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Understanding Diffusion:
The Role of a Western Missionary in Africa

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Since the first disciples were sent out to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, Christianity has moved across cultural, linguistic, and political borders and made itself at home in each of its new locations. Lamin Sanneh points out that "translatability is the source of the success of Christianity."[1] Because of this ability, Christianity has been able to diffuse itself into every new location. As it makes itself at home in each new location and culture, it undergoes a transformation process by those in that location and culture. In the broader context of world missions, there are those who would say cross-cultural diffusion is creating a deeper, more complete understanding of Christianity, whereas others would say it is opening the door for dilution and syncretism.[2]

This raises questions about the diffusion process and the definition of Christianity in reference to orthodoxy and syncretism.[3] Are theologians looking at this Christian "basket of fruit" from different perspectives trying to define the same thing? Or is there something about the diffusion process that causes Christianity to become diluted and syncretized in one culture while continuing on in orthodoxy in another. Once Christianity has been

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[1]Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed., American Society of Missiology Series, 42 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 51.

[2]Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, ed. Ross Cathy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 68; Todd M. Johnson, "Globalization, Christian Identity, and Frontier Missions," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27 (2010): 168–69. Syncretism, in this article will be defined as anything that is added to, or taken away from, the gospel core of Christianity that would cause it to be redefined differently than defined by the Bible, and the character and nature of God.

[3]Orthodoxy is defined as "Following or conforming to the traditional or generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, philosophy, or practice." In the case of this article, that religion, philosophy, or practice is the Christian faith, as expressed by early Christians and the ecumenical creeds as well as adhering to evangelical Christianity as defined by David Bebbington's quadrilateral principles. Oxford Dictionary, "orthodoxy", accessed 22 March 2019, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orthodox. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–17.

introduced, should there be any outsider interaction that would guide diffusion and keep its doctrine and orthodoxy intact? Conversely, would it be best to leave the translation process alone, apart from outsider interaction, allowing for the diffusion process to move freely within the constraints of the indigenous culture creating a new hybrid form of Christianity?

These questions represent the opposite ends of the spectrum. For anyone wrestling with the call of God on their life to go on mission, these are important questions to work through. There is no shortage of material to support either side of the argument. This article will explore the diffusion process of Christianity into the African culture, in general, by examining several models of contextual theology. At the same time, it will explore data from a specific location and people within Africa to help explain what the role of a western missionary is in the diffusion process of Christianity in Africa.

Historically, Christianity has moved cross-culturally, from one culture to another, and has been appropriated contextually by those in the new culture. This movement can be described as diffusion. According to Everett Rogers, "Diffusion is the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among a social system."[4] An innovation is "an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. An innovation presents an individual or an organization with a new alternative or alternatives, as well as new means of solving problems."[5] In this case, the innovation is Christianity and the social system is the African culture. As Christianity is diffused from one culture to another, is the process of diffusion passive or active—or a combination of both?[6] If so, to what extent? Some scholars would argue against Western missionary interaction for fear of exporting Western, or non-indigenous, theological practices into the new culture, which would result in a replicated form of non-indigenous Christianity.[7]

Alternatively, Andrew Walls makes the argument that the incarnate Christ was, and is, a translation of God into humanity.[8] This translation is ultimately the beginning of the diffusion process of Christianity. As Christianity is diffused into culture and conversion takes place, there is also an in-

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[4]Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 5.

[5]Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, xvii.

[6]Active diffusion is a process that is directed and managed whereas passive diffusion is not.

[7]Jesse N.K. Mugambi, "The Future of Theological Education in Africa and the Challenges it Faces," in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 117.

[8]Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 27. He says that "in Christian faith, God becomes human," and "Christ is Word Translated," and that incarnation is translation.

carnational translation that takes place in each believer as they go and make disciples. This is what Walls calls the "Pilgrim Principle."[9] A Christian is an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20).[10] They are a type of, a replication or rendering of the incarnate Christ. He is with each Christian, in each Christian, and empowering each Christian to do what He did (John 14:12). As Christians live out the great commission, to go and make disciples, they are essentially embodying and taking with them on mission the incarnate Christ.

Whether or not the diffusion process takes place actively or passively, when discussing the movement of Christianity globally, agency needs to be addressed. Christians cite the Bible as reasoning for being the agent of diffusion (Matt 28:19 and Rom 10:14–15). They also cite a divine mandate that supersedes culture, religion, politics, and even personal timidity. In other words, each Christian should be an agent of diffusion. The question is, then, should each change agent diffuse Christianity actively or passively?

The Bible does present a compelling, logical argument for active diffusion in Romans 10:14, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" The logic of this argument is that there are people who have not heard about Christ, the author and founder of Christianity, and those who have heard now have a responsibility to share with those who have not heard. This argument does not specify detailed qualifications for who should do the spreading. The implication is, however, if you are hearing these words that Paul has written, then you, as a Christian, are being called to share the gospel message with others.

There are those who would say there is no need for an intentional agent to be involved in the diffusion process at all, that religious ideas are able to spread spontaneously. In speaking about traditional religions, John Mbiti makes the comment:

> religious ideas may spread from one people to another. But such ideas spread spontaneously, especially through migrations, intermarriage, conquest, or expert knowledge being sought by individuals of one tribal group from another. Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another.[11]

[9]The Pilgrim and Indigenizing principles work together in concert, while at the same time stand in contrast with each other. As a new believer wrestles with how to live out their new faith within their community (indigenous), they are, at the same time, drawn from within, to leave the community and take the gospel to places and peoples who do not have it (pilgrim).

[10]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

[11]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990), 4.

If this is true, then it is possible that Christianity could be diffused in a similar fashion and that Christianity could be spread as spontaneously as traditional religions. Since the paradigm for diffusion of a religion is already set up culturally, then it would make sense for anyone in the culture to accept and diffuse another religion, in this case Christianity, into the culture. As a counterargument, could it be that even in this paradigm of spontaneous diffusion, there was still someone actively involved in the diffusion process, at least as an initiator?

An example for the need of an etic perspective, or outside perspective, can be found in the film classic, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The setting for the film is rural Africa, and an outside innovation, an empty Coke bottle, is introduced. When the bottle mysteriously fell from the sky, the Bushmen applied their cultural understandings to this new innovation. While some of their cultural understandings managed to come close to the bottle's originally intended purpose, the other uses for the bottle did not. Even though many of the new uses for the coke bottle were useful and did make everyday life chores easier to accomplish, they were at risk of destroying the innovation and possibly causing themselves physical harm if the bottle had broken. In addition to physical harm was the already noticeable cultural harm that manifested itself in the form of jealously.

One aspect of newness that Christianity brings to the African religious landscape is its belief in supra-cultural truths that need to be communicated. To better understand this new aspect and innovation, an examination of the models of contextual theology put forth by Steven Bevans and Robert Schreiter is needed. This article will examine three models from Bevans and one from Schreiter.

Translation Model

The first model is the translation model. This model insists "on the message of the Gospel as an unchanging message."[12] This unchanging message is something that is outside of culture, or "supra cultural."[13] Aubrey Malphurs uses the idea of essential versus non-essential to describe propositional, or essential, truths that are necessary.[14] Christians hold to the idea that

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[12]Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed., Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 37.

[13]A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 35; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 40.

[14]Aubrey Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 50–51. Essentials of the faith "are propositional truths that are both clearly taught in the Bible and are necessary for one to be considered orthodox. Should someone in the church reject any of these views, his or her version of Christianity is not orthodox. He or she has fallen outside the faith." Non-essentials of the faith "are views we hold that may be based on the scriptures, tradition or on both. They aren't as clear biblically. Unlike the essentials

"all essential truth is to be found in the Bible."[15] African theologian Osado-lor Imasogie says, "the Holy Bible becomes the primary objective medium by means of which the Living Lord, through the Holy Spirit, continues to disclose God to us."[16] The challenge, then, is to determine what the essential truths of the faith are, decontextualize them and then translate them into the culture.

This model does not use the term translation to mean a word-for-word translation. Since "words carry much more than denotative meanings," "translation has to be idiomatic."[17] Charles Kraft says, of translation, that "it must be done by functional or dynamic equivalence."[18] The reason is because "the aim of this dynamic-equivalence method of translation is to elicit the same reaction in contemporary hearers or readers as in the original hearers or readers."[19]

Therefore, in this model, the essential truths of the gospel, which de-fine the Christian faith, are kept safe and guarded from any impurities that might corrupt the original kernel, or gospel core. Individual Christians safe guard the gospel core by directing and managing the transmission, or diffu-sion, of the gospel message. Actively diffusing the gospel core is essential to this model since "theologizing, like all Christian communication, must be directed to someone if it is to serve its purpose. It cannot be flung out into thin air."[20]

The strength of this approach is the insurance of a dynamic equivalent translation taking place during the diffusion process. By keeping the focus on the supra cultural truth of the gospel, syncretism, or the uncritical acceptance of certain religious convictions in a culture as equal to or greater in impor-tance than the gospel core, can be avoided.[21] However, one challenge of this model is if the adherents succumb to obscurantism and confuse "the Gospel with some idea or expression external to the Gospel."[22]

For example, the church in Luangwa says that new believers must go through a baptism class before becoming baptized.[23] This class can last for

of the faith, agreement or disagreement on the nonessentials doesn't affect one's orthodoxy, salvation or standing before Christ. The key word here is liberty. There is room to flex."

[15]Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 12.

[16]Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1983), 73.

[17]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 38–39.

[18]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 269.

[19]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 39.

[20]Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 39.

[21]Ed Stetzer, "What Is Contextualization," *Christianity Today*, 12 October 2014, http://bit.ly/1yqviml.

[22]Ed Stetzer, "Beware of Obscurantism," *Christianity Today*, 8 July 2014, http://bit.ly/1resc1F.

[23]Luangwa, Zambia is where I and my family have been serving the Chikunda

several months and ends with the new convert passing a battery of questions administered by the pastor or deacons. Only upon completion of the class will baptism take place. If the new convert does not pass, then he must retake the class before being baptized. Until a person is baptized in this culture, they are not allowed to partake in the Lord's Supper, attend church business meetings, vote in church decisions, teach, preach, or take any office in the church. This sends a message to non-Christians that salvation is based on knowledge and the ability to pass an exam.

Another challenge this model has is non-contextualization. Many missionaries who minister to cultures other than their own, that have grown up in their respective cultures without interacting with other cultures, "are largely unaware of the cultures in which they live, or the depth to which these contexts shape how and what they think and do."[24] This is true of missionaries who have grown up in the United States, where interaction with other cultures is not as easy due to its geography.

Missionaries who are not familiar with African culture would be wise to remember that "Christian theology must be informed by the contextual milieu of its target audience in such a way that the Word will become flesh among the people."[25] If not, African culture may be seen as less important or inferior to the theological process. The gospel is then equated with the missionaries' Christianity, and positivism becomes the epistemological foundation, "which holds that [the missionaries] scientific knowledge is an accurate, true photograph of the world and corresponds one-to-one with reality."[26] This opens the door for a replication of a Christianity from another culture that ultimately has no relevance to a person's life in the new culture.

For instance, African culture is considered an oral learning culture. However, theological education is something that was important to both European and American missionaries dating back several centuries, which they brought with them when they first arrived on the African continent.[27] Upon arrival, missionaries began establishing schools. On the outside, the establishment of these schools could be looked at as meeting a basic humanitarian need: education. According to Western missionaries, Christianity was learned and understood by reading the Bible. For this reason, reading was

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people since 2009. This is where the research documentation and all oral interviews for this article were acquired.

[24]Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 19.

[25]Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 14.

[26]Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 20.

[27]Dietrich Werner, "Theological Education in the Changing Context of World Christianity: An Unfinished Agenda," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 2 (2011); Isaiah O Olatoyan, "A Visionary Missionary," *Global Missiology English* 4, no. 11 (2014); Peter Acho Awoh, *The Dynamics and Contradictions of Evangelisation in Africa: An Essay on the Kom Experience* (Bamenda, Cameroon: African Books Collective, 2010), 16.

integral to the missionary's strategy, and most of the schools were set up to "teach people to read."[28] At that time, that method was effectual for European and American cultures, but not for an African culture.

When entering into the African context, as well as any context, it is important to discover a method that is reflective of the target audience's context. Theology that is created from this method has relevance to a person's life in the new culture. By incorporating "the Word of God as mediated by the Holy Spirit[,] … the Holy Scriptures[,] … human culture[,] and world view," Christians in Africa will be able to produce an African Christian theology instead of an African anthropology.[29]

Synthetic Model

The second model to be examined is the synthetic model. This model "tries to preserve the importance of the Gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations while at the same time acknowledging the vital role that context has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda."[30] One of the strengths of this model, especially for the African context, is found in its dialogical nature. Aylward Shorter said, "African Christian theology must grow out of a dialogue between Christianity and the theologies of ATR."[31] This model "makes an effort to make theologizing an exercise in true conversation and dialogue with the other so that one's own and one's culture's identity can emerge in the process."[32] This process would allow for the growth of Christianity both in an African culture and from an African culture.

In the context of Christianity being diffused, this model allows for, and encourages, the process of diffusion to take place through a dialogical process between adopters and change agents. Bevans calls the procedure of the synthetic model "more like producing a work of art than following a rigid set of directions."[33] By allowing for the dialogical process to take place between the change agent and the adopter, the Gospel core is preserved while maintaining an emphasis on cultural identity. The hope in the end process is a picture of Christianity that has kept its value positive and value neutral cultural distinctives without sacrificing the gospel core of Christianity.[34]

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[28]Edward P. Murphy, *A History of the Jesuits in Zambia: A Mission Becomes a Province* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003), 62.

[29]Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 72–73.

[30]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 89.

[31]Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 1.

[32]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 94.

[33]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 92.

[34]The terms value positive, neutral, and negative are understood and defined in light of culture. Value positive is any cultural distinctive that positively reflects cultural identity but does not damage Christian identity. An example of this would be the use of the local language. Value neutral is any cultural distinctive that may

Diffusion is "essentially a community process [that] also needs the presence of experts—even sometimes missionaries from overseas, to give the community encouragement and to help it make the necessary discernment and the necessary critique of its own culture, and to promote the discovery of the seeds of the Word."[35] This community process is what speaks to the African culture and is a powerful method for diffusion. For example, the Chikunda already have built into their culture the dialogical process, which can be seen in their daily life from village meetings about gathering wood or planting crops to family disputes.[36] This process is also seen in church meetings, town council meetings, and even meetings with the chief.

The synthetic model seems to fit the Chikunda culture the best. In reference to keeping the integrity of the traditional message, Mattias Phiri said, "When we meet together, the Bible was interpreted, (also means translated or explained) so that we all understand the message."[37] Shorter previously made the comment that the diffusion process "needs the presence of experts."[38] Mattias said of the new innovation, "It needs a teacher first."[39] As far as taking the culture and context seriously, the change agents began by meeting immediate felt needs and then spiritual needs.[40] These needs were deter-

be removed and not reflect either positively or negatively on either African or Christian culture, such as style of worship. Value negative is any cultural distinctive that positively reflects African culture but damages the Christian identity, such as utilizing the witch doctor and magic for resolving personal issues.

[35]Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 92.

[36]I was called by the community at one point to represent the leadership from the local church on a marital dispute between two of the members of that church. We went to the couple's village and gathered with members of the church, local community and members of each of the family members. For about four hours a moderator controlled the flow of the dialogue and interaction between the members of the community, church, and family. Each person was able to contribute to the conversation as they all attempted to reach a solution that was reasonable. Once everyone had an opportunity to voice their opinion, the moderator took into consideration all that was contributed in that time and then delivered his verdict.

[37]Interview 1, Mattias #9. These personal Interviews were taken to fill gaps that literary sources could not. A representative from two separate villages, where church planting work had been done, was chosen. Another, who was instrumental in the church planting efforts in both villages, was chosen. All three of the interviewees in this article have a detailed and personal knowledge of the culture, Christianity, and its movement into the community.

[38]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 92.

[39]Interview 2, Mattias #5.

[40]Interview 1 Mattias, #1—At first, he (the missionary) came to see the crocodile. When he killed the crocodile, they came to talk to us about the word of God. Amake Tadiwa #2—When they came, they came to help people, number one, and they came to see the way we live here. Number two, they thought of digging a borehole; Interview 1, Mtambo #1—The reason they came to Chikumbi, Humphrey and Jacob, they came to help us to know God and the church.

mined through the dialogical process which allowed for the change agents and adopters to work together in formulating a plan for diffusing Christianity contextually that was culturally appropriate and biblically sound.[41]

Anthropological Model

The third model to be examined is the anthropological model. According to Bevans, this model is "almost at the opposite end of the spectrum from the translation model."[42] Where the translation model is concerned about the preservation of the gospel message, the anthropological model is concerned with the "establishment and preservation of cultural identity."[43] What does this model say for the preservation of Christianity? What does this model say for the continuation of the African culture?

In respect to the preservation of Christianity, this model would most likely have a negative influence or impact on some of its core tenets. Christians hold to a supra-cultural message that is found in the Bible. This belief stands in direct contradiction with the idea that "within human culture that we find God's revelation."[44] Christians would say that the idea of man being good and God's revelation being found in culture mitigates the need for Jesus and His work on the cross.

> While the person who uses the translation model basically sees himself or herself as bringing a saving message in to the context and making sure that it is presented in a relevant and attractive way, the practitioner of the anthropological model looks for God's revelation and self-manifestation as it is hidden within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a context.[45]

Robert T. Rush said missionaries might be best described as "treasure hunters" and not "pearl merchants."[46]

With respect to the continuation of the African culture, the anthropological model is a positive model. This model starts with the "present human experience, with a particular focus on human culture."[47] Instead of touting the greatness of Western culture, it begins with all that is good with in the African culture. This model removes paternalism and seeks to elevate the local culture. Through this model the African culture would have an equally valuable seat at the table of other world cultures.

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[41]Interview 1, Mattias #2—We sat down together and started making the program on how we would begin the Bible study.

[42]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 54.

[43]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 54.

[44]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 56.

[45]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 56.

[46]Robert T. Rush, "From Pearl Merchant to Treasure Hunter: The Missionary Yesterday and Today," *Catholic Mind* 76, no. 1325 (1978), 6–10.

[47]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 57.

This model places great importance on the people as contextualizers. Since there is a difference between the Western scientific worldview and the African worldview, and "given the way context influences one's perception of spiritual reality, such a difference in world view must inevitably affect the resulting theology."[48] This means that an African Christian would be the best person to "provide the biblical and traditional background that will enable the people to develop their own theology."[49] This model's understanding of revelation "recognizes that revelation is not essentially a message, but the result of an encounter with God's loving and healing power in the midst of the ordinariness of life."[50] This idea fits well within the African culture as it speaks to God's healing power and the ordinariness of life. These are aspects that are better understood and propagated by Africans and not Westerners.

Christians would argue against the anthropological idea of revelation. They say that revelation is a message and not merely "the result of an encounter with God's loving and healing power in the midst of the ordinariness of life."[51] While Christians do believe that general revelation can be found in the midst of ordinary life, however, they do not believe it can radically change a person like the personal acceptance of special revelation can.

For Christians in Luangwa, like Humphrey Mpengula, the anthropological model does not represent a good way to diffuse Christianity. There are people who practice the anthropological model who "would insist that while the acceptance of Christianity might challenge a particular culture, it would not radically change it."[52] However, Humphrey Mpengula says, "Culture and Christianity are different. You'll find that Christianity, there are some ways that I should not do. This I shouldn't do and that I shouldn't do, and that and that. But the culture allows me to do those things. That is why I am saying it is different between culture and Christianity. They are not the same. What culture allows, Christianity does not."[53]

Adaptation Model

In Robert Schreiter's book, *Constructing Local Theologies*, he introduces what he calls the "Adaptation Model" of contextual theology.[54] The method

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[48]Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa*, 67.

[49]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 58.

[50]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 59.

[51]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 59; Rom 10:14–15, 17. "How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him in whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! So then, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

[52]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 57.

[53]Interview #2, Humphrey #10.

[54]Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 9-12.

of this model "is one of planting the seed of faith and allowing it to inter-act with the native soil, leading to a new flowering of Christianity, faithful to both the local culture and to the apostolic faith."[55] According to Scott Moreau, this model is similar to Bevans's synthetic model, however there are a few nuances that differentiate it from the synthetic model.

If one followed the example that was given, describing the method as a seed that was planted and allowed to interact with the native soil, to its conclusion, then there are some major questions that arise concerning the growth and maturity of the seed after it is planted. There is no mention of a caretaker in this example or outside involvement that would cultivate the ground in which the seed is growing. This example appears to leave the seed alone once in the ground, allowing for the native soil to interact with the seed only, as opposed to Bevans's synthetic model, which allows for con-textualizers to "develop in dialectic fashion something that transcends the sources while retaining their strengths."[56]

Another nuance of the adaptation model is its need for ideal circum-stances to work, whereas the synthetic model does not. Schreiter labels these ideal circumstances as "those instances where there has never been any con-tact with Christians."[57] As the speed of globalization increases, more and more people are leaving the villages and moving into the cities. This makes the prospect of finding ideal circumstances ever fleeting. However, a strength of this model is how "it tries to respect both the integrity of the apostolic tradition and the traditions of the local culture. In ideal circumstances it should allow for the development of a theology that is not only local, but deeply contextual."[58]

Based on oral interview data, this model has a weakness in what is perceived as passive diffusion. If the seed is planted and left alone to interact with the soil, apart from further cultivation, then it would be like a Bible that was dropped into a village without any explanation and allowing those in the village to interact with it to create their own Christianity. Simon Mtambo said, "if you just left this Bible without teaching me, since I do not know any-thing (about the Bible) I will pack it up and you will find it when you come back the same way it was when you left."[59]

In the area of missions and cross-cultural communication, there are various positions when it comes to the understanding and meaning of con-textualization. A quick glance at Stephen Bevens's *Models of Contextual The-*

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[55]Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 42.

[56]A. Scott Moreau, Evvy Hay Campbell, and Susan Greener, *Effective Intercultural Communication: A Christian Perspective*, Encountering Mission (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2014), 40.

[57]Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 12.

[58]Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 11.

[59]Personal interview, Simon Mtambo, 24 July 2017, 4.

ology reveals some of the different understandings and interpretations of contextualization. He argues that "[The] contextualization of theology, the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context, is really a theological imperative."[60] Taking into account discussions by Moreau and David Hesselgrave, contextualization will be defined as "the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a whole—not only the message but also the means of living out our faith in the local setting—understandable."[61]

This leads us back to the original question, what is the role of a Western missionary in the diffusion process of Christianity in Africa? The emic and etic perspectives need to work together to diffuse Christianity that is both culturally relevant and biblically orthodox. This model of working together allows the etic perspective to inform the emic on blind spots that might arise in the diffusion process. At the same time, the emic perspective is able to represent the culture to ensure that cultural distinctives do not get washed out during the diffusion process.

No one person has a complete revelation and understanding of what Christianity is. It can be seen as a mosaic of human understandings and interpretations of Christ. In other words, something that "melds multiformity and rich diversity of colors with harmony and complexity into a pattern that conveys a unified image without sacrificing variety."[62] Each piece in this model, the etic, and the emic, represents a color in the mosaic that is Christianity.

By bringing in a piece of the mosaic that is different, the resulting version of Christianity is contextually more complete than it would have been without it. This is not to say that Christianity is incomplete or cannot exist without any certain piece. Rather, the African expression of faith is more complete, or has more depth and understanding of who God is (because of the addition of the etic perspective) than if it had developed from an emic perspective alone.

This represents the concepts previously discussed in relation to Bevan's models of contextual theology, in particular the Translation and Synthetic models. The research in this article supports the idea of a supra-cultural Christian foundation that is *translated* into the African context, the pilgrim aspect of Christianity. At the same time there is a *synthesis* between the outsider (expatriate missionary) and the insider (African) expressions of Christianity so that the developing African version continues to grow and flourish.

In applying constant and careful attention to its application, this model

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[60]Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

[61]Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 36.

[62]Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 10.

is not intended to represent or force a colonial or paternalistic perspective. There should be the appropriate representation of emic and etic perspectives to diffuse a Christianity that represents the nature and character of Christ (as defined by the Bible), and the culture (as defined by the emic perspective). Appropriate representation does not mean that each side inputs an amount that is equal to the others in the equation. The dynamic of each culture and person involved in diffusion, both emic and etic, is different and ever-changing. This means that the amount of input from each will differ and vary. The meaning of "appropriate representation" is best summed up in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12 in which he discusses the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. He says, "there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it."

This is a great example and analogy to understand the importance of input from both sides in the diffusion process. Paul talks about how the body as a single unit is made up of many parts. Each part has its function and importance. Even though the heart cannot be seen, it is absolutely vital to the function of the body. Some parts of the body are bigger and might play a more vital role in the body, but each part is nonetheless important and valuable to the body as a whole. Likewise, in the diffusion of Christianity, each cultural iteration needs to have both emic and etic perspectives, but the amount of each side will vary from culture to culture.

Each cultural iteration of Christianity should be like a mirror which reflects, perfectly, the image gazing into it, so the result of the newly diffused Christianity should reflect the very nature and character of Christ. Therefore, etic and emic are but pieces to the puzzle, and each culture might require a different amount of each in order to properly reflect Christ. Since Christ is the foundation of Christianity, and to remove or change who Christ is would result in something other than Christianity, the focus should always be on Christ, not culture or the importance of either the etic or the emic perspective.

The challenge for missionaries from any culture, who go to a culture other than their own to diffuse Christianity, is to present the supra cultural truths of the Bible in their purest form and allow the new culture to wrestle with how to clothe it. If the new culture decides they like how Christianity has been clothed from the missionary's culture, and they want to use the same clothing, then they should be able to make that decision. At the same time, if they decide to wrap it in their own cultural wrappings, then they should be free to do so, as well. Therefore, the task of the missionary is to help them navigate the journey between overemphasizing the indigenous on the one side and the pilgrim on the other as they strive to contextualize Christianity into their culture.