

Conflict theory in the inculturation of the Gospel in the Nso¹ of Cameroon

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Abstract

This article defines and describes conflict theory, critical theory and the views of some of their proponents, inculturation, the gospel, and Nso'. The article looks at conflict in Nso' that can be traced back to the fact that the missionaries did not understand certain aspects of Nso' culture. Consequently, there was some conflict between Christianity and Nso' culture, particularly with *ngwerong*² and *ngiri*³ – the core traditional social associations of the Nso' people. The article thus explains the tension that existed in the missionary era and still exists somehow today between Christianity and Nso' culture. In order to elucidate this tension, the author uses two examples: one on the encounter between one of the most dreaded masquerades and a parish priest (an early missionary in Nso' land), and the other on the main traditional social association in Nso' and the first Christians of Nso' origin. Having done that, the author outlines the incompatible activities of the traditional social associations of the Nso' people *vis à vis* the tenets of Christianity, showing that an understanding of these activities is necessary for the inculturation of the gospel in Nso'. In addition, the article equally shows that an understanding of the complexities and the dynamics involved in the relationship between Christ and culture is also necessary for the inculturation of the gospel. Furthermore, alluding to conflict theory and critical theory and using what he calls “consultative/dialogical” critical approach to cultural transformation, the author suggests how the tension between Christianity and Nso' culture could be curbed.

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- 1 Nso' is one of the largest ethnic groups in Cameroon. It is known in the country for its rich cultural heritage. It is as well considered by many Cameroonians as a stronghold of Christianity. Nso' land occupies the eastern corner of the North West Region of Cameroon.
 - 2 *Ngwerong* is a traditional social association of males only. It has an executive, and ceremonial functions.
 - 3 *Ngiri* is a traditional social association for the royals – males only from the *dui* – extended royal family.

Key words

Conflict theory; critical theory; inculturation, Gospel; Nso’; missionary; culture and Christianity

1. Introduction

Conflict seems to be the order of the day. It has existed from time immemorial and still exists today. It seems to be a reality that, while seeking ways of resolving it, society has to grapple with it ever presence. Sociological theories, such as functionalism, phenomenology, social identity theory and conflict theory, just to name a few, have been developed and used as approaches to explain why and how society operates the way it does. In this article, the author explains conflict theory with a focus on its two traditions (Karl Marx and Max Weber) and shows that its understanding is necessary for the inculturation of the Gospel in Nso’. Critical theory and terms, especially those that make up the title of the article such as inculturation, gospel and Nso’, are equally defined. Having done that, the article traces the tension that existed between the first missionaries in Nso’ and the traditional social associations with a focus on *Big Fadda* (the Parish Priest), the first Christians and *ngwerong*. The article then explores the dynamics and complexities inherent in the relation between Christ and culture and shows that the understanding of such dynamics and complexities is necessary for the inculturation of the gospel in Nso’ and beyond. Finally, the article suggests ways through which the tension between Christianity and Nso’ culture could be curbed and ends with a conclusion.

2. Definition of terms

The terms defined and/or described in this section are those that make up the title of the article and those that recur in the work. They are conflict theory, critical theory, inculturation, the gospel and Nso’.

2.1 Conflict theory

Conflict theories hold that there are fundamental differences of interests between social groups. According to conflict theorists, these differences result in conflict being a common and persistent feature of society, not a temporary abnormality (Haralambos & Holborn 2004: xvi). Yet, they tend

to agree that the existence of groups with different interests does not mean that they will be in conflict all the time. Furthermore, conflict theorists are aware that periods of harmony do appear but they do not last forever because conflicts do return. They base their argument on the existence of competing groups (Haralambos & Holborn 2004: 944).

There are a good number of conflict perspectives: Marxism, feminism, interactionism and postmodernism, just to name a few. Interestingly, supporters of these perspectives tend to disagree about the precise nature, cause and extent of conflict (Haralambos & Holborn 2004: xvi). Some theories stress conflict between particular social groups. For example, most forms of feminism see conflict between men and women as the central feature of society. While the racism approach to explaining ethnic disadvantage focus on conflict between ethnic groups (Haralambos & Holborn 2004: 944). Hence, one could be right to observe that conflict theorists themselves are in conflict. Conflict theory can be better understood when placed under its two main traditions.

2.1.1 The two traditions of conflict theory

Many conflict theories take their inspiration from either the work of Karl Marx or Max Weber, otherwise known as the two traditions of conflict theory as briefly described below.

2.1.1.1 Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Historically, Marxism takes its name from its founder – Karl Marx, the German-born philosopher and sociologist who became increasingly influential in sociology during the 1970s. Marx's view of conflict can be understood when placed under two important features of his approach: historical perspective and dialectical materialism. These features are followed by a critique of Marxism.

2.1.1.1.1 Historical perspective of Marxism

According to (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:945), Karl Marx regarded people as the producer and the products of the society. In other words, people make society and themselves by their own actions. They are equally a product of society in that they are shaped by the social relationships and systems of thought that they create. Furthermore, a society forms a

totality and can be understood as such. The various parts of society are interconnected and influence each other. In this way, economic, political, legal and religious institutions can only be understood in terms of their mutual effect. Economic factors seem to take the lead because they exert the primary influence and largely shape other aspects of society. In addition, Marx indicates that the history of human society is a product of tension and conflict. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution. Instead, it proceeds from contradictions built into society, which are a source of tension and ultimately the source of open conflict and radical change.

2.1.1.1.2 Dialectical materialism of Marxism

Haralambos & Holborn (2004:945), point out that it is often argued that Marx's view of history is based on the idea of dialectic. And dialectical movement, they say, represents a struggle of opposites, a conflict of contradictions. Conflict as they indicate provides the dynamic principle, the source of change. Following this viewpoint, any process of change involves tension between incompatible forces. The struggle between these forces grows until there is a final collision. The result is a sudden leap forward, which creates a new set of forces on a higher level of development. Then the dialectical process begins again, as the contradictions between this new set of forces interact and conflict, and propel change. Haralambos & Holborn (2004:945), further indicate that Marx rejected the priority the German philosopher, Hegel gave to thoughts and ideas because he saw historical change as a dialectical movement of human ideas and thoughts. Marx argued that the source of change lies in contradictions – particularly in the economic system and in society in general. Consequently, and in respect of the priority Marx gives to economic factors – to “material life”, his view of history is often referred to as dialectical materialism. Since people's ideas are primarily a reflection of the social relationships of economic production, they do not provide the main source of change. Therefore, it is in contradictions and conflict in the economic system that major dynamic for social change lies. Given the interconnected nature of all parts of society, it is only through the process of interplay between these parts that change occurs.

2.1.1.1.3 *A Critique and defence of Marxism*

According to Haralambos & Holborn (2004:949), many of Marx's critics have argued that history has failed to substantiate his views on the direction of social change. These critics claim that class conflict far from growing in intensity has become institutionalised in advanced capitalist society. On communist society, critics have argued that history has not borne out the promise of communism contained in Marx's writings. They point out that significant social inequalities are present in communist regimes, and there are few, if any, signs of a movement towards equality. Furthermore, these critics hold that the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s suggests that the promise of communism has been replaced by the desire for Western-style democracies. It is necessary to note that particular criticism has been directed towards the priority that Marx assigned to economic factors in his explanation of social structure and social change. Critics have often rejected Marx on the basis of this "economic determinism" although they admit that the charge of economic determinism is more applicable to some of Marx's followers than to Marx himself.

In a defence of Marx, it is indicated that a close examination of his writings prove more subtle and dynamic than many of his critics have suggested. For example, it is said that Marx rejected a simplistic, one-directional view of causation. Although he gave priority to economic factors, his defenders point out that they form only one aspect of the dialectic of history. Seen from this perspective, the economy is the primary but not the sole determinant of social change. The various parts of society are interrelated in terms of mutual effect (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:950).

Marx as Haralambos & Holborn (2004:950) point out describes the economic infrastructure as the "ultimately determinant element in history". However, Engels, they say, argues that:

If someone twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure ... also exert their influence upon the course of the historical struggle and

in many cases preponderate in determining their form (Marx and Engels 1950b cited in Haralambos & Holborn (2004:950).

One could corroborate this argument by indicating that where there is an ultimate reality there are equally penultimate ones surrounding it. Hence, economic factors cannot be considered the absolute factor involved in Marx's dialectic of history. Accordingly, the various parts of superstructure have a certain degree of autonomy and a part to play in influencing the course of history. They are not automatically and mechanically determined by the infrastructure. Marx is said to have argued persistently that, "man makes his own history". Following this viewpoint, one could be right to agree that although a successful revolution depends ultimately on the economic situation, it requires human initiative (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:950) which produces other factors necessary to bring about change.

2.1.1.2 Max Weber (1864 – 1920)

Weber is highly regarded as one of the three founders of sociology, with Marx and Durkheim. According to Weber social action should be the focus of study in sociology. Conflict theory is known to have its origins in the work of Weber (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:950). Furthermore, he represents one of the most important developments in social stratification theory since Karl Marx. Marx is said to have believed that social stratification results from the struggle for scarce resources in society. Although he saw this struggle as being primarily concerned with economic resources, it can also involve struggles for prestige and for political power (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:12). Weber's approach to issues of conflict is placed under two of his most prominent themes: market situation and status situation. But the author of this article briefly looks at status situation because of its relevance to the article.

2.1.1.2.1 Status situation

On status situation, Weber maintained that while class forms one basis for group formation, collective action and the acquisition of political power, there are other bases for these activities. In particular, groups form because their members share a similar status situation. Whereas class refers to unequal distribution of economic rewards, status refers to unequal distribution of social honour (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:13). In Nso'

such unequal distribution of social honour is glaring. For example, the *ngiri* traditional social association belongs to the royal males only.

It seems necessary to note that Weber's views on classes, status groups and parties reflect the main themes of conflict theory. Conflict theorists argue that the social structure is much more complex than Marx's work suggests. They point out that it consists of many different groups, and not just two classes. Additionally, even though they accept that these groups have different interests; these interests are not just economic. A particular group might strive for greater prestige or status rather than economic power (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:151). This striving for prestige or status rather than economic power happens in the Nso' of Cameroon, where people join traditional social associations and get initiated into the core of it for prestige.

Generally, conflict theory orientation incorporates three central and connected assumptions. The first is that people have a number of basic interests; things they want and attempt to acquire that are not defined by societies but rather are common to them all. The second assumption of conflict theorists, which is even central to the whole conflict perspective, is an emphasis on power as the core of social relationships. The third distinctive aspect of conflict theory is that values and ideas are seen as weapons used by different groups to advance their own ends rather than the means of defining a whole society's identity and goals (Wallace & Wolf 2006:69).

Weber as Wallace & Wolf (2006:74), hold that someone's religion, education, or political faction may be as important a source of power and success. This argument, they say has had great influence on modern analytic theorists who, like him, believe that economic factors are not always the major determinants of people's lives and power. Obviously, some people get into some positions not for economic reasons but to demonstrate wealth, prowess and to seek fame and/or recognition. For example, when the rich in Nso' *tang ngwerong* (*tang* is an act of being initiated into a traditional social group of which *ngwerong* is one), they want to demonstrate wealth and seek for recognition as the "powerful" people of the society and socialise at a level commensurate to their high status.

Summarily, Ian Craib has brilliantly described conflict theory as follows: “Society is like a more or less confused battle ground. If we watch from on high, we can see a variety of groups fighting each other, constantly forming and reforming, making and breaking alliances” (Ian Craib 1984 cited in Haralambos & Holborn 2004:151) These groups as indicated above include sacred and secular.

Conflict theory concentrates on the fact that conflict is inherent in society and does not indicate how it could be resolved. Therefore, it is essential to understand another theory, critical theory, which emphasises the need of curbing conflicts.

2.2 Critical theory

This section presents a brief history and meaning of critical theory.

2.2.1 A brief history of critical theory

Critical theory came to vogue in the period of the Weimar Republic⁴ (1918 –1933), grew to maturity in exile, and achieved cultural currency on its return from it. Then it was passed on from its founding first generation proponents, among others Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno, to the leader of its second, Jürgen Habermas. Critical theory remained central to European philosophical, social, and political thought throughout the Cold War⁵ period (1946–1991) and beyond (Rush ed. 2004:1).

Actually, any account of the conceptual foundations of “early critical theory,” roughly the writings of the core members of Frankfurt Institute from 1930 to 1940, would be greatly weakened were it not to view the development of critical theory in this phase as inherently concerned with defining itself in opposition to other social and philosophical theories. The seminal essays of Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno, the main proponents of critical theory written in the mid to late 1930s bring out in an especially brilliant way how early critical theory was

4 The Weimar Republic is an unofficial designation for the German State during the years as a Republic with a multiparty political system from 1918 to 1933. The name is derived from the city of Weimar, where its constitutional assembly took place.

5 The Cold War (1946–1991) was a state of geopolitical tension between the two primary War II victors: the Soviet Union and the United States of America, its allies and others.

formed by distinguishing itself from rival approaches (Rush ed. 2004:6–7; Fuchs 2015:1). This article has not presented any detail account of the said essays, but the focused on the meaning of critical theory is derived from them.

2.2.2 Meaning of critical theory

In order to go straight to the point, the question to address is: according to Horkheimer, “what does it mean for a social theory to be ‘critical’ or simply, what is ‘critical theory’”? From the first sight, one might be tempted to think that critical theory is “critical” just because it “criticises” existing political life (Rush ed. 2004:9). Just as one might equally think from the first sight that the “countercultural” model of contextual theology is anti-cultural (Bevans 2002), which is quiet misleading.

Critical theory is a way to instigate social change by providing knowledge of the forces of social inequality that can, in turn, inform political action aimed at emancipation (or at least at diminishing domination and inequality) (Rush ed. 2004:9; Fuchs 2015:1,7,8). Following this thought one might think that critical theory is “critical” just to the extent that it makes social inequality apparent, specifies some plausible candidates for the causes of the inequality, and enables society in general (or at least its oppressed segment) to react in appropriate ways. Critical theory is “critical” because it answers the charge laid by the last of Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it” (Rush ed. 2004: 9–10). Critical theory is therefore proactive. Its goal is the transformation of society as a whole so that a just society with peace, wealth, freedom, and self-fulfilment for all can be achieved (Fuchs: 2015:3). This idea of transformation is central to the process of inculturation in this article (see section 5).

Horkheimer first used the term critical theory in his seminal 1937 essay “Traditional and Critical Theory.” Although the core members of the early Institute viewed this essay as the classic statement of the structure and aims of critical theory, focusing on it alone provides a simplified and overly neat answer to the question of what is supposed to make critical theory critical. This is because the traditional-critical dichotomy is only one way in which Horkheimer characterises the nature of the social theory of the Institute. Horkheimer is very used to the idea that conceptions of

social phenomena are all partially true (Rush ed. 2004:18). The conceptions and understanding of these are based on theories. And as Haralambos & Holborn (2006:934) point out, no amount of theory can hope to explain everything, or account for the infinite amount of data that exists, or encompass the endless ways of reality. Theories, they go on, are selective in terms of priorities and perspectives and the data they define as significant. Consequently, they provide a particular and partial view of reality.

2.3 Inculturation

Before attempting a definition of inculturation, it seems necessary to trace the history of the concept, though in brief.

2.3.1 A brief history of inculturation

The term inculturation seems to be of recent origin, but it has precedent in both in Christian history and theology. It is said that Pierre Charles, introduced the concept of “enculturation” in cultural anthropology circles and into missiology in France but it was J Masson who first coined the phrase *Catholicisme inculturé* (“inculturated Catholicism”) in 1962. The term soon gained popularity among the Jesuits, in the form of inculturation. Consequently, in 1977 the Jesuit superior-general, P Arrupe introduced the term to the Synod of Bishops; the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesis Tradendae* (CT) which followed from this Synod took it up and gave it universal currency. It was soon also accepted in protestant circles and has remained one of the most used concepts in missiological circles (Bosch 1991:447; Shorter 1988:10).

Theologically, the foundation of inculturation is the incarnation. The basic argument being that just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became incarnate in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated or incarnated in the local culture and context (Matt. 5:17; Acts 10:34). In this wise, incarnation as the theological model of inculturation could be explained in two senses. In the first one it means the process of mutual penetration of the gospel and culture so that Jesus Christ may be present “today” in every culture. The second sense refers to the event of Bethlehem, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Accordingly, it is the primordial inculturation of the Word of God in human flesh and history, and therefore the foundation and model for subsequent inculturation. “It is

the redemption of humanity in Christ” (Oborji 2006:19–20). Hence, the gospel has a big role to play.

2.3.2 *Meaning of inculturation*

According to Pedro Arrupe, inculturation is:

“The incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a 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 “new creation”” (Arrupe 1978 quoted in Shorter 1988:11).

In this way, inculturation concern is to become a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation. The focus here as Bosch (1991:455), points out is on the “new creation”, on the transformation of the old, on the plant which, having flowered from its seed, is at the same time something fundamentally new when compared with that seed.

Shorter defines inculturation as: “the on-going dialogue between [Christian] faith and culture or cultures ... the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures” (Shorter 1988:11). He indicates that there are three points to note about inculturation, arising from the two definitions above: The first is that we are not only talking about the first insertion of the Christian message into a hitherto non-Christian culture or cultures. We are also talking about a continuous dialogue between Faith and culture because culture is not static. The second point to note is that Christian Faith cannot exist except in a cultural form since Christian faith or Christian life is a cultural phenomenon. Finally, when we speak of inculturation, we are referring to a phenomenon that transcends mere acculturation and becomes a stage when the human culture is enlivened by the Gospel from within, presupposing a measure of reformulation or reinterpretation (Shorter 1988:11–12). This is indicative of the fact that inculturation warrants a dialogical, yet critical approach with the aim of transformation of the culture through the gospel. There are three words to note from the above definitions of inculturation: dialogue, culture, Gospel and transformation. These words will form the basis for the discussion on the dynamics and the complexities involved in

the relationship between Christ and culture in a bid to seek ways to curb the tension that exists between Nso' culture and Christianity (see section 4.2).

Finally, it is necessary to note that inculturation is not “anything goes”. It has a critical dimension, and authentic inculturation may indeed view the gospel as the liberator of the culture; yet, the gospel can however, also become cultures prisoner (Bosch 1991:455). Judging from the meaning of inculturation and the supporting views as stated above, one could be right to conclude that any authentic inculturation would take the gospel seriously, yet with the understanding that no proper contextualisation of the gospel can take place void of culture.

2.4 The Gospel

This is the Good news of Jesus Christ, incarnated in his life, death, resurrection and promises as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. This good news is summarised in what is considered Jesus' mission statement:

“The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has sent me to preach good news to the poor. He has anointed me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Lk 4:18–19).

The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) takes her missions from that of Jesus Christ as stated above and lays emphasis on the proclamation of the Good news of Jesus Christ in word and action – preaching, healing and liberation the people of God from sin (PCC Constitution 1998:1). The PCC is the second largest denomination in Nso' land.

2.5 Nso'

Nso' is one of the largest ethnic groups in Cameroon. It is known in the country for its rich cultural heritage. It is as well considered by many Cameroonians as a stronghold of Christianity. Nso' land occupies the eastern corner of the North West Region of Cameroon. Historically, Nso' people are believed to have migrated from Tikari in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon. They are known to have had a woman called *Ngonnso* as one of their first leaders (Banboyee 2001:5). The author of this article comes from Nso'.

3. Two examples of conflicts between Christianity and Nso' culture

Unprecedented tension cropped up between Christianity and one of the traditional social associations, *ngwerong* at the inception of Christianity in Nso' (75 Anniversary 1987:10; Lafon 1988: Nyuyki 2017:224–227). It was so fierce that it led to the death of some indigenes.

3.1 *Big fadda* (parish priest) and the *kibaranko*⁶ from the *ngwerong* association

In his novel, *The White Man of God*, Jumbam (1980:141–143), dramatizes how one priest – a missionary to Nso' confronted the *kibaranko*, a masquerade from the *ngwerong* traditional social association. The results were that when the masquerade was unmasked, the one inside was his catechist. This surprised *Big fadda* (the parish priest) and he collapsed, probably from the shock. However, onlookers held that it was the power of the *kibaranko* that made him to collapse. The incident unfolds as follows: Father Cosmas who assists *Big fadda*, the parish priest is reported dead. Before his death, the Fon (the sacral ruler of Nso' people) had conferred him the title “Fai Mission” (meaning lineage head of mission).

Father Cosmas related well with the Nso' people and his death was a shock to them. Two days after his death, was the market day and the Fon sent three *Fais* (lineage heads) to announce it to the people in the market. The announcement was made and his death celebration was scheduled for Sunday *Gege*.⁷ When it was Sunday *Gege*, the long-awaited day for the celebration of the death of Fai Mission, many people gathered in the Fon's palace. That Sunday afternoon Christians and non-Christians filled the palace, drinking palm wine and firing guns. Some jujus started displaying in the palace. And at about five o'clock the bell rang for Rosary and Benediction but nobody budged from his/her place to go to church. Big Father then put on his cassock and moved towards the church, but it was the assistant catechist who had rung the bell and not Pa *Matiu* (Matthew).

6 *Kibaranko* is one of the most if not the most dreaded of all masquerades in Nso' land. It belongs to *Ngwerong* one of the traditional social associations of the Nso' people of Cameroon.

7 Nso' has an eight-day week and *Gegee* is the fifth day in order of counting.

People were still waiting to watch the *kibaranko*, the juju that closes mourning ceremonies, so they could not go to church. Pa Matiu himself a member of the *ngwerong* society was right in the *ngwerong* compound.

Then came the time and the *kibaranko* came out and headed directly to the mission compound. There Big Father confronted it. Jumbam (1980:143) dramatises this part as follows:

“Big Father kicked and kicked the *kibaranko* (juju) and when it turned round to him he pushed off its big mask and then got the shock of his life. Face to face with the juju he could not believe his eyes.

“Matthew!”

“Father”

“Matthew!”

“Father”

Then he collapsed on the spot. The juju put on his mask and ran back to the Palace wilder than ever” (Jumbam 1980:143).

This seems to paint the picture of what happened not just in Nso’ but in most of Africa. Everything might not have been “Big Fadda” and *Kibiranko*, but missionaries and cultural aspects that they might not have taken time to study but considered them evil just from the first sight. Hence, the need to understand the culture of a people before attempting to transform it with the gospel is necessary and will continue to be so since culture too is dynamic.

3.2 The persecution of Christians in Nso’ by *nwerong* in the 20th century

The major persecution of Christians in Nso’ is dated 1920, after the baptism of nineteen catechumens. It began with the burning down of the church by the “pagans”, which in most cases refer to members of the *ngwerong* traditional social association. The burning down of the church house was triggered by the festivities of the Christians after their baptism. When the church building was burnt down, the houses around also got burnt. This included the property Monsignor Plissonneau left behind after having

conducted a baptism. The Fon of Nso’ was informed at midnight about the fire incident by Paul Tangwa and Felix Chaiyi, who indicates that the Fon was very surprised and thus exclaimed: “Wir vee ve sevti ji a yee ton, a ton ne rua!” This means, “Those who boasted that they would burn it have actually done it” (Lafon 1988:60).

It seems important to note that the Fon of Nso’ and the Christians did not take the incident lightly. The Fon dispatched a messenger to Mr Duncan – the Divisional Officer in Bamenda⁸, while the Christians sent Aloysius Mukong to Buea⁹ to contact the resident, Mr. Ruxton. Following their complaints, an inquiry was conducted and the Christians named twelve persons as those responsible for the fire disaster. After the inquiry, these twelve persons were imprisoned for two months and had to pay damages. The Fon requested his people to rebuild the church and the houses that were burnt down and they did. Following the faith of the Christians some twenty pagans gave their names as catechumens (Lafon 1988:63).

Migeod as cited in Lafon (1988:64) points out that the persecution of Christians was supported by the British administrator at the time:

Persecution of the Christians instigated by Ngwerong Society was stepped up. At that time the Divisional Officer in Bamenda was Duncan, an English atheist, who strove with all his might to abolish the catholic religion. All Christians and catechumens were quarantined in Shisong. The Christians waged a civil disobedience campaign to traditional authority. Nothing, they believed, was forbidden them. No pagan could enter a Christian village. These Christian villages soon were everywhere Djottin, Tabenken, Shisong, Njinilom etc. (Lafon 1988:64).

It seems that the more intense the persecution the firmer the Christians stood and the more Christian villages were created. Nevertheless, when the German Sacred Heart Fathers left Cameroon in 1915, catechumens were forced to abandon their faith. The “pagans”, repeatedly accused them of disrespecting the Fon. His nobles and *ngwerong* members’ publicity accused Paul Tangwa, one of the founding Christians of being

8 Bamenda is the Regional Capital of the North West Region of Cameroon.

9 Buea is the Regional Capital of the South West Region of Cameroon.

the ring-leader who admits peoples' wives into the Whiteman's church (75 Anniversary 1987:10). Here one could be right to observe that there was conflict of authority, triggered by fear of loss of identity and the power of command by *ngwerong*, as well as lack of trust in the priests in relation to peoples' wives.

Again Migeod, further states:

The old pagan element in the population was actively hostile, and the Nigerian Government rather sympathised with them. This made them harry the Christians all the more and many bear marks of beatings which they received. When this failed, they turned to poisoning children and this in secret – the last act to which paganism could resort (Lafon 1988:65).

This was indeed a terrible act. Interestingly “pagans” found refuge in Duncan, the Divisional Officer, accusing Christians of admitting their wives, without their consent into the church (Lafon 1988:65). In order to reinforce the persecution, the District Officer, Mr. Duncan decreed that all Christian leaders be arrested. This arrest was carried out by the soldiers who were bewildered at the courage of the Christians because they took the chains from them and threw them around their own necks with joy (Lafon 1988:69). Later on the arrest extended to the neighbouring villages such as Sov, from where John Maimo was arrested and Joseph Tar from Mbiame, who was accompanied by Peter Nsame, the catechist, who later suffered the same fate of being tortured by *ngwerong* in Mbiame (Lafon 1988:71).

One of the issues that triggered the persecution of Christians by *ngwerong* was the misconception that its members had about the Lord's Supper, which led them to see Christians as cannibals because they eat the body of Christ and drank his blood (Celebrating 100 Years 2012:45). Here Christians were persecuted because of their opponent's ignorance.

While some of the catechists and Christians were imprisoned, catechist Paul Tangwa was banished on the 8th of March and was also asked never to set foot on Nso' land. Yet he was soon back. In the meantime Joseph Tar was released after two months when another District Officer had replaced Mr. Duncan. Still things did not change. Non-Christians waged war against Christians. In order to prevent Christians from escaping, the members of the *ngwerong* society lit fires all over the town. A fierce fight ensued

between Christians and non-Christians, especially those of the *ngwerong* society. The situation was however diffused by four smart Christians of the royal lineage (75 Anniversary 1987:10). Of all the Christians who suffered persecution in Nso', Paul Tangwa and Peter Nsame seem to have suffered the most. Paul Tangwa was exiled as we have seen, while Peter Nsame remained with an indelible mark, the loss of four front teeth as a result of beatings from the hooded *ngwerong*. In addition, other two Christians – Pa John Ngo and Mama Rosina Kibong are reported to have received permanent scars from twelve lashes each from *ngwerong* (Lafon 1988:67–71; 100 Anniversary 2012:45).

The main causes of the conflict between Christianity and Nso' cultures are power struggle/authority over each institution and ignorance of the importance of each of the institutions. Christianity wants to rule over the receptor culture, while the receptor culture fears that it may lose its position and identity. Christianity is ignorant of the importance of culture to its progress while the custodians of Nso' culture are ignorant of the importance of Christianity to Nso'. Hence, for inculturation to take place in a more meaningful way in Nso' there is a need to understand the complexities and dynamics involved therein before seeking ways to curb the tension.

4. The complexities and dynamics involved in the inculturation of the gospel in Nso'

In his doctoral thesis, “A Missional Approach to the Traditional Social Associations of the Nso' People of Cameroon” Nyuyki (2017:3), terms what the missionaries prejudicially called secret societies as traditional social associations. He argues that the missionaries did not study the activities of such groups well. Consequently, churches in Nso' were born out of such background, and some Christians thus shun these associations since their activities were labeled as evil. In Nso' there are so many of such associations but those that form the core culture are *ngwerong* and *ngiri*. Following (Nyuyki 2017:227–228), the author outlines some of the incompatible activities of Nso' traditional social associations and shows that it is necessary to know them for the inculturation of the gospel in Nso'. Furthermore, he shows that it is also necessary to understand the complexities and dynamics involved in the relationship between Christ

and culture in general because it clarifies some doubt and facilitates inculturation.

4.1 Understanding the incompatible activities of Nso' traditional social associations

From both the focused groups' discussions and various interviews conducted for his doctoral thesis, Nyuyki (2017:288) identifies the following activities of *yengiri*¹⁰ and *yengwerong*¹¹ as incompatible to Christianity:

- Expensive nature of initiation into the *yengwerong* and/or the *yengiri* group, unhealthy competition among members, and the fact that some even borrow money to spend for such occasions is considered incompatible with Christianity.
- The legalistic nature of their rules and regulations is also seen to be incompatible with Christianity.
- The discriminatory nature, not admitting women into these groups is considered incompatible with Christianity.
- The demand to provide wives and boys for the Fon and the traditional social associations respectively as part of the fulfilment for initiation into certain groups is considered incompatible with Christianity.
- Also, the seizing of palm wine from people for occasions in the palace is considered to be unfair for this deprives the owners.
- Sometimes members use injunctions indiscriminately and place them in areas that perhaps belong to people they hate.
- The display with spears and clubs is dangerous; sometimes people sustain injuries, from the throwing of these implements which is sometimes done at random. Some of the medicines they possess affect even non-members and in order to be cleansed one has to pay a fine.
- Some people join the *yengiri* or *yengwerong* in order to display wealth and prowess. Christianity teaches modesty.

10 *Yengiri* is a ceremonial masquerade in the *ngiri* traditional social association. Literally, it is the mother of *ngiri*.

11 *Yengwerong* is a ceremonial masquerade in the *ngwerong* traditional social association. Literally, it is the mother of *ngwerong*.

- Other members also concentrate on food and drink. But the Bible teaches that: "...the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking..." (Rom. 14:17), and that "man does not live by bread alone..." (Luke 4:4).

Biblical teachings on the issues enumerated above, with a focus on food, and drink is discussed in section 5 below in the process of inculturation in such a context. In the meantime, the next section shows that an understanding of the dynamic relationship between Christ and culture is necessary for the inculturation of the gospel in every culture.

4.2 Understanding the complexities and the dynamic relationship between Christ and culture

As seen in the preceding sections, conflict is one of the most prominent existential realities. There will always be conflict of one kind or the other, sometimes minor and sometimes major. In discussing conflict theory, it is noticed that conflict theorists themselves are often in conflict. Conflict generally occurs primarily from people's varied interests. The dynamic relationship between Christ and culture that is discussed below portrays some sort of tension between various viewpoints of different scholars, which somehow conflict with each other if they are not seen as complementing one another.

In looking at the relationship between Christ and culture, one needs to note that Jesus Christ did not only identify with the culture of his days. He also challenged it. For example, he accepted the existence of demons and on the other hand defeated them (Bowen 1998:89). He greatly challenged certain aspects of the culture he had inherited. For example, he castigated the established order so as to prepare the new order willed by God (Shorter 1988:119). Jesus Christ approached the culture of his days in different ways. In his famous book, *Christ and culture*, HR Niebuhr has categorised five views of the relationship between Christ and culture as summarised below:

1. Christ *against* culture – i.e., Christ is the sole authority; the claims of culture are to be rejected.
2. The Christ *of* culture – the Christian system is not different from culture in kind but only in quality; the best of culture should be selected to conform to Christ.

3. Christ *above* culture – i.e., the reception of grace perfects and completes culture though there is not a “smooth curve in or continuous line” between them.
4. Christ and culture in *paradox* – i.e., both are authorities to be obeyed and the believer, therefore, lives with this tension.
5. Christ as *Transformer* of culture – i.e., culture reflects the fallen state of humanity, in Christ, humanity is redeemed and culture can be renewed so as to glorify God and promote his purpose (Hesselgrave 1991:116).

Commenting on these categories, Hesselgrave (1991:116) indicates that the analysis is very instructive and helpful if they are not taken to be rigid and their representatives are not considered to be antagonistic to one another in every case. He goes on to state that the main problem with Niebuhr is that he puts Bible authors and writings at odds with one another. However, he indicates that from the biblical point of view there seems to be some value in emphasis that fall under categories one (Christ against culture), four (Christ and culture in paradox) and five (Christ as transformer of culture) and quite possibly, three (Christ above culture) (Hesselgrave 1991:116).

D.A. Carson’s critique of Niebuhr is quite elaborate but two issues seem to be of much relevance to this article: the reasons for Niebuhr’s popularity and his handling of scripture. According to Carson (2008:31), Niebuhr’s popularity and influence stem from the fact that he embraces:

Catholics and protestants, East and West examples from the Fathers, the middle ages, the reformation, and the modern period, conservatives and liberals, mainstream believes (whatever they are in any period), and sectarians from our perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the only significant component that is missing is the voice of the contemporary church in the Two-Thirds world. In all fairness, however, anyone who reads him sympathetically can pretty well guess where Niebuhr would place most of these voices, without substantially revising his fivefold paradigm. One cannot fairly blame Niebuhr for writing fifty years ago. So we reflect, with gratitude, on his comprehensiveness (Carson 2008:31–32).

That notwithstanding, Niebuhr's comprehensiveness is coupled with what Carson calls "a deadly weakness". For example, Niebuhr eliminates movements like Arians, Mormons, and the followers of Thomas Munzer, which he judges beyond the pale (Carson 2008:32).

One of the strengths of Niebuhr lies in his ability to ground most of his five patterns in the Scriptures themselves. Nevertheless, in his effort to ground his patterns in the bible, he is less than successful with the second: the Christ of culture where he pays title attention to scripture and leaps to two dominant movements, like Gnosticism and liberalism, which detach themselves from the great turning points in the Bible's story line. Simply put, the pattern is not biblically grounded, falls short of the expectation of being a reference. Furthermore, the use of the Fourth Gospel in defence of his fifth pattern, "Christ the transformer of culture" is problematic. For example in reference to John 1:1–3, Niebuhr infers, "John could not say more forcefully that whatever is, is good" (Niebuhr 1952:197). But, surely it would be more accurate as Carson points out to infer, "John could not say more forcefully that whatever the Logos originally made was good" (Carson 2008:36–37). This means that from the beginning creation was good, but sin later came in and is infiltrating it and contaminating it.

Nevertheless, Niebuhr's categories need to be considered complementary and each of them can be applied according to the contextual realities. However, the fifth pattern "Christ as transformer of culture" seems to cut across all culture, and thus more relevant for the inculturation of the gospel in Nso'. Hence, it is discussed under "consultative/dialogical" critical approach to cultural transformation below as a way of curbing tension between Christianity and culture.

5. "Consultative/dialogical" critical approach to cultural transformation

This model engages the people in their context and brings them in dialogue with the missionary/pastor. Given its engaging and critical nature, the author of this article calls it a "consultative/dialogical" critical approach. Experience has shown that people are happy when they are recognised and engaged in discussions that could lead to transformation from within. For example, in his *Christianity Rediscovered*, Vincent Denovan tells of

his struggles as he discovered how to be both faithful to Orthodoxy and Scripture, and to recast the vocabulary of the gospel story to communicate with the Masai in their culture. He got incredible results when he engaged the Masai people in his endeavour to pass on the gospel to them. One of the outstanding responses came from *Ndangoya*, chief of the Masai people, who chose his baptism name as Abraham because he was attracted to his story of leaving everything and leading his people from the worship of a tribal god in search of the unknown High God. The rest of the men and women of *Ndangoya's* community had however chosen new Masai names, filled with meaning for their own baptism (Denovan 1978:97). When one works closely in context with the people their response will obviously be positive.

Whether Christ is considered “against” culture; “of” culture; “above” culture; in “paradox” with culture; as “transformer” of culture, the central issue is to transform aspects of culture (s) that are incompatible to the gospel. Hence, there is need to re-emphasise the fact that every culture needs transformation in one way or the other. Following 1997 Lausanne Consultation, which spoke of moving from contextualisation as a cross-cultural mission to contextualisation as a necessary practice of all churches within their own cultures, Mission-Shaped church (2004:90) observes that every culture including their own (English Culture) needs the transforming challenge of the gospel. And this process can only be effective when it starts from within.

What the author of this article terms a *consultative/dialogical* critical approach follows from what Gaze calls a three-way conversation to be heard in every serious attempt at inculturation: first, the historic gospel, uniquely revealed in Holy Scripture and embodied in the Catholic Creeds; second, the Church which is engaging in mission, with its own particular culture and history; third, the culture within which the gospel is being shared (Gaze 1998:4–13 cited in Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91). All the three components are needed to form a church embodying the gospel in a way both appropriate and challenging to the local context. Hence, Gaze points out that:

It is not possible for a missionary/evangeliser to “do inculturation” by analysing the culture to be evangelised and reinterpreting the Christian message in its light. Such a process could only result in a

superficial adaptation of the gospel “from above”. Inculturation is essentially a community process “from below” (Gaze 1998:11 cited in Mission-Shaped Church 2004:91).

Such a process allows the gospel to transform a culture from below. If not the missionary/evangeliser would rather be transferring his/her culture than transforming the receptor’s culture. In this article, the process of transformation can be understood through a further discussion of “Christ as transformer of culture” in the process of inculturation. The dynamics involved in this process of transformation as described below calls for a *consultative/dialogical* approach that involves the gospel, church and culture. This approach needs to be both critical and tolerant.

Hesselgrave (1991:117) opines that all culture needs transformation in motivation as well as in content. He also indicates that God has ordained culture but does not order man’s cultures, most probably because humanity is prone to distortion and sin. Hence, the Lausanne Covenant states:

Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture (Mk 7:8, 9, 13). Because man is God’s creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness (Mt. 7:11, Gen. 4:21, 22). Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture (Douglas 1975:6–7 quoted in Hesselgrave 1991:119).

In communicating the gospel message, the communicator needs the culture for two main reasons: First, communication is inextricable from culture. Second, though Christianity is supracultural in its origin and truth, it is cultural in its application (Hesselgrave 1991:119). In addition, culture, whether prized as holy ground in the anthropological model or looked on with some suspicion, as in the countercultural model is still regarded as of utmost importance for theology and Christian life. Human beings are not abstract creatures, they are radically cultural beings” (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:389).

The anthropological and countercultural models of contextual theology are among the six models discussed by Bevans in his *Models of Contextual Theology* (Bevans 2002). The six models emerge according to particular

contexts and/or persons' theological orientations in the encounter of Christian faith with human culture. For example, the *anthropological model* starts with a basic trust of culture's goodness and revelatory possibilities, and proposes that the wealth often hidden in a culture might offer new riches to the Christian self-understanding. And the *countercultural model*, while recognising the importance of culture, regards it with utmost suspicion as something that needs to be confronted with the culturally specific yet universally valid gospel message (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:48). The other four models include: *translation model*, *praxis model*, *synthetic model*, and *transcendental model*. Thus no one approach to the issue of the relationship between Christ and culture as stated above can claim superiority over others. They each complement one another though in varying dimensions.

McGavran (1974: 80), aware of the fact that tensions that exist between Christianity and culture are not easily resolved, urges Christians to be tolerant of differing opinions concerning them. Yet he insists that resolutions are Christian and workable only to the degree that they emanate from a high view of Scripture and a high view of culture. Scripture should however remain supracultural.

On the other hand, Kraft proposes five ways by which the missionary should approach culture:

First, the missionaries must seek to understanding the element to be changed from the point of view of the people. Second, they should encourage a minimal number of critical changes in the worldview rather than concentrating on a large number of changes at the peripheral levels of culture. Third, they should seek out the opinion of leaders and work with them for change. Fourth, they should recognise the importance of groups of people to the change process and encourage "people movements" to Christ. Fifth, they should recognise that considerable time may be required to bring about lasting cultural change (Kraft 1979 cited in Hesselgrave 1991:128).

It goes without saying that consulting the receptors and making sure they participate in the process of inculturation is as important, as prioritising one's endeavours. Hence, *consultative/dialogical* approach to inculturation is of vital importance. It helps to curb tension because the participants see a sense of recognition and belonging.

In *consultative/dialogical* critical transformational approach to inculturation one identifies cultural aspects that are incompatible to Christianity and engages a discussion with the people involved until they themselves understand the negative implications of such a practice or practices and deem it necessary to change. For example, in the case of a focus on food and drink in 4.1 above the missionary or pastor will have to do a thorough discussion with those involved, letting them state what they derive from their focus on food and drink. Then with his/her biblical and theological knowledge, s/he will lead them gently to be aware of biblical teachings on food and drink. After that s/he allows the teachings for their reflection for a day or two (or more) before returning to find out their feedbacks. Then from their feedbacks, s/he can lead them to draw conclusions on their own. Using their conclusions s/he can now tell them the reasons why the focus on eating and drinking without paying attention to the word of God is incompatible with Christianity. The significance of this *consultative/dialogical* approach is that it involves the receptors, the people on the spot, “insiders” as Gibellini (1994:41) calls them so that they become part and parcel of the discussion and of its outcome.

6. Conclusion

Mankind from creation is a social being, and likes to identify with his/her kind. The affirmation of Adam: “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh...” (Gen. 2:23) confirms this view. Africans in particular have never learned to live in isolation. They are a communal people. Some Christians are members of the *ngwerong* and *ngiri* traditional social associations. Some of these Christians, like Matthew are catechists and elders in the church. And if all the masquerades were to be unmasked, who knows, one may see a prominent Christian like Matthew, the catechist. Hence, there is a need to de-stigmatise those members who are Christians and instead use them to evangelise those who are non-Christians in *ngwerong* and *ngiri*. This would let them be authentically Nso’ and authentically Christians in their setting. Christian missions will always operate in culture (s). There is no perfect culture and there will never be any. Each culture has positive and negative aspects. What Christianity needs to do is to make maximum use of the positive aspects of any culture she meets while trying to seek ways by which the negative, especially dehumanising aspects could be transformed.

The dynamics and complexities involved in inculturation are enormous and no single approach can claim to solve the tension and conflict inherent when Christianity meets other cultures. Yet, the gospel needs to be upheld as supracultural. Better still, when dealing with the relationship between Christ and culture, there are “The non-negotiables Biblical Theology” (Carson 2008:44) that have to be upheld. They involve some accounts of the great turning points of redemptive history: creation and fall, incarnation, Jesus’ death and resurrection, the coming of the Spirit and the final judgment and consummation. Hence, in whichever culture these accounts are to be taken seriously so that the Jesus who is proclaimed is biblically grounded and culturally authentic. “Consultative/dialogical” critical transformational approach to inculturation helps to curb conflict that often exists when Christianity encounter culture because the receptors have a sense of recognition and belonging. They are part and parcel of the conversation and its outcome. Thus the need for transformation becomes clear to them and the change which comes from within is more authentic because it is grounded in their understanding. It can even result in a celebration.

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