

**THE AFRICAN PRIEST AND THE IMPERATIVENESS OF AN  
INCULTURATED  
PREACHING**

**By**

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**Abstract**

*To the priest in general and to the African priest in particular has been given the mandate to preach the Word of God. This, of course, is in order to feed the flock entrusted to him. With descriptive and analytic methodology, this paper endeavoured to find out how the priest in Africa today could carry out this responsibility better. It was discovered that based on the realities on ground in Africa today, only an inculturated preaching could suffice. Such an inculturated preaching, the paper still made known, would impel him, the African priest, that is, to listen, first of all, to the Word of God, and then to the people in their symbolic world, culture and socio-political conditions. While considering also not only the resources available to the same African priest but also the points he should bear in mind as he prepares for this important part of his ministry, the paper did underscore the significance of prayer to and the way of living of the same African priest. It is hoped that this will be an important addition to the ever-growing call for more attention to be given to the reality of preaching in the house of theology, or better, Christianity, in Africa.*

**Keywords:** African priest, preaching, inculturation, Word of God, symbolic world, socio-political realities.

**Introduction**

While Brown(2000, 695) it was who had observed that it is an irony that the most sophisticated rhetorician and elegant theologian of the New Testament, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, that is, from whose pen the above quotation comes, is an unknown, what, however, is not unknown is the fact that it is the same living, effective and power-laden Word of God that he was talking of and about above that has been entrusted to the hands of the priest, in this case, the African priest. This is even made clearer by the rite of ordination which says, among others, thus:“My son,[...]you must apply your energies to the duty of teaching in the name of Christ, the chief Teacher. Share with mankind the word of God you have received with joy. Meditate on the

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law of God, believe what you read, teach what you believe, and put into practice what you teach”(1991, 52). Hence, the Fathers of Vatican Council II(1965a) would make it known that when all is said and done, and especially, since no one can be saved who does not first believe, the primary duty of the priest, as co-worker of the bishop, would always be the proclamation to all of this same Word for the establishment and building up of the People of God (4).

It will be the preoccupation of this paper, therefore, to look at how the priest in Africa today can best carry out this responsibility, bearing in mind, as a matter of fact, the reality of the African world in which he lives and works so that “the confrontation between the message of the gospel and the African universe[...may] bring forth a meaning with the power to transform the lives of African Christians”(Ela,1990, 4), who would then have life and have it in abundance(cf. Jn. 10:10). And that preoccupation will compel this paper, before anything else, to cast a glance at the face of Africa today.

#### **Today’s Africa In Brief**

Writing in his Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II (1995, 40-41) had observed, among other things, thus:

One common situation, without any doubt, is that Africa is full of problems. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. [...C]ontemporary Africa can be compared to the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him and departed, leaving him half dead (cf. Lk. 10:30-37). Africa is a continent where countless human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned.

Indeed, while that observation was made some twenty-two years ago, precisely, in 1994, and while there has even been yet another Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held, as it were, from 4th-25th October, 2009, and aimed at continuing “the work of the 1994 Assembly, ‘which was intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair’”(Benedict XVI, 2011, 2), the fact remains that not much has changed ever since as to warrant a counter observation. Many factors could,

indeed, be pointed out as being responsible for this. Yes, it was Achebe (1983, 1), who, writing in his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, had made an observation about Nigeria that could be applied to Africa as a whole. According to him, the trouble with Nigeria “is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.[...]. The Nigerian[read African] problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.”

While one can understand where he, Achebe, that is, was coming from, heaping the blame, however, only on the leadership, and leaving the followership off the hook, may not be realistic. The led also share in the blame. In fact, what Marlow had said of Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*(1996),that, “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz”(66), could also be said of Africa. All - both Africa’s leadership and followership - contributed to the making of her, Africa, that is, what she is today. And there is yet another segment that is and ought not to be excluded, no matter how big or small, from the “All” that made Africa today,a “continent wherecountless human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned”. Yes, one is here talking of and about external factors. Hence, Ela (1990,149) would observe: “How can we express our belonging to God in a continent that does not belong to itself? Under the pretext of cooperation, economic and financial organizations freely quarrel over our lands and beaches, our bauxite, copper and diamond mines, and our business and tourism – without neglecting our uranium, oil, and, of course, the very conscience of our people.”

Again, there is the issue of bribery and corruption the latter of which the same Achebe (1983, 38), after observation, had pointed out that it, corruption in Nigeria[read Africa], “has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage.”Richburg (2009) calls this corruption, a feature, indeed, of African social, political and even religious life(Kunhiyop, 2008, 164),“malignant corruption”,in comparison with the benign and productive type which exists, according to him, in Asia(174-175).And it is little wonder then that thanks tosuch “malignant corruption”, Africa would become the world’s most corrupt continent(French, 2004, xvi).Moreover, while the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians (cited in Bujo and Muya, 2008, 265) would maintain that “Ethnicity is a positive element in any human society,”it is to be accepted that in Africa today the same ethnicity has often been abused. According toObiefuna (1994), “during political elections what counts is not whether you are a Catholic or not but to what clan, tribe or town [...] the candidate seeking election belongs. The nearer is his or her home to the

African the more qualified he or she is for election”(9).No wonder, the same Richburg (2009) would conclude: “In Africa it is all about tribes”(241).

Likewise, mention must also be made here of the issue of religious fundamentalism in many countries of Africa today and the reality of Pentecostalism. Of course, “[t]here are many different expressions of [the same] Pentecostalism in Africa”(Anderson, 2011, 65),especially South of the Sahara, little wonder since Pentecostalism itself “is a movement of diverse colors”(Kalu, 2008, 4). But if Lagos, considered “the most Pentecostal city in the world”(Anderson, 2004, 4), is chosen as a case study, there is the presence today, according to Akinwale (2010, 220-221), of an aggressive Pentecostalism with its attendant distortion of the image of God who, having, as it were, been created in the image and likeness of the preacher, is given a job description that is reduced only to working miracles as he is controlled, commanded, bribed and settled in the pursuit of narrow selfish interests, an instrumentalization of God, helped, as it were, by such factors as the traditional worldview of the African, the reality of poverty, apparent rejection of missionary Christianity(Oguejiofor, 2001, 38-54) and erroneous understanding of biblical teaching on miraculous healing and the influence of propaganda, among others(Umorem, 2000, 41-79).

And there is yet another thing that colours the face of Africa today: An “unquenchable desire for a greater humanity and a unified world society”(Moniz, 1999, 13-14), or better, globalization, involving basically, “a restructuring of relationships in an ever-shrinking contemporary world”(Ayanga, 2010, 167) and unleashing, as it were, an avalanche of possibilities for communication, transportation, electronic financing, etc. But truth be told, this same globalization has not only left positive things on its trail but also some negative ones. In terms of the latter, Kasper (2004) would have this to say:

Globalization creates new forms of dependence and injustice and gives the strong the powerful new opportunities for domination. In fact, the influence of people of different cultures gives rise to deep anxieties, which cause problems leading to hatred and rebellion. There is thus an expansion of particular interests and ethnic and cultural conflicts. Some commentators speak of a coming “clash of civilizations”(Huntington) and in many places such a clash is already taking place amidst bloodshed (6).

Above all, as John Paul II had indicated in the same *Ecclesia in Africa*, and as a kind of culmination of all the ills mentioned above - and those like the scourge of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and the recent Ebola epidemics etc.,

which for spatio-temporal reasons cannot be mentioned here - there is in Africa today the reality of a poverty so crushing and prevalent that O'Connor (1991,1) would observe that, "To think Africa, is to think poverty", and this, despite the obvious rich natural resources that Africa can boast of as a continent(John Paul II, 1995, 42). Of course, what is at stake here is material poverty wherein the society, likewise the individuals that make it up, is unable to provide its basic needs: food, clothing, housing, education, etc. But there is also another kind of poverty, the kind that Mveng (1994), had called "anthropological poverty". According to him, this is the "kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person. [...]. This is an indigence of being, the legacy of centuries of slavery and colonization" (156).

Hence, while Mbefo (2001, 11) would conclude by observing that, "The result of European activity in Africa can be negatively thematized as the erosion of Africans' self-confidence," commenting on Mveng's aforementioned observation, Orobator (2000, 151) would state, thus: "Gripping to any reader as Mveng's characterization might appear, the fact remains, however, that we can no longer lay the responsibility for the ongoing scourge of anthropological poverty solely on the doorstep of slavery and colonization. Doubtless, the effects of slavery and colonization remain visible in Africa. But these effects, along with other forms of injustice and oppression, now result primarily from the devious machinations of indigenous taskmasters." No wonder, Odey (2006, 74) would urge that it is high time Africa, or rather, her theology, stopped "bemoaning the crimes that white colonialists committed against the black race long ago when our own brothers, in the name of leadership, have done us more harm than the whites."

In fact, because of the way and manner that Africa has almost become today a shackled continent(Guest, 2004), subjected, as it were, to the fate of the barber's chair of perpetual motion without progress, how it has even become, as Wrong (2002) would rightly term her, "a continent that has not disappointed in its capacity to disappoint"(10), indeed, how it is today in a mess(Mwakikagile 2006), some have even been forced to attribute her situation to the spiritual: the anger and curse of the ancestors! Yes, the very ancestors of whom no African tribe can fail to revere its own(Bujo, 1992, 120), ancestors who "are seen as still part of the family and living with the community and being able to influence one's life for good or evil"(Healey and Sybertz, 2005, 214-215) and whom some believe "constitute precisely the link between the African and God"!(Mununguri, 1998, 10). Indeed, in the words of Mazrui (1986), "the ancestors of Africa are angry. For those who believe in the power of the ancestors, the proof of their anger is all around us. For those who do not

believe in ancestors, the proof of their anger is given another name”(11). Hence,with a note of finality, he would state: “things are not working in and for Africa is the proof of the curse of the ancestors”(1986, 11).

However,it will be a testament to badand unbalanced scholarship to state that the aforementioned “shadows” are the only things that define the face of Africa, and by implication, the African, of today. Ilo(2006) it was who had entitled his book about Africa, thus: “The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows”. Yes, looking beyond Africa’s aforementioned “shadows”, one can see some other positive things happening. Indeed, it was Benedict XVI (2011) who, after having pointed out some of the realities that painfully scar Africa’s memory; the same realties this paper has pointed out above, did not fail, however, to add, that despite all these, “Africa maintains its *joie de vivre*”(9)In fact, one can apply to Africans as a whole what Oduyoye (2001, 12-13) had said with particular reference to African women:

[African] Women never say ‘never’: when it has to do with the good expected of life, what they say is ‘not yet’[...]. Not even Africa’s mammoth poverty can breed despair in women even though from the outside what others see is a future of ‘pain, death, the misery of watching one’s children die and the death of hope herself’. The ‘death of hope’ is an impossible concept in Africa women’s theology, because they believe the Scripture that says, with God, they can scale walls (Ps. 30).

Again, in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke presents one with Paul’s observation about the Athenians in the Areopagus hall: “Athenian citizens, I note that in every way you are very religious”(Acts. 17:22). And there is a way also this could be applied in particular to Africans. “African peoples”, Mbiti observed (1999, 256),“are deeply religious. It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe.”In fact, as Shorter (1978) noted, “religion in Africa is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored – a mountain which, like Kenya or Kilimanjaro, is part of the African landscape”(3).This, as a matter of fact, is something that ought to be praised and appreciated as it is observed in both Christians and followers of other religions predominant in Africa such as Islam and African Traditional Religion. Although questions may be raised as to whether this has always translated into a better of way of living and high moral standards in all facets of life – “If the scale for weighing the strength of their[Africans’] religious depth would be the presence of a healthy social order and the general acceptance of morals in day-to-day life, then Africa suffers greatly today from

a severe religious decline” (Achermann, 1996, 23) – suffice it to mention that this would take this paper beyond what it wishes to say here and what is of greatest interest to it under this section.

Moreover, worthy of praise of and about the African, despite the onslaught of today’s undue individualism, is his or her sense of communion in which, with the same Mbiti (1979), he or she seems to say, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”(1999, 106; Pobee, 1979, 49). In fact, though not exhaustive and in cognizance of the limitations involved and even of the fact that this paper has already hinted at above what it is going to say here, one can still apply to the African what the bishops and priests of Igboland had said about the Igbo man in their document, *The Igbo Catholic Priest at the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, (1999): “Igbo man values the family, and prizes its unity and solidarity. He longs for posterity and is exceedingly devoted to his kins. He has a deep sense of the sacred and the other world. He is deeply attached to his roots and his tradition. He places high premium on community loyalty, his hospitality is legendary as his respect for age and elders. He is achievement-oriented with a high sense of industry.” (16)

### **Between The African Priest and the Africa of Today: The Necessity of an Inculturated Preaching.**

In his book, *A Listening Church*, Uzukwu (1996) had observed that the totem of the Manja chief of the Central African Republic is the rabbit because it has large ears and that the chief then is one who is versed in the art of listening – an imagery he, Uzukwu, would utilize, for his particular style and purpose, in the writing of his book, hence, the caption, *A Listening Church*(x). And the priest in Africa today should, as a matter of fact, be like this Manja chief with large listening ears. In fact, just as Schreiter (1986,40) had said that “there must be a clear commitment to listening as a point of departure for constructing local theologies, and a commitment to continue to listen,” so also, here, there must be a clear commitment to listening as a point of departure for any inculturated preaching and a commitment to continue to just listen.

#### **Listening to the Word of God**

Yes, the priest’s large ears must be, in the first place, for listening to the Word of God, and Word of God which he must approach with awe and reverence. “[F]rom the very outset”, said von Balthasar (1965, 9), “one approaches the word of God, the scripture, on one’s knees, prostrate, in the conviction that the written word has within it the spirit and power to bring about, in faith, contact with the infinity of the Word.” He should let this Word of God talk to him, touch him and incarnate in his life. “Whoever wants to preach”, said Pope Francis (2013), “must be the first to let the word of God move him deeply and become incarnate in his daily life”(150). He should always and

everywhere avoid what one could call the “Enoch Syndrome”. And what does that mean? It has to do with the character Enoch in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Of him, Achebe(2000)would write, among other things, thus:

Enoch [was] the son of the Snake-priest who was believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python. Enoch’s devotion to the new faith had seemed so much greater than Mr. Brown’s that the villagers called him The outsider who wept louder than the bereaved. [...]. Such was the excessive energy bottled up in Enoch’s small body that it was always erupting in quarrels and fights. On Sundays he always imagined that the sermon was preached for the benefits of his enemies. And if he happened to sit near one of them he would occasionally turn to give him a meaningful look, as if to say, ‘I told you so’(167).

That is to say that rather than thinking that the sermon is being preached, or rather, that the Word of God is being directed to someone else, the priest-preacher should see it as talking, first of all, to him. And his doing this, of course, would amount to his overcoming a great temptation. “When we make an effort to listen to the Lord,” Pope Francis (2013, 153) maintained, “temptations usually arise. One of them is simply to feel troubled or burdened, and to turn away. Another common temptation is to think about what a text means for other people, and so avoid applying it to our own life.”No wonder, Cozzens (2000)would observe that, “Though tenders and bearers of the word, they need to hear what they dare to bring to others. Priests, I believe, can easily forget their need to hear the word of God. There is a time to tend the word and a time to listen to the word, and they remember as the word both soothes and challenges them that evangelists needs to be evangelized. [...In fact], tenders of the word must sit with God’s word, savor it as a wine connoisseur savors a winery’s prize vintage. He reads it slowly and carefully, letting it filter into the corners of his unconscious where it takes root under the quiet tutoring of his imagination. Here the word begins to reveal its ever-new promise to transform the lives of those who will soon hear it aloud from the preachers’ lips”<sup>(90-91)</sup>.

### **Listening to the People in their Symbolic World and Culture**

The large ears of the African priest would, as well, enable him to listen to the world, to the culture and, especially, to the people among whom he lives. In fact, living in this world, the African world, that is, which this paper did try, despite the obvious inadequacies, to x-ray above, he should always endeavour to inculcate the Word which he has heard - always taking cognizance of the

observation of Laye (1981, 62) that, “the world rolls on, and changes.” Yes, the world of Africa today is one which has rolled on and changed, it is no longer the Africa of many, many years ago. Hence, there is the need not only to “give up once and for all any mental picture of Africa as a stable world resistant to change, always the same, a stranger to time and history”(Ela, 1990, xv), but also to make sure that the African priest does not preach to the Africa that no longer exists. “Only let us consciously find out how and to what extent”, said Pobe (1979), “African countries and African people have changed, lest we waste time preparing to evangelize the Africa of 1800, which no longer exists”(19). And what this immediately calls for is the need to change the methods, tactics and strategies of preaching and evangelization in view of the changed and changing situations. “The conditions of society in which we live”, observed Paul VI (cited in Paul VI, 1975, 3), “oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.”

One thing that cannot be denied is that the aforementioned modern man, in this case, men and women of today’s Africa, actually wish to hear the Word of God. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons given for most of them leaving the mainstream Churches for the new generation churches is that they are hungry for the Word of God and since the Word of God which they hear in the mainstream churches, they maintain, sometimes does not speak to them, does not, that is, answer to the questions raised by them, they simply have no other option than to go. “Our people,” Dolan (2000, 295-296) noted, “are leaving the Church, the ‘Faith of our Fathers’ – which ‘dungeon, fire, and sword’ could not force them to do – because they can’t stand our preaching! I’m not saying that’s right, believe me...but it’s a fact!” And supporting him nearer home here, Ikpiki (cited in Faniran, 2012, 258), laying bare the result of his research, would observe:

Some of those interviewed complained bitterly about the poverty of homilies delivered by priests. They complained that the Word of God is not preached in relation to their life situations and problems. This, for them, makes the Word of God abstract and without meaning. The most probable reason, therefore, why some Catholics are not touched during homilies is that some priests are unable to address the existential life situation of the people with the Word of God. Hence, the urge to go to other Churches not just for miracles, but also to assuage their spiritual hunger.

Hence, while the document, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, (1965a) would stress the need for the priest to “expound the Word of God not merely in a general and abstract way but by an application of the eternal truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances of life”<sup>(4)</sup>, Pope Francis (2013, 154) himself would, in a similar way, urge: “The preacher also needs to keep his ear to the people and to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear. A preacher has to contemplate the word, but he also has to contemplate his people.[...]. He needs to be able to link the message of a biblical text to a human situation, to an experience which cries out for the light of God’s word”. In fact, while the “The word of the Lord” must be his word, “the cry of the people” must be his cry (Casaldaliga and Vigil, 1994, 126).

Of course, that would have to force priests in today’s Africa to utilize the time and space for preaching the Word adequately and not to use it for something else. In Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Kambili would talk of the Christmas Mass she had attended in her home parish, St. Paul’s, Abba. “It was even harder”, she had begun, “to keep my mind on Mass because the priest, who spoke Igbo throughout, did not talk about the gospel during the sermon. Instead he talked about zinc and cement. ‘You people think I ate the money for the zinc, *okwia?*’ he shouted, gesticulating, pointing accusingly at the congregation. ‘After all, how many of you give to this church, *gbo?* How can we build the house if you don’t give? Do you think zinc and cement cost a mere ten kobo? Papa wished the priest would talk about something else, something about the birth in the manger, about the shepherds and the guiding star; I knew from the way Papa held his missal too tight, the way he shifted often on the pew.” (2004, 89-90) And the exaggerated and fanatic Catholicism of Kambili’s father, Papa, apart, the fact still remains that a lot of people would wish to hear, like him, the Word, would wish, that is, that priests talked about the gospel during the sermon instead of talking about zinc and cement! “So the homily”, said Radcliffe (2008, 55), “is not a chance for the preacher to bang on about his or her hobby-horse. It is not an occasion for plugging one’s own line, or pushing the agenda of one’s party within the Church. That would be an abuse of the pulpit, like someone dominating a meal and letting no one else get a word in.”

Indeed, in talking, during sermons, about the gospel and not zinc and cement and in not banging on even about one’s hobby-horse, they, the people of God, that is, would wish that priests bear in mind that no matter the changed situation of the world in which they live, they, as true Africans, live, as Ela (1990, 35) would observe, “in a forest of symbols’, a unique way of

maintaining their relationships to the universe". Hence, the need for priests to make use of the symbolic in their preaching, to make use, for instance, of proverbs which, as Achebe (2000, 6) noted, are "the palm oil with which words are eaten," make use of idioms, stories, and other forms of oral expressions. "The traditional literature of Africa," observed Shorter (1973), "is very important to the priest, catechist and religious educator for an understanding of the mind of those to whom he is transmitting the Christian message. It is therefore necessary to know something of the traditional literary forms and of the methods of analyzing them. Above all, it is necessary to understand the nature and power of symbols."(83).In fact, the following confession by Achebe (2012, 55) as to how he went about his business of writing could hold true for the priest in this case, thus: "I borrowed proverbs from our culture and history, colloquialisms and African expressive language from the ancient griots, the worldviews, perspectives, and customs from my Igbo tradition and cosmology, and the sensibilities of everyday people."

The imperativeness of such cannot be underestimated. This writer remembers a priest who was in his home parish many years ago and who was in the habit of using proverbs and stories in his homilies. While many people ordinarily have "forgotten" what he said in his homilies, what they still retain are some of the proverbs and stories they heard from him during such homilies and in remembering them, they often remember what occasioned them and then the contents of the same homilies. Hence, Puthiadam (2002, 11) would maintain that, "The best means to preserve and transmit wisdom is the story[and also proverbs]. In fact, what remains deeply embedded in our minds and hearts is not the doctrinal and the dogmatic part of the sermons and exhortations we hear or read in books, but the stories[and proverbs] that illustrate and lighten up and exemplify the doctrines."

No wonder, Ela (1990) would be forced to draw the following conclusion that could be applied, in particular, to what is at stake, here:

If Christianity wants to reach Africans, to speak to their hearts and to enter their consciousness and the space where their soul breathes, it must change. To do so christianity must do violence to itself and break the chains of western rationality which means almost nothing in the African civilization of the symbol. Without some form of epistemological break with the scholastic universe, Christianity has little chance of reaching the African. [...].The whole scholastic and academic pedagogy of the west penalizes symbolism and ridicules symbolic thought.

The collision of the gospel with the African world compels the church to restore to symbols their place and value in the encounter of humanity with God(41-42).

### **Listening to the People's Socio-Political Realities**

The people would wish as well that priests do not close their ears to the reality of things on the ground: the socio-political and religious realities, that is! Indeed, it was Beyer (1998, 26) who had once observed that, "In the Celestial Church of Christ, Elders appointed to read the sermon during service are strictly forbidden from making reference to newspaper publications, or any matter of political nature, or one that affects government or is derogatory to other religious organizations. They are strictly enjoined to limit themselves to the word of God in the Bible whenever there is service in progress." While one may try to understand where they are coming from, in the case of the priest in today's Africa, that may not be the case. Making reference by him, for instance, to newspaper publications in the course of his sermons in which he would surely be talking about the gospel and not "zinc and cement", may not amount to an "original sin". After all, Barth (cited in Schineller, 2004, 12; Taylor, 1977, 63) it was who had pointed out that the preacher ought to preach with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other- for which Miller (2006, 33) had to confess: "I like the metaphor, because holding the Bible suggests that the preacher is not captive to this world, but holding the newspaper says the preacher at least knows where the world is. The sermon should not be an intellectual documentary. But it should be an informed homily. People like listening to a preacher who knows the Bible and understands the culture."

But even at this, a caveat may still not be unnecessary. In the words of Pope Francis (2013), "Let us also keep in mind that we should never respond to questions that nobody asks. Nor is it fitting to talk about the latest news in order to awaken people's interest; we have television programmes for that. It is possible, however, to start with some fact or story so that God's word can forcefully resound in its call to conversion, worship, commitment to fraternity and service, and so forth. Yet there will always be some who readily listen to a preacher's commentaries on current affairs, while not letting themselves be challenged"(155). Hence, Howell (2011, 52) would place the following on the table about the same Barth cited above:

Famous for the image of the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, Karl Barth warned his preaching students against the presumed need that every sermon must be

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as timely as this morning's newspaper. 'We do not always have to bring in the latest and most sensational events'. Events belong to everyday life, 'but now it is Sunday, and people want to go beyond them and rise above them'. He reminisced over the way he preached on the Sunday after the sinking of the *Titanic* and made the disaster the main theme of the sermon. The result? 'A monster of a full-scale *Titanic* sermon'. When war broke out in 1914, he raged in all his sermon about the war, until a woman came and begged him to talk about something else. 'She was right! I had disgracefully forgotten the importance of the submission to the text. All pastors should be good marksmen who aim their guns beyond the hills of relevance.'

However, on the issue of making any reference to "any matter of political nature" - and one is still on Beyer's observation - during his sermons, the same situation holds for the priest in today's Africa. His having done this should not be interpreted as his having committed the worst of sins or to have been involved in Calvin's famous "nefarious perfidy." Instead, the contrary is the case. According to Martey (cited in Odey, 2006, 71), "The objective poverty of the African people stares the African Church and its theology on the face as both claim to bring these same people the liberating message of Christ's gospel. To do theology[read to preach the gospel] in Africa today and wink at the dehumanizing conditions of Africa's socio-economic reality involves what John Calvin called 'nefarious perfidy' because this not only constitutes a betrayal of the gospel itself, but also of the freedom of God's own people."

Hence, while the Fathers of Vatican Council II (1965b) would observe that, though the Church is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system, she should, however, have true freedom to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men, and also to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it(76), Odey(2001, 36-37) would maintain: "There is no Church worthy of its name or any clergyman worthy of his noble calling who will comfortably afford to keep quiet when the rapacious wolves that hide under the umbrella of politics directly or indirectly threaten the very lives of his flock.[...]. If the Church and the ministers of the gospel could steer clear of politics in the past without abandoning their flocks at the mercy of some ravenous wolves, today, when politics has become a matter of life and death, it has become a different story. Any Church or minister of the gospel that will have nothing to do with politics will equally have nothing to do with the

people. As a political animal, you may be partisan or non-partisan, depending on your peculiar interest and vocation in life. But it is certainly a very dangerous contract to leave politics for the politicians alone.”

Little wonder, Nwoko(1993) would conclude: “In its genuine nature politics is neither contrary to Christianity nor to the Priesthood. Rather politics and the priesthood share something in common: a service of the organization of human society. So the priests in the leadership role are also in politics. The problem is with party-politics. This is where the controversies about the clergy’s participation in politics originate. The radical issue is the limiting factor of ideology in the nature of party-politics. It is ideology that relativizes politics into party-politics. And this is the factor, I think, that has always made the traditionalist and the Church reticent about clergy’s involvement in politics.”(11).

Of course, in such talk of justice and the political in his sermon, the priest would surely be accused of “madness” and of being given to clerical opportunism(Amaefule, 2007, 10), or even, of having become a “politician” who is being used by the opposition against those in governance. In this writer’s little play, *The Mad Priest*(2007), the protagonist, Fr. Ashiegbu, who had refused the donation of a huge amount of money from the governor of his state on the grounds that it was stolen from the poor masses was actually so accused and had to defend himself, among others, thus:

I have no personal problems with anybody, no personal problem with those of them in the corridors of power. Neither am I being used by their enemies, as I was once accused of, to thwart the smooth-running of their administration. I am simply too old to be used by anybody except God[...]. Yes, I would like to let them understand as well that I’m not a politician. I’m not a politician in the sense that I do not belong to any political party. I belong to all parties and none at the same time. But as an *Enspoliticum*, a political being, I think I am political and a politician. It is my inalienable right and I owe no one apologies for it. That’s why, by extension, even though the Church has the mandate to preach the Gospel of Christ to all the world and should not ‘involve’ herself in politics, she cannot, however, close her eyes to the political problems of the world. She cannot close her eyes, bible in hand, kneeling and praying pious prayers and standing in the pulpit and preaching powerful sermons, while the

body politic sinks into the maelstrom of political uncertainty. She cannot close her eyes in pious indifferentism, while our leaders ride roughshod over us by their financial recklessness, economic debauchery, political immaturity and neurotic parochialism(64).

Such accusations, of course, would surely be expected. In fact, it was Archbishop Camara of Brazil (cited in Odey, 2007, 127-128) who had once challenged his priests: "Why should we be afraid to see our peaceful battle for justice wrongly interpreted, wrongly judged, when Christ himself was called an agitator, a subversive element, an enemy of Caesar? If it is true that he was sacrificed because he proclaimed himself Son of God, it is also true that on top of his cross it was written in three different languages that he had been put to death for a political reason." Hence, priests in Africa today should not be deterred by accusations of this nature and more but would as always go ahead to preach the Word "in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking or advising, always with patience and providing instruction" (2 Tim 4:2), since it is only in doing so that they can claim to have fulfilled their prophetic roles as visionaries of their time endowed with rare courage (Ehusani, 2003, 68), and, thus, have succeeded, as wont indeed prophets, in keeping the ministry of imagination alive and in proposing alternative solutions. "It is the vocation of the prophet", said Brueggemann (2001), "to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the single one that the king wants to urge us as the only thinkable one" (40).

Thus, such an African priest would become, precisely, then, according to Iroegbu (cited in Nwachukwu, 1999, 19-20), "An African Amos who will not only denounce social evil, but also effectively bring a revolution to the social unjust situation in Africa; an African Jeremiah who will sharply decry and lament, making all and sundry conscious of the African deplorable dilemma, while pointing the way and means to solution; an African Isaiah who will uncover and discern true African leaders who will be God's instruments towards the situation in Africa on all fronts; an Africa Hosea who will rise to the top and proclaim the centrality of love, divine and human, African and universal; an African Moses who will stand up and cross the red sea of poverty and injustice, mental colonialism and religious confusion into the promised land of peace and justice of God, the integral welfare of all Africans; an African Christ who will join the Jesus of history and faith and bring all Africans into the Father's communion in the Holy Spirit."

### **The Significance of the Foregoing Inculturated Preaching**

It was in Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* (1987) that Ogbuefi Odogwu, a non-Christian who, however, knew one or two things about Christianity and who went to Church once a year at harvest, had claimed that, "his only criticism of the Christian service was that the congregation was denied the right to reply to the sermon" (47). In p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (1984, 84), Lawino would make almost a similar accusation:

Protestant and Catholic priests  
Are all the same-  
They do not like questions.  
When they mount the rostrum  
To preach  
They shout and shout  
And most of what they say  
I do not follow.  
But as soon as they stop shouting  
They run away fast,  
They never stop a little while  
To answer even one question.

If these accusations were true, what cannot be denied is the fact that most of the times the people of God do get to talk later, at the back of the preacher, about the homily they have heard. "Preachers", observed Cozzens (2000, 92), "know they will be judged by the very word they dare to preach." According to Pope Francis (2013), "Our people like to hear the Gospel preached with 'unction', they like it when the Gospel we preach touches their daily lives, when it runs down like the oil of Aaron to the edges of reality, when it brings to moments of extreme darkness, to the 'outskirts' where people of faith are most exposed to the onslaught of those who want to tear down their faith. People thank us because they feel that we have prayed over the realities of their everyday lives, their troubles, their joys, their burdens and their hopes" (3). And though they, priests, that is, ought not to preach in order to be praised and thanked – such gestures, however, do help them, or rather, do act as a boost to their preaching ministry. Hence, the same Cozzens (2000, 139) would maintain: "And when his [the priest's] preaching is poor, there is precious little affirmation. Priests who preach well are regularly affirmed. Priests who don't, aren't. Clergy, I believe, are no more in need of affirmation than most people, but being human, it can sustain them in times of fatigue and discouragement."

But when they preach badly, the reverse will surely be the case. In fact, it was the same Achebe (2000) who in his children's novel, *Chike and the River*, had

told the story of one miserly trader, Mr. Nwana, whom Chike, the protagonist, had met at Onitsha. Of him, he wrote:

One day Chike saw Nwana counting bundles of pound notes. He had not known that so much money existed in the world. If Mr. Nwana had so much, Chike thought, why did he live so miserably? He lived in one room with his wife and five children. They ate hardly anything else but garri. If his wife put much fish in the soup he would rave and curse. Sometimes he even beat her. His children wore threadbare clothes to school and were always last to pay school fees. He rode an old rickety bicycle for which he never bought a licence. Whenever he heard that policemen were stopping cyclists to check their licenses he put his old machine away for a week or two. His neighbours called him 'Money-Miss-Road' behind his back(41).

Yes, just as Mr Nwana's neighbours called him "Money-Miss-Road" behind his back, so also the priest's congregation often, at his back, judge him and call him some unprintable names thereof. Some are called "Ogbu Okwu Chukwu", Killers or Murderers of God's Word, "OkunyuEbube", Extinguishers of the Anointing. Others, to paraphrase what a writer had said elsewhere about preaching in American churches, are called "Chillers of the word"(Hilkert, 2006, 13-14). Sometimes, such judgments are done without saying anything but doing just one thing: Sleeping during homilies and sermons! According to Brearley (1999, viii), "Bad sermons [...] are soporific. Latimer told of a London gentlewoman whose neighbour asked her where she was going. 'Marry', she said, 'I am going to St. Thomas Acres to the sermon. I could not sleep all this last night, and I am now going thither; I never failed of a good nap there.'"

At other times, the judgments come by their having to go hunting for good sermons elsewhere. Though Swift (cited in Brearley, 1999, viii), had once complained, that, "It is become an impertinent vein among People of all sorts to hunt after what they call a good Sermon, as if it were a Matter of Pastime and Diversion", the reality, however, is that people do it. In fact, it was Achebe (2000) who, in presenting in his *Things Fall Apart* the missionary whose preaching about the Holy Trinity had brought Okonkwo to the conviction that he, the missionary, that is, was mad and which, eventually, would necessitate his having to shrug his shoulders and to go away to tap his afternoon palm-wine, had, however, this also to say: "But there was a young lad who had

been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul [...]. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth" (104). Yes, the people go to hunt for good sermons that, like the hymn of the new religion, have answers to the vague and persistent questions that haunt their souls. In fact, sermons that like drops of frozen rain melt on the dry palate of their panting earth!

Indeed, Ekpenyong (2004, 90-91) it was who had narrated a personal experience that underscores, in a way, what is being said, here. "There is a parish church", he had begun, "I go, sometimes, to assist at Mass on Sundays. I get confused each time I am told 'Father make your sermon five minutes because people for the next Mass will soon be here'. With this I know that there are six or seven Masses for the day. After my Mass on my way to the Catholic Secretariat, Durumi, I do see some of the people who attended my Mass going for service at the Living Faith Church. I was curious, so one day I called one of them and asked whether the Sunday Masses were not enough to fulfill the Sunday obligation. This Catholic told me, 'Father the Sunday Masses are kind of a quick fix. I make sure I go to communion every Sunday. After that in the spirit of ecumenism, I go to the Living Faith Church to get the Word of God'. Don't mind the new definition of ecumenism. But can you in good conscience blame our Catholics who have this kind of doctrinal mix-up? The Church's doctrinal tradition describes the priest as Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments and Leader of the Christian Community. The truth is that we are building more and more "unGospelled" and "unWorded" cheap grace Christian Community."

And when this happens, when, that is, they "go to the Living Faith Church to get the Word of God" after their Sunday Masses, when they leave their parishes to go elsewhere, the priest\pastor from whose parish\congregation they had trooped out, would always cry foul: that the other priest\pastor had "stolen" his parishioners. But more often than not, however, nobody stole anybody or if at all there were any stealing, it was good sermons that did the stealing! And such *modus operandi* of andin crying foul is never new. Already, "[i]n the ninth century", Brearley (1999, xiv) would note, "Archbishop Agobard of Lyons, a notable anti-Jewish polemicist, protested to Emperor

Louis the Pious that many Christians in the region regarded Jewish preachers as better than Christian ones.”

### **Preparation and Resources for Inculturated Preaching**

In view of the foregoing, priests in Africa today are challenged to dedicate their time to the preparation of their sermons and homilies and not simply to rely on the principle that “the Holy Spirit will tell us what to say during the sermon”. “Preparation for preaching”, observed Pope Francis (2013, 145), “is so important a task that a prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it[...]. Trust in the Holy Spirit who is at work during the homily is not merely passive but active and creative. It demands that we offer ourselves and all our abilities as instruments(cf. Rom. 12:1) which God can use. A preacher who does not prepare is not ‘spiritual’; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received.” Hence, Barclay (2001) would put it on record, thus:

Preaching is the message which the Holy Spirit has given to a man to deliver to the people of God[...]. We must be quite clear what this means. If we say that a man’s message is given to him by the Holy Spirit, that does not for a moment mean that a man is freed from study, freed from preparation, freed from discipline, freed from the most strenuous exercise of the mind which God has given him. The truth is that the more a man uses his own mind, the more the Holy Spirit will speak to him. The more a man studies Scripture with every help which scholarship can give him, the more the Holy Spirit will shine upon the pages of Scripture, and illuminate them so that there will emerge from them flashes of truth which he has hitherto never seen[...]. True preaching comes when the loving heart and disciplined mind are at the disposal of the Holy Spirit (95-96).

In such a preparation, the priest should not forget, as already hinted at above in the Pope’s observation, to dedicate enough time to prayer since it is actually in the very act of prayer that the priest gets to know better the Christ, the Word of God, whom he would preach about later. In fact, there is a way in which what St. Jerome (cited in Aharoni, 1979, x) had said about the land of Judea in the preface to his *Commentary on the Chronicles*, could be applied to Christ, thus: “Just as those who have seen Athens understand Greek history better, and just as those who have seen Troy understand the words of the poet Vergil, thus one will comprehend the Holy Scriptures with a clearer

understanding who has seen the land of Judah with his own eyes and has come to know the references to the ancient towns and places and their names, both the principal names and those that have changed". That is to say then that only he who had seen Christ, who had encountered him in prayer, would understand his words, or rather, He Himself better, in order to preach Him better. Yes, only such a man can confess with the author of the first epistle of John that, "what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, I mean the Word who is Life..." (I Jn. 1:1), him we preach. Hence, Dolan (2000, 298) would observe that, "it is impossible to be a good preacher unless you are a man of prayer."

Indeed, there are no dearth of sources and resources which he, the priest, that is, could utilize in this preparation, or rather, in the actual art of his preaching. "Tending the word", said Cozzens (2000), "the priest discovers, includes tending to the power and depth of his own imagination. The priest who takes preaching seriously takes his imagination seriously; he nourishes it with poetry and novels, with theater and film. He comes to understand that his imagination needs its own solitude, space, and time to interpret afresh the biblical symbols and the Christian message in such a way that they speak to questions and confusion, the blessings and tragedies that make up the human condition of his parishioners"<sup>(94)</sup>. Therefore, he should be open to accept every good thing in the African world, as mentioned before now, that could help him carry out his assignment and needs, at the same time, to eschew any atom of iconoclasm as the one exhibited by Lawino's husband, Ocol, whose head, the wife, Lawino, makes known, is lost "In the forest of books" (p'Bitek, 1984, 113) and who is proud to declare that he would arrest the village poets, musicians and tribal dancers, put in detention folk-story tellers and myth-makers, disband the nest of court historians and singers of the village anthem, send to the gallows the professors of Anthropology and teachers of African history and destroy all anthologies of African literatures and close down all schools of African studies<sup>(129)</sup>.

This is precisely because from the aforementioned as well as other sources, he has a lot, quite a lot, to learn that can handsomely enrich his preaching enterprise -since, in the words of John Paul II (1985, 18), "The Gospel does not lead to the impoverishment or extinction of those things which every individual, people and nation and every culture throughout history recognizes and brings into being as goodness, truth and beauty. On the contrary, it strives to assimilate and to develop all these values: to live them with magnanimity and joy and to perfect them by the mysterious and ennobling light of Revelation." Hence, while the Fathers of Vatican Council II

(1965c) would urge the young churches - in what could be applied here to African priests - to "borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Saviour, or dispose Christian life the way it should be"(22), Shorter (1996, 123) would maintain that, "The African reading of the mystery of Christ should borrow themes not only from oral culture in its dialogue with the Gospel, but also forms of expression from that culture."

Again, there is another thing to be said, here: this paper has pointed out above the reality of globalization and what influence, in terms of digital communication, it can and actually does have on the men and women in and of Africa, especially now that the world, Africa not excluded, consequently, finds herself in what could be called the "Communications Era"(Baur, 1994, 343). In talking about the function of the priest as minister of the Word of God in today's Africa, therefore, this has also to be taken into consideration. Indeed, it was Benedict XVI (2010, 2-4) who during his *Message for the 44th World Day of Communication*, had observed, thus:

All priests have as their primary duty the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and the communication of his saving grace in the sacraments[...]. The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel'(I Cor. 9:16). [...]. Priests stand at the threshold of a new era[...] they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word[...]. Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources(images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis.

When the priest, and in this case, the African priest, makes himself so available he becomes a "digital priest" or even, an "e-priest". According to Ihejirika (2011), "There is no doubt that the most defining element of our world today is the new information and communication technologies, which are the fruits of electricity and digitalization. We are today said to live in a digital world or an electronic world. It is an e-world as most of our activities are carried out electronically. We thus have e-banking, e-payment, e-

registration etc. In like manner, the priest in the modern world could be called the e-priest" (8).

### **Points To Be Always Borne In Mind By the African Priest In His Inculturated Preaching**

It is good to point out that in all his preaching activities, the African priest should never forget, as the Fathers of Vatican Council II (1965a, 5) would maintain, that it is the "Eucharist [...that is] the source and summit of all preaching of the Gospel" and that "preaching is effective only when the priest unites Christians at the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity"(Echlin, 1973, 77). Hence, his preaching, or rather, his prophetic role, should always be connected with his sanctifying and cultic role! "Thus the prophetic activity of Jesus", Galot (2005) noted, "emerges as one closely connected with the other aspects of his pastoral priesthood. In the absence of priestly sacrifice, the prophetic mission would be short of ultimate fulfilment" (46). No wonder, Benedict XVI (2010, 55) would state: "Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God takes flesh sacramentally in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist." Hence, while John Paul II (2004, 3) would observe that, "To evangelise the world there is need of apostles who are 'experts' in the celebration, adoration and contemplation of the Eucharist," Rahner (cited in Echema, 2011, 219), in this regard, would see a priest, and in this situation, the African priest, as "he who, related to at least a potential community preaches the word of God by the mandate of the Church as a whole, and therefore officially, and in such a way that he is entrusted with the highest level of sacramental intensity of this word."

Yes, it was Achebe (1986) who, writing about Ezeulu, the Chief priest of Ulu, in his *Arrow of God*, had observed that, "[w]henver Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam Feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman"(3). The priest, African priest, considering the great power at his disposal, this power to preach and, *ipso facto*, of "telling people what they ought and ought not to do"(Miller, 2006, 9), could, as well, wonder if it was real, but in such wondering let him not forget that such a power only came to him by God's grace. Yes, just as Ezeulu was merely a watchman of Ulu, so the priest, the African priest, that is, should always remember that he himself, by God's grace, is merely a spokesman of and for

God. Indeed, he should always remember that he is nothing but a testimonial to grace, to God's grace (Amaefule, 2013, 38). Hence, with St. Paul- in what African priests as a whole should make their motto -they should always confess: "As for us we would not dare consider that something comes from us. Our ability comes from God. He has even enabled us to be ministers of a new covenant no longer depending on a written text but on the Spirit" (2 Cor.3:5-6). No wonder, Barth (1957, 186) would conclude: "As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability and by that very recognition give God the glory."

Again, the African priest should always bear in mind that being the spokesman of God, or better, the oracle of the Eternal Word, as St. John Eudes (cited in Lebrun, 1934, 233) would call him, the onus actually rests on him to lead his fellow Africans to an encounter with this same Word, Jesus the Christ, whose oracle and spokesman he is. "The first goal", Fogliacco (2001) would insist, "of the entire inculturation programme [just like inculturated preaching] consists precisely in leading Africans to identify Jesus Christ" (121). Hence, John Paul II (1995, 57) would observe that, "the new evangelization should be centered on a transforming encounter with the living person of Christ. The first proclamation ought to bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith." And the significance of the aforementioned rests on the fact that it is only after they had identified him, Jesus Christ, that is, only after they had encountered him, that they will be able to say who he is for them and be in a position to give him a name, not any name but his unique name, the one Christological title that situates him in the African world of spirits and distinguishes him from all other Principalities and Powers (Fogliacco, 2001, 121).

What a challenge this is, this giving a name to Christ, that is, to every African, or better, every African Christian, who not only confesses, to borrow the title of Kasper's book, "the God of Jesus Christ" (1984), but also to whom the word of the same God has been preached. According to Orobator (2008),

Based on his or her flesh-and-blood experience every African Christian who confesses the God of *Jesu Kristi* faces the challenging task of formulating his or her own answer to the Jesus question [Who do you say that I am?]. This answer will be conditioned by his or her situation in life and the degree of personal relationship that each has with *Jesu Kristi*. In other words, the answer will derive

from each Christian's personal encounter of *Jesu Kristi*, rather than from the erudite speculations of theologians<sup>(77)</sup>.

Indeed, it is this identification, personal encounter and the consequent naming of Christ by the African Christian as, indeed, the God to whom nothing is impossible(cf.Lk.1:37), the God to whom every knee in heaven, on earth and among the dead must bow(cf.Phil.2:10), the God who, as John Paul II (1995, 57) would say, "saves the African...from oppression and slavery" and, consequently, as "the victor over the powers and forces which Africa knows no means of deliverance", as Mbiti (1972, 55), on his own part, would see Him, that will help a good number of African Christians overcome a fundamental problem which is sometimes seen in their way of life. And that is the problem of double allegiance which sees them "keep one foot in the beliefs of their African Traditional Religion and one foot in Christianity"(Healey and Sybertz, 2005, 294), with the result that "the two faiths seem to hang rather precariously in the convert's single mind"(Okorocho, 1987, 264). Ela (1990, 139) regards it, this double allegiance, which has been known to be caused by many factors(Nwaoru, 2004, 195-201), as the "tragedy of most black African Christians."No wonder, while Penoukou(cited in Fogliacco, 2001, 120) would observe that, "stating that one believes in Christ, while at the same time committing oneself to other spiritual powers, cosmic or metacosmic, simply shows the failure to identify Jesus Christ successfully in order to confess him radically", Nwaoru(2004) would put it on record that,"[i]t is when inculturation theology, through the process of assimilation, has enabled Christian teaching/preaching(prophetic ministry) to succeed in bringing the concept of God to such a level that no African Christian will think that the God he or she worships is a stranger, or be frightened and lured into seeking the face of other gods in the time of difficulty that it could be said to have met its target"(209).

Finally, the African priest should remember that when all is said and done the best way for him to inculturate and then proclaim the Word is and will always be by his way of life, his manner of living, which, like a magnet, is what will attract men and women of today more to what he is saying than anything else. "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories," John Paul II (1990, 42) would note in what Paul VI (1975, 41), in his *EvangeliiNuntiandi*, had earlier observed, thus: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."No

wonder, Guest (cited in Amaefule, 2005, 23), in his poem, "Sermons We See", would maintain:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day  
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely show the  
way  
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear  
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear:  
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their  
creeds  
For to see the good in action, is what everybody needs  
I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done  
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast  
may run.

Nobody, as a matter of fact, can underestimate what a "seen sermon" of and the authentic witnessing by the African priest can do to the African Church and its world at large in these days, as pointed out above, when people prefer to *see* sermons rather than just hear them<sup>(Ehusani, 2003 139)</sup>. "A good image of the priest in the African Church", said Ndiokwere (1994) in support, "will no doubt contribute immensely to the growth of the Church of Christ in Africa, while a distorted or dented image of the priesthood will mean disaster"(124).

### **Conclusion**

Kung (1967, 77) it was who had observed that, "Every believer can and must, having been taught by God, teach others; can and must, having received the word of God, be its herald in some form or other. Every Christian is called to be a preacher of the word, in the widest sense, even though, in view of the variety of the gifts of the Spirit, not everyone can by any means do everything. All are called to preach the gospel in the sense of their personal Christian witness, without being all called to preach in the narrow sense of the word or to be theologians". While there is no contesting that observation, the interest of this paper has been to look at those who are called, as he observed, "to preach in the narrow sense of the word", to preach, by virtue of their ordination, in a special way, priests, that is, and in this case, priests in and from Africa.

The paper has found out that the most effective way priests in Africa today can undertake this great responsibility is by way of inculturated preaching, that is, that preaching which is open to the symbolic world of Africans and at the same time never closes its eyes to the socio-political reality of the same while being built, as it were, on the Word of God, on Jesus the Christ, whom Christians not only "personally know, love, and serve and with whom we

frequently commune in prayer” (Dolan, 2000, 299), but whom we believe and believe strongly also shares “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way” (Vatican Council II, 1965b, 1).

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