

Missionary Practice and Cultural Sensitivity: Exploring African Catholic Missionaries' Encounter with African Indigenous Religions in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Early Western missionaries to Africa have been criticised for lacking cultural sensitivity to African indigenous religion(s) (AIR). This interpretive phenomenological study examines how the presence of Indigenous African Catholic missionaries in modern sub-Saharan Africa may have shifted the narrative of missionary encounters. It investigates how these missionaries navigate and experience cultural sensitivity within the context of their work. This study is based on the theoretical frameworks of inculturation and dialogue, informed by the Second Vatican Council's focus on interreligious dialogue and Pope John Paul II's advocacy for evangelising African cultures. Eight African missionaries from Western, Eastern, Central and Southern sub-Saharan Africa participated in this study, providing narrative data through semi-structured interviews. African missionaries have indicated both cultural sensitivity and insensitivity towards AIR, with some missionaries appreciating shared values and actively engaging in respectful interactions with AIR. However, challenges emerge in this interaction, including navigating cultural differences, syncretism, historical prejudices and theological dilemmas. Despite these challenges, indigenous missionaries are committed to inculturation and dialogue, incorporating certain indigenous practices into worship and developing culturally relevant pastoral approaches. The study recommends developing culturally sensitive evangelistic approaches that not only value and respect indigenous identities and spiritualities but also promote mutual understanding and social unity.

Keywords: African Indigenous Religion, African Missionaries, Cross-cultural Awareness, Cultural Sensitivity, Inculturation, Interfaith Dialogue.

Introduction

Western missionaries in Africa have faced accusations of cultural insensitivity towards indigenous religions at mission stations, as indicated in the literature. The historical background of their engagement with African Indigenous Religions (AIR) reveals a path marked by misunderstanding and conflict throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Increasingly evident is the transformative impact of Indigenous African Catholic missionaries, especially with the emergence of indigenous African missionaries. The indigenous missionaries studied in the research belong to the Society of the Missionaries of Africa "White Fathers", founded in 1868 by Monseigneur Charles Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers in Algeria. Today, 1,232

Missionaries of Africa from 36 different countries operate in 42 countries, 22 of which are on the African continent.¹

Early Missionary Encounters with AIR

According to Gundani in his study, 'Views and Attitudes of Missionaries toward African Religion in Southern Africa during the Portuguese Era,' many Western missionaries considered AIR inferior and embraced a crusading mentality that hampered genuine dialogue and understanding.² This aligns with Tugume's observation in his study titled 'Attitudes of Christian Missionaries towards African Traditional Religious Beliefs in East Africa during the British Colonial period Rule.'³ They misinterpreted local rituals from a Christian perspective, which created a distorted perception of African spirituality.⁴ Early encounters between Christianity and AIR were called peace in some regions, as missionaries recognised that traditional religion played a significant role in shaping African societies. However, tensions began to emerge with the consolidation of the Christian presence, largely because of the absence of organised dialogue between the two faiths, which contributed to protracted conflicts.⁵ This historical discourse continues to shape contemporary African Christians' perceptions of AIR.⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all early missionary encounters were characterised by turbulence. For instance, Fatokun argues that the initial interaction between foreign missionaries and practitioners of AIR in southwestern Nigeria demonstrated potential for cultivating cultural sensitivity.⁷

As Christianity became more deeply rooted in African societies, tensions naturally arose, largely due to the cultural backgrounds and interpretative approaches of missionaries. The lack of organised interchange between Christianity and AIR created gaps that contributed to clashes, entailing that cultural sensitivity could have alleviated misunderstandings. The early European missionary encounters were almost always marked by conflicts and the perception of AIR as 'primitive' and 'heathen.' This perception encouraged the efforts to "save" Africans through conversion and "civilisation," which involved imposing European culture on African communities.⁸ Certain missionaries, particularly conservative Germans in Tanzania, adopted a more open approach. They used concepts such as *adiaphora* and

¹ "Our Roots," Missionaries of Africa, February 7, 2017, <https://mafrome.org/about-us/origines/>.

² Paul H. Gundani, "Views and Attitudes of Missionaries Toward African Religion in Southern Africa During the Portuguese Era," *Religion and Theology* 11, no. 3-4 (January 2004): 298-312, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157430104x00140>.

³ Lubowa Hassan Tugume, "Attitudes of Christian Missionaries towards African Traditional Religious Beliefs in East Africa during the British Colonial Rule," *African Journal of History and Culture* 7, no. 10 (October 2015): 193-99, <https://doi.org/10.5897/ajhc2015.0276>.

⁴ Dorothy Tembo, "Protestant Missionaries' Understanding of and Attitude toward African Religion in Colonial Malawi," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 4 (June 2022): 555-63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393221098142>.

⁵ Samson Adetunji Fatokun, "Christian Missions in South-Western Nigeria, and the Response of African Traditional Religion," *International Review of Mission* 96, no. 380-381 (January 2007): 105-13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2007.tb00595.x>.

⁶ Jacob Mokhutso, "Ancestors Are Demonic - Is It True? Traversing Christian Demonology and African Traditional Religion," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 2 (November 2022): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.103.2046>.

⁷ Fatokun, "Christian Missions in South-Western Nigeria."

⁸ Mokhutso, "Ancestors Are Demonic - Is It True?"

Praeparatio Evangelii to create space for traditional African practices and beliefs within their missionary work. Western missionaries often regarded AIR as a precursor of Christianity, allowing for the possibility of integrating the gospel into existing cultural practices.⁹ This historical perspective has left a lasting impact on perceptions of AIR, with many literate Africans now viewing some traditional practices as demonic, shaped by missionary teachings and cultural imposition.

Attitudes and Perception of Missionaries Towards AIR

The attitude of Christian missionaries toward AIR during the colonial era was negative and dismissive.¹⁰ Missionaries considered African beliefs and practices as barbaric, pagan, and requiring civilisation.¹¹ They could not understand that traditional religion was at the core of African societies.¹² This led to serious misinterpretation and very few effective ways in which to evangelise.¹³ The missionaries applied their Christian perceptions to African rituals, resulting in erroneous interpretations of local cultures. Christianity's arrival in Africa vastly altered its socio-cultural landscape.¹⁴ The African Christians' perception of ancestral veneration as demonic still endures today, even though it is an idea foreign to the traditional African worldview.¹⁵

The superiority complex of the missionaries and their unwillingness to dialogue with African religions.¹⁶ This led to limited success and disillusionment.¹⁷ It is this approach that has contributed to the resurgence of traditional beliefs in modern Africa.¹⁸ The attitudes and perceptions of missionaries towards selected indigenous customs varied considerably.¹⁹ For example, herbal medicine has received numerous responses because it highlights most traditional religious practices.²⁰ Historically, some indigenous missionaries were herbs as pagan and evil.²¹ The rise of the independent African church movement, however, altered this

⁹ Phillip C. Huber, review of *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940*, by Klaus Fiedler. *Missiology: An International Review* 28, no. 1 (January 2000): 109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960002800111>.

¹⁰ Tugume, "Attitudes of Christian Missionaries."

¹¹ Mokhutso, "Ancestors Are Demonic - Is It True?" 1-2.

¹² Tugume, "Attitudes of Christian Missionaries."

¹³ Gundani, "Views and Attitudes of Missionaries."

¹⁴ Tembo, "Protestant Missionaries' Understanding."

¹⁵ Mokhutso, "Ancestors Are Demonic - Is It True?"

¹⁶ Tugume, "Attitudes of Christian Missionaries."

¹⁷ Gundani, "Views and Attitudes of Missionaries."

¹⁸ Tugume, "Attitudes of Christian Missionaries."

¹⁹ Cephas T. A. Tushima, "The Ramifications of Missionary Proselytisation on Tiv Culture: Lessons for Contemporary Critical Biblical Contextualisation," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (September 2020): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2061>.

²⁰ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Therapeutic Strategies in African Religions: Health, Herbal Medicines and Indigenous Christian Spirituality," *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no. 1 (April 2014): 70–90, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2014.0072>.

²¹ Elochukwu Uzukwu, "The Clash and Continuity of Interpretation of Redemptive Suffering between African Religions and Christianity," in *Atonement and Comparative Theology: The Cross in Dialogue with Other Religions*, ed. Catherine Cornille (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2021), 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823294374-009>.

view as herbal medicines were then viewed sacramentally.²² This engagement led to the reinterpretation of Christian tenets within the context of traditional beliefs, thus portraying an intricate and dynamic interaction between Christianity and AIR.²³

The Significance of African Cultural Background to Cultural Sensitivity

The narratives from the missionary and colonial eras tended to push indigenous African cultures and religions to the margins of perception. This historical context implants a sense of cultural inferiority and a lack of sensitivity to traditional beliefs and practices.²⁴ Indigenous missionaries face the challenge of reclaiming and upholding their cultural heritage as they seek to evangelise within their communities. Emphasising the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and practices provides an important basis for developing culturally relevant strategies for missionary work.²⁵ Incorporating indigenous healing traditions with Western psychological methods will help AIR command gain more understanding and respect. Cultural eclecticism, which acknowledges the significance of Western and IKS and strives toward a more holistic and inclusive paradigm of understanding and lodging cultural diversity, works along these lines.²⁶ The dynamic and evolving nature of this relationship has been shaped by historical context, the rise of indigenous perspectives, and the coexistence of beliefs.²⁷ Though challenges surround the dialogue and integration of both, opportunities abound that could enhance mutuality and respect between Christianity and AIR.²⁸

African Missionaries, Cultural Sensitivity and Their Challenges

African missionaries utilise socio-culturally sensitive methods in their outreach toward AIR.²⁹ These include borrowing commonly held motifs, idioms, and symbolic practices that

²² Joel Mokhoathi, "Neo-Colonialism and the Emancipation of Indigenous Religions of Africa: Reconnoitring Reformist Possibilities," *Religions* 15, no. 7 (July 2024): 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070872>.

²³ Zana Marovic, "Cross-Cultural Indigenous Training: The South African Experience," *Culture & Psychology* 26, no. 3 (February 2020): 605-21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067x20908529>.

²⁴ Ndwamato George Mugovhani and Madimabe Geoff Mapaya, "Towards Contestation of Perceptions, Distortions and Misrepresentations of Meanings, Functions and Performance Contexts in South African Indigenous Cultural Practices," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 27 (December 2014): 1201-6, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n27p1201>.

²⁵ Marovic, "Cross-Cultural Indigenous Training." John S. Pobee, "Health, Healing and Religion: An African View," *International Review of Mission* 90, no. 356-357 (March 2009): 55-64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2001.tb00260.x>.

²⁶ Joshua Mawere et al., "'Piercing the Veil into Beliefs': Christians Metaphysical Realities vis-à-vis Realities on African Traditional Medicine," *African Journal of Religion Philosophy and Culture* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 77-99, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2020/v2n1a5>.

²⁷ Femi J. Kolapo, "CMS Niger Mission Agents' Field Practice," in *Christian Missionary Engagement in Central Nigeria, 1857-1891: The Church Missionary Society's All-African Mission on the Upper Niger*, ed. Femi J. Kolapo (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 85-132, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31426-2_3.

²⁸ David T. Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (October 2011): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v32i1.285>.

²⁹ Andrew Szanajda and Yu Jie Li, "Missionaries Creativity in Nigeria: A Seed for the True Gospel of Christ on the African Continent," *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education* (January 2023): 140-54, <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1006013>.

fit well with local spiritual expectations.³⁰ This, therefore, facilitates the enculturation of the Christian message in forms that resonate with a culture. The post-colonial interaction between Christianity and AIR emphasises mutual respect, understanding and tolerance instead of the previous colonial hostility.³¹ African missionaries, however, typically encounter setting-specific challenges that necessitate personal 'conversion episodes' for them to contextualise their message effectively.³² Indigenous African missionaries face a multitude of challenges in cultural sensitivity toward AIR. These include overcoming historical biases and negative perceptions about AIR and its elements by early Western missionaries and scholars.³³ The interaction of Christianity and AIR has produced a fusion of beliefs and practices, resulting in complex interrelations between these two.³⁴ Missionaries must approach the fundamental theological divergence between the Christian religious view and the African religious perspective regarding God, community, healing, and the afterlife.³⁵ Understanding and appreciating the socio-cultural context of African traditions is also critical in passing the gospel message to them effectively.³⁶

Implementation of Inculturation and Dialogue

The Catholic Church employs two key approaches: dialogue and inculturation. This is to improve the missionary engagement with local belief systems and cultures, and to address issues related to world cultures that are closely connected to Christianity (International Theological Commission, ITC). Inculturation involves a dynamic relationship between the Christian gospel and the unique aspects of different cultures. The process of inculturation entails engaging deeply with a culture while ensuring that the essence of the gospel message remains unchanged. Thus, inculturation is a theoretical and applied missiological approach to understanding and engaging with cultures other than Catholicism. The interaction between culture and religion in indigenous societies, such as those in Africa, is often closely intertwined.³⁷ As a result, dialogue becomes crucial for bridging gaps through inculturation in these contexts. Inculturation and dialogue encourage coexistence among various religions and their cultural expressions. The very early roots of inculturation were laid by Vatican II, with its primary emphasis on communication between the Church and various cultures. The

³⁰ Lukwikilu Credo Mangayi, "Conversions in Context: Insights from an Autobiographical Narrative of a Congolese-Born Missionary at Stinkwater," *Missionalia* 45, no. 1 (September 2017): 77–91, <https://doi.org/10.7832/45-1-185>.

³¹ Osbert Uyovwiewovwe Isiorhovoja, "Understanding African Socio-Cultural Context: Contemporary Challenges to Christian Missions in the 21st Century," *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 3, no. 2 (October 2021): 90–97, <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.3.2.427>.

³² Francis Owusu Sarfo, "Perspectives on the Challenges of Christianity and African Traditional Religion throughout the Ages to Contemporary Times," *Journal of Basic and Applied Research International* 29, no. 6 (December 2023): 30–49, <https://doi.org/10.56557/jobari/2023/v29i68576>.

³³ Irving Hexham, review of *The Missionary and the Diviner: Contending Theologies of Christian and African Religions*, by Michael C. Kirwen, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, no. 4 (1988): 707, <https://doi.org/10.2307/219755>.

³⁴ Sarfo, "Perspectives on the Challenges of Christianity."

³⁵ Isiorhovoja, "Understanding African Socio-Cultural Context."

³⁶ Isiorhovoja, "Understanding African Socio-Cultural Context."

³⁷ Dennis M. Doyle, "The Concept of Inculturation in Roman Catholicism: A Theological Consideration," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 1 (December 2012): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cht.2012.0000>.

council's teaching focuses on culture and salvation in Christianity. Inculturation involves assimilating significant cultural values that are true among different human societies into Christianity, resulting in profound transformation at a personal level as stipulated by the ITC.³⁸

The evangelisation of cultures has been a mark of Pope John Paul II. Such cultures, according to him, are in the likeness of Christ's humanity in contributing positively to the expression and diffusion of the Christian faith.³⁹ The establishment of the Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC) was based on the need for dialogue between the Church and various cultural realities. Inculturation comprises all aspects of Christian existence, including theology, liturgy, customs, and structures. According to the Catholic Church through the PCC, inculturation is the incorporation of faith into non-Christian cultures.⁴⁰ Since religion holds a prominent place in culture, a local or particular church should, on the one hand, fit within a non-Christian sociocultural milieu and, on the other, deeply consider the religious elements of that milieu to their depth and vitality. Interfaith dialogue is vital for Christian life. Inculturation is a dynamic one that changes based on how fidelity to the gospel message is observed, as well as ensuring respect for cultural diversity. The cultural dimension significantly enhances the manifestation of the "Word" in missionary outreach.⁴¹

While research has examined the cultural sensitivity of Western missionaries like Gundani, Fatokun, Adamo, Sarfo, and Tugume and others, none has focused on contemporary African missionaries. This includes exploring their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of their own cultures, as well as how their backgrounds influence their cultural sensitivity and their personal responses within their mission fields. With the increasing number of indigenous missionaries serving in African communities, understanding their perspective on this enduring challenge in missionary work is crucial. Therefore, this study investigates how Indigenous African missionaries experience their lived realities regarding Indigenous religions, their attitudes and perceptions towards AIR and how such perspectives influence their cultural sensitivity, all within contemporary Africa. It further explores how the African cultural background of missionaries impacts their ability to develop cultural sensitivity. African missionaries' culturally sensitive AIR interactions are explored. The study focuses on missionaries' views of cultural challenges in Africa. It demonstrates the implications of a culturally sensitive encounter with AIR for both the mission and missionaries. The study contributes to missionary activities by calling for cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural awareness, and the promotion and initiation of indigenisation, cultural preservation, inculturation, interfaith dialogue, and bridging the gap in cultural sensitivity in missionary work.

Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach, specifically interpretive phenomenology as a research design, to explore personal missionary practices and their cultural sensitivity within African communities. Self-reflection was essential for interpreting the collected data. It aimed

³⁸ "Faith and Inculturation," The Roman Curia, The Holy See, 1988, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html.

³⁹ The Holy See "Faith and Inculturation."

⁴⁰ The Holy See "Faith and Inculturation."

⁴¹ The Holy See "Faith and Inculturation."

to illuminate missionary experiences that are often overlooked. The study involved indigenous African missionaries from the Missionaries of Africa, commonly referred to as the "White Fathers." This missionary society has established numerous missions across Africa, contributing significantly to inculturation and dialogue with indigenous traditions and local cultures. To gather insights, eight (8) African missionaries from the Missionaries of Africa are currently serving in various sub-Saharan regions. This includes West Africa, where there is 1 missionary in Mali (coded as M3) and 1 in Ghana (coded as M5). In Central Africa, there are 2 missionaries in the Democratic Republic of Congo, coded as M1 and M2. East Africa is represented by 1 missionary in Uganda (coded as M6) and 1 in Tanzania (coded as M7). Finally, in Southern Africa, there is 1 missionary in Zambia (coded as M8) and 1 in Malawi (coded as M4). These were randomly selected to participate in this study. Each individual was approached with respect and given the freedom to choose whether to participate in this meaningful exploration of their experiences and perspectives. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Using Van Manen's hermeneutic thematic reflection, this study emphasised systematic investigations into lived experiences, grounded in a profound reflection on a phenomenon under study.⁴² The study explored how lived experiences; attitudes, perceptions, personal strategies for cultural sensitivity and lived implications are understood in the real world. First step: the researcher collected data through interviews of actual lived experiences. The second step: the researcher identified and analysed themes, which involved going through the interview records and reflecting on the major themes that constituted the phenomenon while acquiring insight into the overarching meaning of the participants' experiences. Step three: the researcher wrote and rewrote the material, engaging in a much more complex task of expressing the participants' thoughts, feelings and attitudes in a way that held to the guiding questions of the research. Orientation towards the phenomenon was critical, as it directed the conversation and the interpretation of the themes. The last step: the researcher continued evaluating the study design and validated the analysed data against a wider context.⁴³

African Missionaries' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards AIR and Their Impact

The participants in this study have indicated both positive and negative attitudes and perceptions towards AIR and its elements. These attitudes and perceptions shape the missionaries' approach to cultural sensitivity accordingly.

Positive Attitude and Perception Towards AIR

The African missionaries indicate diverse attitudes and perceptions towards AIR, and these have an impact on their cultural sensitivity. Regarding how African missionaries view indigenous beliefs in their mission areas and whether they see indigenous elements as a hindrance or an opportunity for their ministry, M6 said, "These religions can have some values which we find in Christianity, such as love for the other, fraternity, and search for salvation and forgiveness." He added, "Even if it may not imply the same in Christianity." The participants argued that AIR was an opportunity for missionaries to know what kind of God African followers believe, and from this base, we can build Christian faith. While M8 views AIR as an opportunity for their ministry to recognize shared values with Christianity.

⁴² Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd ed. (London: Althouse Press, 1997).

⁴³ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*.

African missionaries aim to engage with and learn from these religions to better understand the beliefs of the people they serve. Responses from most participants express a desire for mutual interaction where respect and cultural identity are essential.

There is an impressive interaction between African missionaries and Indigenous religions within mission areas. M5 expressed a positive view, stating, "Yes, our interaction with African beliefs and practices is very impressive." This demonstrates a respectful effort to connect with the local belief systems and the significance of cultural awareness and reciprocal respect in missionary activities involving Indigenous communities. M3 reflected on this dynamic, stating, "Engaging with African beliefs is profoundly enriching because it has expanded my understanding of diverse realities beyond my own [Catholic]." M1 shared a notably positive perspective, expressing, "My interactions with African beliefs have been overwhelmingly welcoming, I have never sensed any hostility. Instead, the Indigenous communities embraced me as a missionary with genuine respect and openness." Similarly, M5 emphasized mutual recognition, noting, "The indigenous people exhibit deep respect for our conception of God, and in return, they understandably expect the same reverence from me." These experiences highlight the elaborate relationship between missionaries and indigenous beliefs, characterized by respect, curiosity, and shared values. African missionaries are actively engaging with indigenous communities in a respectful and immersive manner. Additionally, the missionaries' willingness to engage with Indigenous religions respectfully may lead to greater acceptance and receptivity to their message.

These encounters also reveal significant challenges faced by African missionaries. M4 echoed this sentiment, noting, "Syncretism exhibited by some of my local parishioners is a constant concern, as I strive to maintain the integrity of my faith while respecting the cultural traditions of the people I serve." Additionally, M6 shared the complexities of conversion, stating, "It is a delicate balance to share the Gospel without imposing my beliefs [Christian] on others or undermining their cultural heritage." The challenge of reconciling Christian doctrines with traditional beliefs reflects the inherent tensions in inculturation. Various missionaries hold diverse ranges of attitudes towards specific traditional practices.⁴⁴ While the missionaries seem to be happy about the rich experiences and positive reception by the indigenous communities, they are stuck between the complexities of cultural differences, syncretism, and the almost impossible task of sharing their faith while respecting the indigenous people's beliefs. These findings stress the need for dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect in missionary work in vastly diverse cultural and religious contexts.

Negative Attitudes and Perceptions of AIR

In encounters with AIR, both missionaries and lay Christians often display negative attitudes and perceptions. As evidenced by M4, who asserted, "Some of our Christians do not understand how a priest can interact with the people of African religions. For them, it's an abomination." This reflects bias and ignorance about AIR among Christians, and the reluctance by missionaries to engage with these religions shows a short-sighted disposition that fails to appreciate the richness of African spiritual traditions. M3 asserted, "There is resistance from church authorities and congregants to integrate elements of AIR into Christian practice because of fears of syncretism and a view that all AIR elements are pagan and sinful." Similarly, the denigration of AIR by African missionaries indicates a lack of respect for cultural and religious practices of indigenous communities, obstructing genuine interreligious

⁴⁴ Tushima, "The Ramifications of Missionary Proselytisation on Tiv Culture."

encounters. These ingrained biases hinder understanding of indigenous spiritual traditions, illustrating a rejection of AIR that stems from a failure to recognize their validity within a broader spiritual context. Such attitudes, rooted in the colonial era, marginalize African spiritualities and contribute to cultural and religious exclusion. Ethnocentric bias is evident in the unwillingness of some missionaries and Christians to engage with AIR, assuming Christian doctrine is superior and incompatible with indigenous practices. M4 further argued, "Ancestral 'worship' associated with the AIR...lacks a comparable concept, leading me to view ancestor veneration as inappropriate or heretical." The perception of ancestral veneration as demonic among African Christians persists today, despite it being foreign to the traditional African worldview.⁴⁵ For true inculturation and dialogue, mutual respect and understanding are essential, acknowledging that indigenous beliefs can deepen Gospel values. African missionaries may need personal "conversion experiences" to contextualize their message effectively. These episodes can bridge different theological and cultural misunderstandings rather than serve as crises.

The challenge lies in maintaining equal esteem for indigenous traditions alongside the integrity of the Gospel, avoiding syncretism or relativism. Dialogue must be doctrinally faithful yet open to cultural diversity. With humility, missionaries should approach indigenous communities as partners in the inculturation process, promoting respect and openness that lead to mutual understanding, cultural dignity, and an authentic Christian presence within African spiritual contexts. This call for interreligious dialogue, as argued by Mangayi emphasizes the importance of mutual respect across the religious divide, acknowledging that African missionaries may encounter situations requiring personal contextualization of their faith.⁴⁶

African Cultural Background and African Missionaries' Cultural Sensitivity

The African cultural background of the African missionaries has a significant impact on their cultural sensitivity and engagement strategies. The missionaries' lived experiences provide insights into the opportunities and challenges of navigating complex cultural terrains through inculturation and dialogue. Inculturation is a respectful sharing of power, allowing the Gospel to be articulated authentically in the cultural idioms of local communities, nurturing encounters for mutual understanding and transformation.⁴⁷ The present study has established the influence of African cultural heritage on the development of cultural sensitivity among missionaries, especially those from communities and traditions similar to that they evangelize. The experience of African missionaries brings about a new aspect in terms of challenges and opportunities presented by cultural sensitivity.

African missionaries have indicated familiarity with the cultural subtleties of the communities they serve. For instance, M1 noted, "Certain African values resonate deeply with my Christian values, such as respect for the sacred and reverence for elders." These shared values promote inculturation, enabling missionaries to present the Gospel in a culturally meaningful way. Additionally, M4 shared, "As an African, I have had the privilege of living alongside neighbors who uphold African religious traditions. I believe this mutual respect lays the way for meaningful dialogue." Such narratives highlight inculturation as essential for understanding and respect. Mutual respect must avoid uncritically elevating indigenous

⁴⁵ Mokhutso, "Ancestors Are Demonic - Is It True?"

⁴⁶ Mangayi, "Conversions in Context."

⁴⁷ The Holy See, "Faith and Inculturation," 1.

beliefs without examining their doctrinal limitations and potential for syncretism. M7 remarked, "I find it quite natural to instigate discussions with parishioners of indigenous beliefs and practices," adding, "These efforts help me build a bridge of understanding and connection with the local faithful."

Missionaries with African cultural backgrounds have demonstrated an advantage in interpreting local indigenous beliefs and practices. Their shared values of respect for the sacred, reverence for elders, and mutual respect for different beliefs provide a foundation for meaningful encounters with the communities they serve. IKS and practices serve as a vital foundation for developing culturally relevant strategies for missionary work.⁴⁸ The experiences narrated by these missionaries stress that cultural sensitivity, empathy, and a genuine interest in understanding local traditions enhance communication and interaction. They can create bridges of understanding, which is a significant strength in their work. However, it is essential to maintain a balance between cultural sensitivity and doctrinal fidelity, ensuring that interchange aligns with the truth of the Gospels. While their cultural familiarity facilitates connections, careful evaluation is necessary to avoid compromising the core message of the Gospel. Cultural sensitivity, expressed through compassion and respect, is crucial for building trust and meaningful engagement with local cultures.

African Missionaries' Culturally Sensitive Strategies in The Encounter With AIR

African missionaries integrate local customs and traditions into their religious practices through inculturation and open community dialogue. They also prioritize showing empathy and respect towards the cultural beliefs and practices of the people they are serving. Additionally, missionary formation equips missionaries with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate cultural differences effectively.

Contextualized Inculturation and Intra/Inter-Faith Dialogue

The processes of inculturation and interchange are integral to African missionary activity, highlighting the necessary meeting of indigenous culture and the Christian message. This culturally diverse theology aims to make the Gospel more accessible and meaningful by incorporating local traditions. Inculturation integrates customs, languages, and artistic expressions of worship and catechesis, affirming the value of African culture and enhancing Christian expression. For example, M6 stated, "I engage in thoughtful dialogue with pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices, searching for common ground where Christianity can both complement and transform indigenous beliefs." This dialogical approach, based on mutual respect, promotes understanding and supports cultural preservation, an essential aspect of inculturation. M1 added, "As an African missionary, I engage in the vital processes of inculturation and dialogue," which includes practices that honor local cultures while upholding core Christian principles. M3 elaborated, "I listen and understand local customs, languages, and beliefs." This enables a culturally relevant gospel communication by the missionaries that enhances understanding. Not all cultural elements can be enculturated, as M4 expressed: "I combine acceptable elements of rich African culture into our worship through traditional music, expressive dance, local art, and storytelling." This approach enhances worship and affirms cultural identity within Christianity. M7 emphasized the importance of engaging local leadership and the community in understanding local belief systems, raising questions about potential impacts on ecclesiastical authority. To guard

⁴⁸ Mugovhani and Mapaya, "Towards Contestation of Perceptions."

against cultural relativism in inculturation, continued insight and guidance from Church authorities are necessary. M5 noted the need to craft theologies that resonate with African experiences and values, addressing issues like family dynamics, community ties, and social justice in culturally relevant ways.

M6 argued, "The respectful exchange honors the spiritual heritage of our people while identifying elements that harmonize with Christian values, leading to a more inclusive faith experience." M7 articulated their mission: "I focus on empowering local leaders and laypeople, inspiring them to take active roles within their communities. I strive to cultivate a vibrant atmosphere in the church where local customs and perspectives are integral to church life, allowing traditions to flourish alongside our faith." M8 shared his approach:

I design educational programs that resonate deeply with local cultures, utilizing regional languages, proverbs, and metaphors in catechesis. This significantly improves the comprehension and retention of religious education for both youth and adults, making the teachings more relatable and impactful.

M6 conveyed:

I am involved in social justice causes that meet the immediate needs of our communities, particularly in healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation. I aspire for my work to embody the path of love and service advocated by Christ, serving as a tangible expression of faith that responds to our struggles.

M8 reflected on their role as an African missionary within the Catholic Church, stating, "I advocate for expressions of faith that resonate with the people," promoting a deeper understanding between traditional beliefs and Christianity, enriching both faith and cultural heritage. African missionaries strive to use culturally appropriate methods when engaging with AIR. This includes utilizing well-known motifs, idioms, and symbolic practices that align with local spiritual beliefs.⁴⁹ Such an approach expands the possibilities for translating Christian messages into forms that resonate culturally. The essential values of mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance guide the postcolonial relationship between Christianity and AIR, moving away from the hostility that characterized colonialism.⁵⁰ This strategy promotes the growth of an innovative church with enhanced theological strength and diversity, facilitating engagement with the dynamic tensions between faith and culture.

Empathy and Respect

Focusing on the role of being an African missionary in understanding indigenous religious beliefs and practices, M1 said, "My interaction with different cultures has significantly broadened my horizons." This reflects the inculturation encounter that promotes intercultural sensitivity and recognition of local traditions. This is a transformative journey for missionaries, opening eyes to the wealth of African traditions, which the inculturation effort seeks to honor within the context of the Gospel. Similarly, M4 remarked, "These experiences have given me a better appreciation for the vast cultural traditions and practices, improving my understanding of a shared human experience." While the journey is individual, it emphasizes the transformational aspect of intercultural dialogue, moving beyond mere tolerance into genuine appreciation rooted in shared humanity. This embodies the core of

⁴⁹ Kolapo, "CMS Niger Mission Agents' Field Practice."

⁵⁰ Adamo, "Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s)."

interchange, where mutual understanding and respect facilitate deeper engagement and cultural sensitivity. However, a critical viewpoint suggests that such appreciation may only lead to individual enrichment rather than nurturing an ongoing intercultural encounter that would integrate local beliefs into Gospel witness. While these encounters can deepen respect, they must tie into the proclamation of Christian truth to avoid cultural relativism.

Experiences like those of M1 and M4 are valuable but must be contextualized within a broader ecclesial and theological framework that ensures sustainable dialogue, one that recognizes differences in beliefs while committing to the proclamation of the Gospel as the ultimate reference point. While challenges exist in the negotiation and integration of both, numerous opportunities could enhance mutual understanding and respect between Christianity and AIR.⁵¹ Thus, inculturation involves not only exposure to local customs but also ongoing theological discernment, respecting cultural expressions without obscuring the clarity of the Gospel message. These evidences demonstrate how intercultural encounters enhance missionaries' respect and understanding of indigenous religions. They call for a critical engagement that avoids superficial dialogue while advocating for a respectful and transformative inculturation rather than mere cultural accommodation.

Missionary Formation

The emphasis in the missionary formation of the missionaries of Africa is placed on promoting a deep respect for diverse cultures and other religious beliefs. In this context, M3 shared:

As missionaries in Africa, we are immersed in teachings from priestly formation that encourage us to engage in meaningful dialogue and respectful encounters with practitioners of other faiths, particularly Muslims and adherents of AIR. Before entering formation in the Missionaries of Africa, I had a dismissive attitude towards these African religions, viewing them merely as superstitions.

In contrast, M5 expressed, "My journey as a Missionary of Africa has profoundly shifted my perspective. I now hold significant respect for indigenous belief systems, even as I maintain my conviction that salvation is found solely through our savior, Jesus Christ." This suggests that missionary formation programs are effective in promoting intercultural negotiation and respect for diverse religious beliefs among missionaries.

Missionary training transformed attitudes toward other faiths, as highlighted by the assertions of M3 and M5. These programs have significantly improved intercultural understanding and attitudes towards diverse religious beliefs. M3's shift from dismissiveness to engagement illustrates how inculturation enhances open-mindedness, rooted in serious theological reflections on differences and respectful engagement frameworks. M5's ability to maintain his Christian faith while respecting other belief systems reflects the balance encouraged in missionary formation. Missionary training equips individuals with the skills and attitudes necessary for respectful and meaningful engagement with diverse cultures and religions. However, misunderstandings can lead to a hierarchical view of respect rather than mutual enrichment, risking an exchange based on evangelistic superiority instead of true partnership. Critical questions arise: Is the dialogue mutual exploration or merely cordial tolerance? From an inculturation standpoint, the goal is to contribute to the common good while safeguarding Gospel truths, requiring ongoing theological discernment to avoid

⁵¹ Mawere et al., "'Piercing the Veil into Beliefs'."

syncretism and relativism. Missionary formation promotes positive attitudes but must also promote critical engagement, distinguishing between respectful appreciation and syncretistic appropriation. This distinction will help prevent superficial dialogue and doctrinal compromise.

Missiological Challenges Faced by African Missionaries in Cultural Sensitivity

African missionaries face historical prejudices against AIR, theological dilemmas regarding their spiritual beliefs, pastoral challenges in offering support and guidance, and negative attitudes toward individuals who engage in AIR and AIR elements.

Historical Prejudices of AIR

In evaluating the historical and current challenges faced by African missionaries regarding cultural sensitivity towards AIR, the experiences of M1, M2, M3, and M4 highlight issues related to inculturation and dialogue. African missionaries face several historical challenges regarding cultural sensitivity to AIR. These challenges have evolved, influenced by colonial histories, theological perspectives, and societal attitudes. M1 said, "As an African missionary, I am aware of the impact of colonialism on the perception and treatment of AIR. The historical biases and ethnocentric attitudes of early missionaries have a lasting stigma associated with indigenous religions." However, he asserted, "I strive to overcome these inherited biases and promote a more respectful approach to AIR in my missionary work." M2 said, "I recognize the challenges of engaging with AIR communities in regions where Christianity coexists with traditional beliefs. Interfaith tensions and historical conflicts complicate efforts to promote understanding and respect." M3 asserted, "There is resistance from church authorities and congregants to integrate elements of AIR into Christian practice because of fears of syncretism." This underscores the tension between respecting indigenous traditions and maintaining doctrinal purity. M4 advocated for cultural sensitivity and strove to find a balance that respected both traditional beliefs and Christian teachings in his missionary efforts.

These reflections affirm that genuine inculturation and dialogue must confront neo-colonial attitudes that have historically marginalized AIR. This engagement is hindered by barriers such as colonial legacies, ethnocentrism, and misinterpretations of Indigenous beliefs. Addressing these biases is critical for respectful interactions. AIR holds social and spiritual significance for millions in Africa, necessitating a framework emphasizing respect rather than appropriation.⁵² The challenge of AIR in dialogue arises from its deep connections to community life, identity and spiritual experience. Understanding these relationships will enhance missionary activities by promoting respectful exchange of Gospel values within local cultures, building trust, reducing tension, and creating meaningful integration of the Gospel into indigenous contexts. Addressing biases, having honest discussions, and supporting missionaries committed to genuine inculturation can contribute to building African Christian communities and promote cultural understanding. AIR holds cultural and spiritual significance for millions in Africa and must be engaged with respect and thoughtfulness.

Theological and Pastoral Dilemmas

⁵² Isiorhovoja, "Understanding African Socio-Cultural Context."

Modern African missionaries involved in inculturation and interfaith dialogue face significant theological dilemmas that challenge their cultural sensitivity to AIR. These dilemmas arise from the apprehension between observing Christian doctrines and honoring indigenous beliefs. M1 stated, "I encounter several theological dilemmas that hinder my cultural sensitivity to AIR," highlighting the conflict in inculturation efforts that seek respectful engagement without doctrinal compromise. M2 noted, "One challenge I face is understanding the divine authority in AIR," as Christianity's monotheism may conflict with the polytheistic or ancestral veneration systems found in various AIRs. This scenario complicates recognizing ancestors or other deities, often leading to a hierarchical valuation of cultures and undermining the exchange of faiths.

M3 addresses the dilemma of salvation, indicating that Christian teachings offer a specific understanding that may conflict with the redemptive frameworks of AIR. Certainly, exclusivist stances can dismiss indigenous spiritualities as superstition, which hinders the recognition of AIR as meaningful cultural expressions. M3 narrated, "Christian teachings emphasize exclusive salvation through Jesus Christ, which conflicts with AIR that provide their systems of meaning and redemption. I struggle to respect indigenous paths to spiritual fulfilment while maintaining my beliefs." M4 acknowledged the challenge posed by the theology of ancestors: "In many AIRs, ancestors guide and protect the living. However, the Christian framework often lacks a comparable concept, leading me to view ancestor veneration as inappropriate." This perspective complicates efforts to establish cultural sensitivity, illustrating how indigenous cosmologies organize community and spiritual life, while contemporary Christian theology often dismisses ancestor veneration.

M5 asserted, "I grapple with interpreting traditional practices in AIR, as they are often seen as superstitious or contrary to the Christian faith," creating challenges in building respect for these practices as integral to indigenous cultural identity. Concern about "mixing AIR with Christian beliefs" indicates a discourse that is rarely addressed openly. Furthermore, M6 attested, "I struggle with the fear of syncretism, as blending elements of AIR with Christian beliefs is a significant concern." This fear leads to outright condemnation of orthodox practices or hinders constructive engagement. To resolve these theological challenges, missionaries must engage openly with the beliefs of the people they serve, recognizing indigenous cosmologies as valid spiritual paths. Embracing a hermeneutic of dialogue acknowledges the depth of indigenous spiritualities while effectively sharing the Gospel. Transforming biases into intercultural open-mindedness allows missionaries to view indigenous beliefs as opportunities for exchange, promoting healthy relationships and meaningful faith conversations.

In this exploration of the challenges African missionaries face as they engage with Indigenous religions and their associated practices, it becomes evident that significant cultural differences shape local Catholic communities. Missionaries often navigate a complex landscape where traditional beliefs and rituals intersect with Catholic teachings, leading to misunderstandings and opportunities for deeper dialogue. There are many cultural perspectives, and often what becomes a particular pastoral dilemma requires a lot of sensitivity to develop an authentic relationship and mutual respect among various faith traditions. When discussing these challenges, M2 stated, "The cultural differences pose a significant challenge." The merging of two or more belief systems and traditions is a complex process that highlights the multidimensional interactions among different cultures. This represents a central path that expands on both belief systems, requiring an understanding and appreciation of the socio-cultural context inherent in African traditions. This understanding

is crucial for effectively communicating the gospel message.⁵³ There is a concern about unrealistic perceptions of indigenous traditions as inherently compatible with Christianity. This viewpoint risks validating certain practices uncritically, potentially diluting doctrinal integrity or endorsing those that conflict with core Christian principles. These raise whether engagement should stem from mutual respect for differences or the integration of indigenous practices into Gospel values. Acknowledging indigenous values can facilitate a transformative inculturation process, contextualizing the Gospel within African cultural realities. However, this approach requires critical reflection, respectful engagement, and adherence to doctrine to achieve a culturally sensitive balance in pastoral settings.

Implications of a Culturally Sensitive Encounter with AIR

The relationship between African missionaries and their remote communities has significant cultural implications and impacts on the lives of individuals. Such encounters facilitate inculturation, where missionaries learn to adapt their practices to the native traditions of the region. This exchange enriches understanding. These interactions directly impact missiology, which is the scientific study of sharing faith across cultures, promoting the idea of coexistence. These meetings encourage acceptance and integration within the community by bringing together diverse ideas and practices. Culturally sensitive interactions lead to mutual understanding, social unity, and peaceful coexistence.

Missiology and Coexistence

The missionary encounter with AIR has impacted the missionary in diverse ways. For instance, M6 expressed, "I have gained a deep understanding of the rich diversity inherent in African cultures. It has been particularly enlightening to recognize that African spirituality is deeply woven into the fabric of African life." This indicates the appreciation gained from the rich diversity present in African cultures and suggests that the missionaries have developed a deeper respect for the various traditions and beliefs that exist within African societies. The recognition of spirituality as a fundamental part of African life indicates a shift in perspective towards valuing and acknowledging the importance of indigenous spiritual practices. Similarly, M1 emphasized the importance of relationships: "I have nurtured meaningful friendships and embraced our shared identity as children of God, which has enriched my mission experience." African missionaries have positively impacted their mission work through engagement with AIR.

These African missionaries have formed strong bonds with the communities where they are placed, promoting a sense of belonging and respect through a common identity as 'children of God.' By engaging with AIR, African missionaries have acquired valuable understanding and experiences that recognize cultural diversity, the spirituality of various communities, and connections rooted in common values and beliefs. Inculturation is a mutual learning process where missionaries gain insights into indigenous cultures while also recognizing diverse spiritual beliefs and assessing them through their perspectives. It is therefore important to engage with AIR to appreciate cultural diversity and spiritual understanding. Missionaries should approach this engagement with humility, openness, and a willingness to learn from the local community, as these interactions go beyond mere cultural artefacts. Balanced processes of mutual enrichment effectively promote authentic exchange between the two faiths.

⁵³ Isiorhovoja, "Understanding African Socio-Cultural Context."

Acceptance and Integration

The encounter with AIR has led to the acceptance and integration of certain AIR elements. In self-reflection on the value of engaging thoughtfully with Indigenous religions, M7 provided examples of how this practice has had far-reaching consequences for African missionaries in their lives and missionary activity. M8 stated, "Culturally sensitive engagement with AIR has significantly facilitated a sense of acceptance and integration within the community, allowing for deeper connections and mutual respect." Thus, engaging with indigenous religions has had a positive impact on African missionaries and their missionary endeavors. Thus, acknowledging and recognizing indigenous religions can effectively facilitate relationship-building and conflict resolution in cross-cultural contexts. However, it is indicated that African missionaries might find it hard when they serve in an unknown context, which would require some personal 'conversion episodes' for contextualizing the message. African missionaries may encounter unfamiliar contexts and tough experiences, which are evident in conversion episodes.⁵⁴ These processes involve adaptation, reinterpretation, or re-evaluation of the gospel within a new cultural context. Missionaries can enhance their inculturation through authentic dialogue and respect for local beliefs by engaging with indigenous religions. Superficial acceptance is not appropriate; rather, they should appreciate the sacredness of indigenous spiritual traditions, aligning with a theology that respects and responds to local culture. Indigenous religions can strengthen community bonds and promote conflict resolution. However, this engagement must demonstrate theological discernment to avoid reducing indigenous practices to mere cultural expressions. Effective inculturation requires a critical, dialogical, and balanced approach that acknowledges cultural differences.

Mutual Understanding and Unity

African missionaries are experiencing a culturally enriching interaction with AIR, which has nurtured a profound sense of mutual understanding and unity among diverse communities. M8 expressed, "We share [with people of indigenous faiths] a deep and meaningful connection that transcends our faiths, enriching our religious dialogues." M7 observed the remarkable shift in missionary perceptions: "Many of the biases and misunderstandings that were once prevalent regarding our faith have diminished significantly, and they are no longer a source of concern." M5 added, "What truly remains is a beautiful harmony of love and peace that envelops our exchanges, creating a warm and supportive atmosphere with the indigenous belief systems around us." Cultural exchange between the African missionaries and the AIR confers beneficial transformations for both, realizing a calling for unification and environmental cooperation. The process of cultural eclecticism should value both Western and IKS to prevent rushed syncretism that undermines the integrity of indigenous beliefs.⁵⁵

It can be argued that without careful engagement, dialogue may become superficial, risking cultural appropriation and the loss of genuine indigenous identity. Integrating indigenous beliefs into the Christian mission requires sound contextualization based on an inculturation strategy that balances fidelity to the Gospel with respect for culture. This approach prevents viewing indigenous beliefs as mere adjuncts to Christianity, which can

⁵⁴ Mangayi, "Conversions in Context."

⁵⁵ Marovic, "Cross-Cultural Indigenous Training."

lead to paternalism or exploitation. A genuine inculturation process promotes a mutual understanding that respects the cultural integrity of both traditions, promoting understanding and spiritual growth. Such interactions require careful interchange and theological reflection to ensure authentic exchange and prevent a superficial blending that undermines the essence of each tradition.

Conclusion

This study, unlike those consulted, focuses on modern missionaries of African descent. It has explored their lived experiences through their attitudes and perceptions regarding their home cultures, how their cultural background influences their cultural sensitivity and their personal responses to the realities of their mission work. The evolution of cultural sensitivity in African Catholic missionary activities marks a significant shift in understanding and practice. The emphasis on respect for indigenous beliefs and advocating for open dialogue and inculturation in this study is an effort to move away from the paternalistic views of earlier Western missionaries. Highlighting the importance of mutual respect, the ITC promotes interfaith exchange that recognises and incorporates local spiritual traditions. The study has revealed that indigenous African missionaries strengthen social bonds and theological relevance by affirming indigenous identities and integrating local customs into worship. This culturally sensitive approach is crucial for building relationships with AIR and facilitating inclusive evangelisation that respects the spiritual diversity of sub-Saharan Africa. The future of missionary work requires training in cultural sensitivity and exposure to various theological traditions, promoting a shift from the colonial legacy of superimposition to partnerships that honour mutual dignity and value.

The study reveals how possible this is through the willingness of the African missionaries. These African missionaries' culturally sensitive practices encourage respectful engagement and celebrate diverse beliefs, affecting discussions on cultural preservation and interfaith dialogue. It has been established in this study that interactions between early Western missionaries and AIR have shaped contemporary practices in sub-Saharan Africa. While some early missionaries caused misunderstandings, their cultural awareness helped lay the groundwork for respectful dialogue. Drawing on their African heritage, these missionaries are well-suited to mediate, leveraging their understanding to shape their approach and attitudes towards local customs. However, this same background has also presented challenges, sometimes hindering cultural sensitivity. Some missionaries, for instance, still perceive African Indigenous Religions as incompatible with Christianity, labelling them as primitive or pagan. Recognising and integrating local beliefs into church activities such as liturgy shapes interreligious dialogue and cultural diplomacy. This study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness in missionary practice, contributing to discussions on indigenisation and interfaith dialogue. Future research can prioritise participatory methods that elevate indigenous voices, viewing AIR as an essential part of spiritual and cultural identity rather than an obstacle to Christian faith and development.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following: first, the missionary societies should encourage missionaries to adopt as a critical methodology of engagement instead of superficial dialogue that involves intensive theological reflections on differences, emphasizing respectful

exploration of beliefs rather than a view from a hierarchical perspective. Second, the missionary societies and African missionaries to create opportunities for intra-dialogue between Christian communities and AIR practitioners through joint community projects focusing on common social issues so that people can respect each other and demonstrate practical implications of common values.

Thirdly, the missionary societies need to prepare resources and pastoral training to help missionaries should provide sensitive and informed guidance to people engaging in AIR issues, among others, through pastoral challenges. Fourth, the missionary societies and African missionaries to establish forums or platforms for intra-faith dialogue to deal with issues of syncretism and relativism in the Church. Through this, congregants can share their experiences, concerns, and solutions about intercultural engagement.

Fifth, there is a need for endurance in the missionary community with issues of inculturation rooted in continuous theological reflection and open respect for diverse beliefs while keeping attention on the balance between doctrinal purity and cultural appreciation. Lastly, the missionary societies to establish periodic evaluation of mission strategies, objectives concerning cultural changing patterns in responding to the needs of the church and the society the mission serves. The missionary societies and African missionaries need to work together with local leaders of both Christian and indigenous faith systems in building an epistemic environment that shares a sense of ownership toward the mission, hence engendering trust and mutual respect.

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