

Public Abstract

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One of the most urgent problems within many Christian denominations is how to relate the Christian Gospel to diverse cultures. The importance of culture in the missiological process cannot be overstated; for culture is the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one's experiences. This social framework forms a basis for understanding why an individual or group behaves or reacts in one manner or another.

In this paper, I will argue that the Christian Gospel message is fundamentally and essentially not limited by any one cultural expression and, as such, is trans-cultural. I have selected the term "trans-cultural" to describe the characteristic or property of being able to expand beyond the experience or limits imposed by any prior culture. In order to defend this thesis, I will provide a cursory review of a first century New Testament account of what may be the earliest Christian effort to spread beyond its original cultural setting. Next, I will review and analyze debates involving the concepts of conversion, inculturation, and syncretism as dynamic aspects of religious change. Following this, I will present a more modern account of Christian development among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria and offer it as an ongoing example to demonstrate the difficult yet determined effort of some to embrace the Gospel message within their own unique cultural context. The final chapter will address specific issues raised in the test case that are relevant to inculturation theory and theology in academic discussion.