CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN GHANA AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

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Right from the era of Western missionary enterprise in Africa, native receptors of the gospel have not been passive rather, they have consistently contributed to the rooting and spread of Christianity on African soil. The role of natives in African Christianity is due to strands of continuity between African religion and culture and Christianity. The two have blended to give some categories of Christianity an African imprint. Charismatic churches in Africa are a classic example of unique contemporary Christian expression of Christianity due to its ability to adapt to the African context. It has gone far in its attempt to fit the gospel with African primal world-view, and in fact the general situation in Ghana, hence its rapid growth. The Charismatic churches are seen as helping to redefine African Christianity in terms of African culture. They are playing a crucial role in the whole process of interpretation and application of Christian truth to real-life issues within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, by way of responding to concerns raised by the latter yet in another vein is perceived as anti-African culture.

This essay begins by examining how culture can be perceived. It uses the Akan world-view as a typical example of Ghanaian/African world-view. It then looks at the Akan concept of salvation as a background to the adaptation sought by Charismatics. It looks at the transmission of Christianity by western missionaries and its failure in the direction of contextualization. It discusses the African Initiated Churches (AICs) as the earliest example of a Christian movement that sought to adapt the gospel to the African situation, which is the essence of contextualization. We focus on the contemporary Charismatic movement, which is the most dynamic religious development in Ghana and how it has endeavoured to adapt itself to the socio-cultural context in Ghana. It would be presumptuous to claim an exhaustive discussion of the all facets of contextualization by Charismatics in this limited space. Thus what we have discussed are examples of the efforts Charismatics are making in the enterprise of contextualization in Ghana.

A view of Culture

Culture is a label that anthropologists put on the structured customs and underlying world-view assumptions, which govern the lives of people.
Culture is the way of life of people, their design for living, their way of coping with all dimensions of the context in which they live. E.B. Tylor defines culture as 'the complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a person] as a member of society'.¹ Thus, culture is essentially, all-inclusive and total.²

Some scholars have tried to make a distinction various levels of culture. Charles H. Kraft for instance has distinguished two major levels, namely Surface-Level Culture and Deep-Level Culture.³ The Surface-Level deals with patterned human behaviour or structure, which is the lesser part of culture. For him, the world-view is at a deeper level since it forms the basis of how people govern their behaviour. Lloyd E. Kwast, further distinguishes the following levels of culture: Behaviour, Values, Beliefs and World-view.⁴ He uses the 'man from the Mars' technique, which imagines how a man who recently landed from the planet Mars would look a culture, as shown below to illustrate his point.

For Kwast, Behaviour, which explains what people do in a cultural context is the first thing the man from the Mars will encounter. The next is Values that concerns the choices that people in a context make. The beliefs of a people, which is deeper, answers the question 'what is true?' Finally, Kwast perceives the world-view of a people, which answers the question what is real as being the core of their culture. Kwast perceives that the world-view underpins the religious beliefs of a people and the religious beliefs forms the bases of their values which in turn affect their behavior. He draws the following conclusion:

This understanding of world-view as the core of every culture explains the confusion many experience at the level of beliefs. One's own world-view provides a system of beliefs which are reflected in his actual values and behavior. Sometimes a new or competing system of beliefs is introduced, but the world-view remains unchallenged and unchanged, so values and behavior reflect the old belief system. Sometimes people who share the gospel cross-culturally fail to take the problem of world-view into account, and are therefore disappointed by the lack of genuine change their efforts produce.⁵

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⁵ Ibid. 364.