

## POSTMODERNITY: ITS CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND PRIESTLY FORMATION<sup>1</sup>

Patrick ETUK, MSP

This historical period has largely been described as 'postmodern'. Exactly what this means is still a matter of debate. Furthermore it does not lend itself to definition since, as R. Aina notes, “definitions which cast various dimensions of reality in iron are part of what postmodernity critiques.”<sup>2</sup> Fixed definitions appear to be postmodernists' major criticism of previous epistemological approaches in philosophy, theology, cultural sciences, and even the natural sciences especially in the modern period.

S. Grenz sees postmodernity<sup>3</sup> as a reaction within modernism that has come to form a paradigm of its own.<sup>4</sup> Modernism was a product of the enlightenment and emphasised the importance of freedom from irrational thoughts and blind faith. It also relied heavily on human reasoning and intelligence to bring about progress and development. PM conversely is a revolt against such a notion that progress is possible only through reasoning. PM has affected the contemporary society in a profound manner such that its influence can hardly be ignored. The church's missionary activity risks irrelevance if it does not take into consideration the challenges often posed by postmodernism. We contend here that though fundamental

---

1. Text of the Inaugural Lecture for the 2013/2014 academic year of the National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul, Gwagwalada, Abuja, on October 7, 2013.

2. Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Christian Reflections and Mission Amidst Broken Boundaries: On Tensions between Global Ethos, Universal Ethics and Inherited Traditions of Enquiry," *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2 (2012): 250-267, at 254.

3. Postmodernism will henceforth be abbreviated as PM.

4. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer to Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 15-16.

Christian beliefs have been severely questioned by postmodernism, the postmodern context provides great opportunity for missionary work and is indeed a great impetus for missionary activity.

### The nature of Postmodernism

Attempts at defining PM are compounded by frequent interchange of the terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism'. While postmodernity refers to a cultural condition or state of being, postmodernism is viewed as a cultural movement or plurality of movements within a culture. We can say that postmodernity is the condition in which late twentieth century culture finds itself while postmodernism is a reflection upon that condition and a response to it.

Reaction against modernism can be moderate or excessive. M. Erikson describes the two forms of reaction as hard or soft postmodernism. The soft PM attempts to debunk the excesses of modernism such as:

1. The dogmatic naturalism and anti-supernaturalism. This version of PM appears opposed to any reductionistic view of human reason.
2. The limitation of knowledge to sense experience.
3. The restriction of the understanding of human personality as a set of stimulus-response reactions.
4. The naïve objectivity that denies the effect of historical and cultural situation.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, soft PM can be seen as an anti-reductionistic movement against the excessive rationalism of the modern era.

The hard PM, on the contrary, is linked to deconstruction, which tends to accentuate the influence of other factors external to a particular text. Such influences could be cultural factors, or personal values etc. Hence, hard PM denies any possibility of objectivity and rationality due to the presence of these previously unidentified elements. This leads to the conclusion that there is no

---

5. Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 19.

objective truth only that which is true for the interpreter.<sup>6</sup> This pattern of thinking obviously leads to the demise of metanarratives and the *uni-verse*. Instead, we see the rise of the local or tribal narratives and the *multi-verse*.<sup>7</sup> This implies that each culture has its own lenses, its own language games and its own theory of truth. Consequently, the question, "is it true?" does not seem to be sufficient anymore. In fact, it is no longer the epistemological priority. Rather, the questions "what use is it? Is it efficient?" seem to carry more weight. Truth therefore becomes relative to the situation and not relevant to the world.<sup>8</sup>

D. J. Adams attributes four major features to post-modernism: the decline of the West, the legitimization crisis, the intellectual market place, and the process of deconstruction.<sup>9</sup>

### The Decline of the West

There were some basic assumptions at the basis of the enlightenment project. Prominent among them were (a) the inevitability of progress – fascinated by the progress that the nascent positive science was making. Scientists typically believed that scientific progress was going to be unending. (b) Invincibility of Positive Science – positive science was seen as paradigmatic of all knowledge and enquiry. Any knowledge that is worth the name was to be modelled after scientific knowledge. (c) It was also assumed that the West was the best, hence the attempt to westernise every culture and civilisation. This cultural superiority as promoted by the enlightenment spirit was seriously called into question by postmodernity.<sup>10</sup>

From the foregoing it is clear how modernism influenced the church. The pride of place that theology had as the queen of science was dethroned as its methods were not typically in the image of positive sciences. Thus, in a bit to catch up, theologians

---

5. Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 19.

6. Ibid.

7. Grenz, *Primer to Postmodernism*, 48.

8. Cf. Ibid.

9. Daniel J. Adams, "Towards a Theological understanding of Postmodernism," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1997-1998), <http://www.crosscurrents.org/adams.htm> (accessed 08.03.2014).

10. Cf. Ibid.

tend to mimic the sciences in their inquiry. This often ended up with dry and abstract theology that had no bearing with existential challenges of the lay faithful. On the other hand, some form of *westernism* had coloured missionary outlook as it led missionaries to repudiate the cultures of the peoples that they were evangelising. They already had Eurocentric biases. This form of *westernism* was severely criticised by PM; the missionary enterprise constructed on *westernism* suffered great set back.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Legitimation Crisis*

The legitimation crisis means that the so-called meta-narratives hitherto accepted as authoritative are now seriously challenged and in many instances even abandoned. One metanarrative is that of unlimited development, which has been delegitimised or deprived of its authoritative acceptance by a number of factors such as a] Environmental pollution owing to inability to contend and manage biochemical waste from industrialization, or the fear of global warming and increasing depletion of the ozone layer; b] serious accidents at facilities such as chemical factories and nuclear plants; c] increased poverty in much of the world because of unequal development; d] the observation that developed nations seem to reach an optimum point in development at which economic decline sets in and the overall quality of life begins to deteriorate. Hence it is no longer a given that progress is unlimited or even that certain kinds of development are necessarily good or desirable.<sup>12</sup>

Another classical instance of deligitimation crisis is the Judeo-Christian sexual ethics. Traditional sexual ethics sanctions monogamy and heterosexual marriages, while outlawing sexual intercourse outside of marriage. In postmodern context, cohabitation (traditionally called concubinage), homosexual marriages and sexual activity merely as recreation are taken for granted, and are seen as valid alternatives to traditional Judeo-Christian sexual ethics.

---

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

### *Intellectual Market Place*

The intellectual market place is the third characteristic of postmodernity. In the past, there was some form of elitism in the area of religious, cultural and even scientific knowledge. Parents controlled their children, teachers their students, clergy their parishioners, politicians the electorate. Knowledge was power and therefore its diffusion was strictly controlled. To be qualified for the diffusion of knowledge, one had to undergo years of specialised education with rigorous examinations in order to be allowed to practice. This situation however has changed dramatically today. This sort of monopoly and elitism has been broken. Satellite television networks, computers and fax machines have made both censorship and control seem obsolete. The wiring of these technologies into vast networks including our personal computers and Smartphones go a long way in enhancing this intellectual market place.<sup>13</sup>

### *Deconstruction*

A fourth characteristic is deconstruction which has already been hinted at. Suffice to say that for the advocates of this method of inquiry, any given text does not harbour any inherent meaning. What matters is not necessarily what the author intends to communicate but how a text is being interpreted. Hence no fixed meaning can be ascribed to a particular text.

This obviously has implications for theology. Objectivity of truth is undermined and apart from the fact that the scripture is not seen as having any ultimate meaning. The books of the scripture basically lose their authority in themselves. The network or web of relations outside the text may determine both the meaning of the text and the nature of its authority.<sup>14</sup>

\*\*\*\*

Consequently certain themes stand out in postmodern thought.

1. Truth is not seen as objective but subjective and this subjectivity is more or less a form of sociological

---

13. Ibid.

14. Cf. Ibid.

subjectivity. It is no longer the autonomous subject that is engaged in the cognitive act as in the disengaged reason of the modern period but the person forms part of a larger sociological matrix, which includes history, culture, economics, religion and politics and philosophical world view. Hence theology even dogmas do not fall from the skies but are constructed within a complex sociological matrix. Truth is not revealed or discovered but constructed.

2. This ineluctably entails a shift from deductive theology to inductive theology. This shift has given impetus to contextual theologies like liberation theology, feminism, Black theology, Hispanic theologies, and a host of other socio-political theologies now in vogue.
3. Theology arises out of the needs of community within the ever-changing context of culture and history. Scripture, creeds and confessions, and ecclesiastical traditions are part of the ever-changing contexts of culture and history and cannot therefore serve as the foundations for theological life and work.
4. Praxis is also given a pride of place. Postmodern thinkers have criticised uncompromisingly that aspect of modernism where non-western cultures have been exploited. As a result, contextual theologies have placed so much emphasis on praxis. Hence theology far from being a mere exercise in speculation must be existential. Orthopraxis now towers over orthodoxy. Sociology, in so far as it deals more with context, has in some instance replaced philosophy as the major dialogue partner of theology.
5. The enlightenment spirit typically denigrated non-rational dimensions of the human person and did not give much value to them but the postmodern spirit is ascribing great significance to emotions, instinct, interest and the

---

15. Cf. Marguerite Peeters, *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution*, trans., Benedict Kobus (Brussels: Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2007), 31-32.

spiritual dimension of the human person.<sup>15</sup> Rationality does not seem to be determinative in human actions but the will to power (cf. Nietzsche). Class interest, according to Marx, and instincts as Freud noted seem to have overriding influence in determining human destiny and history. Here one can speak of reason as instrumental as it is basically at the service of other forces in human reality contrary to the regal position that was ascribed to it by modernity.<sup>16</sup>

### Challenges of PM to the Mission of the Church

The challenges of PM to the missionary activity of the church is increasingly becoming clear from the forgoing but D. Bosch points out various issues :

1. *Secularisation and Religion*: The process of secularisation seems to have made faith in God redundant. Of what use is religion if we have the ways and means to cope with the demands of modern life?<sup>17</sup> However, in this lecture I contend that Bosch's observation is more in respect of modernism than postmodernism. In the postmodern world, there seems to be disenchantment with science and technology. Materialism leaves a yawning void in the human heart. So, there seems to be a return to the sacred. Accordingly, it seems that we are living at a time when religion is becoming more relevant.
2. *Radical pluralism*: The world can no longer be divided into Christians and non-Christians separated by oceans. Today owing to emigration and secularisation we live in a pluralistic world from a religious point of view where Christians, Buddhists and followers of many traditional religions today live side by side. This situation does not leave the various faiths indifferent. Rather there is a lot of syncretism going on, and while some, afraid of gradual erosion of their core beliefs, have resorted to fanaticism and

---

16. Cf. Ibid.

17. David Bosch, *La trasformazione della missione. Mutamenti di paradigma in missiologia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2000), 16-17.

fundamentalism, some are even becoming violent such as the widespread Islamic fundamentalism that is noted around the globe. It is also true that many have become indifferent to their faiths as well seeing one as good as the other.

3. *Guilt and Western Christianity*: Because of its complicity in the subjugation and exploitation of coloured people, the West and its form of Christianity tends to suffer from an acute guilt feeling and this tends to dampen and undermine missionary zeal.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Walter Kasper also sees a situation of paradox in the contemporary scene. While there seems to be greater mix of human kind and increased efficiency in means of communication and beneficial exchange, there seems to be what he calls counter-movement to globalisation: rise in ethnic conflict, an increasing loss of common values and fundamental convictions as a result of rejection of the postulate of unity which marked all western thought. This undermines the very basis of the church herself definition as a sign of unity and peace.<sup>19</sup> This fundamental option for plurality represents an immense challenge for the church.

### Church Response to Postmodernity

John Paul II responded with a note of hope and optimism in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

If we look at today's world, we are struck by many negative factors that can lead to pessimism, but this feeling is unjustified: we have faith in God our father and Lord, in his goodness and mercy. As the third millennium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a great spring time for Christianity and we can already see its signs. Never has there been a favourable time to evangelize as we have in this moment of history. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for inner life, a desire to learn new forms and methods of

18. Cf. Ibid.

19. Walter Kasper, "The Unicity and Universality of Jesus Christ," *Cristologia e Missione Oggi* (Urbaniana University Press 2001), 35-36. Cf. Fernando Galbiati, "The Church in the Post-Modern World," <http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/galbiati.htm> (accessed 08.03. 2014).

meditation and prayer. This represents an opportunity for the church. The church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind.<sup>20</sup>

Pope Francis seems to be re-echoing this hope and challenge posed by John Paul II in his message for the 2013 mission day celebration:

We also live in a time of crisis that touches various sectors of existence, not only that of the economy, of finance, of food security, or the environment, but also that of the deeper meaning of life and the fundamental values that animate it. Even human coexistence is marked by tensions and conflicts that cause insecurity and difficulty in finding the right path that leads to a stable peace. In this complex situation, where the horizon of the present and the future paths seem threatened by menacing clouds, it is necessary to proclaim with courage in all realities, the gospel of Christ, which is a message of hope, reconciliation, communion and proclamation of God's closeness, of his mercy, his salvation, a proclamation that the power of God's love is able to overcome the darkness of evil and guide us on the path of goodness. Humanity of our time needs the secure light that illuminates its path and that only the encounter with Christ can give. Let us bring to this world, through our witness, with love, the hope given by faith! The church's missionarity is not proselytizing, but the testimony of a life that illuminates the path, which brings hope and love.<sup>21</sup>

Such courage to proclaim the word at a time like this is not in any way an imposition but, as already affirmed by Paul VI, it is a great homage to human freedom owing to the liberative and salvific content of the Christian message itself:

Sometimes, it is still thought that proclaiming the truth of the gospel means an incursion on freedom.... It would be an error to impose something on the consciences of our brethren. But to propose to their consciences the truth of the gospel and salvation of Jesus Christ, with complete clarity and with total

20. Ioannes Paulus Pp. II, "Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate", no. 86, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html) (accessed 08.03. 2014).

21. Pope Francis, "Message for World Mission Day 2013," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130519\\_giornata-missionaria2013\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco_20130519_giornata-missionaria2013_en.html) (accessed 07.03. 2014).

22. Pope Paul VI, "Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*," no. 80, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html) (accessed 08.03. 2014).

respect for free options which it presents is a tribute to freedom.<sup>22</sup>

The response of the church from the forgoing is clearly a clarion call for a renewed enthusiasm in missionary activity, which is witnessing to the timeless liberating truth of the Christian message. The church is convinced that she has a great role to play in bringing healing and wholeness to a fragmented and broken world in spite of the challenges posed by postmodernity. She is convinced that the faith she preaches can satisfy human hunger for meaning and fulfilment so characteristic of the age that we live in. Yet mission must be more of witnessing and not proselytising.

### Priestly Formation in a Postmodern World: Problems and Prospects

E. Galbiati affirming blessed Fr. Paolo Manna, founder of the Missionary Union of the clergy (1916), strongly asserts that the key to the missionary problem lies in the hands of the clergy since they are the leaders and form of the flock. Inspired by this conviction always and above all in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church has always laid emphasis on the need to encourage missionary vocations.<sup>23</sup> The first duty was to increase the number of local clergy and perfect their formation in mission territories. Taking into consideration the spirit of the times in both forming local missionaries in their own context, the church declared as absurd any attempt to change the customs and lifestyle of local peoples in order to transfer France, Spain or Italy to China, for instance.<sup>24</sup> The church seems to be alive to the fact that missionary activity is not to westernise the world. This has been greatly emphasised in Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*:

These general requirements for priestly training, both pastoral and practical which have been laid down by the council must be accompanied with a desire to face up to the particular nation's way of thinking and acting. Therefore, the minds of the students must be opened and refined so that they will better understand and appreciate the culture of

23. Galbiati, "Church in the Post-Modern World".  
24. Cf. *Ibid*.

their own people, in philosophy and theology they should examine the relationship between the traditions and religion of their homeland and Christianity. In the same way priestly formation must take into account of the pastoral needs of the region, the students must learn the history, goal and method of missionary activity as well as the peculiar social, economic and cultural situation of their own people. They should be formed in the spirit of ecumenism and properly prepared for fraternal dialogue with non-Christians. All this demands that as far as possible, studies for the priesthood should be undertaken in close contact with the way of life of their own people.<sup>25</sup>

### The Reality on Ground

The observation of Galbiati on the situation in our seminaries is worth giving serious thought:

With honesty and out of duty I feel obliged to say that, no matter how often it has been affirmed and called for in the Church's documents, this centrality of Mission in formation in seminaries is still a pious desire if not indeed a distant dream even in seminaries in mission lands. It is true that there are activities and methods to bring mission closer to future priests: lectures, publications and visits by missionaries to tell them about missions and inspire seminarians to take an interest in the missionary problem. But all this leaves mission in the background. It makes it almost an optional, an interesting but distant reality, when other religions and other cultures are now part of the life and reality in which the future priest must live and work. Also missiology lessons are still a rare occurrence in most seminaries and on the whole they are relegated to a course of culture or to *extra-curricula* interventions. This does not do justice to a subject that should be central in studies and incorporated in the systematic theological studies of future priests.<sup>26</sup>

From this observation we can gather that there is a serious deficiency in the teaching of missiology and formation with

25. Vatican II Council, "Decree *Ad Gentes* on the Mission Activity of the Church," no. 16, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html) (accessed 08.03. 2014).  
26. Galbiati, "The Church in the Post-Modern World."

missionary orientation in our seminaries. The candidates are barely either aware of the terrain they are going to engage in missionary activity or equipped with the skills they need to become efficient in their missionary work considering the challenges posed by postmodernism in the world of today. This will call for emphasis being placed on the study of sociology and cultural studies in our seminaries, and a formation that equip the candidates to be discerning of the signs of the times and the particular society that they have to carry out missionary activities.

More worrisome is A. Dulles' observation that seminary formation has still not moved away from a certain orientation typical of the modern epoch, where concern was more of demonstrating the rationality of the Christian faith.

The reluctance of Catholics to evangelise has many roots, historical, sociological, cultural and political. I shall restrict my attention to the theological roots. Catholic theology, in my opinion, still lags behind the evangelical shift that has taken place on the level of the church's pastoral leadership. The program of evangelization calls for a renewal of Catholic theology, so that it may contribute to, rather than retard, the evangelical effort... A theology that is both Catholic and evangelical differs from medieval Scholasticism and Counter-Reformation apologetics. These theologies contained much that is true and permanently valid; they lent themselves well to the situation of earlier centuries, when Europe was a self-contained Christian society. But they are no longer adequate for the complex global culture of today... Christian faith, understood in evangelical terms, is much more than an intellectual assent. It is a complex act involving the whole person - mind, will and emotions.<sup>27</sup>

It is very evident in this observation that seminary formation should be geared more towards a theology of witness which encompasses the whole person rather mere apologetics aimed at gaining merely intellectual.

---

27. Cited in *Ibid*.

## Concluding Remarks: The Way Forward

Modes of thinking that shake the very foundation of the church and call into question its *raison d'être* is not new in the history of the church. Yet in a way that defies human logic, the church has had a reputation of always surviving such threats and even coming out more robust and dynamic. The threat posed by modernism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was devastating, let alone the recent widespread cases of abuse of the minors by clergy. However, with the new pope the church seems to have acquired a new vigour and lease of life. From every situation the church learns something and her knowledge of mission widens, sharpened and clarified in the process.

To respond adequately to the challenge of postmodernism, the church must continue to take hold of the opportunities PM presents. There is so much that the church can learn from the postmodern condition which is not contrary to the spirit of the gospel. I shall highlight five.

1. *Gender Sensitivity*: The attempt to rationalise gender inequality in the church and hierarchical structure has often been ridiculed by postmodernism. Our church must be sensitive to this challenge by being willing to adopt new models of community life that enhances greater participation of women in decision making and also adopt more a non-authoritarian pattern of leadership. Right from the seminary days the candidates must be formed in being sensitive to gender issues, and how to encourage greater participation of women in decision making in church administration.
2. *Rejection of Metanarrative and Christ's Universal Salvation*: The central issue in PM is the rejection of metanarrative. Yet, Christ died that all might be saved and that salvation comes only through him. This is an unacceptable metanarrative hard postmodernists; they are more inclined to see it as one among many beliefs. However, this singular focus on Christ and his crucifixion for the world cannot be denied by Christianity. It is the heart and soul of what we believe. How then can this truth

be presented to a postmodern mindset? Christians cannot afford to let go of their foundation. Nevertheless, we can learn from PM not to succumb to the temptation to use the metanarrative as an instrument of power i.e. using its metanarrative to discriminate and exclude others from genuine communion. The church cannot proclaim it merely as a propositional truth and expect the audience to merely accept it. The church needs to be a community that lives it out, in power and in truth. The real manifestation of the love of Christ in action through the church community will convince the postmodernist of the reality of the truth of Christ. This was the witness of the early Christian community that converted many to the Christian faith. It was not because of economic power or political power of the Christian religion. The church has to recover in some way the spirit of the early Christian community that was manifested in that strong witness to the redeeming love of Christ. We need to constantly remind ourselves that the gospel of Christ is meant to bring healing and wholeness and should not be directed to establishing power. Formation of seminarians must take as a matter of priority the dimension of witnessing to the liberating truths of the Christian faith.<sup>28</sup>

3. *Rebuilding Trust through Mediators*: Today in particular there is need for people who can play the role of mediator between different communities whose persuasions, commitments, worldviews and perspectives differ from each other. Following the example of Jesus, we need to understand different communities and build trust between them.
4. *Christ the Elder and Reconciliation in Africa*: Considering the preponderance of conflict between communities in our continent, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria had

---

28. Cf. "Church Response to Postmodernism," <http://saintbeagle.wordpress.com> (accessed 08.03.2014).

chosen the image of Christ as elder, one in African context who is not just a repository of wisdom but most importantly one who uses wisdom to ensure unity and harmony within the society. Considering the pluralistic nature of our world today, the church must take up urgently that reconciliatory role following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

5. *Formation in Responsible Use of Social Networks*: The cyberspace and the social media have become very efficient tools in communication. The church has to make use of these if it has to be effective in evangelisation as emphasised time and time again. Yet there is need for formation right from the seminary days in the responsible use of the social media. Candidates must be alerted about the possible dangers of the social media and be guided on its proper use.

In conclusion, PM's challenge and its impact on church missionary activity are enormous and call for serious reflection on the part of the church to find adequate ways of responding. While the church cannot compromise the fundamental truth of the centrality of Christ in the salvation of humankind, it cannot ignore the insights of postmodern culture that calls for a greater appreciation of truths in other religions and cultures. Hence there is need for continuous dialogue with different cultures and civilisations while witnessing positively to the message of salvation that she bears.

---

29. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis for the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (n.p.: Catholic Secretariat