

Introduction

In this brief presentation today, our major concern is to attempt to preach Jesus within an African world-view that can be facilitated among many African values, by proverbs, songs and other symbols. As such therefore, inculturation is the in-depth of the Gospel through sound culture. Inculturation is the transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in various human values [RM 52, EN 20, and GS 58].

The reality of inculturation was already existent in the life of Jesus. While he became part of his culture, he also uplifted that culture and transformed it. Jesus used the language, stories, proverbs and imageries of his time [Lk 8:4-15]. He moved his disciples from the known to the unknown.

What we are today, to a large extent depends on where we have come from. We are our roots. We are our past. Our background and our cultural milieu have shaped up our thoughts, perception, outlook, and attitude and to a large extent our principles of life. It is in this context that we would like to show how Jesus Christ can be seen as Chief in Africa.

Terminology

Christ means ‘the anointed one.’ In various Zambian languages he is referred to as ‘Uwa subwa’ in Bemba, ‘Munanike’ in Tonga, ‘Ozodzedwa’ in Nyanja. In Luba language of Congo-Kinshasa, Christ is referred to as ‘Mulaba.’ There are many African tribes that have a name for Christ. The power of a local name for Christ becomes the people something more than just a proper name. It arouses an attention and questions such, with what is he ‘anointed?’ Why is he anointed?

Who is a chief in Africa? A chief is a leader or ruler, especially of a tribe or clan. He is a person with a highest rank in that tribe and he is an anointed one.

Jesus Christ as Chief

In the recent years, the Christ issue, as one among the local people has accelerated. Therefore, Christ has received quite a number of traditional titles. And one of the titles is the title of ‘chief’. For example, what qualifies Christ as ‘chief’ according to the Bantu people? According to Francios Kabasele, a Congolese theologian, one of the determining factor to the birth of the title of ‘chief’ for Christ, has been facilitated by the rewriting of Liturgical Latin prayers by the local Churches and not only translating them. This is a response

to the needs culturally by the local people in question; their ancestral faith in the Supreme Being and the genius of their language.

Tradional Attributes

The 'why' question has to be equally answered. Why do the Bantu people call Christ their 'Chief?' By virtue of the primary denotation of this general word which designates someone who holds some authority and who governs a part of the people. It is interesting to note that colonialists, missionaries, parish priests and civil leaders are all called, Bwana Mukubwa in Nyanja, Mwami in Tonga, Imfumu in Bemba etc. The reason is that all of them hold power.

Surely, the Christian revelation proclaims Christ as God. But the Bantu people call him Chief for another reason. The prerogatives of Bantu chief are seen to have been fully realized by Jesus Christ. Power belongs superlatively to Jesus Christ because he is a Mighty hero, because he is the chief's son and the chief's emissary, because he is strong, generous, wise and a reconciler of human beings.

Therefore, the Bantu people see Christ as "chief" first of all because he has conquered – he has triumphed over Satan.

1. Among the Bantu people, a chief is considered as a hero. The chiefs defend and protect their people. Hence, Christ is defender and protector as a chief.
2. A chief is considered as one who never runs away from the enemy but at his sight they scatter. Jesus the anointed one never flees from the enemy.
3. A chief is considered as one who wins victories, whom no one dares to confront.
4. A chief is considered as one who never relents. Those he wins to himself, he does not leave ever again. He is like a python in the forest.
5. A chief is considered as one with a great power like that of great winds. Christ is powerful.
6. A chief is considered as a strong one. Hence, Christ is the vessel of a life force that protects and strengthens his subjects.
7. A chief is considered as one who is generous. Therefore, Christ as chief is generous and wise.
8. A chief is considered as one who leads to reconciliation in the spirit of love and union. A chief is like a big tree under which his subjects gather to share their spoils. Christ is noticed by the Bantu as one who opposes the spirit of vengeance; he preaches forgiveness.

Symbols

Among the Bantu people, the chiefs use various symbols as their insignias. These symbols define what the chief stands for. The symbols will vary from culture to culture. Each culture, may understand Christ that way. This may refer to what the Christ use in their Christian faith as they inculturate it. For example:

1. The Leopard skin: it is a symbol of Christ's sovereignty over the universe. When the Christians use the leopard's skin, they declare their commitment to the service of Christ's sovereignty. They may use the leopard's skin as a tabernacle veil.
2. Axe, spear, elephant stakes: symbols of fear and trust. The enemy is afraid, but the chief's subjects feel protected. For the Bantu Christians, the above insignia are a symbolism of Christ as a defender in the world they still see as a vast battle field of life and death.
3. Royal necklace: These may be made by the leopard's teeth or cowrie shells which are African symbolisms of wealth. The chief is, for the people, a supplier par excellence. Christ already in the 16th Century was understood as such. The crucifixes from that century were fashioned by the Congeese, as Christ wearing a royal necklace of pearls and cowrie shells.

My personal questions

1. Can Christ's concept of authority help the Bantu chiefs in their governance?
2. Why do presidents, Bishops, priests in Africa exercise authority in the way they do? Why do they hold on to power forever?
3. Is western and African concept of democracy compatible?

Books to Refer:

Robert J. Schreiter, "Faces of Jesus in Africa" Christ as Chief by Francois Kabasele

D. Biebuyck, Hero and Chief [1938]

Eric de Rosny, Healers in the Night [1985]