CROSS-CULTURAL CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES AND PROSPECTS
ISAAC BOAHENG[1]

ABSTRACT

The Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20 and its parallels) mandates the Christian Church to proclaim the gospel in different nations and to all manner of peoples with the purpose of revealing God's salvific plan for humans wherever they might find themselves. Certainly, this missionary role of the Church involves an encounter between the *gospel* and different cultures. Encountering people of a new culture and introducing the Christian faith comes with challenges. Yet, at the same time, there are a number of strategies by which missionaries can work effectively and make use of various prospects in their field. This paper, through a critical analysis of data extracted from textbooks, thesis/dissertations, and scholarly articles, discusses the challenges, strategies and prospects related to cross-cultural missionary enterprise in Ghana. The main thesis of the research is that the gospel can and should permeate the ethos of a group, its essential attitudes, its institutions and all its structures without necessarily becoming an obstacle to the promotion of the Ghanaian cultural heritage. Hence, to make the Christian faith meaningful and relevant to every culture, missionaries must try as much as possible to contextualize their message.

INTRODUCTION

Defining culture does not seem to be an easy task. From the Latin words *colere,* meaning to cultivate or instruct, and *cultus,* meaning cultivation or training, the term culture has been defined variously by different scholars, few of which are outlined below. From the perspective of anthropologists, culture is "the totality of human learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted within a given societal group" or "the shared and integrated patterns of behavior exhibited by a particular group."[2] In this sense, culture could be described as an organism composed of an integrated system of "ideas, values, plans of actions, ways of implementing, and feelings that keep a particular society moving in specific directions and acting in particular ways."[3] No part of the components of human culture stands in isolation; they all work together and influence one another in order to contribute to the general health of the culture.[4]

John S. Mbiti has defined culture as "the human pattern of life in response to man's environment, … expressed in physical forms, such as agriculture, arts, technology; in inter-human relations, such as institutions, laws, customs, and in forms of reflection on the total reality of life, such as language, philosophy, religion, spiritual values and world view."[5] From Mbiti's view it can be deduced that culture is informed by the social, religious, economic, ideational and political environments in which people find themselves. It has to do with accumulated knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, religious patterns, notions of time, feelings, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a particular group of people and passed on across generations. Culture is therefore accumulative,

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[1] *ISAAC BOAHENG, an ordained minister of the Methodist Church Ghana, currently serves as a Translator for the Bible Society of Ghana. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Trinity Theological Seminary and has research interest in Public Theology, Biblical Studies, and African Christianity. Email: revisaacboaheng@gmail.com*

[2] Ebbie Smith, "Culture: The Milieu of Missions" in John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds) *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 260.

[3] Smith, "Culture: The Milieu of Missions", 260.

[4] Smith, "Culture: The Milieu of Missions", 260.

[5] Bruce J Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 11.

transmittable and a plan designed for coping with the environment. It may be compared to a map that directs a group of people on how they have to live and interact with others in an acceptable way.[6] Emmanuel Asante adds his view to the concept of culture by defining it as "[t]he sum of patterns of behavior acquired from humans' dealing with their environment and transmitted to later generations through art and symbol, the aim of which is to define a group's identity and aspirations, to serve as the basis of social behavior, and as a factor determining what is to be accepted or rejected in a given situation."[7] Asante's assertion that culture gives people their social identity is worthy of note. For example, the language a person speaks tells others what cultural group the person belongs to. A person who speaks the Bono dialect could easily be identified as coming from the Bono region of Ghana. Asante also makes that point that culture tells us what a group of people aspires to achieve in life and for which reason they behave in a certain way. This means that culture does not only tell us about the past and present of a group of people but also about their future. Like Mbiti, Asante also considers culture as a means by which people adapt to their environment. In this sense one many consider culture as "the sum total of learned behavior patterns of individuals which enable them to live and identify themselves as a community."[8]

The scholarly views given above lead to certain conclusions about the term culture. Culture varies from people to people. This happens because different people live in different environments to which they respond differently to define their culture. We should therefore expect one living in a hot environment to adopt clothes that differ from one living in a cold environment. More so, the food people eat, the language spoken, political systems, economic plans, marriage and inheritance systems, and other elements of culture differ as one moves across people groups. Yet, it must be noted that cultural relativity does not equate to ethical relativity. In other words, the fact that cultures differ does not mean that the Christian gospel must differ from culture to culture. Another important thing to note about culture is that it is a human achievement (the work of human mind and hand) and must be distinguished from nature. As we have mentioned earlier culture comes as a result of people's attempt to adapt to their environment. No culture should therefore be regarded as superior to others. One's culture considered as superior may not be appropriate for another environment. The point has to be made therefore that it is wrong for missionaries to impose their culture on the people they wish to evangelize. Further still, it must be noted that culture is fluid (dynamic) rather than static. This means that culture changes with time, in subtle and tangible ways. This happens through changes in the environment (be it social, economic, religious and so on) and through interactions with other cultures. The Ghanaian culture, for instance, has been affected by Western culture in terms of dressing, religion, food, and language, to mention but a few. The foregoing discussions underscore the fact that cross-cultural communication is a complex task. With this background, the next section considers what the *missio Dei* really entails.

The Concept of the *Missio Dei*

Since the 1930s scholars such as Karl Barth and Karl Hartenstein began to use the term *missio Dei* (the Latin expression for "the Mission of God") to draw attention to the fact that Christian mission is God's own activity, not human's.[9] The concept of the *missio Dei* presents at least three points namely, that the Triune God is in mission to the world; the cross of Christ is central to God's mission to the world; God calls and sends the Church to participate in His mission in the world.[10] Commenting on who owns Christian mission, J. David Bosch asserts that the *missio Dei* is "primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church (Israel) is privileged to participate."[11] For Bosch, Christian mission is primarily an attribute of God, as opposed to primarily an activity of the Church.[12] The fact that God is the source of mission is evident in every aspect of biblical revelation. God's missional heart is seen at work right from the creation stories in Genesis (1-

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[6] Smith, "Culture: The Milieu of Missions", 260.

[7] Emmanuel Asante, *Towards an African Christian Theology of the Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of Onyame* (Lewinston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 5.

[8] Sam Oppong, *Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures: The Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: SonLife Printing Press, 2009), 10.

[9] B F Fubara-Manuel, *In the Missio Dei: Reflections on the Being and Calling of the Church in the Sovereign Mission of God* (Calabar: Presby Press, 2007), 5.

[10] Fubara-Manuel, *In the Missio Dei*, 6.

[11] J. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 392

[12] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390–393.

2) to the creation of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. A careful reader of the Bible will not fail to acknowledge God as the Initiator, Sustainer and Implementer of Christian mission.

We notice from Genesis 1-3 that God is the one who creates and redeems His creation. God created all things to be good and hence without sin (Gen. 1:31). When Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world by eating from the Forbidden Tree, God responded to the Fall by initiating a program for their redemption (Gen. 3). God promised a Savior, the seed of the woman, to come and destroy the work of the Devil so as to deliver humanity from the bondage of sin (Gen. 3:15). Since then God, through His prophets, continued to give prophecies about the Savior to different people at different times until Jesus, the Christ of God, was finally born by the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-25). The life and ministry of Jesus was geared towards the redemption of humanity. In Luke 24:44ff, Jesus made it clear that the whole of the Old Testament points to Him. As the Messiah, Jesus came to die in the stead of humanity and to purchase salvation on our behalf. God reconciled sinful humanity onto Himself through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.[13] He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Paul summarizes the Christian gospel as the fact that Christ died for human sins, was buried and was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, therefore, serves as the pivot around which God's salvific plan for humanity revolves. All these underline the centrality of the Cross in God's salvific plan, without which there is no salvation.

After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and told them to wait in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). The promised Holy Spirit descended on the disciples after Jesus' ascension and empowered them for ministry to the world (Acts 2:1ff). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in Acts 2 was not only to fulfill Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit but was also meant to establish the Christian Church and equip her for missions. The Church serves as a representative of God in mission to the world. As Moltmann rightly observes "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."[14] Dearborn makes the same point when he says "It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world."[15] The point these scholars are making is simply that God is the source of all missionary activity or mission is a movement from God to the world. God however, uses the Church as an instrument through which He demonstrates His love towards the lost. J. H Wright points out that a biblically-informed and validated mission must necessarily include the Church's committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.[16] One can therefore conclude that in mission, God's role differs from that of the Church; God is the Owner of mission while the Church is a participant in God's mission upon God's invitation.

Challenges Associated with Cross-cultural Mission in Ghana
A cross-cultural mission involves leaving the comfort and familiarity of one's own culture to enter another culture with the aim of propagating the gospel.[17] For example, a European who undertakes missionary activities in Africa is involved in cross-cultural mission. Similarly, an Akan who does missionary work among the Ewe people is also doing cross-cultural Christian mission. No matter who is involved, cross-cultural mission comes with a number of challenges, some of which the present section outlines. The first challenge is language barrier. Kofi Agyekum defines language as "a collection of symbols, letters or words with arbitrary meanings that are governed by rules and conventions that help people to communicate effectively."[18] In the view of Sapir, language is "a system of phonetic symbols for the expression of communicable thought and feeling."[19] The reasons for using language may include giving or receiving information, stimulating actions, expressing feelings or emotions and indicating an attitude.[20]

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[13] John D. K. Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2005), 1.
[14] Moltmann as quoted by Bradley T. Morrison, *Already Missional: Congregations as Community Partner* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2016), 33.
[15] Dearborn as quoted by Morrison, *Already Missional*, 33.
[16] J. H. C. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Westmont, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 22-23.
[17] Smith, "Culture: The Milieu of Missions", 260.
[18] Kofi Agyekum, *Linguistics: Ethnography of Speaking* (University of Ghana, Accra: Institute of Continuing and Distance Education, 2010), 18.
[19] As cited by Agyekum, *Linguistics*, 18-19.
[20] Agyekum, *Linguistics: Ethnography of Speaking*, 18ff.

Language is so important that without it, effective verbal communication is impossible.[21] Thus, effectiveness of Christian mission depends largely on the language used in communicating the message. Nelson Mandela alludes to this point when he says, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."[22] Kwame Bediako argues that, "The ability to hear in one's own language and to express in one's own language one's response to the message which one receives, must lie at the heart of all authentic religious encounters with the divine realm…"[23] because "God speaks into the African context in African idioms, and that it is through hearing in African mother tongues 'the great things God has done' (Acts 2:11), that African theology emerges to edify not only the African Church but the Church world-wide."[24]

Missionaries face the language barrier because in almost all cases cross-cultural communication takes places in a language different from that of the missionary. Imagine a European missionary who comes to Ghana to propagate the gospel without having workable knowledge of the language of the people he is ministering to. The person will have to work with translators to help translate whatever is said to the local people. This method is sometimes not effective because the accuracy of the message received by the people depends on the efficiency of the interpreter, who in most cases is not well-versed in the language of the missionary. For this reason, most of the early missionaries committed themselves to learning African indigenous languages so as to be able to speak directly to the people in their ministerial context.

Another challenge to Christian mission is the social barrier. This has to do with the difficulties encountered by missionary with respect to his/her social relations with the people he/she seeks to evangelize. Social barriers exist even in contexts in which the bearer of the message comes from a background that is culturally near to that of the receptor. It also has to do with the related issues of credibility and trust. To a certain degree, these issues are tied into a successful overcoming of the first three barriers. It may be considered as resulting from geographical, linguistic and cultural distance between the missionary and the mission field. Social barriers come to play when the people being evangelized perceive the missionary as a stranger and hence feel reluctant to embrace the message he/she brings. To deal with the situation, the missionary needs to understand the receptor culture and then based on this understanding, establish credibility through building personal relationships with the people. This is important because the Christian message is expected to foster a personal relationship not only between God and humans but also among humans.

Further still, Christian mission is faced with financial challenges. The training of missionaries, the logistics for mission, among others are all capital intensive. In most parts of our world the missionary often encounters people in abject poverty. In such a context, the gospel message cannot be meaningful if it does not appeal to the financial conditions of the people. There are a lot of people who could have encountered Christianity through social action programs. Yet, the people may be in abject poverty because such facilities may not be available to them. These people look up to the messenger of the gospel to demonstrate the love of God proclaimed to them by helping them start their own vocation or business, among other interventions, to help them survive. In addition, a number of people in mission fields may have one health problem or the other resulting from poor eating habits, poverty, illiteracy, among others. They may all look up to the messenger of the gospel (that is, the missionary) to assist them in solving their health problems. These and other demands of Christian mission makes it quite expensive and demanding.

Finally, Christian mission is faced with the challenge of differences in worldviews from culture to culture. Missionaries may sometimes find it difficult appreciating the worldview of their recipients and adjusting to it.[25] The main areas that differ from one community to another and therefore may hinder missions are the spirit world, the perception of reality, the social and economic structures among people groups, the norms and taboos among the people and many others. Since these aspects of culture may differ

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[21] Agyekum, *Linguistics: Ethnography of Speaking*, 18ff.
[22] "Mandela in his own words," CNN homepage, June 26, 2008, accessed April 9,2018 from http://edition.cnn.com/2008/world/africa/06/24/mandela.quotes
[23] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 60.
[24] Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong: Editions Clé and Regnum Africa, 2000), vii.
[25] See Isaac Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa: Implications for Rethinking the Great Commission" In Emmanuel Asante and D. N. A. Kpobi (eds.) *Rethinking the Great Commission: Emerging African Perspectives* (Accra: Type Company Limited, 2018), 214ff.

greatly from people to people, it is not uncommon for some missionaries to consider those in their mission fields strange as enough and to feel that these people and their cultures are real hinderances to their mission enterprise. As a matter of fact, no Christian mission can be immune from these and other similar barriers. However, a way must be found to reduce the effect these barriers have on the *Missio Dei.* In the candid opinion of the author, the approach to handle these difficulties is to adapt to the new cultural environment, identify with the people and contextualize the gospel message. The next section explains how this approach could be a right tool in cross-cultural mission enterprise.

Contextualizing the *Missio Dei*

The success of the *Missio Dei* depends on how sensitive it is to contextual issues. Ross Langmead defines contextualization as "the dynamic, ongoing encounter between Word and world in a concrete context, at some cultural depth, taking new shape in each situation."[26] In the view of the present author contextualization may be considered as the process by which the gospel is incarnated in a culture in a way that makes the people (recipients) understand and respond to it based on their own socio-cultural context and considerations. Contextualization of the Christian gospel is based on the assumption that the gospel needs to take a fresh shape in each culture, because the Good News of Christ is incarnational.[27] Contextualization goes beyond "doing worship in a culturally-sensitive way or witnessing in a language people can understand" to developing "a local theology, local church structures."[28] The main aim of contextualization is that "the church be enabled in a particular time and place, to witness to Christ in a way that is both faithful to the gospel and meaningful to men, women, and children in the cultural, social, political, and religious conditions of that time and place."[29] What principles should guide the process of contextualizing the gospel message in different cultures? The author attempts to answer this question in the sections that follow.

Understanding and Maintaining the Core Message of the Gospel

The first principle for effective contextualization of the *missio Dei* is to have adequate understanding of the Christian gospel and maintain its essential truths without compromise. This principle has to do with affirming and upholding the authority of the Bible as the final authority rather than just a partner or a subservient source.[30] The Bible is God's word given to humanity as a guide to life on earth. This means that cultural practices must be subjected to the scrutiny of the Bible, not the Bible to the scrutiny of culture. In other words, the Bible must be the lens through which cultures are viewed, not the culture being the lens through which the Bible is read. This can only be possible if the missionary has a well-developed biblical world view and convinced about it.

A proper understanding of what constitutes the gospel is therefore crucial in the Christian mission enterprise. Unfortunately, there has not been scholarly consensus regarding what constitutes the Christian gospel. Yet, it is the author's belief that the core message proclaimed by the early church included at least seven components, namely, the sinfulness of humanity and the need for repentance, prophecies about the coming Messiah, the miracles and teaching of Jesus, the Christ, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, Jesus' physical resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the *Parousia.* The contextualization of the gospel does not mean that some of the essential truths may be lost in the process. Rather, each of the above supernatural aspects of the gospel must be preserved relevantly in all cultures. There are biblical antecedents to this kind of approach. For example, Peter did not compromise the core of the gospel in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14-42; see also 10:34-43). Similarly, Paul maintained these essentials of the gospel in his defence before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-29) and reminded the Corinthians not to depart from it (1 Cor. 15:1-5).

C. Thomas Wright identifies two major dangers that may affect the impact of the gospel in the process of contextualization, namely, syncretism (that is "blending former religious or cultural practices which results in a diluted gospel") and folk religion ("traditional activities and religious practices that are

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[26] Ross Langmead, "Mission and Contextualization" in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1998): 45-61, 49.
[27] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 214ff.
[28] Langmead, "Mission and Contextualization", 49-50.
[29] C. Thomas Wright, "Contextual Evangelism Strategies" in in John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds) *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 453.
[30] Isaac Boaheng, *Is the Bible Really the Word of God?* (Sunyani: Jonnette Secretariat, 2019), 50-53.

created by humans trying to find God").[31] The tendency of blending old religious practices with the Christian faith is highly recognized in all societies. Folk religions are characterized by the demand to add other requirements than faith in the atonement of Christ for salvation. They include practices that are not only mostly exclusive or too inclusive but also heavily dependent on outward activities rather than inward transformation.[32] The practice of polygamy among some Ghanaian Christians can be a typical example of syncretistic lifestyle. The Ghanaian culture which allows polygamy still takes hold of some people who profess faith in Christ. More so, while many Christians in Ghana do not doubt the fact that Christ's death on the cross has redeemed them from the power of evil spirits, some of them still continue to consult traditional priests and offer sacrifices to idols in their quest for power, wealth, protection and redemption from the influence of evil forces. These are examples of syncretistic lifestyles that must be dealt with in order to ensure that the authentic meaning of the Bible and the Christian faith is not lost. It is only through such approach that theological formulations suitable for any local context will also be suitable for the global church.

Adequate Understanding of the Socio-cultural Contexts of the People Involved
The cross-cultural dimension of mission is complex as one has to recognize and account for intercultural differences to effectively preach the gospel across the different cultures of the human society. Knowing about one's own culture is not adequate for cross-cultural Christian mission. One needs to have adequate understanding of the cultural heritage of the recipient community. Unfortunately, most of the early missionaries misunderstood and disregarded the African culture and saw themselves as transmitting an eternally unchanging gospel which must destroy other (non-Western) cultures.[33] Early Christian missionaries arrived with the doctrine of the *tabula rasa* (clean slate) which made them think that everything in the Ghanaian or African culture must be erased before one could become a Christian.[34] Ethnocentrism made the missionaries think that their own culture was superior, the center of the universe, while other cultures were inferior and uncivilized.[35] Their approach to mission was to westernize Africans in order to make them suitable candidates for accepting the Christian faith.[36] This was done through such practices as change of names at baptism, separation of Christian converts from their communities, propagation of western ideologies through formal education, adoption of western style of worship, among others.[37] This ethnocentric posture was evident not only religiously and socially but also economically, and politically. This approach did not sit well with Africans and so there were series of oppositions and confrontations.

Contrary to the mindset of early European missionaries who came to Africa, the present writer contends that there are some good elements in every culture and hence "effective cross-cultural mission requires missionaries to identify aspects of the receptor culture which are consistent with the will of God"[38] and use them as springboards for proclaiming the gospel. This means that the missionary must be a cultural learner in order to relate the gospel to the socio-cultural, ethnic and linguistic contexts of the recipients of the message. Some few biblical examples can be noted and outlined. For instance, Jesus is a perfect example of a cross-cultural communicator. He ministered to people of all sort of backgrounds, including women, Gentiles, Jews, Pharisees, farmers, fishermen, and others. Jesus compared the same kingdom of God to the activities of the sower and fisherman depending on where he found himself and the people he encountered. Paul also varied the way he presented his message depending on the kind of audience he ministered to, without changing the gospel. That is to say, he approached different people differently with the same gospel. He alludes to this approach when he says that he became all things to all people that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22-23).

This approach of deciding how to approach the audience of different backgrounds with the same message using what they can identify with is necessary for the following reasons. People find it difficult to hear and understand a message that is not presented to them in their context. A little experience from

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[31] Wright, "Contextual Evangelism Strategies", 453-454.
[32] Wright, "Contextual Evangelism Strategies", 453-454.
[33] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 212-213.
[34] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 213-214.
[35] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 212-213.
[36] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 214-218.
[37] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 214-218.
[38] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 229.

the author's ministerial context underlines the fact that people are more willing to listen to those who share their context other than those who disassociate themselves from their (the audiences') context. Common grounds such as societal interests, concerns, needs, or values, promote effective communication and understanding. In the author's opinion, it is only by identifying with a person's context that one can appreciate the way things are in that context. That is to say, the understanding and acceptance of the gospel message is enhanced by communicating it in common, familiar and understandable terms to people within their own context. This is what Bediako means when he says that "the ability to hear in one's language and to express in one's language, one's response to the message me hears, must be at the heart of all authentic encounters with the divine realm."[39]

Aspects of the recipients' worldview which the missionary needs to understand are varied. They include beliefs, values and relationships. The missionary needs to have adequate knowledge about the religious beliefs and practices of the people to be evangelized. For example, a missionary working in Ghana needs to comprehend at least the four distinctive markers of the Ghanaian traditional religious view, which include, belief in God (or the Supreme Being), lesser divinities, ancestral spirits and the spirit powers and mystical powers inherent in amulets and talisman.[40] Each of the names and appellations for God in the different ethnic groups in Ghana underscores their experience with God in one way or the other. For example, the Akan consider *Onyame* or God as sovereign, the only great One and so they refer to him as *Onyankopɔn*. The Frafra of northern Ghana refer to the Supreme Being as *Yinɛ* which means the Only One, one who is alone and above all.[41] The Ewe of Ghana refer to God as *Mawu* which literally means the Supreme Being or God, the sovereign Being.[42] The name *Mawu* depicts the Ewe belief that God is depended upon for everything and will provide them of their needs. The common Ghanaian belief could be summarized as God is supreme, the creator, the sovereign, the giver of life and one who is above all power.[43]

In addition, the core values of the people need to be known. What do they consider as good or bad? What do people place in the highest esteem? Ghanaian social and cultural values include relationships based on community, sacrifice for others, unity, peaceful co-existence, co-operation, hospitality and inclusiveness, which corroborate   biblical teaching. Therefore, a European with an individualistic mindset has to adjust to the communal worldview of the Ghanaian in order to have a successful mission.[44] The formation of Christian communities for new converts (a strategy which was used by early missionaries) is not suitable for any society in Ghana because it tends to militate against the communal life of the people (as hinted earlier).[45]

Another aspect of recipient background that must be studied is the means of communication. The missionary needs to be conversant with the communication pattern of the people, including both verbal and non-verbal communication. The first mode of communication to consider is language, the means for verbal communication. Ghana, like other countries, have many languages and dialects, each having its own features and words could have different meaning in different cultures. For example, the word *tam* means cloth among the Fante but an underwear among other Akan groups like Bono, Akuapem and Ashanti. Another word is *kuruwaba* which the Fante use in reference to a cup the Bono, Akuapem and Ashanti use in reference to a chamber pot. Imagine a Fante who minsters among other Akan communities (say Dormaa or Akropong) and invites his congregation to come to the Communion table and drink from a *kuruwaba* (a chamber pot!). Definitely, people will feel insulted and reluctant to partake in the Eucharist because the "chamber pot" is not an object used for eating, but for collecting human excreta. Note however, that what is on the communion table is a cup, not a chamber pot; only the name *kuruwaba* has made it sound that way to the people who call cup *kuruwa and* chamber pot *kuruwaba*. In addition, there is the need to know which language is used in the home and which language is used in commerce. Understanding

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[39] Bediako, *Christianity in* Africa, 60.

[40] Oppong, *Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures,* 48ff.

[41] Samuel Ayinbora Atinga, "Death and Dying: A Study of the Mortuary Rites of the Frafra of Northern Ghana in the Light of the Christian Funeral Liturgy, An Attempt at Inculturation" (Doctor's Degree in Theology Dissertation: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006), 7.

[42] Isaac Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Relation to God's Plan for Salvation* (Unpublished Master of Divinity Thesis: Trinity Theological Seminary, 2016), 57.

[43] Boaheng, *Exploring the Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Relation to God's Plan for Salvation,* 57.

[44] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 214ff.

[45] Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa", 228.

of the communication pattern of the people will enable the missionary to know how best to communicate theological truths to the people in a way they can best understand.

Aside verbal communication, non-verbal aspects (such as gestures) also vary in meaning from place to place and also serve as a barrier to cross-cultural mission. For example, in Africa it is common to see people of the same sex holding hands and walking to show friendship and personal communication with a confidant, without any sexual connotation. In America and other parts of the world, however, the same gesture may connote homosexual relations. In Europe one may use the left hand to greet another. In Africa, however, to use the left hand in that way is a sign of disrespect. The point therefore, is that one gesture may be offensive in one culture but acceptable in another.

More so, background knowledge about music and dance patterns of the people is important for the success of the mission enterprise. This can help the missionary to appreciate and participate effectively in the worship services of the local people. Among the Southern Ewe, the Agbadza music and dance, which evolved from the times of war is the most popular recreational dance today. The instruments used include a bell, (which serves as a timeline for the rest of the ensemble), Sogo (the lead drum), Kidi (which communicates with the Sogo to create a conversation using drumming language), Kagan (a support drum), Ajatse (a beaded-rattle) and a rhythmic handclapping. Adowa is the funeral music and dance of the Akan people, Instruments used in a classical *adowa* performance are an *atumpan* pair of 'talking' drums, *petia*, which is a tenor drum, *apentemma*, a supporting drum, *dondo* (hourglass drum), *adawuraa* (bell), *trowa* (made of gourd rattles) and rhythmic handclapping. Once this is done, those cultural resources should be applied in evolving a truly incarnated Christianity for the people. In the words of Sam Oppong, "The missionary must become a cultural learner in order to perceive cultural diversity."[46]

Prospects

Despite the barriers associated with communicating the gospel across cultures in Ghana, there are many aspects of the Ghanaian culture that can be used to facilitate the propagation and understanding of the Christian faith. The author therefore, contends in this section that to communicate the gospel effectively one has to begin by getting into the people and their worldview, and having learnt about their worldview, use it as a springboard for proclaiming the gospel. Few of the prospects that lie within the Ghanaian context are outlined below. Firstly, the Ghanaian culture and the biblical culture have certain commonalities such that the Ghanaian context has great potential that can enhance our understanding and interpretation of biblical texts. Since the Ghanaian worldview seems to be closer to the biblical world view than the European worldview, Ghanaians are in a better position to understand God's word if they would go directly to text and engage it from their own perspective. For example, the celebration of funerals, the agricultural activities undertaken by ancient Jews, the purification rites for women during their monthly flows, the communal worldview, the practice of polygamy and other practices in the Old Testament are found in most indigenous African societies. More so, biblical wisdom literature can be understood easily by Ghanaians because of their rich proverbial traditions. Interpreting these biblical materials from the perspective of Ghanaians will enhance their understanding.

Secondly, there are a number of ways in which missionaries can find bridges in the Ghanaian culture for bridging the gap between the biblical world and the Ghanaian context. The belief in the Supreme Being as Creator, belief in life after death, and the practice of sacrifices are some of the bridges that can be used to communicate the gospel more effectively and meaningfully in the Ghanaian context. Like Paul, the missionary can use the Ghanaian practices of animal sacrifices as a bridge to make the point that true worship includes the offering of one's body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1). Again, Ghanaians can easily appreciate the sacrificial rituals found in the Old Testament narratives and Jesus' own sacrifice on the cross more easily because of their experience of sacrifices performed. The mediatory role of Christ can be explained in terms of the mediatory role of the traditional priest. However, the point must be made that the idea of mediation in the traditional religion does not match the biblical representation of Christ's priestly role. Similarly, the Ghanaian traditional concept of the Supreme Being, life after death, sacrifices, offerings and others must only be understood as redemptive analogies that aid the communication of the gospel rather than regarding them as another way of worshipping God. To this end, the missionary must present the message in such a way that the recipients would understand clearly the difference between God and the lesser gods or deities.

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[46] Oppong, *Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures*, 48.

Another factor that can bridge the communication gap is to let the recipients know that the God of the Bible is one who is close to us and cares for our needs. Most Ghanaian societies are in abject poverty. Therefore, proclaiming a gospel that relates to the needs of the needy will go a long way to make people appreciate and accept the gospel. Over-emphasis on the material benefits of the gospel must however, be checked. The Fatherhood, Motherhood and Kingship of God and his love for humanity must be stressed. Just as human fathers provide for the needs of the children so God, our Father, also makes provision for the needs of His children, that is Christians. As King, all things belong to Him and He makes those who come to Him in repentance and genuine faith co-heirs with Christ. The fact that Christ has won victory over evil spirits also needs to be stressed in our context, where we try to find spiritual antecedents to whatever happens physically. This is a message of hope to Ghanaians who need liberation from the demonic powers against which they constantly fight.

CONCLUSION
Throughout the study, the author has contended that to be effective, the gospel can and should permeate the ethos of a group, its essential attitudes, its institutions and all its structures without necessarily becoming an obstacle to the promotion of the Ghanaian heritage. The author agrees with Emmanuel Asante that effective Christian mission must be done "on the basis of love that appreciates, seeks to understand and enters into dialogue with people with different religio-cultural orientation, which deviates from what the Christian missionary considers as standard or norm."[47] To conclude, the author wishes to make the following recommendations to cross-cultural missionaries. Firstly, missionaries must have a clear understanding of the gospel of Christ, the power of God and His will in missions. The gospel message has different perspectives, each of which must be understood and applied to specific situations. Secondly, missionaries must undertake cultural studies in order to understand what culture entails particularly in relation to the society they seek to evangelize. This is important because different people have different cultures which affect their understanding and readiness to accept the gospel message. The third recommendation is that having understood the receptor culture, missionaries need to find means of adjusting both their personality and their message to the receptor community. One has to avoid reducing the gospel into dos and don'ts, an approach which marred the efforts of early missionary work in Africa. One must also avoid ethnocentric tendencies, which lead to the imposition of one's culture on the recipients of the gospel message. Missionaries must not create the impression that their food, language, and other aspects of life are superior to those of the receptor community, otherwise they will create a big hinderance to the success of their mission. On this note, the author agrees with Aylward Shorter that, "There is no Christian value which is not first of all a human value expressed in a specific cultural form. Christianity cannot exist except as incarnate in a culture."[48] Fourthly, missionaries must understand the methods of accommodating the Christian gospel to cultures, and the dangers and limitations of such accommodation as well as the biblical ground for such accommodation. Finally, the process of contextualization must not involve only the missionary but local leaders as well. To this end missionaries must train local Christian converts who will be "at the forefront of the reflection which results in contextualized theological formulations, ecclesiastical structures, and evangelistic methodologies."[49] In all, any model adopted for contextualization must do justice to both the Bible and the socio-cultural needs of the local community.

Finally, attention must be drawn to the fact that contextualization of the Christian faith does not only involve the message preached but all spheres of culture. The present author is of the view that the African church has not achieved much in contextualizing the Christian faith in terms of ministerial vestments, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremony and others. Is it culturally and medically appropriate for African ministers to wear black cassock or gown to church and other programs? Does God require African Christians to marry in accordance with both customary marriage rites and by ordinance marriage rites as most African churches require their members to do? Is the marriage ring Christian or Western? Should African Christians take "foreign names" in order to please God? This paper recognizes the efforts

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[47] Emmanuel Asante, "Sharing and Understanding the Distinctiveness and Difference: A Love Motivated Paradigm of Mission" Emmanuel Asante and D. N. A. Kpobi (eds.) *Rethinking the Great Commission: Emerging African Perspectives* (Accra: Type Company Limited, 2018), 17-32, 32.
[48] Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Spirituality* (London: G. Chapman, 1975), 66.
[49] Daniel R. Sanchez, *"*Contextualization and the Missionary Endeavour" in John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds) *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 332.

made by past and present African Christian theologians in providing answers to these and other similar question. Yet, the African church is not fully emancipated as we speak. African Christianity seems to encompass Western cultural aspects, African cultural aspects and the core of the gospel message. A clear dichotomization of these elements will go a long way to enhance the emancipation of African Christianity, in that the African church will then be in a better position to avoid majoring in minors and minoring in majors. When fully emancipated, the African church will have maximum impact on the society, discipleship will be enhanced, and Christianity will be more meaningful to every believer.

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