

Chapter Three

Short Historical Traces and Models of Inculturation

3.1 Introduction

So far we have presented an example of an African society before its contact with European culture and Christianity. We have also seen how the contact took place between this African culture (taking Igbo Culture as an example) and the European one. This point of contact was at the same time the point of contact between African traditional religions and the Euro-Christian practice of Christianity. Though this contact took place years ago its results are still of consequence in African society and is noticeable not only in the benefits for both sides, but equally in the side effects, problems or challenges posed by it. Noble ideals were set up, but from much that was accomplished and the methods applied it becomes clear that practice and theory were worlds apart.

Surveying the activities of the missionaries in Africa, one cannot but notice one missing, but important, element. There was no effort towards establishing dialogue between Euro-Christianity and the African's society, their culture and religion. What actually occurred was a monologue led by the different agents of Euro-Christianity to the utter neglect of healthy contact between the two sides. It was as a confrontation resulting in the devaluation, and almost an annihilation, of a non-European culture. The way in which this was done was nothing to be proud of and has been attracting criticism of different sorts for a long time. One such criticism is based on the fact that the

purported evangelisation of Africa was just a forceful and violently coerced transplantation of institutions, symbols, concepts and moral values of European Christian culture. It can be maintained that there was no real encounter between the Message of Christ and the indigenous African reality and culture. Coupled with the collaboration of the missionaries with the colonialists, this explains the reaction of some Africans towards the missionaries beginning in the period when some critical Africans started fighting colonialism. At the same time a movement began towards a better understanding of the Message of Christ in the African culture. Today more than ever before, this movement has reached a stage where it can no longer be ignored.

This work in general and this chapter in particular are occupied with this issue. Attention will be given to origin, history and some models of this effort towards a better understanding of the Message of Christ in Africa – Inculturation, which is one of the models, will be treated as well.

The particular model proposed in this work lays emphasis on dialogue and understands inculturation as a process. Hence there is the need for mapping out its guiding principles, goal and subject matter, spheres, prerequisites, and methods. In the conclusion, some thematic examples of this kind of inculturation shall be presented. These will include examples of outstanding contributions both of Christianity with its European background and of the African traditional religions and cultures.

3.2 Origin/Short Review and Models of Indigenisation of the Message of Christ

3.2.1 The Old Testament

From biblical history it can be maintained that „indigenisation” in terms of the relationship between God and his people has been present starting with the Old Testament. Examples found in the Old Testament are instances where the message of God tries to take root in the culture of the Israelites. This indigenisation occurred in the encounters between God and the people of Israel where God’s loving care and the message of salvation found expression in indigenous