



# RENEWING MISSION AND IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH IN SERVICE TO INTEGRAL EDUCATION, RECONCILIATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**WITH FOREWARD BY BISHOP C.V.C ONAGA  
& CONTRIBUTIONS FROM**

+John Onayiekan  
+Ignatius Kaigama  
+Valerian Okeke  
+Matthew Kukah  
+Lucius Ugorji  
+ John Okoye  
Charles Chukwuma Sofudo  
George Ehusani  
Osita Ogbu  
Walter Ihejirika  
Chidi Onyia  
Anthony Anijielo  
Sylvia Nwachukwu  
Regina Eya  
Cosmas Uzowulu  
& others...

**OBIORA F. IKE & BENJAMIN N. ACHI (Eds)**





In response to the obligations of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding the people of God here in Enugu, our diocese organised a council of Bishops, Religious Superiors, Priests, members of the Consecrated Life, Government officials, men, women and young people of different learning and works of life from 4<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2013. Papers presented therein, collectively and variously, tackled the dynamics of our environment and the new challenges to evangelization here in Enugu that confront her commitment to integral education, reconciliation and the development of the human person.

In your hand, therefore, is a collection of articles that were born out of researches and teachings of notable people, who drove the discussions at the Synod as they pertained to their fields of expertise.

+Callistus Chukwuma Valentine Onaga  
*Catholic Bishop of Enugu Diocese*



Printed by: Diocesan Printing Press Enugu @ 08037167940

ISBN: 978-978-53982-0-5





## Chapter Twenty Two

### INCULTURATING SCRIPTURE TEXTS FOR MISSION WORK IN ENUGU DIOCESE

MARYSYLVIA NWACHUKWU DDL (PhD)

#### 1. Introduction

I begin this paper by first of all expressing my very deep appreciation for being invited to address the plenary assembly of the Third Enugu Diocesan Synod. I am addressing this congregation of God's people in Enugu with the topic, "Inculturating Scripture Texts for Mission Work". My first bewilderment at this topic is its vastness. The topic is more adapted for an academic context, but I have tried to give it a pastoral orientation, allowing it to address the Missionary apostolate of the Church in Enugu Diocese. What does it imply to inculturate scripture texts in the Mission and apostolate of the Diocese of Enugu? It should mean, first of all, that the Word of God should be at the centre, nurturing every aspect and stage of the Missionary activity of the Church in Enugu. Secondly, the topic implies that scripture is interpreted and should be applied to the lived context of a people where it addresses and challenges them, while the context also questions the Scriptural text. While developing this topic, I did not lose sight of the overarching theme of the Synod: *Renewing the Mission and Identity of the Church in Enugu Diocese in Service of Integral Education, Reconciliation and Human Development- 'That they may have Life and have it more abundantly'* (John 10:10).

It is important in this brief introduction to identify the pastoral problems that the topic is meant to address. Speaking of the incarnation of the gospel in our local culture, the *Lineamenta* points out that the need is becoming particularly urgent for the Church to be more committed to the difficult but

very important process of incarnating the gospel in the culture of the people.<sup>220</sup> The culture of a people is a major ingredient of Evangelization. The *Instrumentum Laboris* observes that the theme of inculturation received the largest responses from the *Lineamenta*, making it a central and core pastoral topic for the synod.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, the subject of Inculturation merited to receive a one-chapter treatment in the *Instrumentum Laboris* (Chapter 7), where it elaborates on the pastoral problems that arise from the clash, and not encounter, of culture and Christianity.

It must be recalled that during the period of the colonization of Africa, Missionary endeavors, which also included the political idea of the conquest of Africa, sought to erase most of the values that Africans cherish in order to create a spiritual and cultural vacuum upon which to implant a new culture and a new spirituality. In place of this intended goal, these early Missionary efforts produced an Identity crisis, a gross sense of alienation in the African mind. Such confusion and alienation is lamented by many recent books on inculturation and in Novels written by Africans, an example being Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In preparing this essay, I came across articles, monographs and research projects on inculturation in the past three decades. These documents express different ideas of what and how inculturation ought to be, but they fall short of one important element. They spend a generous effort lamenting the consequences of the Missionary strategies used for Africa and fail to blame the local Churches for the lingering of the crisis of Identity in the African mind, hundred years and more after the era of colonization. The present-day pastoral challenges call for the need to pay attention to why Africans are still living with the cultural Identity crisis created by the Missionaries. In spite of its very

---

<sup>220</sup> *Lineamenta*, Third Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu, *Renewing the Mission and Identity of the Church in Enugu Diocese in Service of Integral Education, Reconciliation and Human Development*, Enugu: CIDJAP Press, 2013, pp13-14.

<sup>221</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, Third Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu, Enugu: CIDJAP Press, 2013, piv.



limited scope, the present essay contributes to efforts to provide a way of action to this dilemma. Investigating on how the Bible could be at the service of Mission, it addresses the question of how the Church could more effectively accomplish her Missionary work by enabling the encounter between the gospel and culture. In other words, the essay discusses how the fusion of Gospel and culture could lead the people to accepting the Gospel as word addressed to them, and how this could promote fullness of life for the people.

The essay is divided into five parts. This brief introduction is followed by a definition of relevant vocabulary for the presentation of the topic. Having defined the hermeneutic of inculturation in the third part, Part Four presents the methods and strategies to be followed for successful inculturation of the Gospel for Mission. Since the Bible is the *Magna Carta* for Mission, these strategies and methods are derived from a Gospel Framework. An evaluation of the exposition in the light of current pastoral challenges concludes the essay.

## 2. Description of Terminology

In order to facilitate discussion on the present topic, a short definition of each of the words that make up the topic of the present paper is necessary. These words are: Scripture Texts, Inculturation, Mission and The Church in Enugu.

### 2.1 Scripture Texts

The expression "scripture texts" raises the question of what it means to refer as "scripture" documents that were written in human language more than two thousand years ago. As scripture, the biblical texts are symbolic medium of God's self-communication. It refers to the Bible as one of the basic vehicles of knowledge of God, of God's word to his people and God's



work among them. The Biblical texts enjoy authority in the community of faith because they bear witness to God and make God accessible to the people. What is involved here is an invitation to use the Bible in such a way as to bring to the people a word about God and not to obscure the image of God that it reveals either through neglect of the Bible or through erroneous interpretation of it. From the foregoing perspective, the Bible would play two important roles in the pastoral context of the Mission of Enugu Diocese. Firstly, it mediates God's word of salvation (fullness of life) through the help of the Holy Spirit; and secondly, it is the source for shaping and maintaining Christian self-Identity in the Enugu context.<sup>222</sup> On the basis of this explanation, the expression "scripture texts" is henceforth referred to as "Scripture" or "the word of God" or "the Gospel".

## 2.2 Inculturation

Inculturation is a process that facilitates the encounter between faith and culture. As encounter, the process recognizes the integrity of both realities and takes into account the divinely inspired values inherent in the African culture. This encounter does not involve the process of displacing or replacing one culture with another; it is also not the effort to find correspondences between African and Christian religiosity; it is rather the synthesis of two cultures. Therefore, inculturation (enculturation) is the honest effort to make Christ and his gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. In short, it is the incarnation of Christian message in 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 it and remaking it so as to bring about a

---

<sup>222</sup> Cf. T.E. Fretheim, "The Authority of the Bible and the Imaging of God" in W.P. Brown, *Engaging Biblical Authority. Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007, p47 (pp45-52).



new creation.<sup>223</sup> The goal of inculturation, according to Laurenti Magesa, is to lead all African Christians and peoples to live an integrated spirituality.<sup>224</sup> It would produce a fusion whereby Africans can live their Christianity like Africans, as Magesa would say that the word in the Gospel encounters the word in the culture, the two transforming and fulfilling each other in the process. On the basis of such encounter, the people can live the faith "...as truly African and truly Christian" and will be able to find God in their African-ness.<sup>225</sup> Another goal of the encounter is to enable the gospel to claim what belongs to God in a culture and to enable the culture to see itself in its true light as God's word and not as an abomination. This meaning of inculturation is used here to address the question of how the Church in Enugu can engage with culture in order to relate the Gospel to contemporary problems and to the situation of the modern person.

### 2.3 Mission

The *Magna Carta* of Mission in Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, took up the ideas of *Missio Dei* and its Trinitarian dimension in order to say that the Church is Missionary in origin since she takes her origin from the Mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the decree of God the Father (AG, 2). The most current widely accepted definition of Mission describes it as primarily referring to the purposes and activities of the triune God for the entire universe. Therefore, Mission, as an activity of the Church is only a participation in and service of *missio dei*, with the aim of establishing the lordship of Christ over the whole redeemed creation.<sup>226</sup> Missionary activity in the Church is based on very solid biblical foundations and especially on

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Peter Schineller, *A Handbook of Inculturation*, New York: Paulist Press, 1990, p6.

<sup>224</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation. Transforming the Church in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2004, p159.

<sup>225</sup> Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, p160.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. James Okoye, *Israel and the Nations. A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006, p18.



Christ's mandate to his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). The Church has been faithful to this mandate, always conscious of Christ's abiding presence and support.

#### *2.4 The Church in Enugu*

The Church in Enugu is a particular Church with its own Identity and peculiar gifts and challenges. Defining its unique Identity is important for any serious attempt at inculturation. The Church Enugu is located on the Igbo soil, in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. Coming into contact with the Missionary enterprise in 1910, this Church has grown like the biblical mustard seed, but it is still facing challenges caused by the absence of a proper integration of the Gospel and the culture of the people. Some of what constitutes the cultural values that define the people of Enugu and of the Igbo race in general are: solidarity, sense of the sacred, sacred value of life and the dignity of the family.<sup>227</sup>

### **3. Inculturating the Word of God in Enugu Diocese**

This section of the paper will establish four points. Firstly, while appreciating previous efforts made by the Church to bring the Gospel home to the people, it presents the obstacles to inculturating the Gospel for Mission. Secondly, it defines the task of Inculturation as hermeneutic of the Incarnation. Thirdly, and finally, it proposes a framework which would give a perspective and guide to all Mission endeavors.

---

<sup>227</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, p13.



### 3.1 *Appreciating Previous Efforts at Inculturating the Gospel*

Our generation would be described as ungrateful if all we could say of all previous Missionary efforts is that the Missionaries succeeded to destroy our culture and to bequeath us an Identity crisis. We should rather judge their efforts according to the relative merits of the time in which they lived and according to the goals of Mission at that time. In his post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*,<sup>228</sup> John Paul II invites all Africa to pay homage "to the heroic and selfless dedication of generations of Missionaries" who brought the gospel to Africa (no. 35-36). Although Missionary activities of the colonial era was pursued with the selfish interest of the colonial masters, the Missionaries tried to give integral education to Africans at a time when they were considered as sub-humans, with brute culture and pagan. History has shown that both the then colonial master States and Africans have grown in understanding and knowledge of the divine salvific project. Thanks to the Missionaries, the seed of the Gospel bore much fruit in the growing number of African Catholics, growth of native clergy and consecrated men and women in different religious congregations. Thanks to them also, many Africans received western education and are now able to contribute to the spread of the Gospel both in Africa and in different parts of the world (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 37).

Since after the establishment of local Churches in Africa, Missionary endeavors have progressed immensely with the growth of local clergy and the founding of Institutes of Consecrated life by African clergy and religious. One of the important achievements of this time for Evangelization is the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. This is not yet a finished project because the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, in dialogue with some Igbo

<sup>228</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000, given on 14th September 1995, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1995.

exegetes, is still looking at the prospect of a better Igbo translation of the Bible, which is more faithful to the original texts. Another big project is the preparation of an African Dictionary of Theology by the Association of African Theologians, whose seat is in Abidjan. These endeavors, when completed, hopefully will help the Igbo Church to understand Scripture with the help of their own language and cultural ideas. Since after the Second Vatican Council also, elements, such as singing, dancing, the clapping of hands and the beating of drums has been part of the liturgy. This is evidence of a new awareness and appreciation of the African spirit. There have been original compositions of Church music to the glory of God and the jubilation of Igbo worshippers. The Igbo language now occupies the position that Latin and English used to occupy. In the sphere of art, moreover, certain Christian symbols, such as the tabernacle, crucifix, altar, and images of Jesus and Mary, have been given the tinge of African look. What this means is an application of African spirituality to the expression of the communion between God and his people. In spite of all these great strides, the journey towards total fusion of Gospel and Culture on the African soil is still long and tedious.

Obstacles: One of the obstacles to inculturation is the belief among Africans that (a) the Gospel embodies a culture that is foreign to Africa, and that a fusion of the two would be impossible. One of the primary goals of today's Missionary work should be to heal this mindset in the people through teaching and study of the Bible. Christian faith is not foreign to any culture. The Bible itself bears witness to this through the words of John 1:14 that "the word became flesh and lived among us...", giving assurance that Christian faith is compatible to every culture.

(b) On-going application of previous Evangelization methods which did not work.



(c) The beneficiaries of the inculturation program are the same Africans who suffer crisis of Identity and alienation from their own culture. A basic prerequisite for inculturation is the re-routing of Africans back through their cultural foundations. There are certain constants in the Igbos, for instance, which they cannot loose even given the most extreme estrangement from their environment. This include among others their cheerful and positive attitude to life, openness to the transcendence, solidarity, hospitality and resilience in suffering. On the other hand, there are other cultural things which the average Igbo person should be helped to know, especially cultural elements that have fallen out of practice. The problem is compounded with the fact that a good number of Igbos cannot speak the Igbo language and language is an important window to the culture of a people. These are the young generation who are born and bred in Nigerian capital cities and outside of the country. Moreover, the average Igbo person knows very little or nothing about the Igbo notions of divinity, life, family, marriage, and immortality, to mention but a few. The *Instrumentum Laboris* says much about the need to inculturate the sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation. And we know that inculturation cannot be done fruitfully in these areas when a good percentage of us, Igbos, still ask "What does it mean?" for every important issue that is brought on board discussion. The younger generation needs to be schooled on the origin and history of the Osu - Ume - Ohu caste. There are also other cultural symbols of group Identity and solidarity of which the average Igbo person has no deep knowledge and from which we are gravely disconnected. For instance, around the kola, the Igbos celebrate life, unity and reconciliation, and after all the words that accompany the breaking of the kola, the people depart as un-reconciled as they were before the ritual. Many of us are ignorant of the meaning of gunshots at burial and of the killing of a cow. Therefore, there is more fundamental and basic work to be done. There is the need for deeper study and knowledge of cultural anthropology and sociology of the people. Understanding these basics are important for successful inculturation of the Gospel. Where this is not done

and soon, the prospect of an African Christianity might remain but an unrealizable dream.

(d) The younger generation is the victim of this cultural crisis. To the lack of in-depth knowledge and ignorance of the Igbo language, ignorance of the meaning of cultural symbols of the Identity of the Igbos, there is also an ongoing emotional and spiritual trauma in their lives. They watch and learn as their guardians, teachers and leaders live according to the culture of selfishness, bribery and corruption, and the insincerity that has plagued the present Nigerian State in its social, political and religious aspects of life. Our youth are learning that there is a Nigerian way to success. And they are growing in this society to become the leaders of tomorrow. Some percentage of the younger generation are still in the Church, others have lost interest and a good percentage have joined Pentecostal Churches.

### *3.2 Inculturation as Hermeneutic of the Incarnation*

The task of Inculturation involves continuous interpretation of the word of God within the context of the life of the people. From Vatican II onwards, inculturation has been defined in Christological terms from the perspective of the Incarnation. According to *Lumen Gentium*, 13, Christ is the motive for and the model of Inculturation. The profound meaning of the incarnation is that the word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14; Phil 2:5-8). Jesus was born and was fully inserted into the particular environment of the Jewish people which he assimilated and made his own. The word of God which became flesh in Jesus Christ is the word of God that is proclaimed to all nations. Therefore, wherever the Gospel is received, it clothes itself in the incarnational parameters already set by Christ. The



process of inculturation is a proper incarnation of Christ and of his gospel in a particular culture.<sup>229</sup>

The first apostle to recognize this character of the Gospel was St Paul who adapted the Gospel to the Gentile culture. To do this, Paul used concepts and symbols of the Greek language to translate the Gospel and bring it home to the Gentile converts. It was God, who by giving the Spirit even to Gentiles, convinced Paul of the universal and adaptable character of the word. The working of the Holy Spirit in the life of early converts to Christianity led Paul to believing that the Jewish cultural and religious tradition was not the exclusive norm of God's truth. By using the Greek language to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul was translating the Christian message and adapting it to a new cultural context. The Gentiles did not need to become Jews in order to inherit the blessings. This model of Evangelization continued with the founding of Christian communities in different parts of the Graeco - Roman world in the first Christian era. The four canonical Gospels are not four different Gospels; they do not present four different Jesuses; rather, they are interpretations of the same Jesus event. They represent the honest efforts of the evangelists to adapt the Gospel message to the social and cultural conditions of Christians who lived in places like Asia Minor, Syria, and Rome. This method of Evangelization was not a novel invention of the early Christians. It could be recalled that even in the Old Testament times, different generations of God's people reinterpreted and claimed to be the very people with whom God made the covenant. In the book of Joshua (chapter 24), for instance, after the generation of Israelites who witnessed the exodus had died, Joshua gathered the new generation of Israelites at Shechem, who did not witness the exodus and who did not know much about salvation history. For this new generation, Joshua retold the story of God as if they were the ones with

---

<sup>229</sup> Vincente C. Kiaziku, *Culture and Inculturation. A Bantu Viewpoint*, Kenya: Paulines, 2009, p70.



whom God made the covenant, or as if they were present with their ancestors.<sup>230</sup> The retelling and interpretation of the history of salvation that followed (vv2-13) was given to enable them to understand the character of the God of Israel and to empower them choose to serve him willingly (vv14-27). This passage is cited here to highlight the point that every effort to adapt the Gospel in a culture includes the interpretation of the history of salvation and of the image of the God of the covenant. Through the centuries, every Jewish sect (for instance, Qumran sect) reinterpreted this story as the story around which the Identity of their community is constructed. These Old Testament examples show that inculturation or adaptation of the word of God is always hermeneutic.

On a second level, the work of inculturation is not the work of every one. It requires the services of those who understand what the word says in order for them to interpret it correctly. By its very nature as a means of communication, the word of God, is a symbolic entity that requires interpretation. In its history, the Church has been weary of wrong interpretation of the Word of God and so had instituted a tradition of interpretation that goes back to the apostles. This is done to preserve both the deposit of faith and the image of God that the word reveals. We all have had the experience of being misunderstood by interlocutors who think they understood what we said. When the communication is a dialogue between two close friends, there is the greater possibility of understanding because dialogue allows for clarification. However, the degree of misunderstanding is increased with the admission of many distancing factors like, wider separation of two persons in time and space, or the speaker is unknown to the hearer, or the hearer does not understand the language and cultural

---

<sup>230</sup> Joshua addresses the people with a mixture of the 3rd person plural (your ancestors) and 2nd person plural (You) pronominal forms. Notice this formulation: "When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors...When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, ...and your eyes saw what I did" (Josh 24:6-7).



expressions of the speaker. These intricacies of communication informs our awareness of the importance of correct interpretation for the understanding of scripture. The word of God is communicated to us through the language and culture of ancient people. In order to understand the meaning of scripture, we must try to understand their language and the ideas they expressed from within their historical and cultural context.

The foregoing ideas allow the presentation of another aspect of the hermeneutic of the Incarnation, which is necessary for the task of interpretation. The understanding of the word depends not on human intelligence but on openness to the Holy Spirit. By its very nature, scripture is word of God in human language. Interpreters must pay attention to this nature of scripture as different from other kinds of human teachings because it contains a kind of wisdom that is not of this world (1 Cor 2:1-10). Therefore, we can understand the mysteries it contains only through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10). Many other New Testament texts warn against interpretation of scripture that are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, for instance, 2 Pet 1:20-21. This is another way in which inculturation follows the parameters already set by the Incarnation. Benedict XVI explains that the Holy Spirit through whom the Word of God became incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, guides the process from the writing down of the word of God as scripture to all the stages of its proclamation and interpretation. He also refers to the Church Fathers who affirm that we cannot discover the true meaning of message of Scripture unless we are open to the working of the Holy Spirit (*Verbum Domini*, 15-16). In reaffirming the importance of the Holy Spirit, the Church also lays emphasis on the need to know and understand the living Tradition of the

interpretation of the biblical text, which is sign of growth in insight into the realities that scripture communicates.<sup>231</sup>

Finally, another hermeneutic of incarnation is deduced through the intercultural character of the word of God. This requires the identification of the particular culture in its anthropological and sociological Identity. The Church should understand the culture to be evangelized in its distinguishing features: its physical, linguistic, symbolic, cultural expressions, its values, ways of communicating itself to the outside world through festivals and events. This study of the culture should precede the investigation of how God has acted in and is present in that culture. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI advises that Evangelization will have concrete impact on the life of a people if it takes into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, using their language, their signs, symbols and if it answers the questions they ask (no. 63). John Paul II, in addition, urged Africans to the task of introspection, to look to the riches of African traditions and discover in them Christ who will lead us to the truth (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 48).

The four aspects of the hermeneutic of Incarnation given above allow us the opportunity to address some of the problems which are indicated in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, for instance, issues concerning the menace of fundamentalism and neglect of the Bible by Catholics. Lack of understanding has led to different expressions of fundamentalism which result from literal understanding of the Bible. Perpetrators of fundamentalism are usually people who interpret the Bible without the required training. But what excuse could be given to the evidence of this evil within the Catholic Church, the accused being those who underwent biblical and theological training for about a decade. Obvious consequences

---

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 7.



of this evil is the obscuring of the image of God and altering of the deposit of faith to the detrimental of the believing community. The people of God is so affected by the consequences of the erroneous interpretation of the Bible that a Hosea is needed who would communicate God's cry over his people who "die for lack of knowledge". The Catholic Diocese in Enugu should hear and respond to this outcry with pastoral action. Helping the people of God to discern the will of God through familiarity with the Word of God is an urgent requirement for today's Evangelization.

The accusation that Catholics do not read the Bible cannot be said of today's Christians whose hunger for the word of God is beyond any description which words can proffer. The people of God love the Bible and they read the Bible. Asking them to read the Bible is like trying to convert the converted. Rather, the task of the Church is to increase the interest of the ministers of the Word in the Biblical apostolate, who have been trained to help the people to understand what they read by interpreting the word of God with signs and symbols that are present in the local language. The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:18-22) exposes the consequences for the people of hearing the word of God without understanding: they become prey to the evil one, they cannot withstand difficult times of trouble and temptation or they are lured away by the riches and cares of this world.

Having defined the hermeneutic of inculturation, it remains to describe the methods and strategies to be followed for successful inculturation of the Gospel for Mission. These strategies are derived from the Bible.

#### **4: Creating a Gospel Framework for Mission**

Mission is no longer undertaken for cultural and economic enhancement of under-developed countries through preaching the gospel. The primary objective of Mission is now being redefined to mean witnessing to Christ with the aim of bringing the entire creation under the lordship of Jesus

Christ. This section of the work will first of all present the emphasis that the Church gives to present-day Missionary endeavors. This presentation will precede a discussion of the methods and strategies for Mission. In doing this, it will address some other burning issues of pastoral concern indicated in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

#### 4.1 Today's Missionary Focus

The Missionary activity of the Church is acquiring new focus in response to new areas of pastoral concern in the world. The Vatican II magna Carta of Mission, *Ad Gentes*, took up the ideas of *missio dei* and the Trinitarian dimension, and by doing so, it strongly re-affirms that the Church is Missionary in origin (AG, 2). Therefore, Missionary activity is a manifestation of the will of God and the fulfillment of that will in the world (AG, 9). Since after Vatican II, papal encyclicals and post-synodal exhortations re-echo the Missionary character of the Church made formerly by Vatican II (AG, 2), but they also draw attention to new areas of great pastoral concern in the Missionary activity of the Church. In *Verbum Domini*,<sup>232</sup> Pope Benedict XVI renews the call of Paul VI (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*)<sup>233</sup> and that of John Paul II (*Redemptoris Missio*)<sup>234</sup> to an ever new Missionary season. The context for this new Missionary season is the contemporary world, propelled by the wheels of secularization, and its people "who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress".<sup>235</sup> What is recommended here is a decisive commitment to the *missio ad gentes* (VD, 95), with emphasis that this Mission of proclaiming the word is the task of all the baptized (VD, 94) and that witness of life gives credibility to what is proclaimed (VD, 97-98).

<sup>232</sup> 30th September, 2010. On the Memorial of St Jerome.

<sup>233</sup> 8th December, 1975.

<sup>234</sup> 7th December, 1990. Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Conciliar Decree, *Ad Gentes*.

<sup>235</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1. London: The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, Harleyford Road, 1975.



Therefore, all those who hear the word of God are committed to bear personal witness to it. This personal responsibility is the foundation which should precede every ecclesial effort at inculturation.

#### **4.2. Personal Reception of the Word of God**

The outer Gospel framework for Mission is the person of the Missionary. The first Missionary response to the urgently needed encounter between faith and culture is a personal reception of the word of God. The new Missionary focus has redefined the final goal of Mission as conformity with Christ, "...until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Conformity to Christ is not as simple as one could describe it on a piece of paper. We are human beings defined by our frailties. Therefore, the Missionary's conformity to Christ is possible only through the Holy Spirit. To be an effective Missionary therefore, we must begin to think of ourselves not as priests, as religious, as teachers, as doctors but first of all as Christians. A Christian is one who is filled with the Spirit of Christ, in such a manner that he or she does the work that Christ did. Since the human being needs the help of God's Spirit to do the work of God, this final goal of Mission should, in fact, be taken as the point of departure for this Missionary thrust of the Diocese. *We are obliged to put our humanity in place before in order to save our culture. It was Paul who said that God orders the redemption of creation by first redeeming human beings, conforming them to Christ (Rom 8:19-21). With Christ in us, we can live our Igboness in a Christian way.* Just as the word became flesh through the work of the Spirit, the fusion of faith and culture is possible only through the work of the same Spirit, working through those who have the Spirit of Christ. Today's Missionary approach is no longer emphatic on outreach. It is both personal and Christological. Mission is not done as a disembodied Evangelization. We do not bring simply our learning, obedience and disposition but we bring out entire life. So, our response to Evangelization must go beyond proclamation to conformity with Christ and witness of life. Just as Christ and his message is good news to the poor, so

also we should conform to Christ in such a manner that we are Christ to the world. Our capacity to proclaim the good news to the praise of God; our capacity for reconciliation; our capacity to liberate our fellows who are still being held in the chains of the Osu - Ume - Ohu castes depends on our capacity to have the mind of Christ; and our capacity change unjust structures in the society, depends on our capacity to manifest in our lives God's love for the human person as Christ did. We must become people who show that the only way to changing the world – of making it more human and more brotherly and sisterly – is to live in our lives the mysteries of the love of Christ, for the love of Christ urges us on (2 Cor 5:14). In the words of Benedict XVI, we should re-discover “the urgency and the beauty of the proclamation of the word, which disrupts, calls to conversion, and which opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flowers” (*Verbum Domini*, 93). In his last Apostolic letter (*Door of Faith*, 6),<sup>236</sup> Benedict XVI also affirms, “The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the life of the believers, by their very existence in the world

The text of Matt 28:19-20 offers tips for developing strategies for the inculturation of the Gospel.

#### 4.3 Gospel Framework for Mission - Matt 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:19-20)

This text reports Jesus' last mandate to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19 - *mathēteusate panta ta ethnē*). The person

---

<sup>236</sup> Given on 11th October 2011.



to be 'discipled' is not single individuals, but *ethnē*, national entities. A disciple is one called to learn the manner of life of Jesus through following him on a journey that leads to Jerusalem. When this disciple are national entities, then the Commission is understood as the Evangelization of all cultural and national entities, with the aim of adapting their way of life to the way of the Lord. This text affirms that it is the mind of Christ that Christianity be brought home to different cultures. The full wording of the mandate specifies the modality for this Evangelization. Firstly, different peoples should be brought to believe in the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (v19b - *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*), and secondly, they should be taught to live the spirituality which Jesus taught through the events of his life (v20 - *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*). And lastly, the Church should be armed by the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus as they accomplish this task (v20b - *And remember I am with you always to the end of the age*). The following paragraphs expose these guidelines for the Church's Missionary task. The last guideline receives the first attention.

*I am with You Always!*

A primary task in Evangelization is to recognize and celebrate the presence of God with the Church. Jesus is the one who was born to us as Emmanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23). He is always with his Church with all the authority and power of God in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:19). And after the resurrection, he promised that he would not abandon his disciples in the task of Evangelization; he remains with the Church through his Spirit. "And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ... You know him because he abides with you and he will be in you...[he] will teach you everything" (John 14:16-17,26). These passages show that authentic Evangelization within any culture can happen only guided by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit through

whom the word was made flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin is also the principal agent of inculturation of the Gospel. The implication is that inculturation cannot through discussion of how to merge some cultural practices with Christian rites. According to these texts, the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit grows in understanding of the Gospel of Christ and how to put it into action in the world.

For any local Church, the appropriation of the Gospel involves also the task of helping the people to understand how God is with them in their history and cultural expressions. This interpretation of divine presence is important not only for the Missionary work of the Church, but also for a people who are often oppressed by fear and distress. "The Lord is with you" is the word of assurance that introduces all liturgical celebrations in the Church and it should be celebrated for the people as wellspring of constant renewal in faith in God. The same words were addressed to Mary in order to empower her to say her 'fiat' before the Incarnation took place. That same presence of God, who is the Holy Spirit, guides the Church to the whole truth (John 14:16; 16:13), enabling her to bear courageous witness to Christ. For the full success of this Missionary thrust of the Diocese, prayer to the Holy Spirit should be encouraged at parish and family levels.

#### *The Image of God*

The Gospel is both a word about God and a word from God. In translating the Gospel into a culture, attention is paid to the image of God of the Bible. The Igbos, as well as many African peoples, are characterized by their openness to the transcendence. The Igbo and African notions of divinity come close to the image of the God of the Bible. For the Igbos, God is the Creator on whom all life depends, who bestows on his creatures gifts for sustenance and survival on earth, and who is in constant communion with his creatures through the gift of a person *chi*. As far as here, the Christian doctrine has many points of contact with the Igbo belief. This is why it is



almost impossible to find an atheist among the Igbo. What the Christian revelation adds to the Igbo notion is the revelation of God as the compassionate and merciful Father, who goes in search of the lost, who offered his Son to die for the salvation of the world, and who continues to remain with his people through his Holy Spirit. This is the core of the Christian doctrine of God, which is brought out very clearly in the Gospels<sup>237</sup> and in the letters of Paul. In describing the holiness and compassion of God, the Bible also underscores the freedom of God to determine the course of human life and of history. Every interpretation and proclamation of God's power and holiness is faulty if it does not emphasize the freedom, mercy and compassion of God, as it is fully revealed in the event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The image of God question is important for defining the Identity of the Church. In her Mission, the Church should give authentic proclamation to this image of God that is revealed in Scripture. The first stage of this interpretation is practical witness by the Church to this God of compassion who goes out in search of the lost and who protects the vulnerable members of the society. The Church in Enugu should have the face of the compassionate Father; she is invited to give this task primary attention in the process of inculturation. It should be evident in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church's self-definition as the one who goes in search of the lost can change the *modus operandi* of Mission. In doing this she should discover cultural expressions of love and solidarity of which the Igbo are known and incorporate them in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church should also stand against theologies, preachings and practices which obscure this image of God.

---

<sup>237</sup> The praise of God's compassion in the Song of Hannah (Luke 1:46-55) is a key to Luke's version of the Gospel.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* lamented the menace of syncretism in today's Church, defined as the mixing of elements of the Gospel with incompatible elements from traditions foreign to it. The history of the early Church is the history of how the Church opposed syncretism and articulated her Identity. The early Church was aware that it had a distinct Identity that governed its ethical traditions and relationships with non Christians. Her tenacious defense of the image of God as Trinity caused final break with Judaism from which it emerged. She also contended with mystery religions which abounded at the time, and emperor worship which anchored the Roman social and political order.<sup>238</sup>

A more dreadful menace to the doctrine of God is found today in teachings which portray God as an old tyrant, unforgiving and fault finding, always out to unleash punishment and death sentence on offenders and sinners. It finds expression in the 'Holy Ghost fire' and 'back to sender' sagas, over-emphasis and focus on the power of evil, punishment and not forgiveness of enemies, and in other expressions that emphasize God's anger over his mercy.<sup>239</sup> This teaching, spreading fast within the Church, is becoming prominent through the influence of Pentecostalism, and is being propagated today by ministers who should have been trusted custodians of the deposit of faith. They are a great threat to the Identity of the Church because it is giving the wrong spirituality to Catholics who should bear witness to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Pentecostalism has very positive sides, which include: great attention to the Bible, appreciation of music in liturgical celebrations, eagerness for growth in spiritual life through intimate experience of the Holy Spirit, interest in proclamation and teaching of the Christian faith and a more serious

<sup>238</sup> The early Church's defense against heretical teachings are found in the non-authentic Pauline Letters and in the Letters of John.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 36-37.



commitment of the laity to their Christian calling.<sup>240</sup> The face of the Catholic Church would change for the better if it could learn from these positive aspects of the Pentecostal movement. What is to be guarded against are the interpretations which new religious movements make of the Bible which portray notions of God that do not correspond to the Christian witness. To the negative influences already discussed above, one could also add materialism, discriminatory tendencies, religious tyranny, and exhibition of miraculous power as proof of authentic Christianity. Defining the present-day Christian as materialistic, a paragraph of the *Lineamenta* reads, "We practice religion with the intent of seeing God intervene here and now in our material welfare...where these favors are not provided promptly, our people move on in search of a god who can provide the needed relief without waste of time" (no. 3). Elochukwu Uzukwu notes with regret that the exploitation of the divine for self-aggrandisement is also becoming a common feature of some ministers in mainland Churches in Nigeria. "The Charismatic priests appear to be very conscious of their power - a power which is often times maintained through the exploitation of the superstitious and the irrational of which distressed faithful are easy victims".<sup>241</sup> These negative influences of Pentecostalism is a responsibility for the Church, who is invited to redefine herself in the light of these challenges. We should know that the new religious movements are popular religions which are signs pointing to the fact that the center of mainland Churches have collapsed.

#### *The Love Command*

<sup>240</sup> For the impact of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Church, see, H.C. Achunike, *The Influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic Priests and Seminarians in Nigeria*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers, 2004, p106f; D Udoette, *New Religious Movements in Nigeria: Challenges to the Church in the New Millenium*, p43f; D.P. Ukpog, *The Phenomenology of Pentecostalism in Nigeria- A Theological and Ecclesiological Reflection*, Rome, 2006, pp109-118.

<sup>241</sup> Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996, p123.

Following the affirmation of *Lumen Gentium*, 13 that Jesus Christ is the motive for and the model of inculturation, and since inculturation is defined along the lines created by the incarnation, one can say that inculturation finds its fulfillment on the cross. Therefore, Matt 28:20 gives the final guideline for inculturation as the love command, "teaching *them to obey everything that I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:20). Other New Testament texts specify in what this commandment consists: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:12-14). The core of the message of Jesus Christ is love. John tells us in what this love consists: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16; 4:10). This is redemptive incarnation. The Christian message is encapsulated in the Good News that God revealed his love for the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that through this event, Jesus purified us of everything that keeps us away from God, making the cross a way to fullness of life. Therefore, the Church must live its own paschal mystery to the full, purifying herself of her own faults and sowing in every culture the seed of conversion, true reconciliation and the overcoming of sin.<sup>242</sup>

The witness to this kind of love also has a prophetic interpretation in relation to Christ. Although he was born and raised in Israel, Jesus adopted a critical attitude towards his culture. His confrontation with the political and religious leaders of his time showed how he challenged this culture in its social and religious aspects. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-6:34) shows clearly how he reinterpreted elements of that culture, purifying its values and the people's ways of seeing things so that they may be open to the designs of God. The Church is called to bear this prophetic witness.

---

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Kiaziku, *Culture and Inculturation*, p72.



There are cultural elements in the Igbo culture which are aids to empowering the people to live the love command through suffering and living for others. The notion of redemptive suffering is not foreign to the Igbo and African spirituality. The Igbos are not known for self-centeredness but it is becoming the order of the day in different aspects of our life. The Church in Enugu should awaken in the people, their god-given sense of solidarity as a way of living the love command. It should also exhaust all that there is the symbol of the Igbo - African woman to preach the capacity in the Igbo person for self sacrifice and compassion. The Igbo woman of today is a committed caretaker of the family, and she fulfills this task as the cost of great sacrifice. This role of woman is a value which the Igbos should preserve jealously.

### 5. Evaluation and Conclusion

- a. The essay is an investigation into how the Bible could be at the service of Mission. In other words, it discusses how the fusion of Gospel and culture could lead the people to accepting the Gospel as word addressed to them, and how this could promote fullness of life for the people.
- b. While appreciating previous efforts to bring the gospel home to the people, the paper discusses certain obstacles in the way of inculturation of the gospel: (a) belief among Africans that the Gospel embodies a culture that is foreign to Africa, and that a fusion of the two would be impossible. (b) Ignorance of the language, symbols and expressions of cultural anthropology and sociology of the people. (c) On-going cultural psychological and emotional trauma in the younger generation who are equally victimized and disinterested. The Church should realize that a more basic work needs to be done towards youth apostolate and re-routing the people back through to their cultural foundations. This paper proposes that the study of Igbo language and culture be mandatory in all Catholic schools, especially in institutions where agents of Evangelization are trained.

c. The task of Inculturation involves continuous interpretation of the word of God within the context of the life of the people. Since after Vatican II, inculturation had been defined in terms of the hermeneutic of the Incarnation. Just as the word of God was made flesh within human culture (John 1:14) so wherever the Gospel is received, it clothes itself in the incarnational parameters already set by Christ. The process of inculturation is a proper incarnation of Christ and of his gospel in a particular culture. Instances from the Evangelization strategies of Paul are discussed to show that the inculturation of the Gospel follows this hermeneutic. Other parameters of the incarnation hermeneutic consist of (i) as a means of communication, the word needs to be understood in order to be interpreted correctly, (ii) the interpreted should be open to the Spirit who inspired the word, and (iii) that the word was made flesh also implies that the Church should understand the culture to be evangelized in its distinguishing features: its physical, linguistic, symbolic, cultural expressions, its values, ways of communicating itself to the outside world through festivals and events. This knowledge would enable her to use the language, signs, symbols and cultural expression of the people to preach the Gospel. I think the Church would be making a loud Statement in favor of the Igbo language if it strongly recommends the use of Igbo names for baptism. Jesus was a local name in the place where the Savior was born. As it obtains in some cultures, Igbo names tell the story of the people's or a family's journey of faith with God. Moreover, personal and place names are primary windows to the notions of divinity of a particular people.

d. In explaining this interpretation of inculturation in Christological perspective, references are made to documents of the Second Vatican Council, and papal documents, covering encyclicals and apostolic exhortations of Synods for Africa (*Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*) and the Synod on the Word of God (*Verbum Domini*). The importance of these documents for Missionary activity in Africa and by Africans cannot be underestimated in the African context. These documents need to be studied



and assimilated by different arms of the Diocese. The post-Synodal Apostolic exhortations, especially, renew the invitation to Africans to reflect on their situations in the light of the word of God in order to discover the path towards peace and well-being. The path to that peace and justice is marked out by Jesus, the fullest revelation of the Father and the word of God, whose light illumines the way to the Father, and to whose truth the Church should bear witness.

e. In response to new areas of great pastoral concerns in the world, the Church has redefined both the goal of Mission and strategies to that end in Christological and personal categories. The new emphasis is on witness of life which gives credibility to what is proclaimed. Therefore, the primary Missionary response to the urgently needed encounter between faith and culture is a personal reception of the word of God whose goal is conformity with Christ "...until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Conformity with Christ is possible only through the Holy Spirit. In order to evangelize our territory more effectively and with credibility, we need constant conversion and renewal by the Holy Spirit. We must begin to think of ourselves not as priests, as religious, as teachers, as doctors but first of all as Christians.

f. Evangelizers in different fields - education, hospital, social communication - especially those who train the youth must be persons capable of conversion and compassion. Only if they are open to the Holy Spirit, the Church could hope for the formation of a new society based on truth, responsibility and compassion.

g. Finally, the research discovers in the words of Matt 28:19-20 a gospel framework for Mission. This text affirms that it is the mind of Christ that Christianity be brought home to different cultures. The full wording of the mandate specifies the modality for this Evangelization. Firstly, different peoples should be brought to believe in the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, they should be

taught to live the spirituality of love which Jesus taught through the events of his life, and finally, the Church should be armed by the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus as they accomplish this task (a) Authentic Evangelization within any culture can happen only guided by the Spirit, who is God's presence with his Church.

h. In discussing the Evangelization guideline of Matt 28:19-20, attention is given to pastoral challenges of enormous concern to the Church of today. This concerns the menace of fundamentalism, syncretism and influences coming from Pentecostalism. At issue are theologies, inimical to the image of the compassionate God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The new religious movements also propagate teachings contrary to a spirituality of suffering, whose target is the traumatized Christian who hopes that a better future lies only in the miraculous. In fact, the more authentic remedy to the present social and historical situation in which the Igbos live is a decisive commitment to preserve the Deposit of faith through committed teaching and witness of life. The Church is invited to discover cultural elements in the Igbo culture which will help them to bear witness to the essentials of the Christian message. Our capacity to change unjust structures in the society, depends on our capacity to manifest in our lives God's love for the human person as Christ did. We must become people who show that the only way to changing the world – of making it more human and more brotherly and sisterly – is to live in our lives the mysteries of the love of Christ, for the love of Christ urges us on (2 Cor 5:14).