



New Evangelization For The Catholic Church And Local Cultures In Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

Early evangelization strategies used by missionaries to convert Zimbabweans to Christianity included the training of local evangelists to preach in the vernacular, establishment of hospitals to treat various sicknesses and using hospital missions as agencies for evangelization and the establishment of schools to impart western education and Christianity to the young people of Zimbabwe. A number of traditional cultural practices such as polygamy and ancestor worship were discouraged and driven underground. Globalization and secularization has resulted in many people leaving mainstream Christian churches such as Catholic, Wesleyan Methodists and Anglican to join the new independent churches. This has resulted in about 50% of the Zimbabwean population practising syncretic religion and 25 % practising Christianity and the remaining 25% practice other religions such as Islam and traditional religion. The early evangelization strategies are no longer appropriate. There is need for new evangelization strategies that are more responsive to local cultures and the challenges of globalization. The evangelization strategies for the Catholic Church should be more contextualized and inclusive of marginalized groups.

Keywords: *New evangelization, culture, Zimbabwe, pastoral cycle, strategies, Catholic Church*

1.Introduction

This paper looks at new evangelization in relationship to the Zimbabwe local cultures. The paper describes the strategies used by early missionaries in evangelizing and the resistance that they encountered emanating from traditional practices and belief in the role of ancestral spirits in the lives of local people. Preaching, healing and education ministries resulted in the establishment of schools and hospitals which proved to be very important agencies for evangelization. Traditional practices of polygamy and ancestral worship were driven underground but still exist. Using the pastoral cycle the paper looks at what is happening now in evangelization, why things are happening the way they are and what can be done. There are many Catholics who are no longer going to church and other who have turned to other churches. The church itself marginalizes certain groups of people who find themselves not fitting in and therefore turn to other churches. It is these groups of people who need new evangelization. The paper then looks at what other churches are doing in the area of evangelization and local cultures and draw lessons from it.

2.Culture

Culture has social connotations. It includes all the customs and institutions that serve to make life more human. The meaning of culture can also be extended to include the artefacts, art itself and literature. All these are used by people to express their spiritual experiences and insights. Different ethnic groups have their own cultures which distinguish them from each other.

Culture is historical. Achievements and ways of doing things and beliefs are handed down and passed on from generation to generation through a process that we call tradition. Every culture has its own traditions.

Also globalization is weakening traditions and institutions. Resulting in the fragmentation of cultural unity because social and cultural ties are eroded.

This understanding of culture has implications for new evangelization. It implies that evangelization should be responsive to different cultures. It should be contextualized.

Culture is not static. It evolves and this too has implication for new evangelization.

3.Zimbabwe Local Culture

Zimbabwe is not as culturally diverse as other African countries. It has several ethnic and racial groups, with the Shona being the dominant group making 85% of the total

population of the country (Africa.com, 2006). Sixteen (16%) of the population is made up of the Ndebeles and other indigenous Africans. The remaining 2% of the population is made up of a mixed group comprising Asian and whites. Because of this cultural diversity it is problematic to talk of a local culture, but cultures. One can only talk of a dominant culture basing it on the dominant ethnic groups.

When it comes to religion 50% of the population practice what is called the “Syncretic” religion which is part Christian and part indigenous beliefs. Twenty-five (25%) of the population are Christians, 24% is made of indigenous beliefs while Islam and other religions make up the remaining 1%. Officially 90.7% of Zimbabweans above the age of 15 are literate, they can read and write. The official figures of literacy are disputable with the “true literacy rate today being put at 70% of the entire population “(Africaw.com, 2006).

4.Understanding New Evangelization

In order to understand and appreciate what new evangelization means and implies one has to begin by understanding the word evangelization itself. Evangelizing a culture means transforming it in the light of the gospel so that it reflects Christian values.

Evangelization itself means proclaiming the gospel to those who do yet believe. New evangelization goes beyond that, to include the rekindling of faith in those who have fallen away. Broadly speaking the term new evangelization is used to describe ordinary pastoral outreach to those who no longer practise the Christian faith. So new evangelization is directed to those baptized but whose faith is being eroded or have abandoned the faith.

In the Catholic Church new evangelization also refers to the process of evangelizing to those who have left the church to join other churches or those who have become indifferent and just stay at home but still maintain that they are Catholics.

Understanding new evangelization in this manner has a number of implications as stated below:

- The term “new evangelization” calls for a new manner of proclaiming the Gospel
- New evangelization implies that one takes whatever is good in the new cultures to revitalize the faith.
- New evangelization calls for the examination by the Church of the way Christian communities live and practise their faith today.

- New evangelization calls for the process of enculturation in the Church to be continuously examined in order to incorporate the good in both the traditional and emerging cultures.
- The process of new evangelization consists of viewing real-life situations and pastoral activity in such a way as to make such people turn back to the faith and the church. It entails re-awakening the enthusiasm for being members of the church.

5. Early Evangelization Experiences And Strategies

In looking at strategies for new evangelization and local cultures it is necessary to look at the strategies used by early evangelization missionaries and draw lessons from them.

Traditional cultures, such as polygamy and belief in ancestral spirits, militated against acceptance of Christianity in Zimbabwe. Early missionaries wanted to suppress polygamy. It was seen as a vicious custom which was regarded as a purchase of a wife for the purposes of begetting children and wealth especially if the children are girls because they would be married and bring with cows to the head of the family. Lobola was seen as degrading women. The Jesuits were uncompromising on polygamy. In 1902 they expelled polygamists from Empandeni (Zvobgo, 1986).

Early missionaries believed that if polygamy was made illegal, then lobola could be done away with. Since the African men would not stop polygamy, the solution for missionaries, was to make it illegal. The British South Africa Company that ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) could not be persuaded to make polygamy illegal, fearing another uprising after the Mashona and Ndebele rebellions. They refused to suppress polygamy by force. Early missionaries had to think of other ways of evangelizing.

The early missionaries devised three strategies of evangelization.

- Preaching -which necessitated the translation of the scriptures into the vernacular;
- Ministry of healing;
- Establishment of Christian villages; and
- Western education

6. Preaching

Preaching as a strategy required the training of local Africans to preach and witness to their fellow Africans. It required translation of the scriptures into the vernacular. All Christian churches trained their African evangelists who could speak the vernacular

languages. After being baptised the converts were put into villages in order to protect them from pagan neighbours. To this end Jesuits established three Christian villages at Chishawasha called Loyolla, Montserrat and Rosario where married Christian couples resided. In 1904 nearly 60 couples resided in these villages (Zvobgo, 1986).

7.Ministry Of Healing

Jesus and his disciples used the ministry of healing in their evangelization. For this reason early missionaries saw healing as a way of evangelization that would work. It was believed that a person who had been treated of an illness was more responsive to the Gospel than a person who was suffering from pain (Parsons, 1910). Medical missions were thus established and they became agencies for evangelization. Medical missions sprang up in Mount Selinda Mission in 1893, Chikore Mission in 1900, Old Umtali in 1903 and Morgenster in 1894. These medical missions proved to be an invaluable evangelization agency.

8.Ministry Of Education

The adult Africans were set in their traditional culture and had proved difficult to convert. Since they would not easily give up polygamy and belief in ancestral spirits, the early missionaries had to come up with another strategy, that of targeting the children before the traditional practices had become engrained in them. For this reason they established mission schools. When the schools were first opened, the preaching place was the church and the church was the classroom. For many years, religious instruction occupied a prominent place in the curriculum of mission schools.

9.Lessons From Early Evangelization And Local Culture

A number of lessons can be drawn from the experiences of early missionaries in their evangelization efforts and they include the following:

- It has been noted that early missionary methods are no longer appropriate because people have become more aware of the importance of culture than before (Mashoko, 2005). There is need to develop a strategy that accommodates local better than before.
- Communication of the gospel is more effective if it takes into account the context of the recipients. Contextualization implies presenting the gospel message in

culturally relevant terms. The gospel should be presented in such a way that it is able to speak to the cultures of the people. This requires integrating the message with the local culture resulting in what has been called “Christian living”.

- There is also need to understand the local cultures of communities and present the gospel in ways meaningful to them in such a way that they can apply it to their daily lives.

With these lessons in mind, this paper employs the concept of the pastoral cycle to address the question of new evangelization and local cultures.

10.Pastoral cycle

The pastoral cycle is a method or tool used to analyse and question problems, or concerns that people face. It helps analyse what causes those problems and what obstacles need to be overcome.

There are five stages in the pastoral cycle

- Experience: What is happening now, what needs to be changed
- Analysis: why are things things the way they are, and who controls them?
- Reflection: what does God/the Bible has to say about this?
- Action: what are we going to do to make things different?
- Celebration”: What have we achieved, and what still needs to be done?

11.Experience: What Is Happening Now?

The first step in the pastoral cycle is an examination of what is being currently experienced as regards evangelization and local cultures.

The following has been observed:

- Traditional cultural practices of ancestor worship and consulting diviners is being done secretly. People come to church and still continue with their old traditional ways contrary to the teachings of the church. People go to hospitals and clinics with ailments and when they are told there is nothing wrong with them they resort to their traditional practices and religion. Some medical practitioners may even tell them to try traditional healing methods.
- Polygamy still exists in the new form of what is called “small house” even though the polygamists still come to church as Catholics. “Small House” is a

phenomenon that is widely understood to mean an unregistered union of a married man and another woman with children. There are a number of reasons why these marriages exist. Traditionally polygamous families have always existed. Christianity pushed these marriages underground. There are many women who find themselves in these situations through no fault of their own and are marginalised by the church. Such people leave the Catholic Church to join other churches.

- Globalization and the rise of electronic and data media culture is fast becoming a forum for civic life and social experiences impacting on new evangelization. Information and communication technology (ICT) has a big influence on local culture.
- New cultures emerge when people migrate from rural areas to come to live and work in urban settlements and mines. Urban areas have become melting pots of mixed cultures and this contributes to the erosion of traditional values and practices. Rural urban migration has also led to a new situation of residential areas called in fills, with their own cultures. This results in people developing new forms of solidarity, new values and new practices. New cultures include the following:
 - Increasing self centred attentiveness to individual needs
 - Decreasing role of traditional structures for mediation, with churches taking over that role.
 - New practices are emerging in relation to traditional practices of marriage. . There are now lobola-less marriages. Young couples are living together because of the problems in raising enough money to pay for lobola.
- Some people, born and bred Catholics have turned away from the church to join other churches, such as the Pentecostal (Charismatic Christianity), where believers claim to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Secularization has pervaded the life of many Christians today (Catholics included) with many reverting to individualistic forms of spirituality.
- Many youths come for mass but join other youth groups of other churches for praise and worship and fellowship.

- The work place culture has changed. The workplace has become a centre for evangelization. People go to pray or to preach during lunch time breaks. This way churches are reaching out to many people.
- Enculturation (in the Catholic Church) tends to neglect other contextual dynamics such as socio-political climate and prevailing economic conditions. It is not quite “relevant”. It has largely been confined to liturgy.

12. Analysis: Why Are Things The Way They Are, And Who Controls Them?

The second step in the pastoral cycle is analysis of why things are the way they are and who controls them. There are many reasons of why things are the way they are. Some of the reasons include the following:

- The church is not responding adequately to new challenges and realities of the emerging local cultures.
- There is insufficient spiritual guidance e. g baptism and catechism classes not being taken by mature teachers. Catechism classes are not being taken as seriously and as rigorously as before. Teachers of catechism i.e. catechists are not as prominent in the church as before. Catechism used to be taught in many instances by the clergy and this is less so now.
- Just like a community, every church has a culture. This culture is made up of the way people relate to each other and to those outside of the group. The church culture consists of unwritten rules of how people interact socially. These rules may develop consciously or unconsciously. The Catholic local church culture shuns unmarried people, and unmarried girls with children. The culture shuns people who belong to new churches which are not mainstream Christian churches. The custodians of church culture are the elders, the office bearers, the parish priests. Church culture has a big impact on how “evangelization” can be effected. How the church fathers evangelize and how they share their faith determine the culture of the church and of the rank and file.
- The local church culture is pro the old and very conservative and unresponsive to the new realities. There is a lack of responsiveness to the needs of young unmarried people and young couples. The church seems to be for old people.
- There is less sensitivity to the problems of new cultures resulting in the lack of contextualization of evangelization.

- The structure and nature of the institution of the family is changing. The concept of the family has changed. Over and above the child headed families. The families are becoming less extended than before. Where the extended family used to come in, there is now a gap. Other churches are seizing the opportunity and fill that gap. There are child headed families and families headed by grandparents. There is also the virtual family. The following cases illustrate the new forms of family.

13. Case 1 A Child Headed Family

Both parents died. Traditional practices are no longer practised in urban settings. There is a lot of individualism and the support of the extended family has dwindled. This is worsened by the fact that relatives who used to take care of the deceased family's children do not do so any more. All the inheritance is left to the children, so relatives leave them alone. A family of 4 children of school going age, form 6, 4, form 2 and grade 5. They were left to run the family business and to fend for themselves. They were a very strong catholic family before the parents died. The children continued to come to church for a while and then gradually stopped. The local church did not do much to continue offering psychosocial support. Even the section did not do much to give the support to the children. There was a vacuum. The children needed psychosocial support which they could not find in their local catholic church. The Watchtowers filled in the vacuum. They started visiting the children and giving them support. When asked why they were no longer coming to church, the answer was they were now going to the Watchtower, Jehovah's Witness. Not much effort was made to follow the children up after they joined the Jehovah's Witness. The church was not responsive to the new cultural reality.

14. Case 2 A Virtual Family

A virtual family is one whose family members are scattered all over the world. The father is working in Afghanistan. The mother is working in Harare looking after the family interests and holding fort. One child is studying in London, another in South Africa and two more in Canada. It is a virtual family unit. They are in constant communication with each other through the Skype, face book, whatsApp, and emails. The children scattered all over need ministering and evangelizing. New methods of evangelization to reach out to these diaspora, virtual families have to be found or else

they slip through. The church in the West is “dying”. The mother went to visit her children in Canada who had been very active as youth in the local parish and discovered that they were erratic in going for mass but were going to an interdenominational service every Sunday. They didn’t tell her the reason why because they wanted her to discover for herself. They accompanied her for mass at the local cathedral. The congregation was old, the priest was old, and the singing was ‘dead’. There was tea for 10 minutes after mass with the old ladies and definitely that kind of church community was not for young people. The daughter said that she went to the cathedral just for the Eucharist after which she went to the other church for the gospel, praise and worship and fellowship. She felt at home because she participated in the activities of that church. This is typical of most Catholic churches in the area.

Other than minorities, who are mostly immigrants, the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe marginalizes some social groups and these include: the young married couples and the out of school graduates who are single. They do not quite fit in with youth groups and neither do they fit in with married people. Other than the Eucharist the church has nothing else to offer them. They feel marginalized as they do not fit in with guilds. The way the guilds are structured and their activities are such that such young people feel they do not belong. They believe that the guilds are for old people. Guilds are not responsive to new cultural realities. They still insist on marriage certificates. This poses challenges for unmarried professionals who do not want to marry or are failing to get a husband to marry. It also poses challenges for the single mothers who are not married and for those on separation.

The church is not being responsive to the needs of young couples and youth in general. It is still old fashioned. The youth have a new culture. The youth one finds in low density areas is different from the youth one finds in villages in the rural areas. Their tastes are different and their needs are also different.

15. Case 3 St Agnes and Alouis Guild

We encouraged our children, girls aged 10 and 12 to join the guild at the local church. They went through the lessons but really never enjoyed it. One day both came home crying after a guild meeting and vowed never to go back. We learned that the aunties and uncles known as “tete and sekuru” in Shona, were telling them how bad it was for girls to wear jeans and to polish their nails and perm their hair. It was a sign of bad character. They were ridiculed. “Tete and sekuru” values were obviously not in tandem with the

changing local cultural values as regards youth. Wearing jeans, nail polish and lipstick was traditionally seen as bad and as a hall mark of prostitutes. Even when I was growing up I was told lipstick was for white women and prostitutes. Not being responsive and realistic to the changing local culture drives the youth away. As I speak there has been no St Agnes and Alouis guild at our parish for the last 15 years. All the youth left the guild. There is need for proper training of formatters' and teachers of those intending to join in Shona called "vaedzwa".

The local youth then started their own youth group with the guidance of a married young couple who spoke their language. It became a very active group in the parish. Its called the Youth for Christ.

16.Reflection: What Does God/The Bible Has To Say About This?

Step 3 in the pastoral cycle is reflecting on what God or the Bible says about the situation.

The early church contextualized evangelization. For example on the Day of Pentecost – e g the miraculous gift of tongues was witnessed. The incident illustrates the principle that people need to hear the gospel in their own language. God contextualized the gospel by allowing those who spoke in tongues to "communicate the gospel in as many as 15 different languages. Jesus himself evangelized in the context of the Jewish culture. In his evangelization Christ used culture and shared in the culture of the late Judaism even though in some instances he challenged some of the practices.

17.Action: What Are We Going To Do To Make Things Different?

Step 4 in the pastoral cycle refers to what we are going to do or can be done to make things different. In other words how can we put new evangelization into practice? Before we answer that question we must take a look at what other churches are doing in being responsive to the emerging local cultures.

It seems the Pentecostal – charismatic Christianity (where believers claim to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit) is gaining ground partly because of its ability to adapt itself to the cultures into which it is introduced.

18.Traditional Practices

The traditional role of "tete" has been taken over by churches. The reason is that the "tetes" are not playing their traditional roles anymore because of urbanization. They are

absent in the urban setting. Other churches have moved in to fill in that vacuum. They play that role even up the wedding of a young couple and after. Maybe this is something that the church could emulate.

At funeral parlours other churches have filled in the gap by stationing their pastors at parlours and evangelize to the bereaved.

Story telling is a traditional practice that can be adopted in preaching. Zion Apostolic Church is using the story telling approach as a tool for communicating essential scripture messages. They use storytelling and traditional music instruments. Jesus used story telling in his evangelization.

ZAC has also seen the need to address illnesses associated with evil spirits, the need to cast out demons and healing. If somebody is possessed by a demon, ZAC would pray and cast out the demon and pray for the healing of the person. Traditional belief in evil spirits still exists. Suppressing old cultural practices and beliefs without addressing them simply results in these practices going underground. According to Shona culture something must be done when a person dies in order to bring the spirit back to the home. If not done, it is believed that the spirit will cause problems for the family. ZAC has attempted to accommodate this by introducing a Christian way of carrying out the same ceremony and call it memorial service .

19.What The Church Can Do Or Do More Of

There are a number of suggestions that the church can do in new evangelization efforts.

- Our local church must find ways of reaching out and evangelizing to the diasporans. UK has started doing it, with a Zimbabwean priest (Fr Munyongani) going round to minister to the faithful diasporans in London. This is new evangelization in practice.
- In a study of “Catholic Evangelization among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe” Manunga-Lukakisa (2007), stresses the point and firmly believes that “the process of evangelization will remain forever shallow and superficial if it does not engage the conditions of the evangelized peoples”. The gospel has to deal with the culture of the evangelized. In this book the author advocates for the preservation of the Ndebele culture, taking what is good in that culture and incorporating it into Christian life.

- According to Manunga there is still a lot that needs to be done. There is need for transformation in the way the church evangelizes and these include the following:
 - The need for a more committed ecumenical approach to evangelization
 - Greater recognition of the role of the laity
- The need for the church to create space for what he calls “contemplation in action”. I take this to mean there is need for more action than praying. New evangelization has to seize the opportunity provided by the new media because the later has become a meeting place for social and cultural practices. How? –new forms of solidarity, greater access to information, all these foster the development of a global culture and virtual communities and families.
- Pastoral programmes should be relevant and be responsive to the socio, economic needs of communities.
- New evangelization calls upon everybody to be actively involved in proclaiming the gospel. This includes everyone in the church, individuals, communities, parishes, diocese, bishop’s conferences, groups, guilds etc. All these groups must examine themselves and assess how responsive they are to the realities of the new cultures vis a vis new evangelization.
- Some responses to the Lineamenta on the issue of new evangelization pointed to the need to review formation programmes in seminaries, and formation houses to produce priest and other religious people who have the necessary skills, knowledge and aptitudes that are responsive to new cultures and new realities. E g in the use of ICT and globalization.
- New ways of presenting the gospel are needed in order to be relevant to the youth of today.
- Church should have psycho social support programmes for groups such as youth, married couples, and people living with HIV/AIDS.
- There is need to redesign church programmes and guilds. Most church programs centre around the married and old people and marginalise the youth and young couples and those in between. The church has programmes for older people who are married . Even the constitutions of most guilds require than one produces a marriage certificate or licence for them to be a member of the guild e.g. the Marian Guild “Hosi yeDenga”. This cuts out the unmarried women and the unwedded ones who may wish to join. Those guilds that allow such women in are

labelled negatively. Those girls who fell pregnant and are not married are also marginalized. It is these groups who leave the church to join other churches. New evangelization requires making a paradigm shift to accommodate all new socio-cultural groupings.

- The church should make an attempt to address people's need for healing. Where there is need for medicine, give people some and where there is need for casting out demons do that as well.
- Marriage customs and funeral rites must be addressed by the church.
- In sections there are some cultural groups like, whites, who do not participate in sections and we pretend to continue with sections as if the problem does not exist. We run parallel structures. Sections are for the Africans.

20. Conclusion On New Evangelization And Local Cultures

There is need to understand how people relate to spirits and address the problem. No need to pretend that it does not exist when people go to strange places at night to address the problem. People should be made to understand the problem remove fear and uncertainty which really emanates for ignorance. People need to know that the power of God is greater than the power of evil spirits. If the church does not do something about it people suffering from evil spirits will go to look for help from diviners or some cults that claim to have solutions to spiritual problems.

New evangelization can adopt the same strategy with youth. Peer Education or peer evangelizing – the youth preaching to the youth. The same concept which is being used by Jesuit Aids Project – peer education for behaviour change in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The same youth can be used to evangelize to other youth.

Demons may not exist to the church fathers but to people they are real and the problem needs to be addressed.

The following groups of people need the new evangelization strategies:

- Catholics who are tired and stay at home.
- Catholics going to other churches
- Catholics in the diaspora
- Part time Catholics
- Out of school adults who do not quite fit in
- Young couples who the church is neglecting

- The out casts- unmarried couples, single parents and homosexuals. Part time Catholics go for mass for the Eucharist but go to other churches to listen to the word, the preaching and praise and worship.

There is need for serious dialogue with the young and the old and the church as regards lobola.

21.Celebration

The last stage in the pastoral cycle is to look at what we have achieved and celebrate.

We can celebrate the following achievements:

- Involvement of the laity
- Local priests
- Enculturation of the liturgy
- Recognition of the role of the ancestral spirits at funerals “ varikudenga” meaning those in Heaven.
- Care for the poor through St Vincent

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