

Dissertation Title: LAMIN SANNEH ON MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO  
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: A CRITICAL STUDY

The Researcher : Anikamarn Chitpakdee

Advisor : Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf

Academic Year : 2009

### ABSTRACT

This research paper has three objectives. Firstly, it aims at studying Sanneh's view of Bible translation. Secondly, it attempts to analyze Sanneh's view of missiology and World Christianity. Lastly, it aims to criticize Sanneh's missiological approach to religious pluralism. The thesis statement is Lamin Sanneh's missiological approach is effective only within world Christianity. However, there are shortcomings when it comes to his missiological approach to religious pluralism. Lamin Sanneh's missiological approach to religious pluralism is inclusivism. As a result, the research paper selects theological theories proposed by Hans Küng, John Hick and Paul Knitter as role models for those who want to engage in missiological approaches to religious pluralism. The methodology employed are interdisciplinary approaches including ecumenical, interreligious dialogues, intercultural communication, sociological and anthropological approaches with a documentary research such as books and journals. The limitation is that when it comes to Christianity, it means Christianity in general, not specific to any Christian sect.

The main results show that firstly Lamin Sanneh's view of Bible translation and missiology are very effective in World Christianity. That is, Christianity is rooted

in Judaic and Greek cultures. As a result, Christianity needs to relativize from these Judaic and Greek roots as well as to destigmatize all cultures and languages. For Lamin Sanneh Christianity is a religion of cultural pluralism. All languages and cultures are equal in conveying God's words. Local or indigenous people should be able to receive God's words through their local cultures and mother tongues, not Latin language or Western cultures. Additionally, this research employs interdisciplinary approaches including those of social sciences. For social scientists, culture is a broad term that can include religions, beliefs, norms, social values or rules of behaviors etc. Secondly, inculturation is recommended in this research. Inculturation will allow Christianity to show its high respect for indigenous cultures. Thirdly, the essence of a religion is lost in religious syncretism. Many theologians deny syncretism. In contrast, from secular perspectives, syncretism can be perceived as being attractive and worth a further research. Moreover, when it comes to religious conversion, Sanneh states that religious conversion comes from internal factors only, not external. From theological perspectives, internal factors mean the work of the Holy Spirit and all external factors are already included in internal processes. However, many social scientists view religious conversion differently. For them, internal factors mean an individual's psychology while the rest is considered as external factors such as economics, politics or social bonds. Many sociologists say religious conversion comes from both internal and external factors.

Next, the last finding shows that when Sanneh attempts to engage in missiological approaches to religious pluralism, shortcomings have occurred. This is because Sanneh stands on the position of inclusivism, not religious pluralism. Theories proposed by Paul Tillich, Hans Küng, John Hick, and Paul Knitter are

selected as role models for those who want to engage in missiological approaches to religious pluralism. As for recommendations for further researches, Firstly, Lamin Sanneh does significantly contribute his thoughts on Islam and African Christianity. Thus, it is suggested for any researcher to specifically conduct his research on Islam and Christianity in Africa. Secondly, this research paper deals with Christianity in general only, not any particular religious denomination. Thus, it is recommended to limit the research to one Christian denomination only so that discussions can be deep and more concentrated. Thirdly, the issue of religious conversion and inculturation discussed in this research can be selected for serious discussions in other research papers. Lastly, regarding missiological approaches to religious pluralism, only theories of Hans Küng, John Hick and Paul Knitter are selected to discuss. Therefore, there are still other inclusivists and religious pluralists whose theories could be picked up for a comparative study.

