


Significance of incarnation in gospel contextualisation and communication interculturally

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This article analyses the missional significance of John 1:14 in gospel contextualisation and communication interculturally. All theologies are contextual within an unchanging divine word of God. After the four-decade long contestation, which was at times complex, if not complicated, the consensus was reached between the Evangelical and the Ecumenical scholars. The aftermath of it has a far-reaching implication for an effective and efficient contextualisation and communication of the gospel interculturally. In this regard, the question is: how to maximise an effective and efficient communication of the gospel interculturally? The goal is to point out the significance of John 1:14 in the whole debate for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication interculturally. It is from that context that this article analyses John 1:14 from a missional perspective with an aim to discuss three aspects: firstly, the basic nature of incarnation as a divine accommodation; secondly, the critical debate of gospel contextualisation and communication since the 1970s; and thirdly, the ultimate missional perspective of incarnation as a holistic and divine model of accommodation for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication. And lastly the concluding remarks.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article contributes to the understanding of the nature and significance of incarnation based on John 1:14. It aims to address the ongoing contextualisation debate from the 1970s until today and propose effective ways of contextualising and communicating the gospel in a multicultural South African context and beyond.

Keywords: missional; becoming; gospel; contextualisation; accommodation; interculturalisation.

Introduction

The general consensus reached by evangelical and ecumenical scholars in the four-decade-long debate is that emerging diverse theologies are contextual within an unchanging divine word of God. There are two main hermeneutical processes. The first involves moving away from the hermeneutic circle, which relies on an either/or dichotomic understanding of one's own local or the common global interpretation. The second involves moving towards an open hermeneutical spiral, which focusses on continued dialectical dialogue regarding complex, if not complicated, issues. (cf. Bernstein 1983:133). In this context, every cultural group have the right not only to read and/or interpret the Bible by and for themselves as Parratt (ed. 1987:142) and De Ward (1990:34) argued but also to respond and/or ask their own questions in searching for God's face and answers out of the Bible, as Mbiti (1986:46) and Ukpong (1999:105ff) argued. In the first chapter of his book, 'Reading John Missionally and Theotically', Gorman (2018:xviii, 2) argued that the bible and gospel are not only centred on the *missio Dei*, but that the concepts 'mission' and 'theosis' are coextensive (inseparable) concepts, which are missional hermeneutic (or interpretative) lens, and are embedded within the structure of John 1–12 under the themes of love, light and life. In that regard, this article analyses John 1:14 *from a missional perspective* with an aim to discuss three aspects: firstly, the basic nature of incarnation as a divine accommodation; secondly, the critical debate of gospel contextualisation and communication since the 1970s. Thirdly, the ultimate missional perspective of incarnation as a holistic and divine model of accommodation for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication. In this article, the concept 'incarnation is understood as a holistic and divine model of accommodation, which serves as a necessary hermeneutic bridge in handling diverse hermeneutic gaps (including the linguistic, historical, cultural, geographical gap, etc. (cf. Ramm 1970:1ff), that emerged because of diverse (local) theologies including the African, Asian and the Latin American theologies (cf. Ukpong 1984:502).

The basic nature and significance of incarnation

The definition of contextualisation

What was originally once narrowly known as adaptation and indigenisation is now commonly referred to as contextualisation. It was coined in 1972 by Dr Shoki Coe (cf. Shenk 2005:129). It is still a 'slippery' concept (cf. Carson 1987:219f) with no standard definition yet (cf. Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:35; Peters 1970:20ff). The aim of this research article can be better understood through the following 10 definitions of contextualisation:

1. Making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation (Kato 1975:34).
2. Presenting the supracultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms (cf. Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:1).
3. Enabling the message of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ to become alive as it addresses the vital issues of a sociocultural context and transforms its worldview, its values and its goals (Terry, Smith & Anderson 1998:318).
4. A process by which a local Christian community integrates the gospel with the real-life context, blending text and context into that single, God-intended reality called Christian living (cf. Luzbetak (1988:70, 79, 134).
5. The translation of the unchanging content of the gospel of the kingdom into a verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situations (Nicholls 2000:34).
6. Presenting the supracultural gospel message in culturally relevant terms and in a way that is meaningful to them, (yet still) faithful to God's revelation, out of Scriptures (cf. Hesselgrave 1978:143).
7. An attempt to communicate the gospel message in a way that is faithful to its essence, understandable by those to whom it is presented and relevant to their lives (Neely 1995:9).
8. About who and what the church is doing as God called and sent and it is about the church's incarnated in (midst of) recipients' lives (cf. Bosch 1991:421; Newbigin 1989:121).
9. How the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting (cf. Flemming 2005:13f).
10. An encounter between gospel and culture, which happens in faith community life who are called to live out Bible story (cf. Goheen 2000:145).

In almost all of the stated definitions, there is an element of a process of change or becoming. This article defines the concept of contextualisation as the process of becoming, embodying and/or incarnation of the divine word or text in the human world or context. In that regard, this article analyses John 1:14 as the base of the nature and significance of incarnation to address and/or handle

an effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication in the multicultural South African context and beyond.

Incarnation is understood within Johannine purpose: Belief in Christ

Box 1 presents the macro chiasmic structure of John 1:1–18 with the parallel set of A-B-C-D-B'-A'-pattern (cf. Byung 2009:100,152). This article regards the role of John 1:12–13 as it appears in the structure, not only as the pivotal theme or centre of the prologue of John 1:1–18 and of the whole gospel (cf. Jn 20:30–31) but also as a bridge, transition and/or turning point between the general coming of the Word (the revealed true light in creation and humanity in Jn 1:1–11) and the specific coming of the Word (the incarnated word who became flesh and dwell with and in human society [cf. Jn 1:14]). In that regard, John 1:14 is and should be understood within the Johannine purpose (of believing in Christ, the Word of God, to be saved and have eternal life) as it is pointed out in John 1:12–13 in Box 1.

The relationship between the concept incarnation and the concept contextualisation

Box 2 illustrates two main aspects: firstly, the general coming (revelation) of the Word (the true Light) to enlighten the world and humanity. Secondly, the specific coming (revelation) of the Word (the true Light) by incarnation (the Word becoming flesh) and dwelling in and among human society (cf. Jn 1:14; cf. Byung 2009:152ff). This article regards John 1:14 as the pivotal verse, which indicate not only the nature of incarnation, by the specific coming of the Word (the incarnated word who became flesh and dwell with and in human society [cf. Jn 1:14]) but also the significance of incarnation, in the positive perception and response towards such a glorious, gracious and truthful transformation of such incarnation revealed to creation and humanity (cf. Jn 1:15–18; cf. Byung 2009:152ff). From this analysis of John 1:14, this article demonstrates that contextualisation is related to incarnation in John 1:14, in that, they are both a process of becoming and/or embodiment of the divine word or text in the human world or context.

John 1:14 within the macro chiasmic structure of John 1:1–18

A (1–5) The relationship of the 'Logos' with God, creation and humanity

B (6–8) The witness to John the Baptist

C (9–11) The coming of the 'Logos' and the negative response to him

D (12–13) *Those who believe in the 'Logos' (Johannine purpose)*

C' (14) The coming of the 'Logos' and the positive response to him

B' (15) The witness of John the Baptist

A' (16–18) The relationship of the 'Logos' with new humanity, new creation and God the father

Source: Byung, C.G., 2009, "Belief" and "Logos" in the prologue of the Gospel of John: An analysis of complex parallelism', PhD dissertation, University of Stellenbosch

BOX 1: The macro chiasmic structure of John 1:1–18.

Antithetic parallelism between 'C' (John 1:9–11) and 'C' (John 1:14)**C (9–11) The coming of the 'Logos' and the negative response to him**

a (9) The coming of the 'true light' into the world

b (10) The negative response of the world to him: ignorance

a' (11a) The coming of the 'true light' into his own

b' (11b) The negative response of his own people to him: rejection

C' (14) The incarnation of the 'Logos' and the positive response to him

a (14ab) The coming of the 'Logos' into the faith community

b (14c) Its positive response to him: seeing

a' (14d) The figure of the incarnate 'Logos': confession of its belief

b' (14e) Its positive response to him: confession of its belief

Source: Byung, C.G., 2009, "Belief" and "Logos" in the prologue of the Gospel of John: An analysis of complex parallelism, PhD dissertation, University of Stellenbosch

BOX 2: The Antithetic parallelism: The relationship between John 1:9–11 and 14.

The concept incarnation and the missio Dei in union with his church

God becoming a man (incarnation) is the basis for believers to be born from above or born of God and hence to become sons of God (Byers 2017:60f; 159, 177, 206) who become like God (cf. Athanasius 318:54:3; Collins 2010:55, 62; Payton 2007:143). Believers are sons [τέκνα] and Jesus Christ is the Son [υἱός] of God and hence the only begotten Son [τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ] of God, in John (Byers 2017:59, 182). Jesus Christ who is the fullness of deity and the head of the body (the Church) shares a living union with his people (cf. Bruce 1968:201, 205, 233; Col 1:18f; 2:9f). The language used in the Pauline and Johannine traditions is evident in the gospel of John. It demonstrates the mutual and reciprocal relationship between God the Father and his Son – His Son is in the believers, the believers are in God the Father and both the Father and his Son are in them (Jn 17:21–23; cf. Jn 14:23; 1 Jn 1:24; Gorman 2016:124; Moule 1977:65). Even Pauline language, namely, 'in Christ', and 'Christ in us' is the metaphor language of this reciprocal indwelling and union (cf. Col 1:27; Eph 3:16–17; Collins 2010:42–45; Moule 1977:56–58, 61; O'Brien 1982:50, 133).

The concept of incarnation and the verb 'become'

God who is above his creation (nature and humanity) and unbound by it, not only choose to use and operate within or in terms of culture (Corn 1984:155f) but also God lowered himself to our level so that we can come to know him personally (Tinker 2004:332). In this article, it is indicated that the use of the verb 'becoming' is the foundational basis of contextualisation. As a way of cross-reference, from the beginning, contextualisation as becoming can be demonstrated in the creation of Adam (cf. Gn 2:7). In Genesis 2:7, the verb 'became' defines the creation of humans as holistic in terms of its scope, as it involves two realms, the spiritual (the breath of life) and the physical (the dust of the ground) becoming human being (the living being) to prepare him for cultural mandate (cf. Gn 1:28ff; 2:15ff). Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwell among us (cf. Jn 1:14) came to fulfil God's promise (cf. Gn 3:9, 15; Hiebert 1999:383).

In both cases, Adam became a living being through God's creation and to be restored by God. In the incarnation model, individual Christians and the corporate church are called to effectively and efficiently embody the core message of the gospel in the lives of their recipients. This is accomplished in order to be relevant and easily understood by those in their own multicultural and/or cross-cultural contexts. The concept of 'accommodation' originated from the Roman Catholic cycle, while the term 'indigenisation' came from evangelical circles. However, both concepts share the goal of communicating the gospel, specifically its eternal aspect of salvation, with the aim of bringing about repentance in the individual recipients and establishing indigenous churches (cf. Van der Meer 2001:16).

The relationship between the concept of incarnation and the divine accommodation

The concept of accommodation which means fitting, adapting and adjusting is used to explain the verb 'becoming' in John 1:14 (cf. Soliz et al. 2022:132f). John Calvin's contemporary, Erasmus connected the concept of accommodation and the concept of incarnation. To Erasmus (1905):

By His incarnation Christ accommodates revelation of the divine order to human capacity so that humans can reach above the physical realm to the spiritual reality of imitating Christ's simplicity, purity, and humility. (p. 33)

In many ways, the concept of divine accommodation was associated with John Calvin's argument that Christ's incarnation is not only the most fitting accommodated revelation of God to humanity, which is necessary to mediate between God and humanity (Doughty, Jr, 2017:2) but also the most fitting bridge of the epistemological and soteriological gap (cf. Calvin 1970:1.1.1.; Tinker 2004:332f). John Calvin (2008:2.12.4) insisted that 'Since the whole scripture proclaims that He was clothed with the flesh in order to become a Redeemer, it is presumptuous to imagine any other cause or end'. According to Huijgen 2011:100), 'Additionally, Jesus adapted to reach all people He contacted. This willingness to adapt to all potential believers was imitated by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 9:19–23; Muswubi 2023:4-6)'. This article used the concept of divine accommodation and Jesus Christ's incarnation interchangeably as the foundational basis for effective and efficient ways of gospel contextualisation and communication in a multicultural South African context and beyond.

Towards understanding the critical debate about gospel contextualisation since the 1970s

The much-contested (scholarly) debate since the 1970s on the newly coined concept of contextualisation led missionaries, church planters and missiologists to react to an ethnocentric (western)-oriented mission approaches, including the adaptation and/or accommodation within the ecumenical-oriented World Council of Churches and the indigenisation with its 'three-selves' formula of new church development

(namely, the self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson), which was dominant since the mid-1800s within the evangelical-oriented Protestant missionaries (cf. Kraft 2005:15ff; Moreau 2012:32ff; Shenk 1981:168f). The consensus reached within both cycles, that is the evangelical and ecumenical, is that the emerging diverse theologies are contextual as they both tend towards not only taking cultures seriously but also viewing the Bible as the unchanging divine word of God (cf. Nicholls 1979:24ff).

The critical debate on contextualisation

The critical view on the western-oriented adaptation and accommodation approach

Through the adaptation and accommodation of Church planting models, there was a tendency to heavily impose western cultural forms, symbols, thought patterns and clothing on the recipients, without much regard for their own cultural values (cf. Saayman 1991:31), many western Catholic missionaries were able to translate the Bible, hymns, psalms and songs, in addition to establishing mission stations that included schools, clinics, and hospitals (cf. Gallagher 1996:172f; Schreiter 1985:9ff). Adaptation refers to adapting the western-oriented gospel message and their uncriticised (or unquestioned) western culture-oriented church practices to fit in with their host who are the indigenous people and their cultural practices (cf. Schineller 1990:16). Accommodation refers to the incorporation of western-oriented practices, rituals and behaviours into the native Christian community from the host culture that are not Christian but are assumed to be consistent with the gospel (cf. Luzbetak 1988:67f; Moreau 2012:326).

The critical view on the western-oriented contextualisation by the evangelical missionaries

In the last two decades, there has been a debate among Evangelical scholars about the biblical basis for gospel contextualisation and communication. They have reached a consensus that there is no such thing as a pure or culture-free gospel. Newbigin (1986:4f, 1989:141ff) gave the main reasons for it, namely that the past models or approaches (adaptation, accommodation and indigenisation), incorrectly equated the gospel with the western culture, whereas there is a cultural 'blind spot' found in all cultural groups (Western, African, Asian and Latin American). In the late 1980s, the biblically based incarnation model was identified as the starting point of the prophetic word to be communicated (translated) in the local context with an expectation of receiving diverse insights (responses) from the local people with diverse religions, cultures and ideologies (cf. Gilliland 1989:53; Glasser 1989:49). Early in the 1980s, Hiebert (1987:109f) already proposed the renewed approach as the critical contextualisation with three steps involved: firstly, the exegesis of the local culture, religions and ideologies; secondly, the exegesis of the Scripture and thirdly, the critical responses whereby local issues (questions) are re-examined based on the Scripture (cf. Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:149–151). The receiver (the third horizon) forms the bridge between the text (the first

horizon) and the reader (the second horizon) for two reasons: firstly, so that God's message (and/or the textual meaning) is clearer in the new culture context and secondly, so that both the readers and the receptors are freed from, and moved out of, an orbit of the hermeneutic circle (of either/or dichotomy [cf. Bernstein 1983:133], towards the hermeneutic spiral of the continued dialectical dialogue). God's message (and/or the textual meaning) is compromised on two main conditions: firstly, when the readers preserve foreign cultural expressions and refuse to adapt them to the receptors' cultural expressions and secondly, when the receptors uncritically accept cultural beliefs because of diverse reasons including seeking favours (money, power, etc.). In this context, every cultural group has the right not only to read and/or interpret the Bible by and for themselves as Parratt (ed. 1987:142) and De Ward (1990:34) argued but also to respond or ask their own questions in searching for God's face and answers out of the Bible, as Mbiti (1986:46) and Ukpong (1999:105ff) argued. This article analyses John 1:14 from a missional perspective with an aim of discussing the third aspect, namely, the ultimate missional perspective of incarnation as a holistic and divine model of accommodation for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication in a multicultural South African context and beyond.

The ultimate missional perspective of incarnation

Holistic model for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation

Among the many models that illuminate the effective and efficient embodiment of the core message of the gospel in the lives of its recipients, enabling it to be relevant and understood within their multicultural and/or cross-cultural context. These four models, among others, are helpful in bringing the holistic dimension in the contextualisation of the gospel, namely, firstly, the incarnational model; secondly, the point of contact model; thirdly, the symbiotic model and fourthly, the intercultural model. In the light of these models, both the individual Christians and corporate church are called for effective and efficient gospel contextualisation and communication in a multicultural South African context and beyond.

Incarnation model: The incarnation model is a holistic model. The key word, 'becoming' as discussed in this article, clarifies this model. In this model, individual Christians and the corporate church are called to effectively and efficiently embody the core message of the gospel in the lives of their recipients. This is essential for the message to be relevant and easily understood by recipients within their own multicultural and/or cross-cultural contexts. Both the senders and recipients benefit in many ways including five main ways: firstly, the incarnate model addresses their holistic (physical and spiritual) needs in their respective contexts and also by being part of their holistic life (cf. Jn 1:14ff; Bosch 1991:389; Chester 1993:38, 127; Hesselgrave 1978:134f; Newbigin 1989:121; Saayman 1990:316; Schreiter 1985:6–16; Stott in Nakah 2003:8; Verkuyl

1978:3, 395). Secondly, the incarnate model enables them not only to read and interpret the gospel core message by and for themselves and hence to apply it in and for their own context but also to reflect and formulate their own local theology in their present (new) context based on their past (history) and future expectation (cf. Bevans & Schroeder 2004:73; Bosch 1991:421). Thirdly, the incarnate model also enables them to build not only the vertical relationship with triune God but also the inward relationship with oneself and outward relationship with humanity to form faith communities and with the rest of creation (nature) (cf. Eph 4:12; Bevans & Schroeder 2004:271; Newbigin 1989:85). Fourthly, the incarnate model enables them to distinguish the gospel core (constant) message from the gospel cover (context) in the sender's culture. This distinction is important in many ways, including avoiding situations where the core message of God (and/or its textual meaning) is compromised in two main ways. Firstly, when readers preserve foreign cultural expressions without adapting them to the cultural expressions of the receptors, for example, like a pupa in a cocoon being out-of-touch. Secondly, when there is an uncritical acceptance, reception, adoption and adaptation of the gospel cover of the sender's culture without distinguishing it from the gospel's core message. This leads to the creation of a chameleon-like message and life, which is manifested outwardly, mostly through hypocritical and superficial worship, as well as a pseudo-lifestyle that shows allegiance to both the native and alien gospel cover or culture (Hiebert 1985:184; Saayman 1990:311, 318). Although it is difficult to distinguish, it is important to clarify the difference between a cocooned-like gospel witness (a gospel cover that fits all contexts) and a chameleonic gospel witness (a gospel cover without a clear gospel core). Witnessing the gospel like a pupa in a comfortable cocoon occurs when the witness fails to consider two main aspects. Firstly, they do not acknowledge and appreciate the diverse (multicultural) context of both the sender (preacher) and the receptor (hearer) in the gospel witness. Secondly, they do not translate and/or apply the elements of the gospel core message into the given diverse (multicultural) contexts (cf. Bosch 1991:11; Crafford 1993:169). The western institutionalised (monologue) form of gospel sharing and worship became a disputable issue because the gospel cover is set above as if they are superior to the receptor's cultural forms or worship styles (cf. Molyneux 1984:280). The Chameleonic gospel is the gospel cover (socio-cultural) without a gospel core (message). It is a situation, where the gospel core is replaced by the gospel covers of either the Sender's or the recipient's culture and/or both. Without a gospel core, the gospel message loses its key identity and hence it is compared to a Chameleon that changes its colour in any context in which it finds itself. In this regard some of the African Independent Churches (AICs), the Pentecostal and/or charismatic churches adopted this kind of gospel contextualisation. In this case, the gospel core message is syncretised and hence such a mixture and/or confusion of the gospel core with the familiar gospel cover (or cultural forms) without making a distinction between the two is a point of concern.

Point of contact model: 'The greatest methodological issue faced by the Christian mission in our day is how to carry out the Great Commission in a multicultural world, with a gospel that is both truly Christian in context and culturally significant in form.' (cf. MacDonald 1983:6). God in his reconciling ministry in Christ not only allowed Christ to be incarnated (born) in a specific culture ministry but also from the very beginning initiated the point of contact, that is, the platform where there could be a mutual (two ways) relationship, sharing and dialogue (neither the monologue nor the monopoly) (cf. Gn 3:9; 2 Cor 5:17ff). Both the senders and recipients benefit in many ways including in three main ways: firstly, the point of contact model urges the interaction of the senders and the recipients on an equal footing whereby they respect each other's gospel cover (contexts and culture) (cf. Bosch 1991:421f, 427; Hiebert 1985:82; Kraft 1991:173; Newbigin 1978:10–22; Dao in Karecki 1993:153). Secondly, the point of contact model breaks down personal and socio-cultural barriers. It allows Christians and/or the Church to not only identify with but also enter into, the local context and the frame of reference of the recipients. This helps to gain a wide range of knowledge about the recipient's culture and develop a deep understanding of local norms, language, ceremonies, feasts, taboos, and more (cf. 1 Cor 9:22; Gourdet 1999:3,6; Lingenfelter in Hill 1993:1) It also positions the Christians as catalysts who participate with the attitude of children - one of respect and trust. By engaging in the same activities, such as speaking as the recipients speak, playing as they play, eating as they eat, feeling as they feel, and so on, the Christians can remove barriers and earn the respect, admiration, and the right to be heard. This approach aims to win as many people as possible by sharing the core message of the gospel in local contexts (cf. Bosch 1991:421; Kraft in Gourdet 1999:2; Newbigin 1989:121).

Symbiotic model: The symbiotic model (cf. Greek word, *συνβίωσις* constituted by Greek *σύν*, with and *βίος*, life) is a holistic model whereby both spiritual and physical life is viewed together as integral, interdependent and inextricably inter-woven and hence not as a separate realm. The symbiotic framework benefits both the spiritual realm and the social realm. The spiritual realm involved the theology from above or the heavenly led reforms including the gospel evangelisation performed by faith. The social realm involved the theology from below or the earthly led reforms including the social gospel carried out by praxis. This model is an effective intercultural witness because it combines two realms with one inseparable intention: the cultural mandate. It encompasses distinct, diverse and multidimensional ministries that address holistic community needs (cf. Bosch 1991:405, 411, 423; Chester 1993:38,127; Giddens 2000:22; Hendriks 2004:15).

Intercultural model: The intercultural mission model urges the sender to maintain Jesus Christ's incarnation model, which was imitated by Paul in his ministry (cf. Ac 20:17ff; 1 Tm 1:13f; 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Th 2:8; 5:17; 2 Th 3:3ff; Hb 5:7). The

readers are to use the model set by Christ and by Paul not only as the basis and standard of their own life and ministry, in the sense of relating with the self (self-introspection cf. Eph 1:16ff; 1 Th 3:10; 2 Th 1:11f) but also as the basis and standard of interacting with others inside and outside the Church as the body of Christ. As an example, Paul not only submitted himself to the Antioch local church as his base of God's call to whom he is accountable and hence reported his missionary journeys but also requested the Church (1) to pray to God for the missional journeys, efforts and successes (cf. Ac 13:2, 3-5, 26, 28; 18:22, 23) and (2) to support him for such mission endeavours (cf. Paul's missional plans in the west, as far as Spain, was shared with the Church in Rome for their prayers and support (cf. Rm 1:11-16; 15:15-24; 36-41; Drane 1986:262). In light of the intercultural missional model, Paul used teamwork, team effort and companions in his missionary journeys. Barnabas and John Mark set out with him on the first journey (Ac 12:25; 13:13) and Silas set out with him on the second (Ac 15:40). Paul sought a joint effort, mutual support and accountability with each other while sharing spiritual gifts, in instructions on spiritual formation and growth (cf. Ac 18:5; 20:4; 1 Th 1:1; Dittberner 1974:1549-1552:71; Scott 1971:112f). Paul must have recruited many and diverse fellow labourers (cf. Ac 17:4; 18:2, 3; 19:22; 20:4 2 Cor 1:19; 8:23; Col 2:7, 4:7, 10, 14; Phil 2:20, 22, 25; Rm 16). In the light of the intercultural missional model, Paul did his pastoral oversight (follow up) and nurturing of the new converts as the basis for further outreach, planting and expansion of the Church (Ac 14:21-22; 15:36, 41; 16:4-5). Among other models that shed light on the contextualisation of the gospel, these four models are helpful in bringing the holistic dimension to the contextualisation of the gospel, namely (1) the incarnational model, (2) the point of contact model, (3) the symbiotic model and (4) the intercultural model. In the light of these models, the individual Christians and corporate church are called to effectively and efficiently incarnate (embody) the gospel core message in the life of their recipients to be relevant and to be understood by the recipients in their own multicultural and/or cross-cultural context.

The significance of incarnation and the right of all human beings to theologise

Understanding the Incarnation in John 1:14 is significant to both the senders and recipients in many ways including in three main ways: firstly, the incarnate model addresses their holistic (physical and spiritual) needs in their respective contexts also by being part of their holistic life (cf. Jn 1:14ff; Bosch 1991:389; Chester 1993:38, 127; Hesselgrave 1978:134f; Newbigin 1989:121; Saayman 1990:316; Schreiter 1985:6-16; Stott in Nakah 2003:8; Verkuyl 1978:3, 395). Secondly, the incarnate model enables them not only to read and interpret the gospel core message by and for themselves and hence to apply it in and for their own context but also to reflect and formulate their own local theology in their present (new) context based on their past (history) and future expectation (cf. Bevens & Schroeder 2004:73; Bosch 1991:421). Thirdly, the incarnate model also enables them to build not only the vertical relationship with triune God but also the inward

relationship with oneself and outward relationship with humanity to form faith communities and with the rest of creation (nature) (cf. Eph 4:12; Newbigin 1989:85; Tillich, quoted by Bevens & Schroeder 2004:271).

The significance of incarnation and the practise of the intercultural contextualisation

The questions arose as to *'how far the Gospel should enter and address or answer the basic questions of the culture people group'* (cf. Bosch 1991:433). In the early 1960s, most of African theologians and the missiologists such as Kraft, Mbiti and Bediako among others, sought new and relevant methods and/or mission approaches to address their real context as the past missional method proved to be inadequate in an African context (cf. Bosch 1991:420f; ed. Parratt 1987:142; Pretorius et al. 1987:111; Ritchie 1999:8). In this way, the recipients need the gospel core of Christ's love to help them face many and diverse challenges who worship other gods and not the one true God worshipped in and through Christ (Yammori et al. 1996:7). In this stage, there is a deeper relation between the gospel and culture whereby the biblically faithful gospel core and a culturally appropriate gospel cover is used to address the recipients' needs and challenges (including the conditions of the unjust system which produced hopeless, helpless, homeless, fatherless, childless, orphanages and abused and broken families, starving and poverty conditions) (Muswubi 2023; cf. Prv.22:22; Guder 1998:14,19).

Syncretism means to put together, mixing, blending, mingling or confusing two incompatible elements, namely the six distinctive, indispensable and essential elements of the gospel core and the non-essential elements of the gospel cover like the belief in modern idols such as material wealth, health and prestige and/or the belief in the traditional idol (ancestor spirits veneration). In this case, the recipients are urged to believe in the prosperity and/or the ancestral gospel to be offered material wealth and physical health when the personal fate or curse or evil spirits or demons that caused the physical sufferings and sickness are cast out publicly or privately by consulting the medium including the prophets or diviners so that through the medium they can pray and worship to appease God (Kraft 1989:6, 408; Zvanaka 1997:74-75). The diluted gospel message is Christ plus idols, and both are regarded and worshipped as saviours and controllers of their lives (cf. Hiebert 1985:184). The results of such syncretic tendencies are the compromising, dilution and/or changed gospel core message and Christianity's basic nature (identity and features) is lost (cf. Bowen 1996:105; Gooch 1987:127; Hiebert 1999:382; Kraft 1999:390,408; Neely 1995:44; Newbigin 1997:7; Schreiter 1985:144).

Conclusion

This article investigates the significance and relevance of the concept of incarnation not only in the four-decade-long contested contextual debate since the 1970s but also in the gospel contextualisation intercultural. Although

the term contextualisation is a slippery term, this article defined and discussed the history of gospel contextualisation. It became clear in this article that the concept of becoming serves as a necessary hermeneutic bridge in handling the hermeneutic gap and hermeneutic circle (of either/or dichotomy), towards the hermeneutic spiral of the continued dialectical dialogue. It is important to avoid God's message (and/or the textual meaning) being compromised, as it can be compromised on two main conditions: firstly, when the readers preserve foreign cultural expressions and refuse to adapt them to the receptors' cultural expressions; and secondly, when the receptors uncritically accept cultural beliefs because of diverse reasons including seeking favours (money, power, etc.). In this context, this article used incarnation based on John 1:14 and in relation to the concept of divine accommodation (which is attributed to John Calvin) not only to explain the fact that God became human (in Christ) to bridge both the epistemological and soteriological gap (cf. Tinker 2004:332f) but also to address three aspects from missional perspective: firstly, the basic point, understanding incarnation as a divine accommodation; secondly, the critical point: understanding incarnation within the contextual debate since the 1970s; thirdly, the ultimate point: understanding incarnation as the holistic models for gospel contextualisation. To avoid conceptual disarray not only of the term contextualisation but also of the effective and efficient communication of the gospel interculturality, it becomes clear that using the concept as a foundation, every cultural group has the right not only to read (interpret) the Bible by and for themselves as Parratt (ed. 1987:142) argued, but also ask their own questions in seeking right answers from the Bible, as argued by Mbiti (1986:46) and Ukpong (1999:105ff). This article concluded its discussion by pointing to the ultimate missional perspective of incarnation in three main perspectives, firstly, in viewing incarnation as a holistic model and its benefits thereof; secondly, by reflecting briefly on the significance of incarnation and the rights of all human being to theologise and lastly, but not the least, to look at the significance of incarnation and the practice of the intercultural contextualisation and gospel communication.

All this was done as a way of finding ways and means for understanding the nature and significance of incarnation from John 1:14 with diverse objectives two of which are to attend the contextualisation debate from the 1970s up to now and to propose an effective and efficient ways of gospel contextualisation and communication in a multicultural South African context and beyond.

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