The Church as an Agency of Ecological Changes on African Culture

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Abstract: This paper attempts to examine the church as an agent of ecological changes. Before the coming of the missionaries, African traditional communities had their tradition /cultural arrangements that were acceptable and transferred from one generation to another. These cultural beliefs and practices gave them a common sense of belonging that enhanced their livelihoods and satisfied their ecological demands that sustained their survival. This gave them harmony and co-existence with nature, God and fellow human beings. The coming of the missionaries groups expected their African converts to abandon their own cultural and religious heritage, and adopt their new cultural norms. Through acculturation, the church worked out viable possibilities where the Gospel could understand culture and where the community's culture could meet the Gospel for cohesive environment. This paper therefore attempts to explore Christianity as an agent of cultural change and the role of the church in development.
Keywords: African Traditions, Culture, Church, Inculturation, Development.

INTRODUCTION

Ecological changes exert a profound influence upon the environment of evangelization. If a religious group is to survive in a specific area, it must respond to first, the existing environment and secondly establish a conductive ecology which will sustain its survival.

Just as Orobator contends [1] that plants, animals as well as inanimate beings of nature constitutes what makes an African family. This inclusion situates the concern for ecological integrity within the scope of an African community. In the African world-view, animals, plants and objects of nature are all imbued with life. Besides, African religious expressions advocate reverence for nature. Therefore, one of the primary concerns of Africans is harmony with nature, that is, a balanced relationship with the entire universe. A breach of this harmony can result in severe consequences, hence the attempt to tame, placate or neutralize potentially harmful elements of nature. It is therefore imperative that the authentic ecological characteristics which shaped the survival of most African's social, economic, political, and spiritual solidarity which interconnected nature of life in community needs to be emphasized. This explains why the church in its attempt to implant itself in an African life and in an effort to make an authentic African Church, must put into consideration some of the environmental aspects that creates a bonding, a key dimension of life in Africa.

Although some Christian religious institutions are dominated by an inherent conservative bent, recent studies suggest that some denominations have put in place measurable mechanisms as a greater attempt to interrelate the church and community's cultural beliefs and practices which are coherently imbued in their environment. This is on the realization that to build a solid rock on which Christianity can flourish, then having touch with the community needs to have positive effects upon the strength of the church, is significant. Thus failure to keep in touch with the community's cultural practices and beliefs for theological reconstruction may results in a catastrophe, if not a total failure of a religious institution itself.

Whereas the Catholic Church on encounter with most African traditional cultural beliefs and practices in many respects became conservative, the emerging ecological changes frequently presented themselves to the church in the form of problems and dilemmas for those who shape its policies, plans, and programme. It is well evidenced that African culture has in the past been portrayed as a deficient vehicle for

expressing the Christian faith. In general, most missionary groups expected their African converts to abandon their own cultural and religious heritage, and adopt the cultural norms of Europe and North America in order to be accepted as 'good Christians' [2]. However, through acculturation the church worked out viable possibilities where the Gospel could understand culture and where the community's culture could meet the Gospel for cohesive environment.

Culture in this context is the cumulative product of people's activities in all aspects of life in their endeavor to cope with their social and natural environment. Its components include religion, economic, political and social dimensions. In each of these characteristics, reconstruction is necessary from time to time, to ensure that the social structures are finally tuned to the needs of the people. When some components of culture are not finally adjusted, there is uneasiness which can erupt into unrest. When some components of culture are not finally adjusted, there is uneasiness which can erupt into unrest. Spencer-Oatey [41] clearly defines culture as a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior. In other words, culture is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next [42].

Consequently, the emerging issue is that there was need for dialogue for the reason that first the missionaries found African traditional beliefs and practices repugnant and therefore condemned them strongly. Secondly, there was an entity ordinary with their unresolved duality, who are in need of internal dialogue to help them integrate the different outlook, or at least to confront them consciously. Thirdly, which was needed for a situational theology, which was to look into their real needs and aspirations and lastly, the missionaries who viewed African beliefs and practices as being pagan oriented were looking forward to forge a move to Africanize the life and worship of the church as a betrayal calculated to produce what they termed a 'half-caste Christianity'. Culture being a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture, inculturation became handy and relevant as a forward way of reconciling the Gospel and culture. A theology had to

be opened to help the Gospel become incarnate in the life of the people and more especially in Africa in general. This was in an attempt to resolve the gap between Christianity and culture.

Communication between human cultures can only take place effectively through dialogue and participation, through listening and through readiness to learn [3]. Dialogue between churches, religions and religious-based countries leads to a better self-identification and hope for convergence or growth towards a common horizon of truth. It is only through interdependence in corporation, and congruence that conversions can successfully take place. There is an emerging consensus that culture is a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture. Practical inculturation is relevant to the African nations, which have been Christianized and areas where the Gospel has been proclaimed. As long as faith is present to a culture, then inculturation dialogue must take place. These sentiments were emphasized by Martinez [43] when he stated that when two human beings really listen to each other, they meet each other. That encounter changes us, reshapes us, and transforms us". According to Martínez, to promote dialogue in a very sensitive area: the relationship between faith and culture", because "*in an age of fundamentalism and ruthless intolerance, this kind of dialogue is not a luxury: it is a vital necessity if we want to coexist well*".

The question underlying this paper is to establish what the church is doing in its social environment. The major argument will be based on the fact that the church exists within a particular environment. The paper as argued by Orobator [1] presupposes that social environment, as it concerns Africa, is constituted by some observable phenomena. Furthermore, it contends that these phenomena or issues seem particularly apt to provide materials for studying the interface between church and society in Africa and for formulating a theology of church that responds to this encounter. The fundamental steps that the church has taken as a continuous process of change and continuity with an aim of establishing an authentic African Christian church in a contextualized environment, was the core of this article.

The overall objective of the paper was to examine the Catholic Church as an agency of ecological changes on African culture. Specifically, the paper seeks to meet the following objectives; asses the

Catholic Church and socio-cultural change, examine the church and development and relevance of inculturation theology.

Christianity and Socio-cultural Change

The Church is regarded as the right institution in social change because it is closer to the people and, therefore, shares their experiences. It could also be regarded as the hope of the hopeless and the voice of the poor in many communities. However, Baur [4] accentuates that Christianity came together with colonialism that brought with it an abrupt cultural change for which people were badly prepared. The new order and values were imposed from outside and took roots very slowly, or not at all. While Megia, in Radoli [5], states that political independence marked the end of colonialism and imposition of foreign cultural patterns, but also left profound changes that are, in many cases, irreversible. Attaining political freedom did not necessarily mean reviving past cultural identity. The above sentiments render this paper useful as they addresses how the Church brought changes and continues to bring more changes in socio-religious, -economic and -political arrangements of different communities in Africa.

Shorter [6] notes that evangelization is addressed to human individuals who belong to clearly defined social groupings and who are profoundly linked to a cultural tradition. The Gospel cannot, therefore, be transmitted to or from people independently of their culture. In one way or another culture is evangelized, along with its adepts. Evangelization therefore involves change and it should not be a matter of embarrassment that the Church is an agent of change. The conversion of heart, which is the aim of evangelization, involves a change at the deepest levels of cultural identity. Evangelization challenges that basic worldview, the religious root of culture and the final location of meaning. It is, therefore, committed to bringing about the most radical kind of change. The Church is an agent of structural change.

Ayisi [7] observed that social change in Africa has meant progress in some parts and abject negation of self-determination in other parts. The changes, which have so far occurred in Africa, have not caused any radical change in the social fabric. This is because of the peculiar and resilient structure of African societies, which is amenable to change. In discussing change in Africa, however, we have to take into account certain variant features of the societies because Africa has undergone a process of westernization. When the Western powers partitioned Africa they adopted different types of administration and these have influenced the people in different ways. In addition, these colonial policies had their negative aspects but they also contained certain positive elements. This calls for a critical survey on the influence of Christianity as a Western religion on the social structures of the local people. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the colonialists also played a role in social change in Africa although; the aspect does not capture the scope and interest of this study.

Kraft [8] maintains that during the period of colonialism much of African culture in all its forms, was altered or supplanted by the more vigorous and technically advanced forms of colonizing Western culture, backed by the political power dominant at the time, in any particular area. Even in the Church in the colonized African states, there was generally an attitude of looking down upon African culture. Whereas Manala [11] notes that Christianity led to the demise of the African customs, which it viewed as pagan and evil. With the coming of independence, there has been a strong reaction to all this, and the political liberation forces have played a greater part in re-asserting African culture in its various forms. For example, African traditional dances, and other forms of artistic expression, have now been given their rightful place in public entertainment.

Hastings [9] lucidly points out that Europeans in general and European missionaries in particular, with some few exceptions, admitted, little, if any, culture of value in Africa, just as many had denied that Africa really had any religion other than fearful superstitions. It was more or less taken for granted by many missionaries that the more a new social order, a new economy and a new culture replaced the traditional one, the better for Christianity. Besides, missionaries still found a vast range of African cultural practices incompatible with Christianity and taught accordingly. Gunter [10] clearly and concisely points out that, the coming of missionaries affected the African family patterns. Initially, traditional African marriage pattern was polygamous. Widow inheritance was also practiced. With the coming of the missionaries, monogamy was recognized by Christians as the ideal form of marriage. Widow inheritance was compared to immoral acts. Therefore, this means that, the traditional family life has to adjust itself to the Christian marriage system.

Christianity came into Africa not as the coincidental by-product of new economic opportunity

but rather as a result of a calculated campaign to win Africans to a religious and cultural loyalty. That, other new religions in Africa were seeking to win Africans to a new faith and as a new vision of the world order and new norms of behaviour offering themselves as potential agents of social changes. This new faith destabilized the relationship which existed between the society, the living dead and the spiritual world. Christian Churches should, therefore, utilize their capital, gospel messages and personnel for spiritual and material development of humanity. Manala [11] makes a very important point when he ably notes that the gospel message brought about real transformation, transformation that instilled divine principles and humaneness in the socio-political lives of African people. The work of the Church has always included socio-economic development alongside evangelization, mainly on humanitarian grounds.

Greertz [12] validates that African religious beliefs and practices could not escape the inter-societal interactions of the colonial situation because religion which tunes human action to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order on to plane of human experience is inextricably bound up with the social action and processes of social change. The alternative of forcing change on people is not an acceptable solution. Such a procedure displays no regard for human dignity and social justice and in the extreme can lead to social upheaval and cultural bankruptcy. The laws and regulations set-up were meant to enhance social, economic, political, or religious ways of life. Religion was expected to make a positive contribution to development by promoting the high moral standards and integrity so fundamental to the effective division of labour, specialization in production and development of an exchange economy. In Kenya, the freedom of religion is guaranteed and positive support to religious institutions is encouraged by the state.

According to Gulliver [13], religion has not so far been a divisive force in East Africa. Tribal and even racial identity is still stronger than the religious identity. Religion has of course had its impact on East Africa. In particular, we find that some traditional attitudes and customs have changed, regarding polygamy, witchcraft and even the status of women and children. Gulliver further makes an emphatic point when he states that the emergence of new political institutions has been a more complicated matter. The indigenous political arrangements in Eastern Africa were systems of ethnic organization and government. While this clearly differed, sometimes substantially, from one ethnic group to another, the systems typical of most ethnic groups assured every mature member of an ethnic group a voice or at least an influence, depending more on age-grouping than wealth. Besides, the advent of colonialism in Africa meant that another set of political institutions was superimposed on the traditional arrangements. While the new set was in many ways distinct from the old, in that Africans even in the later years had only very limited participation in the political systems, the new institutional arrangement did affect the traditional systems. Gulliver has stated how colonialism changed the political system of many African states.

Cohen [14] argued that socio-cultural change in the newly independent African States today poses a sociological paradox, for it seems to be producing at one and the same time, two contradictory phenomena: The first case is when ethnic groups not only retain their cultural practices but also emphasize and exaggerate their cultural identity and exclusiveness. The same ethnic group may also adjust to the new social realities by developing new customs, which are shared with other groups. In the second case, an ethnic group adjusts to the realities of its cultural ties by reorganizing its own traditions or customs or by developing new customs under traditional symbols, often using traditional norms and ideologies to enhance its distinctiveness within the contemporary situation. Barrett [15] correctly states that the missionary activities not only brought the evangelical message of the Gospel, but also another way of life. This is witnessed not only in the field of religious and moral conceptions but also in the domain of technical capabilities, habits of consumption, way of living and hygiene. He further observes that, all socio-economic activity of the Church is secondary to its work of preaching the word and is to be considered originally to prepare youths for the priesthood or to give a Christian education to young people. But is it clear that at the same time they did great service in the field of socio-economic progress.

Ogutu [16]observes that the response the people of western Kenya made to the missionary proselytization must be analyzed within the framework of tension between the forces of change and those of continuity, and the recognition that the most forceful social determinant in the society when the missionaries arrived was religion, which was inherited religious affiliation with a social fact. Personal as well as communal rights, privileges, and freedoms were predetermined by the religion of the community, which gave the individual a sense of belonging. That the

introduction of Christian principles and values generated tension between new religious affiliation and the traditional religious elite needs no more emphasis. The Church, as an institution, was opposed to the known structures of African traditional society. Consequently, the introduction of Christian education, clothing, and health facilities fitted the African into the new culture. The mission did not create religion-ideological vacuums in the minds of the African to be filled by Christian religion ideologies. Traditional cultural patterns remained incompatible with current conditions; therefore adjustment was inevitable in the course of change.

Ogutu extends his argument by asserting that missionaries to western Kenya maintained a sufficient level of tension between Christianity and African culture. Here, Christianity was recognized as the way in which traditional culture would be redeemed. Little note was taken of the fact that culture must provide the modes of expression, the framework, and meaningful categories of a people so that the Christian message could become relevant and meaningful. This development was understandable because the missionaries were by-products of nineteenth century missionary zeal. The nineteenth century was not only a century of mission, but was also a century of colonialism and imperialism. The same social facts which shaped the lives of the colonial administrators were those which shaped the life of the missionaries. The missionary often universalized his own ways, values, and meanings to life. He expected the people to whom he went to take up his 'superior' culture forms and structures to adjust to his needs. It was these assumptions of cultural superiority that led to the establishment of Christian villages, which became centres of conflict between the Christian messages and traditional teachings on morals and norm formation. Ogutu additionally maintains that the first converts to the Roman Catholic faith were more traditional in outlook. They embraced the Catholic concept of life, their worldview, and teachings about God as creator and sustainer of life. Their dress, religious regalia and weekly walk to the church were symbols of a new identity. But, inwardly they remained conservative, although the partial breakdown in traditional values and norms produced strains and stress that resulted in disaffection and frustrations. This surfaced later in the form of lapse cases. It is also arguable that to these first-generation Catholics, there was a marriage for convenience between traditional religious values and practices, and the new Christian values as propagated by the Catholic missionaries.

Munro [17] postulates that the established African religious authorities faced a challenge from mobilization of political loyalties and economic resources because any innovatory activity raised issues about the appropriateness of their beliefs and behaviour. Munro further stresses that, the Church, as an institution, exists in tension with the world around it. It has to be true to its calling as the bride of Christ, and at the same time live in the world and for the world. By living in and for the world, the Church has to show a measure of accommodation with culture. This accommodation inevitably presents elements of syncretism. But religious forms must stem from the cultural millennium so that meaning, belonging, and action may follow. The forms in which Christianity was presented needed to be relevant, and also meaningful within the framework of a living experience.

Muga [18], Kirwen [19], Obudho [20], and Okullu [21] accentuate that, the missionaries stuck to the belief that Africans needed Christ. As a result, they therefore, set out to destroy African culture and religion, ignoring to fulfill the Catholic Church's resolution of Vatican II on adoption which states that:

All cultures have the right to be an independent existence with Christianity and that the introduction of the Christian teaching in a new culture must involve an adoption that preserves the essential integrity of culture, it's values, institutions and customs [19].

In support of Okullu's view, writing on the ecumenical openness towards other cultures, Mbiti [22] cites that all cultures of the world have a right and access to the Gospel and they will express its presence in ways that may not be the same. We need, therefore, to cultivate a genuine and humble ecumenical openness that is willing to share and receive the meaning of the Gospel in other cultures, which then calls for inculturation. While Ogutu [16] contends that African culture- language concepts and world view are important if we are to make the Gospel permanent on every aspect of life—social-economic, -political and -cultural. Unless this is done, the impact and reception of the Gospel by the people will be less effective. Those missionaries should bring Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new. This can

only be effective if we bear witness to the Gospel in word and deed, in every area of people's lives.

The first important thing to observe in achieving a genuine dialogue, is finding a common ground. Despite the real differences and even disparities between culture and religions, there is a basic stratum of human commonalities that can make it possible for people to communicate with one another and to discover points of contact with others [44]. Such commonality may include common experiences, fears, questions and sorrows that people everywhere share. It is a fact that any genuine dialogue, especially religious dialogue, depends on the cultural settings from which the partners speak; therefore, it is imperative not to overlook the cultural differences that are expressed in different religious beliefs if genuine dialogue is to be achieved. It means that the first requirement for a genuine dialogue is to find 'a firm ground where the dialogue itself may take place. Such common ground is the local myth'. There must be an equal preparation for the two parties, both theologically and culturally, to avoid misunderstandings by any of the parties. Religious and cultural democracy should not be the only thing; human rights, social justice and economic democracy should be practiced in the process of achieving a genuine dialogue with African Instituted Religion (AIR). This will assist in eradicating the culture of domination, oppression, injustice and economic exploitation. Any dialogue that does not focus on peace and the meaning of human life that is the source of conflict cannot be genuine [45].

During Pope John Paul II visit to Kenya in September 1995, he called on all African Churches to consider inculturation. His address systematically presented the concern for the need to inculcate the Gospel in accordance with the people's aspirations, needs, thought forms and mentality, and take into account "great socio-cultural religious demand" while avoiding syncretism and false exclusivism or particularism among all the people of Africa. In his document, *"The African Synod,"* the Pope urges Christians to accommodate traditional African values with the Christian Gospel and not to see them as merely animistic religion [23]. He stated that inculturation of the Christian message in the African cultures is essential and a necessity in the work of evangelization in Africa. It is also an urgent task that has to be assumed by the entire Christian Church in Africa now [24, 25, 4].

The pope further reiterated that the methods of evangelization change according to the times, the places and the prevailing cultures, and accordingly they represent, as it were, a challenge to our ability to discern them and adopt *(Evangelii Nuntiandi, No.40)*. Holding the same views, Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical, Evangelii Praecores encouraged respect for existing customs in the contexts of evangelization. He said; "*Let not the gospel, on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful*". Christianity in its origin is inculturated. Jesus Christ was born into a specific culture, spoke a particular language and communicated with the imageries and symbols common to His audience. In this sense, there is no pure Christianity but Christ is above and within every given culture [26].

To achieve the foregoing, the process of initial evangelization or catechism must take root in the local cultures and traditions, a process also known as inculturation. Inculturation entails, on the one hand, the ultimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity, and, on the other hand, the insertion of Christianity in the various cultures. To Ogutu [16] and Shorter, [3] inculturation is therefore an urgent priority in the life of our own particular churches and leads to a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa. Following Ogutu's line of thought, the church fathers contend that evangelization does not consist only in making converts and enrolling members but also in witnessing to the world by proclamation of the truth, service in favour of authentic human development and making Christ present in an authentic Christian living in the world (*Ad Gentes*, No.11). It is true then that an intensively Christianized community would witness not only to the transformation of the individuals, but also to the different levels of its life, laws, customs, moral values and it's world view in the light of the Gospel [27].

Considering the foregoing discussions, this, no doubt has to be an ongoing rather than a one-time affair. To fulfil this task effectively, the church has to dialogue with the cultures of the people and their historical backgrounds and above all, endeavor to enhance the spirit of ecumenism with other religious faiths [26]. Evangelization entails dialogue, co-operation, inculturation and contextualization. If the proclamation of faith has to be done in context, it must not lose sight of the fact that mentality, situations and behavioral patterns are dynamic. This fact explicates the need for

constant renewal of the means and tactics of evangelization. On this, Pope Paul VI reiterates in his Encyclical, Evangelii Nuntiandi that *"The conditions of society today require us all to revise our methods and seek out with all our energy new ways and means by which the Christian message may be brought to men of our time"* (Evangelii Nuntiandi, No.3). However, care must be taken not to turn African Christianity into AIR in the name of indigenising Christianity in Africa. It must be emphasized that it is not all in AIR and culture are good. African Christians must sieve what is bad in African religious tradition and take what is good [45]. The African Synod included in her agenda 'Interreligious dialogue' amongst the top priorities of the Church in Africa. With this, it was noted that the religious situation at the time requires a serious consideration of the condition of the possibility of a genuine interreligious dialogue. In 1996, at the Catholic Bishop Conference in the Philippines, a series of dialogues with followers of traditional religions were initiated and Archbishop Fernando Capalla also asked for forgiveness from the traditional religious leaders, just as Pope John Paul II did. Vatican II made possible the dialogue between AIR and Christianity and between Christianity and Islam, by recommending dialogue with non-Christian religions of the world, noting also that there are some lights of truth from the same God, the creator of all people [45]. Vatican II made possible the dialogue between AIR and Christianity and between Christianity and Islam, by recommending dialogue with non-Christian religions of the world, noting also that there are some lights of truth from the same God, the creator of all people. African theology faculties were established for the purpose of a clear awareness concerning the dialogue with African cultures [46].

Moreover, whereas inculturation is a movement towards full evangelization, when we consider the rapid changes in the cultural, socio-economic, and political domains, it becomes a different and delicate task. As a communion in diversity, a trusting collaboration, inculturation remains a dialecting process, an appropriation of the Gospel to a people of a given culture. What we need in the new Church in Africa is not adoption but inculturation whose dimensions encompass the entire Christian life, theological, liturgical, sacramental, catechetical, pastoral, juridical, political and communal characteristics of Christianity. Inculturation is a requisite for evangelization if we are to reduce conflict and tensions between faith and culture. There is an urgent need for dialogue between Christianity and

African Indigenous Religion (AIR), because the present version of Christianity and the increase in the membership of AIR is alarming. The missionary version of Christianity accepted by Africans can be described as hypocritical because many African Christians still patronizes AIR, especially in times of emergency. This means that the influence of AIR is still strong, especially in moment of crisis [47]. Just as Ogutu indicates, this therefore, calls for serious studies of our culture and the culture of the people among whom we work in order to bridge the gap between faith and life.

Christianity cannot be expressed or communicated without a cultural medium. Any culture can be a medium for the expression and communication of the Christian faith. The Christian faith can be effectively expressed and communicated only in "culturally designed" media. If a missionary's work in a culture other than his own is to be effective, he must learn to appreciate the culture of the people whom he wishes to evangelize. He must learn their language and appreciate their art, music, dance, architecture, ritual and all other aspects of that culture. He must identify himself with the community of those whom he is introducing to Jesus Christ. Then he must go further and translate his understanding of the Christian faith into the cultural terms familiar and traditional to his prospective converts. He must be willing to be changed. [48]. Kanu [49] argues that for the realization of an intensive evangelization in Africa, there is need for inculturation. Only inculturation would lead to an intensively Christianized community that would witness transformation of the different levels of its life, laws, customs, moral values and its worldview in the light of the gospel message. Since evangelization in Africa in the third millennium is primarily the responsibility of Africans, it should focus on the evangelization and Christianization of African worldviews, cultures, institutions and values.

Niebuhr's theory focuses on how Christians relate and interact with surrounding cultures, for example, how does a Christian be both part of the world and not part of the world? The Bible would appear to suggest both. Thus Niebuhr looked at five ways that Christians, now and within history, has dealt with this dilemma, hence his articulation of the five views: Christ against culture, Christ of Culture, Christ above Culture, Christ and Culture paradox and Christ transforms culture [50]. The central question in this study is: How much do we understand African cultural beliefs,

practices, the norms and values that hold our societies together?

Church and Development

Stangler [51] states that the church, with its proven track record of delivering basic social services, has a critical role to play in sustainable and equitable development. He says that those religious organizations have the ability to both "reach down" and "reach up" by providing essential services on a hyper-local level. Okullu [21] contends that men and women are saved and liberated for the bodily as well as the spiritual service of their fellowmen. God is not a God of souls only, but of the body as well. There is no department of life, which he does not enter. A true Christian is the one who is holy and unworldly. While Sanks [28] agrees that the church cannot describe itself as holy and mean that it is separate from the world and the world's agenda. Stating doctrines inside the church will not liberate unless the church gets out into the streets, heals the sick and confronts the unjust. The church is in the world that God loved, and has to work for the wellbeing of the world. Seeing that God's presence cannot be limited to organized Christianity, the church does well to see where God is at work and to promote those *salvific acta*. Whenever the image of God in humans is promoted, the church should be present to enhance the effort [28]. Development cannot take place devoid of culture; and since religion is the nexus of culture, there cannot be any meaningful development on the continent without serious recourse to the religious beliefs and practices of the people. Development community seriously take into consideration the people's religious thoughts on matters related to these and other areas of human endeavor when formulating policies for Africa [52].

Sivov [53] identified four good reasons for non-religious national and community-centered NGOs to consider the churches as potential partners for long-term socially-related programmes. Firstly, the Church's ethos that is firmly engrained in the concept of the spiritual community. Secondly, the church has a division in virtually every settlement, both large and small. This makes it easily, one of the most usual partners for regional programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, and networking initiatives at a large-scale. Thirdly, the church has resources in the form of buildings and agricultural lands that can be engaged for national programmes for social integration or provision of social services. Lastly, serving the society within which a church is situated is within its mandate,

exclusive of discriminating anyone on grounds of age, gender, social status and religious belief. The Church has an undisputed role to play in development work to improve social conditions for the benefit of the whole community. Furthermore, the Church, through the scriptures, has a mandate to serve the poor as its responsibility. The Church has a clear understanding of both the origins of the complications in stimulating development work and the background and culture of the people involved. Therefore the Church has the competency to make significant contributions, which are not within the capacity of various profane organizations [54].

Accordingly, the Church is concerned with the whole of man's life, with his material as well as his spiritual welfare. Man's life on earth, his dignity, his freedom, his development in social, political, and economic and the other things which make him a citizen of this world and a citizen of heaven, are the Church's vital concern. As the body of Christ, the church is called to such ministry of service from within the suffering of the world. It can bear this task because it knows that, whatever its present condition may be, the material world is created by and dear to God. It is held within the love and care of Christ and it is destined for glory through the Spirit [29]. It is therefore worthy to note that a Christian should be able to carry on with God's purpose of His world by looking at the material welfare of His people as He intends. As earlier stated, Jesus not only forgave the sinner, but fed the hungry and healed the sick in body and mind. This is clearly reflected when John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the promised one who would redeem the Jewish people and the whole world. Jesus replied, "*Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind can see, the lame can walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life and the good news is preached to the poor*" (Luke 7:22).

This concern of the Church for the world and its development and social change is very clearly brought out by the history of the Church in many parts of the world. If a person came to join the catechists' class for baptism he also got treatment for his sore eyes or deaf ears and received alphabetical instruction to enable him in the long run to read the Bible. They set a clear signal that man is much more than his soul; and that love of one's neighbor means caring for his body as well. It is then that a prayer is turned into action. This is why the Church has been at the forefront not only to change humanity in terms of structural living

arrangement, but also to initiate development activities for creating a permanent solution to the problems that challenge the livelihood of man. It has been the goal of the Church to foster projects that give initiative and creativeness to local people whenever established. Such projects should satisfy a Christian concern in social change and development, namely, to provide fellow man with bread, work, health, education spiritual nourishment and general revitalization of his whole being including his social economic, and political nature. Just as Orobator [1] contends, the church is an open human community of faith, that is, opens to society, and to its social environment. The same views are held by Haight [30] when he validates that the church is an open institution that look out upon the world and understands itself in service to the world because it mediates something of value for the world.

Referring to the Second Vatican Council (1963-1966), Abbot [31] notes that the human person stands above all things and there should be made available to all people everything necessary to make humanity truly human. This implies that every social group should consider the needs and aspirations of the whole human race, and strive to solve them. The Catholic Church has been in the forefront in the changing of the social structure of humanity. The Church is one of these prime voluntary institutions, which are deeply rooted in rural areas and whose basic philosophy is supposed to meet the aspirations and needs of the people. A study done in Zimbabwe show those churches in Zimbabwe are attempting to alleviate the social and economic problems that the communities in Zimbabwe are facing. This is being done through the establishments of institutions around the country in the education and healthcare areas, as well as other social establishments such as orphanages. The churches are also channeling efforts towards the betterment of the lives of the citizens within the community through teachings and promoting entrepreneurship activities. The study also revealed that the institutions established by the churches are supported by the churches themselves, regardless of whether profits are being made or not [55].

Bryne [32], asserts that the Christian Churches in Africa have more or less accepted development as an integral part of the ministry and apostolate for the betterment of the community. Bryne cites the essential humanitarian impulse implicit in the concern with development tends to make Christians feel that this is something they can identify with and should be involved in combating hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease or the adverse effects that the wrong kind of development can have on the society. There are Christian organizations like World Vision and Tear Fund, departments of the World Council of Churches and some major international denominations, which have launched or support major development programmes often alongside or arising from relief activities. Evangelistic or mission organizations and local churches are also increasingly getting involved in various development projects. Sivov [56] reiterates that religious communities traditionally have played a major role in communities. In modern civil societies, religious beliefs are still among the key factors that bond people together to form communities, both large and small. Most of the modern social institutions' roots in many countries, such as hospitals, schools, retirement homes, etc., can be traced back in the structures of the churches. The church is often regarded as an institution itself, and this attitude is often passed onto the social institutions that the church creates and maintains. In many countries, the church has a special place among the state's institutional partners, as a key provider of a long range of social services. The religious institution can be a full-fledged provider of certain social services at acceptable levels of quality.

Going by the same view, Macpherson [33] emphasizes that development is about what constitutes the good society and how the good society has been or may be achieved by Christians. He notes that Christians should be concerned about what a good society would be, and how the world can be made to better reflect God's design for humankind and his glory. In 1960, Catholic Bishops of Tanganyika emphasized the fact that social services such as education, social security, medico-social assistance, community development and so forth, should not fall under the exclusive domain of the state alone but the Church should also be involved actively. This stress on protecting the role of the Church in providing social services, especially in education which had a broader context. One of those principles was that the Church had a divine right and distinct role to play in providing social services. Semboja and Ole Therkildsen [34], and Baur [4] contend that the Church should be in co-operation with the governments to overcome the three enemies of humankind, that is, ignorance, disease and poverty.

In his address, originally given to the Maryknoll Sisters in New York, Nyerere [35] presents a

powerful plea for the Church to be actively engaged in the creation of a more just and equal society. The Church has the obligation, Nyerere argues, to fight for a society, which will enable every man and woman to live with dignity and well-being and to work for the eradication of exploitation and for the sharing of wealth. Nyerere further contends that the Church should accept that the development of peoples means rebellion. Unless the Church participates actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations, which condemn human beings to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the Church will become irrelevant to humankind and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the Church, its members and its organizations express God's love for humanity by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present conditions of human beings, then it will become identified with injustice and persecutions. If this happens, it will die and it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to modern humanity.

It should be noted that not all missionaries in Africa have followed similar approaches in their work [36]. The way they saw the new situation, the way they expressed their appreciation, the way they concerned their evangelical mission and the method they used to propagate it; and above all, the way they responded to local people's needs and aspirations would naturally, differ from person to person and from area to area. Indeed most missionaries have been credited with their contribution in the field of education, medicine and welfare. Summer [37] concedes that education was seen as the '*avenue of progress in the new organization and as the chief integrating link in the new community*'. In other words, education was seen as the chief instrument for change, a pre-requisite of development and modernization. The missionaries were said to have been involved in teaching literacy as a means of disseminating knowledge of the scriptures and this was seen, and rightly so, as the 'precursor' of secular education in many parts of Africa. The above sentiment is strongly supported by Yiman [36] when he asserts that many present day political, educational and technological leaders of Africa were first educated, taught, or were themselves associated with clergy or missionary institutions. This may be regarded as testimony to the role the missionaries played in the enlightenment of Africans about the social needs of their fellow countrymen.

Religion plays an influential role in development in three ways. Firstly, religion offers a wealth of universal values, which lends itself to interpretation and practice by individual seekers and practitioners, both religious and secular, to inform their sustainability practice. There are important resources within religious traditions that can help define morally informed and yet practical economic growth for sustainable development [57]. Tsele [58] argues that

historically the church has an obligation to demonstrate that it brings something substantive to the economic development table and that her commitment is driven by different motives. Responding to the materially poor, according to Clarke [59] the church has a long history in many religious groups and individuals motivated by concepts of religious charity to provide material care, comfort, education and health facilities often long before nation states provided such institutions. Solomon [60] identifies with Tsele [58] when he argue that by reintroducing faith-inspired motives in development, which seek to restore the dignity of the church's work and which in turn make people subjects in their own human restoration project, the church's development enterprise can be authentic. Yiman [36]) and summer [37], believe that almost every president in Africa is the product of a missionary education, and many remain closely associated with the Church. Okullu [21] developed some useful insights when he notes that the Church has made significant strides in many spheres of development especially in medical and educational fields and it is wrong for national leaders to consistently warn it not to interfere with politics. This implies that the Church is a stakeholder in East Africa due to the investments it has made in educational and medical areas, among others. In Kenya the Church has sponsored some educational and medical centres. Therefore, Okullu's work shows that the Church should be involved in development because it is a stakeholder. Okullu further points out that the Church must go on to foster projects which give initiative and creativeness to local people.

Langley and Kiggins [38] while writing on serving people, contends that the Church is concerned with the whole of man's life with his material as well as his spiritual welfare. Man's Life on earth, his dignity, his freedom, his development – social, political and economic and all the other things, which make him a citizen of this world, are the Church's vital concern. This concern of the Church for the world and its development is very clearly brought out by the history of the Christian Church in East Africa. Since its inception, the Church has been very closely involved in the development of East Africa, especially perhaps in the fields of education and medicine. Holding the same views on religion and development, Theuri cited in Theuri and Getui (eds) [39], tries to show that religion can be one that really promotes development in Africa – that gives to life an orientation that enables Africans to develop fully and provides an object that is truly worthy of devotion. On the same vein, according to Mugambi [39], the mission of Christ and His church, is twofold: To liberate humankind on the socio—political and economic plane and lead people to salvation on the eschatological plane. The Body of Christ, and His Church, historically has the responsibility in its developmental role to assist humans in bringing them towards the place of complete reconciliation with God and with their fellows and their environment [60]. If the

church's role in economic development does not seek transformation and liberation of the poor from conditions of dependency and structures of oppression, it is ideological and thus its authenticity is in doubt [58].

The salvic mission of the church in relation to the world must be understood as an integral whole. Though it is spiritual, the mission of the church involves human promotion even in its temporal aspects. Kamaara [40] further correctly contends that the two-fold mission of historical Jesus involved attending to people's needs in totality. Jesus did not only prepare His followers for eschatology, He cared for their physical needs as well. That is why He fed them when they were hungry, healed them of their physical and spiritual ailments and spoke against the injustices of His time (Cf. Lk.9:10-17; 14:1-6; 11:37-54). The mission of the church is therefore both physical and spiritual. To fulfil Christ's mission, the church has to exercise a liberative and salvific role towards all people, regardless of their religious affiliations.

On the unlimited mission of the Church, Radoli [41] postulates: "*like Christ who came not to be served but to serve*" (Mt 20:28), the church has to render service to everyone whether they are believers or not. Eastern Africa consists of a suffering people. There is widespread injustice in the region. The people of this region desperately need a ministry of healing that will take into account all the elements and aspects needed to make them whole and sound. This clearly indicates that there is a profound interrelationship between evangelization and human socio-economic and political development.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to examine the church as an agent of ecological changes. It was noted that African communities had beliefs and practices which held them together as one unit group. The coming of the missionaries changed these traditional practices that led to changes on traditional political, economic, social and their spirituality. To make an African feel at home for an effective evangelization through the theology of inculturation, viable African beliefs systems have been inculturated into the African church. It is further observed that despite cultural changes brought by the church, the church itself is also involved in development matters as an effective agent of change and continuity in their evangelized environment.

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