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"I Am the Bread of Life": Reinterpreting Jesus' Metaphor in John 6:35 in the Light of the Contemporary Society.

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Abstract

Metaphor is the creative link between an existing knowledge in order to comprehend the unknown problems, thereby getting new ideas. Studies on Jesus' teachings have focused mainly on his use of parables and miracle stories. However, little has been done on how the contemporary believer can use metaphors in his language and culture to engrave the various teachings of Jesus in the heart of the contemporary believers. This study explores an exegetical study of the bread metaphor Jesus used in John 6:35 with the aim of bringing out its values for contemporary church leaders in communicating religious virtues to believers. The Johannine Gospel is selected because of its wide use of metaphors in proclaiming the message of Christ. The study adopts George Lakoff's theory of Conceptual Metaphor. The study affirms that the use of metaphors to communicate the Gospel message is very relevant in the contemporary society. Preachers and teachers of the word of God should use symbols in their local languages to communicate Jesus' teaching in appropriate contexts.

Keywords: Metaphorisation, Johannine Gospel, Conceptual Metaphor, Jesus' Teachings

Introduction

The contemporary age is that of technological advancement and social media explosion. School curricula, except those in faith-based institutions, are mostly exclusive of religious instructions. Most societies learn more from the social media, even on religious matters, at the expense of instructions from religious worship places. Hence there are, most times, conflicts between the language of the contemporary Christian, the cultural language and the religious language. This often results in friction between the contemporary Christian, the church and the home. The home and the church see some cultural expressions and symbols as "ungodly" and demonic; the contemporary Christian sees the church and the home as institutions that would not allow him 'belong' to his own "world". This situation requires serious attention if the church would not lose her younger generation as a result of these frictions.

Asadu and Egbe opine that style and language are tools which the Nigerian government can use in national re-orientation and transformation to curb all forms of imperialism and return Africanness to the African man and woman. Omole corroborates this by noting that, in the present stage, the interaction between language, culture and education is that in which there is the call for the replacement of English with indigenous languages because the standard of the indigenous language is falling and the language is facing some forms of manipulation. Omole's claim implies that using indigenous tools to convey religious instruction would not be out of place.

Review of Related Literature

The word 'metaphor' is a transliteration of the Latin and Greek words μεταφορα (*metaphora),* meaning "a transfer" or "carrying over" (Partridge 400). It is a *combination* of the terms μετα(*meta*) meaning "over" or "across" and φερω(*phero*) meaning "I bear" or "I bring". It is a derivative of the Greek μεταφερειν (*metapherein),* meaning "to transfer", "to bear" or "to carry" (Mish730). According to Mish, it is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (730). In other words, an object, activity or idea can be treated as a metaphor. Delvin on the other hand, sees metaphor as the idea of being a symbol or being figurative. Onions defines it as "a figure of speech involving the transference of a name to something analogous" (572).

The place of metaphor in the development and extension of natural languages in all disciplines and life's activities is significant because it talks about one thing as being another, such as the case of theoretical models, and talks about one thing as-if it were another (Keehley). A metaphor is about implicit comparison because it involves using an object or an idea in place of another. Zheng observes that what enables cognition to map one thing onto another is resemblance in the objective, the physical shape and function as well as mentally. Notably, to use metaphor effectively, it must be something that can fit appropriately into the target domain (17). This corroborates Banjo's call for a "symbiotic relationship between English and the indigenous languages, a pooling of the resources of all the languages without foreclosing the contributions that any of them can make" (187). To him, there is the need for the formal or creative use of the indigenous languages. This also goes for religious instructions. It would not be out of place to use elements in the indigenous languages/words that have resemblance to the biblical words to convey religious instructions to contemporary Christians. This is also in tandem with Stott's view that,

> ...metaphor, when extended into a brief coherent story, can deliver succinct implicit messages typically to convey abstract principles. Cultural wisdom, moral values, and lessons of life have long been embedded in and imparted through fictional narrative, such as the parables of Jesus, the tales of the legendary (7).

For example, the kingdom of God, which is the hallmark of Jesus' teachings, is a political metaphor (Powell).

According to Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow, "Conceptual metaphor theory posits that complex conceptual metaphors combine, and integrate primary conceptual metaphors in culture-specific metaphorical realizations" (185). To cognitive linguists, "image schemas" are structuring devices which every human being uses in the conceptualisation of complex concepts and the meaning

explication (Babatunde and Aremu130). They proposed that "metaphor is a fundamental property of concepts, moulding our very thinking, and understanding and not just a feature" (Stott et al. 10). Stott et al. opine,

> Lakoff and Johnson's thesis is that our mental representations of complex concepts are inherently structured by a set of metaphorical correspondences, which give rise to our cognitive processing of those concepts. In addition, these underlying conceptual configurations allow us to generate a surface stream of metaphorical linguistic expressions and also to comprehend figurative language spoken or written by others (p. 11)

According to Lakoff and Johnsen, "…so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms…" (p. 115). The theory involves interactions between the source domain and the target domain. The metaphor is a bridge between a source domain, which is more concrete to a target domain, which is more abstract (Lakoff). To Lakoff and Johnson, one of the key conceptual metaphors human beings hold is "life is a journey", in which the concept of life is the target domain, while the concept of journey is the source domain. The target domain is being shaped by the source domain (Stott et al*.,* 2010, p. 11). In other words, one understands one conceptual domain in terms of another. Ritchie (2013, p. 70) argues that in "Conceptual Metaphor Theory, relatively few concepts are based on direct physical experience."

> …a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a *similar* concept. But such issues are not matters for definitions; they are empirical questions … the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another (Lakoff, 1992, p. 1).

Nevertheless, there have been several criticisms of the theory. Donoghue (2014, p. 165) opines that Lakoff and Johnson do not stick completely to metaphors because they, at times, turn to personification, metonymy, and synecdoche. Also, Lakoff and Johnson assume that conceptual metaphors represent unitary and consistent mappings between concepts and direct experiences. Ritchie (2013, p. 82) avers that the "underlying mappings often seem to be ambiguous, and may be interpreted differently by different people, based on their own unique experiences. The underlying mappings may also change over time, as familiar metaphors are reinterpreted in the light of new cultural experiences." To (Stott et al., 2010, p. 12), "Lakoff and Johnson's identification of many clusters of apparently consistent mappings between abstract and concrete concepts, and the realization that our language and thought about many abstract ideas is fundamentally anchored to other domains of cognition, was an important and major step forward".

If metaphor would be used effectively in conveying the teachings of Jesus, then the differences in time and cultural context must be taken into consideration through the process of transymbolisation, which takes cognizance of the historical and cultural situations of Jesus' time (van Aarde, 1994). Hence, "in judging the historical value of Jesus material with regard to separate witnesses, it is necessary to take into account genetic relationships and attestation" (van Aarde, 1994, p.243).

Metaphor is used in various ways in the Old and New Testaments. Kanagaraj (2006, p. 119) notes that God is called the father of creation (Isa. 63: 16; 64:8, Deut 32:8, Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 6:32, Ephesians 3:14-15 and Luke 11:11), the father of Jesus (Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3, Mk. l4:36) and the father of those who believe in Jesus (John 1:12, Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). God is also depicted as a mother variously, as having a womb (Isa. 46:3-4; cf. Deut. 32:18 and Gen. 1-2), grasp and pants like a woman in labour (Isa. 42: l4b) and like a woman curdling her child (Psalm 131:2-3). Kanagaraj (2006) avers that,

> …most of the NT metaphors have their roots in the OT. The same God who worked in the history of Israel in a particular way revealed himself in Jesus Christ for the world…. Metaphors drawn from ordinary family and rural and semi-rural life-situations (e.g., Father/Mother-Son-Children; Tree-Fruits-Harvest; Sower-Reaper; Shepherd-Vine) speak to people (p. 128).

Metaphors and analogies abound in the New Testament with the aim of articulating the importance of Jesus and the kingdom of God to the audience (Kochnash, 2016, p. 8).

The man Jesus, who was born around A. D. 1, in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, and grew up in the small village of Nazareth, was conversant with the nooks and crannies of the Judean Province under the Roman Empire. He lived a simple life. Not a nomad, but always moving most times on foot from one place to the other delivering the message of God to the low and the high in the society (Destro and Pesce, 2012). To some, Jesus was a religious leader; some see him as a great philosopher; yet others see him as a political leader because Jesus was conversant with the social and political situations of the society, he found himself. The people of his days saw him, leading social and political revolution (Powell, 1998, p. 53)**.** Richard Horsley calls him the social prophet; Geza Vermes identifies him as a charismatic figure; Morton Smith views Jesus as a magician; Ben Witherrington III sees Jesus as the Jewish sage; while F. Gerald Downing conceives of Jesus as the cynic philosopher (Powell, 1998, pp. 51-65). Jesus used everything within his environment, including various literary techniques, to teach his audience. Ortberg (2012) notes that, "…Jesus taught to change lives. In the educational system of our day, we tend to think of *teaching* as the transfer of information. The teacher pours information into the student like pouring water into an empty jug, and the student is evaluated by one thing only: can he parrot back what the teacher said?" (p. 50). "… although God's rule is 'unobservable', Jesus (like anyone of us) used metaphorical language to articulate God's presence among people" (van Aarde, 1994, p. 247).

The Gospel of John was originally written in Greek, perhaps in Ephesus in Asia Minor, in the last decade of the first century. The identity of its author or authors is unknown. The composition history is complicated as some scholars posit a prior written source and successive editions and the discrepancies in the historical narratives. These are based on its geographical inconsistencies, irreconcilable chronological and content differences, as well occasional interruptions (Adele, 2001:32, 34). "None can be taken as 'gospel truth'; they are developed from particular readings of the Gospel itself" (Adele, 2001:32). It is the story of Jesus, the world, and the community. The "I am" sayings of Jesus are found mainly in John's Gospel.

John is completely independent of the Synoptics. Some scholars (Ford, 2021; Anderson, 1995; Kurek-Chomycz, 2018) have thought that he tried to combat Gnosticism, a doctrine that insisted that the created order is evil and that he was confronting Docetism which denied the biblical testimony of the full humanity of Jesus Christ. This may be true, but his purpose is clearly stated in John 20:31: "these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." John was writing to oppose the followers of John the Baptist, and Christian teachers who gave too much place to the sacraments or too little place to the sacraments. John's principal aim was to present to the world a kind of "Hellenized" Christianity (Morris, 1971, pp. 35-40).

There are 140 sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Powell (1998:67) notes that Robert Funk claims that none of the 140 sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John were deemed most likely to be authentic, 134 were those deemed least likely to be authentic, only 6 represented degrees of uncertainty. He adds that:

> For example, the Synoptic Gospels repeatedly present Jesus as a teller of parables, but Jesus never tells a single parable in the Gospel of John. Historians do not allow the Johannine portrait to cast doubt on the image of Jesus as a parable-teller, but assume that the Synoptic portrait is accurate and that John just missed this point (or omitted it because it did not serve his interests). Again, in John's Gospel Jesus talks a great deal about himself, claiming to be "the light of the world" (8:12) and "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). He does not make such grandiose claims about himself in the other Gospels. Historians are reluctant to admit the authenticity of such claims on the testimony of John's Gospel alone (Powell, 1998, p. 43).

The implication is that the “I am” sayings of Jesus, according to the Jesus Seminar, might not be the authentic sayings of Jesus. The Jesus Seminar concluded that some of the sayings did not belong to Jesus but were put in Jesus’ mouth by Peter and Paul (Powell, 1998, p. 74).

Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar (1993) divide the quest for the sayings of Jesus into seven pillars. The first pillar began with Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) and followed by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who made a distinction between what the authors of the gospels said about Jesus and the real teachings of Jesus from the Christian doctrine. David Friedrich Strauss, in the second pillar, distinguished between anything mythical and historical in the Gospel. Hence, the Gospels consist of supernatural Jesus, the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus. The third pillar was the recognition of the Gospel of Mark as prior to Matthew and Luke. The fourth pillar was the identification of the hypothetical source Q as the explanation for the “double tradition" –the material Matthew and Luke have in common beyond their dependence on Mark. Johannes Weiss (1892) and Albert Schweitzer (1906) saw Jesus' ethic as only an “interim ethic”, which is good only for a brief period before the end of age. Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann dismissed the quest of the historical Jesus as an illegitimate attempt to secure a factual basis for faith –an attempt to "prove" Christian claims made on behalf of Jesus. This was upturned in the 1970s and 1980s when the liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus and the search for the authentic words of Jesus began. The fifth pillar looked at the different genres in the gospels and this gave rise to the liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus from Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus. The sixth pillar recognized the fundamental contrast between the oral culture of Jesus and a print culture of modern times. The Jesus of history never had the opportunity of the modern prints.

Hence, all that could be found of him would be sourced from "fragments of tradition that bear the imprint of orality: short, provocative, memorable, oft-repeated phrases, sentences, and stories (Funk, Hoover and The Jesus Seminar, 1993:4). The seventh pillar aimed to prove that details in the Synoptic Gospels were nothistorical. Funk, Hoover and The Jesus Seminar (1993) notes that this task, undertaken by D. F. Strauss, failed and this is captured below:

> The current assumption is more nearly the opposite and indicates how far scholarship has come since Strauss: the gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand. Supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so. The Jesus Seminar has accordingly assumed the burden of proof: the Seminar is investigating in minute detail the data preserved by the gospels and is also identifying those that have some claim to historical veracity. For this reason, the work of the Seminar has drawn criticism from the skeptical left wing in scholarship –those who deny the possibility of isolating any historical memories in the gospels at all. Of course, it has also drawn fire from the fundamentalist right for not crediting the gospels with one hundred percent historical reliability. (p. 5)

Theἐγώεἰμι ("I am") sayings are not peculiar to the New Testament alone. The statement, "I Am" appears 154 times in the Old Testament with the final form of Old Testament "I Am" in Malachi 3: 6. The phrase "I am that I am" (אהיה אשר אהיה) is represented in the Greek LXX asἐγώεἰμιὁὤν. ἐγώεἰμιis first person present active indicative of the verb to be – "I am", whileὤνis the present active participle of the same verb. The second "I am" in the phrase is translatedὁὤν. Farrar (2009) notes,

> It is easy to see how this phrase was widely interpreted by readers of the LXX to express God's absolute existence, which transcends time and space – particularly by those who were influenced by the Platonic notion of 'being.' We have suggested that absolute presence with mankind is the primary meaning of the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* in this verse, but these two interpretations are complementary rather than contradictory (p. 12).

ἐγώεἰμιis the divine word of self-revelation and of command (cf. Exod. 3.6, "I am the God of your father, the God, 3. 14, "I AM WHO I AM.", 20.2, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt…." The same formula is found in the Prophets, e.g. Isa. 5 I .12, "I, I am he that comforts you…" The Wisdom Literatures emphasizes the wordאני (e.g. I in Prov.8; elsewhere rendered ἐγώεἰμι, hereἐγώ) and is in general cast in an "egoistic" form; and becomes a declaratory and revelatory formula due to the form of the Isis aretalogy (cf. Ecc.l. 24).

ἐγώεἰμι appears 63 times in the new Testament, 12 times in the Synoptic Gospels and 32 times in the Gospel of John.ἐγώεἰμιconsist of two Greek words, ἐγώ translated "I" and εἰμι translated "I am". εἰμιis the Lexical, first person singular, present active, indicative form of the verb, and means "I am".

In the Synoptic Gospels, "I" is a declaratory formula (Matthew 5.22,28,32,34,39,44, ἐγώδὲλέγω ὑμῖν (But I say to you); Mark 9. 25, ἐγὼἐπιτάσσω (I command you)*;* Matt. I2. 28, Luke 11. 20, ἐγώἐκβάλλω (I cast out). The "ἐγώ" is veiled under parables in the Synoptic Gospels which are subject matter of the Johannine "I-sayings" (Barret, 1978:292). In the book of Revelation, the phrase "I am" is mentioned eight times, all affirming the sonship, deity and eternal nature of Christ.

When together, ἐγώεἰμι has two uses, the predicate nominative use and the absolute term. When the phrase ἐγώεἰμι is in the predicate Jesus is referring to his actions that are associated with his saving work in the gospel, while those without a predicate refer to Jesus' Divinity, "…Christological altitude and explicitness of messianic reference" (Anderson, 2011, p.144). Nevertheless, Henwood (2018, p.6) notes that "it is the surrounding context of Jesus' use of this Greek expression that determines whether Jesus is claiming to be the "I AM" of the Scriptures or not". The ἐγώεἰμι of John 6:35 is in the predicate nominative.

The "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John can be divided into two: ἐγώεἰμι*and* ὀῶν. The ἐγώεἰμιcan be subdivided into three. One, the ἐγώεἰμι*sayings* with predicates which point to Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the incarnate Word, and a man in whom YHWH himself is present. These include, "I am the Bread of life" (John 6:35), "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12), "I am the Door of the sheep...I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:7, 11), "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and "I am the True Vine" (John 15:1). Two, the stand-alone ἐγώεἰμιsayings are not intrinsically a claim to deity or even a remarkable claim, "Before Abraham was, I am [he]" (John 8:58) , "Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (John 8:24, 28), "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:26), "It is I; do not be afraid" (John 6:20), "That...you may believe that I am he" (John 13:19), "When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:5-8) and three the other ἐγώεἰμιsayings of Jesus which is in John 8:23 " I am from above". The ὀῶνexpresses Christ's absolute existence. These are, "The only God, who is at the Father's side" (John 1:18) and "He who is from God" in John 6:46 (Farrar, 2009). Quoting Leon Morris, Vereş (2008:125) claims that the "I am" sayings are in agreement with the purpose of the Gospel of John in 20:3: "when Jesus used the 'I am' construction, he was speaking in the style of deity. 'I am' mostly represents the speech of the heavenly Father or of the Son."
This work looks into one of the seven "I AM" sayings of Jesus in the fourth Gospel that are metaphors and how it can be relevant in the contemporary society.

Exegesis of John 6:35

In John 6:35, Jesus said to the multitude, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst". He repeated the same phrase, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς ("I am the bread of life") in verse 48. Jesus made the statement after the feeding of the multitude. There was the probability that the people were more than five thousand since five thousand men sat on the grass.

εἰμί("I am"): The use of the verbεἰμί,, "I am", in the present active indicative indicates preparedness of Jesus to act proactively in all situations affecting his followers. It lays emphasis

on and points to Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the incarnate Word, and a man in whom YHWH himself is present.

ἄρτος(bread) : bread is in the nominative masculine denoting potency and energy. Christ told us of the origin of this spiritual food; secondly, he proved what he has just said (v. 33). "The metaphor "bread of life" Gn. 6:35, 41, 48) denotes Jesus as the Son of God whose origin is in heaven and who took flesh and blood. Those who come to him believe in him (metaphorically "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man" [Jn. 6:51-58]) will have the heavenly life both now and at the end-time" (Kanagaraj, 2006, p. 124).

The questions that an average African man would ask are why the people took Jesus for an expected prophet (6:14), why they wanted to make him a king by force (6:15), why the people were waiting to see him (6:22), why they travelled to another town, Capernaum, seeking Jesus (6:24), and even when Jesus seemingly insulted them, they would not still leave him alone (6: 26-27). One reason: Jesus gave them Bread. These are serious questions because, to an African man, bread is not one of the best or special delicacies. A Yoruba of Western Nigeria would appreciate *amala* (yam-flour meal); the Hausa man in the North would prefer *Tuwo* (maize/ rice flour meal) to bread; while an Igbo man from the East would prefer *Apu* (Cassava starch meal) to bread.

Bread is a primary food in the East. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word,לחם l*ehem,* meaning bread is also in the noun common masculine singular absolute denoting potency and energy. *Lehem* played a large part in the vocabulary and in the life of the ancient Hebrews. In Genesis 3:19, Judges 13:15-16 and 1 Samuel 20:27 it stands for food in general. It may include honey (1 Sam. 14:24, 28) or to mean goat's milk (Proverbs 27:27). In Palestine bread is "sacred" as everything depended upon the wheat and the barley which also requires the short period of rain to thrive well. Bread is so sacred that a passerby who sees a scrap of bread should not tread on it. Besides, the exchange of bread is a sign of friendliness and hospitality; a stranger that eats the bread of his host is bound to his host (I Kings 18:19). It is so important that the wicked person would give up his wickedness for "handfuls of barley" (Ezekiel 13:19). It is used figuratively in many passages of the Bible. The Psalmist, when in grief and distress, refers to "the bread of tears" (Ps 80:5) and "the bread of sorrows" (Ps 127:2). In Proverbs 31:27, the virtuous woman would not eat "the bread of idleness". In Hosea, "the bread of mourners" (9:4) is eaten at the time of death. Prophet Isaiah, in times of hardship, refers to "the bread of adversity" (30:20). (Eager, ISBE).

Besides, Palestine, in Jesus' time, was a dry land with short period of rainfall. The only arable crop that could stand the short period of rainfall was wheat. There were no great rivers in Canaan; so, it depended precisely upon rainfall. The Jordan River was always so heavily laden with chemicals that its potential nourishment was lost to the Canaanite society. Hence, the promise of God to the Israelites in Lev. 26:3-20 was not a joke: "If you ... observe my commandments ... then I will give you rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase ... but if you will not hearken to me ... I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass ... and your land shall not yield its increase."

In the New Testament, four words translate to food: τροφη (Matthew 3:4; Matthew 6:25;10:10;24:45; Luke 12:23; John 4:8; Acts 2:46; 9:19; 27:33, 34, 36; Acts 14:17; and James

2:15), βρῶσις (2 Corinthians 9:10), σιτομέτριον (Luke 12:42), andβρώμα (Matthew 14:15; Luke 3:11; 9:13). In most cases the King James Version of the Bible translates it meat, except in Acts 14:17 and James 2:15. Jesus knew the importance of bread that he included it in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew). He also knew that his disciples would not want to go on a mission trip without the bread. He, therefore specifically mentioned bread among the things they should not take along (Mark 6:8; Matt. 10:10). In the Lord's Supper, Jesus included bread: it would be difficult for the Church to do without the bread (Eager, ISBE).

John is not speaking of the sacrament. The Jews had experienced the provision of manna in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus had fed five thousand people with two fishes and five loaves of bread. The people knew the importance of the bread for their survival (Morris, 1995:316). The notion of heavenly bread is rooted not only in the Old Testament and Jewish thought but also with the Greeks and the East, in general. The "bread of life", however, assumes the sapiential interpretation in the Johannine Gospel" "God feeds men by his word; Jesus is his word…. and the primary reference is not to the Eucharist but to union with Christ effected by faith, through which life is conveyed to men. …If a man truly has life-giving contact with Jesus, he never ceases to be dependent on him" (Barret, 1978, p. 293).

It should be noted that Jesus did not use any of the four words (τροφη, βρῶσις, σιτομέτριονandβρώμα) used for food in the New Testament Greek to speak to his audience most of whom were Jews. He, rather, used the wordἄρτος, bread, which reminded the Jewish people of their relationship with God in Egypt, during the period of the Exodus. It also reminded them of the fact that wheat, and one of its products, is so important for their physical existence and their spiritual well-being because of its importance in the Temple, and during their major festivals.

In the Yoruba Bible, bread is translated as *ounje,* food. It is translated as *ounje* (food) or akara (fried bean product) in *Dictionary of Yoruba Language* (1979:23). Both the Yoruba Bible and the Dictionary of Yoruba Language do not give the exact meaning of what bread is among the Jewish people of the first-century Palestine. Fakinlede (2003, p. 85) translates bread as*iwukara* (leavened bean flour) among the Yoruba. This may not give the exact meaning of what bread is among the Jewish people of the first Century Palestine. *Akara* is a food derived from beans and not wheat. Hence, to say Jesus is the *akara* or bread of life would not be strong enough for the traditional Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa man. While bread was a special delicacy and staple food among the Jews of Jesus' time, it has never been among the major traditional ethnic groups, and the contemporary Nigerian Youth. *Akpu* (cassava flour), *Tuwo* (Maize/rice flour) and *Iyan/Amala* (Pounded Yam/Yam flour) would be staple foods among the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba elders respectively, while Sharwama, Pizza and fried rice are preferred delicacies among the Nigerian contemporary youth.

Towards an Effective Use of Metaphors in the Church

The amalgamation of Christianity with African cultural and religious context has given rise to three views: a. the conservative Christians who would not want to permit any cultural inculsion

that are in conflict with the ones revealed in the Bible into Christianity. Such inculsion includes cultural values such as some languages, dancing steps and other cultural practices; b. the rigorist Christians who believe that there should not be any amalgamation between the African cultural and religious context as this will be a constraint to African religious and cultural values; c. the moderate African religionists who believe that African cultural and religious values could relate without any constraint to either of them (Mokhoathi, 2017, 8).

At the beginning of missionary endeavours in Africa, indigenous languages were employed in preaching the Gospel and to keep the locals' self-confident, thereby making a deep impression on the hearts and minds of the people (Dally 2014, p.11). Kipuri (2009) avers,

> "Language is an important component of one's identity. It is fundamental to understanding values, beliefs, ideology and other intangible aspects of culture. It enables people to communicate as specific peoples and determines participation, access to knowledge, leadership and depth of understanding" (p. 57).

However, in recent times, there are various views about using the indigenous language to spread the message of Jesus Christ in the contemporary society**.** This is not an issue only within the church, it is an issue in the larger society. Kipuri (2009) claims,

> "Indigenous languages were dismissed as the "gibbering of monkeys" or "barbaric tongues" that were to be eradicated to make way for an English (or French or Spanish, etc.) that "all who are civilized can understand". These assimilation policies lead to the destruction of languages and can thus be considered a form of ethnocide or linguistic genocide" (p. 58).

As Kipuri (2009) observes, some Christians feel that the indigenous languages are demonic and so should not be used in the church. Therefore, one must stick to the exact words used in the Bible. Some youths turn to the use of English or "speaking in tongues". As a matter of fact, to use indigenous metaphor would not be accepted at times, because they are perceived to be demonic, and would probably lure a "born again" to paganism. Equally, to use the contemporary language is also a problem, especially to the leaders and elders in the Church. They believe the younger generation's language is vulgar, killing the elders' linguistic heritage, and if care is not taking, this linguistic heritage would go into extinction. Nevertheless, languages are evolving. There is currently a deviation from the indigenous languages and the church would do well to shift ground and blend with the society using the contemporary metaphors that are not sinful, rather than seeing the languages as evil and demonic.

Jesus knew the nitty-gritty of his language and culture. He used the language to appeal to the emotion of his audience. Jesus used things that are of utmost importance in their culture to interact with his followers. For instance, using the metaphor of Jesus as the bread of life has serious cultural and spiritual implication to his audience.

Jesus did not use luxurious, expensive, gorgeous things to describe himself. Rather, he used things that are of low appearance but that have high values to describe himself. All metaphors that Jesus used are common and within the reach of every believer, high or low. The wheat and, even, the vine are usually cultivated mostly by the low and the poor in the Jewish society. The low in the society pastures the lamb. The same goes for the shepherd and the light metaphors.

The preachers of today should not use things that are not within the reach of the members or believers while using metaphors in their languages to preach the Gospel.

Jesus was very specific. He did not use any of the four Greek words for food but he used *artos* (bread), the particular word that would appeal to his audience. Jesus, wanting his audience to have a better understanding of his message, took time to explain what he meant, taking them through their wilderness experience to see the importance of the bread as against some other foods (John 6:35-58).

Conclusion

The use of metaphors to convey the message of Christ is good and not demonic. Jesus held the language and culture of his audience and his environment in high esteem. Just like he used images within his environment to convey his messages, the contemporary believers would do well to use images within their environments to convey the message of Christ. The contemporary language/slang of the youth within the society that are not sinful can also be used to spread the message of Christ. If this is done, the adults in the church would not become bored, while the younger generation would feel relevant in the Church and the Church would not lose them to other religions and beliefs, resulting in moral laxity within the society.

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