

# CHRISTIAN RELEVANCE IN MODERN AFRICA

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*Relevance is a contemporary concern for Christianity worldwide. The gospel by its nature is always relevant, for it has been revealed by the eternal true God to humanity made in the image of God. But the gospel must be made to address men and women in the particulars of their culture. It must become incarnate within each culture even as Christ, the eternal Son of God, was incarnate as a Galilean Jew of Nazareth. The gospel must speak to specific men and women in their particular cultural contexts. Dr. Kunhiyop sets forth helpful guidelines in making biblical Christianity relevant for Africa even while it remains the unchanging gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The principal challenge facing African Christianity is making Christianity relevant enough so that it addresses African existential problems and biblical enough so that it is consistent with God's revelation.

In this regard, Jean-Marc Ela's insightful remark in his book, *My Faith as an African*, is appropriate.

If theology wants to avoid the meaninglessness of purely verbal orthodoxy, which produces generalizations that interest no one, it must

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take into account what is actually lived in particular experience of African local communities.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity must face up to the challenge posed by converts who know they are Christians but feel pulled by these traditional beliefs. The need to make Christianity authentic and relevant to the Church in modern Africa is extremely important and urgent. G.C. Oosthuizen in *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*, observes: "For various reasons, a theology in Africa, which takes the African situation seriously is desperately important."<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Cragg states that

New Christians become responsible to Christ for their old setting and to their old setting in the new Truth. But they are not thereby 'going foreign'. . . it is personal discovery of the meaning of the universal Christ within the old framework of race, language, and tradition.<sup>3</sup>

What is being urged and will be attempted in this article is a relevant Christianity in modern Africa. A more technical word for a relevant theology is contextualization. By contextualization, we mean, "making concepts or ideas relevant to a given situation."<sup>4</sup> John Frame elaborates this definition by observing that contextualization "applies Scripture to the experience of a particular culture to make its message better understood."<sup>5</sup> Making the gospel relevant to a particular historical context - in this study, modern Africa - is the task of this article.<sup>6</sup> Seeking to make Christianity relevant to the church

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*. Trans. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999):166-167.

<sup>2</sup> G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa. A Theological and Anthropological Study*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1968): 221.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Mary Knoll, Orbis Books, 1988), 306.

<sup>4</sup> Byang Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas, (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 1217.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship. The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987), 308. Justin S. Ukpon observes that "contextualization means making the Christian message penetrate the fabric of society. Authentic contextualization is encounter between the Christian message and the local context. It is a cultural response to the challenge of the Good News." "Contextualization. A Historical Survey" *AFER*, 29, (1987), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Grant Osborn makes the same point by observing that the key issue in contextualization is "relevance." In addition, he states that religious principles must be adapted to meet new cultural challenges." *The Hermeneutical Spiral. A*

necessarily involves communicating the message of the person, works, word and the will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as put forth in the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential context.<sup>7</sup>

## **GUIDELINES FOR A RELEVANT CHRISTIANITY**

While conservative Churches have remained orthodox in their biblical teaching, they often have not succeeded in making Christianity meaningful and relevant to the history and experience of their members. Pioneer missionaries demanded from their converts a life-style, rightly or wrongly, consistent with their Western life-style. The expectation of the missionaries on their converts put a serious strain on many Africans. The crisis and dilemma created by missionaries in part led to the rise of many independent churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim and the United Native African Church and many others.

Specifically, these indigenous churches were founded to make Christianity relevant to Africans who felt that the official churches were not sympathetic to their deep seated beliefs and practices. Unfortunately, they have neglected the authoritative role of the Scriptures, even though they give lip service to it. Evangelical and conservative churches continue to insist on some beliefs and practices while new church movements are focusing on many areas that seem to be more relevant. The tension between the two positions demonstrates the crucial nature of the Church of Christ in Africa. The fact that both ways fall short of a proper notion of a relevant Christianity suggests very strongly that we must seek ways whereby the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, is meaningfully presented to Christians in their particular setting. What should be done to make Christianity relevant to the Church? Here are some recommendations.

### **Understanding Culture and Religion**

In order to make Christianity relevant, there must be a rigorous attempt to understand the culture and religion of the people without seeking to be

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*Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 319.

<sup>7</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization. Meanings, Methods and Models*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 200.

judgmental. Here the role of the anthropologist and sociologist becomes very important to the theologian. For example, anthropologists have shown the need to study different levels of culture such as (1) materialistic aspect, (2) underlying meanings and values, and (3) the worldview, namely, the particular way of understanding and acting towards the world. Thus,

the analysis of a culture must be carefully and thoroughly done. A superficial treatment will often be very misleading, for the apparent situation may in fact belie the actual questions being asked.<sup>8</sup>

Of great importance is the core of the culture which determines the shape of the other layers and of the culture itself. This core is religion. It dynamically shapes the whole culture. It is the heart, the essence of culture. It is like the cell nucleus in any living thing. It contains values and assumptions which a culture develops. Religion interprets puzzling phenomena and provides an understanding of the ultimate mysteries.<sup>9</sup> Clifford Geertz, the renowned social scientist, defines religion as

. . . a cultural system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.<sup>10</sup>

For Geertz then, religion gives meaning to cultural data. It imparts conviction and motivation, and is, at the root of culture. A religious understanding of culture is at the heart of culture.<sup>11</sup> In the exegesis of culture and religion of people, the church must strive to enter into the daily experience, willing to learn.

In order to accomplish this, Christians need and must bring a wide and

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<sup>8</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 74.

<sup>9</sup> Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding. A Handbook for Christian Communication Across Cultural Landscapes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992): 257.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed., M. (Banton, London: 1966), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Alyward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 40.

warm understanding.<sup>12</sup>

This means studying those aspects of culture and religion in all the moods, overtones and undertones of their existence. In addition it means being near enough to hear.<sup>13</sup> Unspoken ideas and concepts are found in proverbs, crises such as death, and happy occasions such as marriage and the naming ceremony. Names reveal much about their philosophy and theology. They reveal much about those deep seated beliefs and worldview which Christianity must deal with in order to make itself relevant. Of course, this is not easy because, "probing beneath the surface like peeling an onion is a tearful process. To understand the deeper levels of another people's way of life requires sharing in that life. That sharing means putting aside some familiar things and leaving the 'comfort zones' of our own way of life."<sup>14</sup> The world of the invisible spirits which affects the physical world is very real. There must be a serious exegesis of the culture and religion. Failure to do this will only drive the old way underground.

### **Interpreting the Scripture**

Understanding the culture and religion of the people is just the beginning of a relevant Christianity. The task of understanding, interpreting and applying the Scripture is mandatory for an authentic and relevant Christianity. It is not enough to receive without question the theologies developed in other contexts, and expect them to be the norm in an African Church. Ela's important observation reinforces the urgency for an African reading and exposition of the Word of God.

The reading of the gospel is not yet finished nor is it our sole task to repeat what others have discovered, thought, and organized, like those parrots captured in our virgin forests. We must learn to dispense with the mediation of foreign forms or we will end up living our relationship to the gospel with a borrowed personality.<sup>15</sup>

The implication of Ela's proposal is that no "theology" can claim finality. It is only the Word of God which is final. In addition, it is important to make a distinction between a "theology" and Scripture. Whereas theology is like a reflection and interpretation of the revealed Word of God, the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Without denying the usefulness in other "theologies" it is

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<sup>12</sup> Cragg, 179.

<sup>13</sup> Cragg, 247.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, 252.

<sup>15</sup> Ela, 142.

only Scripture that is inspired and binding upon other Christians. Furthermore, the biblical and evangelical principles of the priesthood of all believers and the perspicuity [clarity] of Scriptures should motivate Christians to search the Scriptures for themselves and apply the truth in their particular situation.

The task of making the gospel relevant is to exegete and "extract the core meaning of the gospel through listening to God in the context of our communities."<sup>16</sup> By core, we mean the biblical truths which provide the core of the gospel message and its ethical ramifications. These biblical truths (core) are absolute and must remain inviolate in biblical truths in any cross-cultural communications.<sup>17</sup> The core or these universal truths must be distinguished from the form in which they came. The Scriptures were written in different cultural contexts. When an evangelical is calling for a relevant Christianity that is authentic, he means that the cultural aspect or form that came along with either the Scriptures or the pioneer missionaries must be decontextualized so that the biblical truth of the gospel may be discovered and applied afresh to the African existential situation. The need to understand the culture and exegete the Scripture must be held in perspective. The two guidelines are not isolated but complementary. The need to understand both culture and religion and the Word of God is critical for an authentic contextualization. In this regard John Stott notes.

We refuse to become either so absorbed in the Word that we escape into it and fail to let it confront the world or so absorbed in the world that we conform to it and fail to subject it to the judgment of the Word... We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it.<sup>18</sup>

Listening to both culture and Scripture is therefore integral to a meaningful presentation of Christianity in any historical context. A number of themes present themselves as useful for exploration as one seeks to make a relevant Christianity in modern Africa.

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<sup>16</sup> Cragg, 306.

<sup>17</sup> Osborn, 321.

<sup>18</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian. Applying God's Word to Today's World*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1992), 27-8.

A relevant Christianity in modern Africa must respond biblically and theologically to those fundamental questions that the people are asking. In other words, a relevant Christianity must scratch where the modern African Christian is itching. These questions and itchy spots include a theodicy, ontology of spirits, a concept of marriage, death, salvation, political involvement, women issues (such as ordination of women, training of women in theological institutions), baptism of polygamists, the membership of second wives, homosexuality, *in vitro* fertilization, and various traditional and religious forms of communication. These areas do not exhaust the list but provide fruitful themes to explore. Let me briefly expand on some of these areas.

Theologians and church leaders must understand and respond to African theodicy which sees pain, evil and suffering to be caused by evil spirits and witches.

In order to make Christianity relevant to the church, there needs to be a biblical and systematic presentation of theodicy. A number of passages such as Genesis 3; Job 1-4, and 1 Peter 3-4 are instructive. Genesis 3 gives the origin and cause of evil and pain in the world. In Job, there is an interaction between God, Job, Satan and pain (evil). Evidently, though satanic powers were involved, there is the sovereignty, love and the permission of God. Another clear insight is that it was not because of Job's sin that all the evil befell him. A proper interpretation therefore must take into account the sovereignty of God, the role that Satan and demonic powers play in this dramatic story. Certainly, contrary to most African beliefs, an omnipotent, loving and caring God could and does allow pain and suffering to fall upon his own children.

A theology that seeks to be relevant and meaningful to the African Christian will seek to apply the Scriptures to the world of the invisible which is very real. Bayo Abijola states. "The African world of this century is still dominated by supernatural thoughts of witches, ghosts, spirits, demons and powers which are strongly believed to be against the welfare of man."<sup>19</sup> Darryll Forde also notes.

Gods, spirits, and magical forces beyond the community, together with witches and sorcerers within it are postulated in the explanation of the workings of the universe, of the incidence of benefits and misfortunes, and

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<sup>19</sup> Bayo Abijola, "St. Paul's Concept of Principalities and Powers in African Context" in *African Theological Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (1988), 127.

of the strains of life in society.<sup>20</sup>

I find it very intriguing that even though we teach in Bible Schools, theological colleges and seminaries that a Christian or one who has experienced the new birth and is indwelt by the Spirit cannot be possessed by Satan or demons, there are pastors and church leaders who would testify that some Christians need to be "delivered".

We must acknowledge the existence of principalities and powers (Col.2:20, Eph. 6:12) but also boldly declare God's triumph over them through Christ. However, the battle with these supernatural forces is still on with Christians (Eph. 6:12). The theologian must therefore explore these passages and the whole of Scripture and make them relevant to the African Christian. The cross has defeated all elemental spirits and powers that may not wish the Christian good.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the belief and power of witchcraft, a careful reading of Scripture indicates that God's people are forbidden to deal in witchcraft, and sorcery (Deut. 18:10-12; Lev. 20:27; 1 Samuel 28). The very condemnation of God about these practices indicates that they are real, otherwise the injunction is vacuous. In Scripture, especially the New Testament there is much evidence to the reality of spirits and their relationship to human beings. For example, I find very disturbing that some Christians would say that a man or woman can marry a demon and have children. Though this is possible within the African worldview, the biblical revelation does not warrant it since it states that Satan and demons neither marry, procreate, die, or even increase. The church needs to explore these biblical passages and articulate a theology that is truly biblical, based on a historical-grammatical and evangelical method of interpretation.

A relevant Christianity will seek to address the concept of marriage. Most expatriate missionaries see and interpret polygamy only in sexual terms. A man is believed to be a polygamist only to satisfy his sexual desires. Even Walter Trobisch, a missionary and a renowned author on African marriages demonstrates a serious misunderstanding of African marriage and sexuality. He writes.

In a culture [African] in which love is identified with sexuality, in which the individual's personal erotic love is a dimension of the human heart, in which he lacks experience in all its aspects and in which, consequently,

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<sup>20</sup> Darryll Forde, *African Worlds. Studies in the Cosmological and Social Values of African Peoples*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), x.

<sup>21</sup> Bayo, 127.



the idea of "faithfulness" does not exist, a word like "adultery" must remain an empty, abstract, juristic concept.<sup>22</sup>

Trobisch's remark betrays a serious lack of understanding regarding African marriage and sexuality. Most societies knew what was unfaithfulness and punished with great severity those who commit adultery before the coming of Christian missionaries. In my traditional society (the Bajju of Central Nigeria), an adulterer was forced to drink the excreta of a he-goat. He was also paraded about naked in the neighborhood. Of course it is not only the Bajju, but there are many other African societies who know and regard adultery as a very serious offense. Another observation is that Trobisch's remarks demonstrate how easy it is for the outsider to read a meaning into a culture. A proper understanding of marriage and sexuality that is relevant to African Christians must realize that there are many reasons for marriage, including economic, social and religious. The need for children, especially male children, has been the most compelling reason for polygamy. A man who dies childless falls into oblivion. He is unable to find happiness in the next world because of having no children to honour him. He is cut off from the family community. Childlessness is a personal disgrace.<sup>23</sup> A contextualized theology must show that whatever the marital circumstances, the African man or woman can still experience meaning and wholeness in his new faith.

Another important area for Christianity to make itself relevant is the concept of salvation. To the African, salvation is not only spiritual but has physical and social dimensions. This view of salvation seems to be close to a biblical notion of salvation which depicts human beings not only as spiritual but as physical entities. Many illnesses and even death are believed by Africans to be unnatural, requiring special spiritual power to rescue him from these powers. There is therefore need to proclaim Christ as the all sufficient Saviour.

All Churches must hold fast to the message of the cosmic victory of Christ on the cross over demonic powers. They must preach total and complete salvation and the adequacy of Christ over human problems. Christ must be proclaimed not only as Savior of the soul, but as Lord of lords, King of kings, Victor, Conqueror, Healer and all in all Savior who is sufficient for

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Trobisch, "Church Discipline" in *Practical Anthropology* (Sept-October, 1961), 202.

<sup>23</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Orbis Books, translated from the German by John O'Donovan (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, New York, 1992), 115-16.

all human needs.<sup>24</sup>

The need for caution and careful exegetical theology in terms of discarding, transforming and retaining cultural practices is a very important step in the contextualization of the message of Jesus Christ. The role of theologians and pastors becomes crucial because they are equipped with the Word of God and they also know "where the people itch." A proper contextualization is best done by well trained indigenes. This is probably the greatest area of need for the evangelical church in Africa. The need for such theologians is important and urgent.

Oosthuizen declares. "What Africa needs today is men thoroughly versed in the Bible, in contemporary theology, in world trends and social conditions, and in the African world and its thinking."<sup>25</sup>

The theologian and pastors do not operate in isolation. They must demonstrate their expertise in conjunction with the believing community - the Church.

### **Involving the Church**

The Church plays a significant role in contextualization of theology. Thus, as Oosthuizen notes,

Theologically, the church is called upon to digest the relation between God and the concrete world; this should be done dynamically and positively. Theology is the intellectual work to be undertaken by devoted Christian thinkers in the church, and having as its aim to explain the church's basis and spiritual experiences in such a way that it satisfies the desire for clearness and cohesion of the believers.<sup>26</sup>

The church has to reevaluate its practices, attitudes, and teaching on questions that were left unanswered during the first phase of evangelization. The missionary apostalate "cultivated in Africans only that surface which invited cultivation, leaving fallow a no-man's land bristling with clumps of questions, doubts, hopes, and dissatisfactions of every sort."<sup>27</sup>

One must warn that the church must maintain a proper perspective on its

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<sup>24</sup> Ajibole, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Oosthuizen, 235.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>27</sup> Ela, 140.

task of contextualization. The church should retain the qualities of foreignness and indigeneity. In other words, while the church is in some sense indigenous, there is something about it that demands foreignness. Max Warren declares,

There is a proper sense in which we can speak of the church becoming indigenous and that is when we can think of it as taking root in some particular country and there establishing a colony of heaven. But that colony, if it is true to the quality of heaven, will be quite unlike anything else in that country. There can be no escape from this foreignness.<sup>28</sup>

What is being emphasized here is that the Church ought to retain the idea of indigeneity and also foreignness. These two must be maintained. The foreignness, indigeneity, rootedness in Christ, living and spreading in the climate are therefore important elements in contextualization. Finally, "a truly indigenous Church is a group of believers who live out their life, including their socialized Christian activity, in the patterns of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of their felt needs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures."<sup>29</sup>

#### **Checks On a Relevant Christianity**

There are always dangers in contextualization. One of the obvious ones is the danger of syncretism which is very evident in some African independent churches. The evangelical church must have some ways of checking against such a danger and many others.

**The first check is the role of Scripture.** For the evangelical theologian, Scripture is the measure for Christian life and conduct. Though issues change and need to be addressed, the Word of God remains the same and has to be the source for the development and evaluation of any contextualized Christianity. A relevant Christianity is not the last word, but the Word of God is. Christians need to affirm the controlling and guiding role of Scripture in their relationship to culture. Byang H. Kato writes in this regard,

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<sup>28</sup> Max Warren, *The Truth of Conversion. A Study in the Nature of Christian Hope* (London: The Canterbury Press, 1948), 138. In the words of Oosthuizen, "The Church must be rooted in Christ before they can be related to the soul, and they will in this sense be foreign to the world, but they must live and spread in the new climate" p.220.

<sup>29</sup> Oosthuizen, 224.

Africans who become Christians should, therefore, remain Africans wherever their culture does not conflict with the Bible. It is the Bible that must judge culture. Where a conflict results, the cultural element must give way.<sup>30</sup>

It is a fair statement to note that most independent church movements have four sources of authority, namely, the Bible, the missionary churches, the traditional belief system, and the teachings of the prophet.<sup>31</sup> This results in very serious syncretistic Christianity as these movements have shown.<sup>32</sup> The only way to avoid such heretical teachings is to recognize the singular authority of the Scripture over traditional beliefs and practices.

**The second check is the nature of culture.** In as much as culture has positive features, it should never be forgotten that it cannot have the last word on what is normative for the Christian. Bruce J. Nicholls rightly notes that "culture is never neutral, it is always a strange complex of truth and error, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, seeking God and rebelling against him."<sup>33</sup> The search for a relevant Christianity must come to grips with this fact. If Scripture is allowed its authority, certain cultural practices will have to be stopped. Hence, "in Africa, contextualization of the believing community must include the deculturalization not only of these Western accretions but also of indigenous concepts that are contrary to the word of God."<sup>34</sup> This is very critical in light of the contemporary situation which sees everything cultural or indigenous as good. The early church demonstrates that certain elements of culture had to be condemned, such as idolatry, food and meat contaminated by idols, and fornication (Acts 15).

**The third check is the need for dependence on Holy Spirit.** An evangelical concept of a contextualized Christianity recognizes the active role of

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<sup>30</sup> Kato, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Sheila Suzanne Walker, *Christianity African Style. The Harrist Church of the Ivory Coast*. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976, 244.

<sup>32</sup> As an example of serious syncretistic contextualization, the Harrist Church teaches that Harris did the same thing for the Africans that Jesus Christ did for the Europeans—he brought us Christianity. God sent each of his sons to a different group of people to save them. Jesus went to Europe to save the whites, but he did not come to Africa. It was the Prophet Harris, an African like us, whom God sent to bring us into the light. Walker, 247.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Nicholls, "Gospel and Culture" In: *Down to Earth. Studies in Christianity and Culture*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 68.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

the Holy Spirit in leading believers to discover truth and application as they read Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is responsible for giving the new birth (Titus 3:15, John 3:5), moreover, He is to be depended upon to change the core of the person to the image of Christ.

**The fourth check is the role of Church history and the universal Christian community.** An evangelical concept of a contextualized theology recognizes the fact that God has been at work in the history of His people. It is, therefore, the obligation of the Church to hear the teachers that God has used over the hundreds of years of its existence. They must be heard critically, in order to profit from their mistakes, as well as from their achievements.<sup>35</sup> In seeking to make the Gospel relevant, the church does well to study her history and thus avoid the errors and heresies that have been committed. The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement would have avoided "syncretistic contextualization," such as Arianism, if it had cared to examine how the Church of Jesus Christ had dealt with this issue of great theological significance. What is being said here is that church in her history acts as a check in contextualization. It is not just the tradition of the church in past centuries, but the present church in various cultural situations which also checks contextualization. Paul Hiebert best sums up this aspect.

We need each other to see our sins, for we more readily see the sins of others than our own. Similarly, we see the ways others misinterpret Scriptures before we see our own misinterpretations. Along the same line, we need Christians from other cultures, for they often see how our cultural biases have distorted our interpretations of the Scripture. This corporate nature as a community of interpretation extends not only to the church in every culture, but also to the church in all ages.<sup>36</sup>

There is need to be cautious in trying so hard to indigenize the church to the point whereby it is only a reaction against western imperialism and she refuses to listen also to what God is doing in the western churches.

## CONCLUSION

What will a relevant Christianity in modern Africa look like? A contextualized Christianity worked out according to the principle of the preceding discussion means that the actual expression of theological truth will differ from

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<sup>35</sup> Frame, 304.

<sup>36</sup> Hiebert, 398.

culture to culture. However, the content, namely, the basic theological truths, will not change.<sup>37</sup>

In order that the Church be relevant it must seek to understand the culture, exegete the Scriptures, and involve the Christian community. The Bible should be the judge of culture. The Bible should also be used to take captive all traditional means of communication. African traditional forms of communication, such as drama, story-telling, and rituals that were effective in communicating traditional and religious beliefs and values need to be transformed for effective communication of biblical truths in forms that are relevant and authentic to the African. Though contextualization faces the danger of distorting the faith in order make it more palatable in a given historical context, that need not be the case, if the guidelines discussed in this chapter are followed. If our Christianity is to be meaningful, it must be relevant, scratching where new converts and the whole church are itching. Many theologians, preachers and teachers are scratching. The evangelical theologian is committed to the inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility and authority of Scripture as well as being well informed with the problems and needs of contemporary church. A relevant Christianity in Africa scratches where the modern African, the contemporary believer is itching.