

INITIATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

A systematic symbolic analysis

With special reference to aspects of Igbo religion in Nigeria

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Abbreviations

AAE	American Archaeology and Ethnology
AAP	Africa: Apostolic Pilgrimage
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
ACR	African Clergy Review
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
A. D.	Anno Domini
AER	African Ecclesial Review
AICA	Articles evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa
Amecea	Association of Members of Episcopal Conference of East Africa
AS	African Studies
ATJ	African Theological Journal
AWACC	Anglophone West Africa Catechetical Commission
BATH	Bulletin of African Theology
B. C.	Before Christ
BGPhMA	Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters
BK	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BRAB	Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs
BRC	Baptism, Rites of Passage, and Culture,
C. B. C. N.	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CChrSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CDWDS	Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments
C	Canon
CASAS	The Church in African and the Special African Synod
CC.	Canons
CI	Catholic International
Chron	Chronicles
CIC	Codex Iuris Canonici
CIWA	Catholic Institute of West Africa
CMJ	Can Medical Association Journal
Col	Colossians
Cor	Corinthians
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticum Latinorum
DBT	Dictionary of Biblical Theology
De Mystr.	De mysteriis
De Sacr.	De Sacramentis
DOL.	Documents on the Liturgy
Diakonia	Diakonia. Internationale Zeitschrift für praktische Theologie
Dt	Deuteronomy
NDTh	The New Dictionary of Theology
EATMCP	Evangelization in Africa in the Third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects
EDD	Evangelization, Dialogue and Development
EJALR	Encounter, A Journal of African Life and Religion
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
Ep	Epistles
et al	and others
Ex	Exodus
DTh	The New Dictionary of Theology
FaCh	Fathers of the Church
FC	Fontes Christiani
Fr.	Father

FTS	Frankfurter Theologische Studien
FB	Forschungen zur Bibel
Germ.	German
Gk.	Greek
GLKD	Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik
GS	Gaudium et Spes
HD	Handbuch der Dogmatik
Heb	Hebrew
HLW	Handbuch der Liturgische Wissenschaft
HThG	Herders Theologischer Grundbegriffe
HThK	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
Ibid	Ibidem (the same reference)
i.e.	id est (that is)
Is	Isaiah
ITQJ	The Irish Theological Quarterly Journal
Joh	John
Josh	Joshua
JDPH	Journal of the Department of Philosophy
Jdt	Judith
Jer	Jeremiah
JES	Journal of Ecumenical Studies
JIT	Journal of Inculturation Theology
JLH	Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie
JLW	Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies
Kg	Kings
LASFCRA	L' Afrique et ses Formes de Vie Cahiers des Religions africaines
Lat.	Latin
LBS	The Library Biblical Studies
MThZ	Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift.
NA	Nostra Aetate
NDT	The New Dictionary of Theology
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NT	New Testament
LBS	The Library Biblical Studies
Lev	Leviticus
LG	Lumen Gentium
Lk	Luke
LM	Liturgie et Mission
LThK	Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche
NEB	Neue Echter Bibel. Neuetestament
NJB	The New Jerusalem Bible
OICA	Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum (Order of Adult Christian Initiation)
OT	Old Testament
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca
Phil	Philippians
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
Prov	Proverb
Ps	Psalms
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
RCIA	Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults
RConf.	Rite of Confirmation
RERC	Les relations de L'Anglais avec les religions non chrétiennes
Rev	Reverend

RGG	Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart
Rom	Romans
RRJ	Radical Religion Journal
Rt.	Right
Sam	Samuel
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
SCNC	Sacred Congregation for Non-Christians
SECAM	Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar
Sir	Sirach
SFPS	Structure And Function in Primitive Society
SL	Studia Liturgica
SPS	Sacra Pagina Series
Sr.	Sister
StdZ	Stimmen der Zeit
ST	Schriften zur Theologie
SSTh	Studien zur systematischen und spirituellen Theologie
TAAP	The American Academy of Paediatrics
TET	The Expository Times
TG	Theologie und Glaube
TI	Theological Investigations
TNEB	The Encyclopaedia Britannica
TS	Theological Studies
ThG	Theologie und Glaube.
ThuK	Theologie und Kirche
TuKA	Theologie und Kirche in Afrika
ThWNT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament
Trad Ap.	Traditio Apostolica
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
TRWA	Traditional Religion in West Africa
USQR	Union Theological Seminary Quarterly
WA	Luther's Werke, Weimaer Ausgabe
WCD	Worship and Culture in Dialogue
Wis	Wisdom
ZMRW	Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft
ZNW	Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

General Introduction

B. Hearne was right when he observed that since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has been progressively seeking to become more “Catholic” and less “Roman”. According to him, “the only way the church can prove it is not just an import, along with other consumer goods, from the West, and it has the message and a way of life for every single human being, is to show that it can accept, incorporate, and learn from the authentic human values that belong to every human culture. This should be an easy task for the Catholic Christianity, with its joyful acceptance of the seeds of the word in every culture, and with its acknowledgement that nothing truly human is alien to it.”¹

The above remarks become more relevant in the contexts of inculturation and mission theology, especially when we discover that the Christian mission in recent centuries has been limited by a sense of Western superiority and a narrow theology of revelation. However, today, with joy, the Church is rediscovering its task of ‘inculturating’ the one faith in Christ in a variety of cultures. No longer can the West, for all its boastful technology, claim any superiority over what were once seen as inferior and ‘uncivilised’ peoples. True civilisation grows from exchange and interaction between different cultures, not from any form of imperialism.²

It is consoling that with Vatican II Council, a new era has dawned in the Church.³ The Church now seeks to discover more positive values in non-Christian religions and relate better with them. She now urges her sons and daughters to engage in prudent and charitable dialogue and collaboration with members of these religions.⁴ What came out of Vatican II, therefore, poses a great challenge, especially to the inculturation of the liturgy. The Church is challenged than ever, while proclaiming the uniqueness of the Christian message of salvation, to endeavour to incarnate her message and rites in the human culture.⁵

With reference to Christian initiation, the task becomes more challenging when we realize the fact that the tree of Hellenized Christendom cannot simply be uprooted from Europe and replanted in the swamp of Asia or African cultures;⁶ no less than the celebration of the Christian initiation. The need to have a true African-Christian liturgical rite, which takes account of African cultural background and at same time, maintain the unity of the Church is necessary.

i The Object of This Research Work

In the light of the above, the dissertation examines *Initiation in African Traditional Religion: A systematic symbolic analysis. With Special Reference To Aspects of Igbo Religion in Nigeria* from the perspective of systematic theology. It seeks to discover the rich symbolisms and elements of initiation in African Traditional Religion and the possibility of applying them to the liturgy. The work is an honest effort to contribute to the theme of inculturation of the liturgy in African rites in the light of Vatican II Council.⁷ It creates an awareness to discover rich values of African culture and their places in the Church. The task of realizing this goal is not only the responsibility of the local Churches in Africa (on the area of research), but also the Universal Church⁸ on its concrete application.

¹ B. Hearne, *Forward* to E. E. Uzukwu, *Liturgy Truly Christian Truly African*, Kenya: 1982, ii.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ NA 1.

⁵ Cf. B. Hearne, *Forward* to E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), ii.

⁶ Cf. H. Küng, *Christsein*, München: 1974, 82.

⁷ SC. 37-40; John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, June 2, 1985, No. 21, AAS 77 (1985), 802-803; cf. *Discourse to the Pontifical Council for Culture Plenary Assembly*, No. 5; AAS 79 (1987), 1204 -1205.

⁸ CDWDS, *Varietates Legitimae (Fourth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy*, Rome, March, 29, 1994, (Nos, 37-40), No. 37.

It takes the incarnation as a *modus operandi*, that is, Jesus Christ of Nazareth who took the human nature, without prejudice to human nature and without sin and incarnated in the Jewish/human culture, the same Jesus challenges the Church not to continue to remain foreign to the people of Africa. It challenges, in a special way, the celebration of the liturgical rites of initiation in Africa.

It raises questions that the reader would not consider spurious; questions to which up to date no concrete answers have been found. Such questions centre on the development of an authentic Christian-African liturgical rite, which takes account of the African cultural milieu: its initiation rites, myths, elements, symbolisms, language and ways of expressions, *et cetera*, - one that allows the African to live and celebrate his/her faith-experience in his/her cultural world.⁹

It highlights the inadequacy of the celebration of the Christian mystery with foreign forms and symbolisms. The Church is challenged, more than ever, while remaining faithful to orthodoxy,¹⁰ to open more doors to the inculturation of African rites and symbolisms, allowing the liturgy to take African flesh and spirit.

With reference to Christian theology, the thesis contends that theology should not merely pre-occupy itself with “Gottesrede” (God-Talk), but also with the *praxis* of theology in the human society and culture.¹¹ That is why N. Mushete designates the theology of the Church that does not operate on the principle of incarnation of the gospel in the human culture as “a theology of Church implantation.”¹² Such a theology is an alienated one that gives rise to paralytic Christian communities. Mere copies of European models, they have shown little or no initiative, creativity, or originality. Christians brought up with such theology only “pray with borrowed

⁹ Confer Jesus who did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to complete them. (cf. Mt 5:17; cf. Rom 3:31).

¹⁰ John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Mozambique on “ad Limina” visit, Rome, 23 September, 1982. OR.EE., 22 November, 1982, 10, in: D. Chidi Isizoh (ed.), *The Attitude of The Catholic Church Towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*, Lagos: 1998, 46.

¹¹ GS 40-45.

¹² N. Mushete, “The History of the Church in Africa: From Polemics To Critical Irenics,” in: Kofi Appiah-Kubi (ed.), *African Theology en route*, (1979), 24-26, 24. The theology of Church implantation was solidly defined as ecclesiastical and even ecclesiocentric in its orientation. On the clean slate or the slate wiped clean of people without culture or civilization, missionaries, following this theological principle, were to establish the Church as it has been known historically in the West. Its personnel, methods and works were to be copies of the Western Church. This theology differs from the theology of Conversion. Similarly, there is the theology of Salvation of souls. This theology was developed and defended by the missiological school of Münster. Such theology polarized missionary reflection for several centuries right up to the start of the twentieth century. For a long time it embodied the proper and specific goal of missionary activity. The proponents of this theology were T. Ohm and K. Müller who rejected the theory of implantation the Church. For them, the theory of implantation finds no confirmation in St. Paul, though he is wholly and completely missionary. For them, Paul had “... no thought whatsoever of making the establishment of a Church the proper, specific, theological goal of his apostolic activity”. cf. K. Müller; “Das Missionsziel des Paulus”, in: *ZMR* (1957), 99-100, 99; cf. T. Ohm, *Faites des disciples de toutes les nations*, Paris: 1964, 1, 23. For this group of theologians, “the essential role of the mission is to heal, convert and christianize people.” (cf. T. Ohm, (1964), 272; Maurier, “La Mission demain a la lumière de la mission cher”, in: *Englise et Mission* 205 (1977), 33-42, 41. The essential task of the missionary is to proclaim the Gospel, to be the herald of Christ’s good news. Solidly grounded on the adage, *extra ecclesiam (romanam) nulla salus* (outside the Roman Church, there is no salvation), theology centred on the salvation of the infidels and logically led its partisans to wholly disqualify the cultural and religious traditions of the African peoples and every thing African. This theology saw the souls of black people as living in darkness and shadow of death. The theoreticians of this theology were imbued with the excessive zeal of defending the oneness of Christianity and of the saving God is omnipresent, that there exists a universal revelation beyond the bounds of any “special” revelation. But this is the new factor in the missionary situation and in the ecumenical-theological reflection: Christ is at home everywhere in the world. Salvation could be obtained through non-ecclesiastical channels as diverse as the various ideals and humanisms nurtured by human beings”. (cf. Dournes, *Dieu aime les païens*, Paris: 1963; idem, *L’offrande des peuples*, Paris, 1967; cf. J. Kerhofs, “Vers d’autres formes d’une assistance des croyants sur le plan international”, in: *Englise et Mission*, 202 (1966), 5-12, 6.

books, borrowed words think by proxy and operate by way of Rome, Paris, London and other European capitals.”¹³

From the history of the Church, we gather that one of the most major tests that confronted the early Christian community was whether everyone who wanted to become a Christian also of necessity had to become a Jew as a pre-requisite for entrance into the new community of believers. The issue at stake is whether one qualifies to be a Christian through adherence to the Jewish identity, which centres on circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic legal code. The crisis resulted to the convocation of the Jerusalem Council (cf. Acts 15), which tasked itself with the definition of the Christian identity. The Council bases its definition of Christian identity, separable from adherence to the Jewish cultural practice (a form of cultural imperialism), solely on election by God in Jesus Christ.

The event of the Pentecost in Jerusalem, moreover, demonstrated what the nature of the spreading of the message of this new community of believers in Jesus Christ should be: that “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Capadocia, Ponthus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylis, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome, Jews and Proselytes alike, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:9-11) could understand all that was communicated by Peter through the force of the breath of Jesus in their own mother tongue, without first becoming Jews. Following the same spirit of the Pentecost event and the missionary zeal of Paul, the Church became Greek to the Greeks, European to the Europeans and American to the Americans, but regrettably the Church of Jesus Christ has not become Chinese to the Chinese, Japanese to the Japanese, Indian to the Indians¹⁴, Arabic to the Arabs and African to the Africans. Viewed as a whole, the Church of Jesus Christ has remained a purely European-American affair. A veto has been placed on every valuable contribution from other cultural sources. It is a holy blackmail forbidding every innovation in essentials under pain of deviation from orthodoxy.¹⁵ Under such atmosphere, the incarnation of the Christian theology, especially, liturgy in the African culture and the incorporation of African rites, symbolisms and forms become problematic. Thus, the remarks of Braine Hearne becomes germane when he states: “Not only the witness of the Independent Churches, responding to real needs of the people; not only the challenge of the ancient Christian churches of Africa, but also the great openness of the new rites of the Catholic Church itself, invite and call the Church in Africa to respond creatively to the needs of African Christians. It would be mark of obscurantism to close one’s eyes to the call of Paul VI and Pope John Paul II which challenge the Church in Africa to become truly African as well as truly Christian.”¹⁶

This dissertation, therefore, seeks to offer systematic theological reflections and justification for the authentic incarnation of the liturgy in African rites. The work is more theoretical than praxis-oriented. However, it does not fail to offer some concrete guidelines. To every critical-minded reader, the issue of inculturation of initiation in African Traditional Religion poses some problems, which range from the complexity of its nature, profundity of its symbolisms and practical application in the liturgy. In addition, it creates the problem of avoiding subjectivity in the analysis and evaluation of the rite. The latter requires not only the ability to maintain a balance between dogmatism and progressivism, between “orthodoxy” and “African traditionalism”, and at the same time, not to allow oneself to be swayed by either side in defence of the other. The work demands balance and objectivity. The author endeavours to maintain these criteria in the course of this research work.

It presents initiations in Edda and Ezza, Abakaliki, Igboland, South-East of Nigeria as typical *rites de passage* in African Traditional Religion. The choice is based on the tremendous

¹³ N. Mushete, *African Theology en route*, 1978, 24.

¹⁴ H. Küng, (1974), 83.

¹⁵ T. Okere, “The Assumption of African Values As Christian Values,” in: *Lucerna*, 1 (1978), 15.

¹⁶ B. Hearne, Forward to E. E. Uzukwu (1982), ii.

roles of initiation in these communities and the positions the two communities occupy as integral parts of Abakaliki Diocese, Nigeria. We shall also cover, briefly, other forms of initiation rites in African culture.

ii Methodology

We shall adopt critical, scientific and systematic analytical approaches to this study; making use of commentaries, questionnaires, documentaries, monographs, magazines, theological and anthropological publications. The University Library constitutes the basic source of information. To achieve the goal, the work is divided into the following structures:

iii Structure of the work

Chapter one examines African Traditional Religion, its nature, object and principles as well as its component elements: spiritual beings, ancestors and cult. The aim is to clear the background in which initiation in African context occurs.

Chapter two takes a look at symbol: its origin and evolution, sources and symbolisms, and draws classic distinctions between signs and symbols. In addition, it examines symbol in the Christian context, exposing Jesus' use of symbols. The chapter clears the basis for the discussion of the symbolisms of initiation in African Traditional Religion.

Chapter three examines initiation in African traditional religion *per se*. It highlights its various forms, structures and stages. It exposes, in a special way, its occurrence in Edda and Ezza, Abakaliki, Nigeria, and their symbolisms to these communities.

Chapter four focuses attention on initiation in the Christian context. It traces its origin and developments in the Church, and the contributions of some of the Church Fathers, starting from the early Christian century to Vatican II Council. In addition, it establishes the theology of natural sacraments as a basis for the consideration of the possibility of the inculturation and incarnation of the liturgy in African rites.

Chapter five takes a look at the position of the Church on non-Christian religions, the principles of missionary activities, the effects they produce and the factors militating against such missionary programmes in Africa. Similarly, the chapter seeks to remove the bias some may have on initiation in African Traditional Religion.

Lastly, chapter six examines, in concrete terms, the possibility of inculturation of the liturgy, especially the Christian initiation in African context. The aim is to seek the possibility of realizing the intention of the Vatican Council II on the incarnation of the liturgy whereby a study of initiation in African Traditional Religion forms the *condition sine qua non* for arriving at an African rite.

Far from presenting the work as having a final word on this theme, it offers room for more researches, insights and suggestions on this topical issue. If the work succeeds in provoking reactions from our readers, and especially of those in authority, the effort of writing it would be a reasonable venture. We wish that further studies on this theme would improve on what we have begun.

CHAPTER ONE

1 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

1.1 *Nature, Fundamentals and Principles*

The Africans are known to be deeply religious. Each people have its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Deep within the being of every African, is a feeling of an irresistible religious imperative. Religion makes the most absolute claim in the life, hopes and aspirations, fears and joys of the average African person. J. Mbiti expressly highlights the centrality of the African Traditional Religion in African society, maintaining that this religion: its beliefs and practices, and how they affect the African community is the key to understanding the Africans and their world; which they strongly believe to be permeated by the presence of the Sacred.¹⁷ That means that for the Africans, religion occupies a central position in their life activities. In the words of C. Isizoh, “Religion is the means by which the black man realises his aspirations towards freedom, justice and success.”¹⁸

The religion of the Africans is replete with sacred religious symbols and varied systems. In this religion, the element of sacred symbols plays a key role to the understanding of its nature and unique place in the life of the African. That is why it would bring too big- a- disaster to ignore such a value of the sacred aspects of religious symbolism in this religion, and man’s attempt to deal with any key issue relating to this religion. According to J. S. Mbiti, “To ignore these traditional beliefs, attitudes, practices and *symbolic values* can only lead to a lack of understanding of African behaviour and problems.”¹⁹ In addition, African Traditional Religion could well be comprehended within the context of the “beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and religious officiants”.²⁰ Moreover, it is within the context of the African symbolic value system that one could ask such questions as: What is actually the place of initiation in the African Traditional Religion? What meaning does it still make Africans in the modern African society, when some of these archaic practices are being overtaken by history, necessitated by the progress of human ingenuity and scientific development? Is it still necessary to undertake a research of this nature, analysing the symbolism of initiation in African Traditional Religion vis-à-vis the Christian faith, when such a phenomenon has almost “(..) lost prestige and secret societies *is* being outlawed?”²¹ Although this may be the case, one would not dismiss the fact that for Africans, religion is a yardstick for the interpretation of their vision of the world that embraces the world beyond, the concept of God, relationship with God and fellow human beings in the society.²²

The African’s view of reality does not only have vertical, but also horizontal dimensions. His religious ideas and life are not oriented in the Platonic world of ideas (the world of idealism), but have concrete consequences in the life in the society: how one fulfils ones religious obligations, offers sacrifices to ones god; ones relationship with fellow human beings, and the observance of the moral norms. Therefore, one can surmise that African Traditional Religion is not primarily

¹⁷ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd. Edit. Britain: 1969, 1-2.

¹⁸ C. D. Isizoh, (ed.) *The Attitude of The Catholic Church Towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*, Lagos: 1998, 147.

¹⁹ J. S. Mbiti, (1969), 2. My italics.

²⁰ Ibid 1.

²¹ H. W. Fitzjohn, “*Initiation: The Poro Society*”, in: E. A. A. Adegbola (ed.), *TRWA*, (1983), 91.

²² Cf. O. I. Igwegbe, *Sacramental Theological Thinking In The African Symbolic Universe*, Frankfurt am Main: 1995, 40.

for the individual, but for the community of which one is an integral part.²³ Religion, more than anything else, colours the Africans' empirical participation in the universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. This is the philosophical understanding that underlines African myths, proverbs, oral traditions, symbolic values, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, ethics and social relationships. In addition, as far as history is concerned, this traditional religious attitude maintains an almost absolute monopoly over African concepts and experiences of life.²⁴

In African world, relationship exists between religion and culture. Religion is inextricably linked to culture, exerting enormous influence on human beings; and at the same time, animating both his/her personal and communal activities in the society. Thus, African Traditional Religion is "inherently holistic."²⁵ This feeling of wholeness is an important aspect of African life. The religion permeates almost every crucial aspects of the African life, namely: marriage, birth, naming ceremony, initiation rite, illness, healing, and death.²⁶ In the African Traditional Religion one could hardly distinguish the secular from the sacred, the religious and the non-religious, the spiritual and the material areas of life.²⁷ Both of them are interwoven.

African religions tend to have a precise, one-to-one association with a particular form of social group. They are unlike the other world religions, (Islam and Christianity in their relation to human society) in their approach, which are flexible enough to submerge many forms of social structure.²⁸ African religion and society are different ways of viewing the same universe. God and the spirits are real beings, and they exert strong influence on man.²⁹ Africans never doubt their existence. This is crucial when we bear in mind that for the African, especially the Igbo, "the word religion has a completely different concept as it has in the mind of the European."³⁰ G. T. Basden maintains the line of division between the secular and the sacred is quite meaningless to the Africans, especially, among the Igbo people. H. Adigwe highlights the difference between the Christian and African Traditional Religion thus: "The African, especially the Ibo lives his belief ... there are no acts of his that are not surrounded by some determinants. The native African, who is an adherent of the African Traditional religion is more conscious than the Christian that his actions can be either in accordance with the norms of his religion or not. Since his actions have all some moral bearing, he recognizes no morally indifferent acts."³¹ This statement of Adigwe is very striking. It leaves a question mark on the integrity, moral rectitude and the justification of the Christian who claims the possession of orthodoxy, absolute truth, and supremacy of religion above other religions. With specific reference to the Igbo, a particular ethnic group in Nigeria, they "are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, a truly and a deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that 'they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously.' Succinctly put, 'the religion of these natives is their existence, and their existence is their religion.'"³²

The Africans are always religious. To them, such questions as: Who is man? Where does he come from? Where is he going? What is the purpose of life? How must he live? What is the source and meaning of pain and joy, disease, suffering and death, suffering, are existential ones. They try to provide answers to these questions by turning to the deities and medicine men in time of crisis. Thus, at every crisis, personal or collective, religion is called upon to provide a

²³ Cf. Ibid 40.

²⁴ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: 1975b, 262.

²⁵ O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 41.

²⁶ Cf. Ibid 41.

²⁷ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1969), 2.

²⁸ Cf. Mourad Wahba, "Contemporary Moslem Philosophy in North Africa", in: C. E. Eze, (ed), *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, (1998), 50-52, 51.

²⁹ P. Bohannan, *Africa and Africans*, New York: 1988, 23.

³⁰ H. Adigwe, *The Beginnings of the Catholic Church Among the Ibos of South-Eastern Nigeria (1885-1930)*, Vienna: 1966, 34.

³¹ Ibid

³² O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 41.

solution, prevent disintegration, and strengthen the bond of human cohesion and sanctity. To the Igbos, just like other ethnic groups in Africa, religion provides a system of values relevant to the fundamental requirements of individual society.³³ However, how did the African Traditional Religion actually originate?

1.1.1 The Origin of African Traditional Religion

In tracing the origin of African Traditional Religion, it is difficult to say *when* it was founded and who founded it. Obviously, African Traditional Religion is as old as the first African. And the first African is its “founder”.³⁴ It originated from the Africans, from their experience in the world and of the world. This claim does not imply that the African Traditional Religion is merely humanistic. It has also a divine orientation. The African Traditional Religion confirms what the Christian Religion testifies that in the past that God revealed himself to our ancestors in many and various ways.³⁵

The Africans value nature, and relate very well with it as against the culture of scientific technology of the West, where man sees himself as a “self-realising and self-controlling being.”³⁶ In the culture of scientific technology, human beings plunder nature. They adore science and scientific enquiry, which gives rise to how human beings define nature, their being, dignity, and social status in the world. In the modern society, this factor reduces man to a slave of the products of human hands. Thus the freedom brought about by technological modernization has increased the enslavement of human beings to the forces of mass culture.³⁷

On the contrast, among the Africans, man values nature, preserves it and relates well to it. The attentive observation of nature and natural phenomena, comprising life cycles, birth, growth, death, transience of beings and man’s limitation by sickness and death characteristically distinguish Africans from other races. Being observant lovers of nature and imbued with the sense of mystery and wonder, they come to have a sense of the existence of God. The awe of nature evident in the African experience of and relationship to hills, mountains, thick forests, big trees, rivers, rocks, deserts, and wild animals manifest the wonder of the Creator and dispose the Africans to arrive at the conclusion that God exists as the Being who is the Creator and – the origin and source of all things. In their different languages and cultures, Africans address this Being with different names according to their experience with and of him. The African affirmation of the existence of a Creator God through the observation of nature is not only humanistic, but essentially philosophical – philosophical in the sense that through ‘wonder’ (wonder of the nature and order of created things), they arrive at the conclusion of a Creator. This element of wonders, arising from the exercise of the human intellect, is an essential function of philosophy.

Could we say that the characteristic feature of the observation of nature and natural phenomena in the African Traditional Religion has led some Western scholars to see this religion as *animistic*? But the word *Animism*, which derives from the Latin word, *animare*, means an attribution of conscious life to nature as a whole or to inanimate objects. Here, we have to make a distinction between attributing life to nature as a living being or entity and attributing life to nature in terms of life originating from nature. The attribution of consciousness to nature or inanimate objects in Animism does not pertain to the source of life but to the possession of life as a living object, that is, as an object that has life in it. Africans do not attribute life to nature like earth or inanimate objects, as the source of life rather they see nature as mediating life. Through nature, they approach God who alone is the Creator and source of life (*Chukwu Okike*). F. Arinze affirms this when he states: “the ordinary Igbo man does not stop to analyse: ‘Now I am going to offer sacrifice to Ani. The *Ani* will offer it to *Chukwu*. Then *Chukwu* will give to *Ani* a child and

³³ Cf. Ibid 41.

³⁴ Cf. Ibid 41.

³⁵ Cf. Heb 1:1.

³⁶ E. Ilogu, *Christianity And Ibo Culture*, Netherlands: 1974, 121.

³⁷ Cf. Ibid

Ani sends the child to me.”³⁸ *Ani*, a part of nature, is seen as a medium through which the orthodox African traditional religionists approach God.³⁹ They do not attribute life to it, as possessing life, rather only to God (*Chukwu Okike*), who is the “Giver and source of life”.⁴⁰

As regards the origin of the African Traditional Religion, the African reflection on their experience in life led them to reverence and fear of God, therefore, to a religion.⁴¹ This accounts for the genesis of the African Traditional Religion. The view of H. Newman supports this, when he states that the existence of creatures implies a Creator, of order an Orderer, and of harmony a Harmoniser.⁴² The could also rightly apply to the Africans. The course of the world, the witness of their own minds or consciences and of the collective voice of the human community forms the channels through which Africans acquire the knowledge of God and their duties to him.⁴³

The aspect of mediation in the African Traditional Religion comes into sharp contrast with the Christian Religion. It centres on how to reconcile the sole mediatorship of Christ in both the Christian religion and the African view, which allows the peaceful co-existence of a multitude of mediators. This is the task of missionary evangelisation in Africa. To spread the message of Jesus Christ in Africa does not justify a devaluation and devastation of the rich symbolism of the African world view simply because it does not conform to the Christian faith. African world view and value system should be allowed to exist and remain. Christians and non-Christians should practise their religions convictions freely without any interference from the other. None engage on schemes that would jeopardize the existence of the other. Both Christianity and African Traditional Religion mutually co-exist with one another. The mutual co-existence should a *litmus test* of the maturity of the two religions. E. Hillman brings out the function of Christianity as transformation and not destruction of cultural values, stating: “The message of Jesus is not about saving ‘souls’ for an after-life in some ethereal paradise. Nor is Jesus to be seen as a medicine man sent to solve miraculously the local problems of each individual who would invoke his assistance. He came to usher in a new age that would transform the very structure of human life.”⁴⁴ Transformation, according to him, does not mean destruction and substitution. Using simile, he attributes it to the activity of a tiny measure of yeast working gradually within a mass of dough. It is one of an appropriate New Testament image of Christ, an

³⁸ F. Arinze, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, R. Willard Trask (trans.), New York: 1959, 22

³⁹ This is similar to Christian praying to the Saints whose images are enshrined in statue forms. The statues are inanimate objects but have the character of symbolic representation for they represent the Saints. The Christians regard them as sacred objects and pray before them. In addition, they pray to the Saints, who act as mediators, though, in a lesser degree manner, as Christ is the only Mediator between God and man (cf. Heb 8:6; 9:5; 12:24; cf. 1 Tim 2:5). Therefore, to understand the Christian act of praying to the saints or praying before their statues as attributing life to them, is misleading; and gives a good understanding of neither the symbolic character of the statues nor the intercessory role of the saints in the Church. In addition, it does not give a correct comprehension of the Christian theology of the saints: the mediator role of Christ in Salvation history, and man’s approach to the mystery of the divinity through symbolic images. In the African Traditional Religion, *Ani* or the Earth Goddess is a symbolic representation of the spirit of the dead ancestors. The Africans approach them with offerings and sacrifices. This is because of their intercessory role between *Chukwu*, the Creator and the traditional religious worshiper. The Ancestors have a similar status as the Saints in the Christian religion. Therefore, to interpret the Africans’ approach to God through the ancestors or *Ani* as *idolatry*, *animism*, or to understand them to attribute life to them, is misleading. It would be wrong to use a part to describe a whole. If the element of *animism* features in the African Traditional Religion, it would be an error to use this part to define the whole of the African Traditional Religion.

⁴⁰ F. Arinze, (1959), 23.

⁴¹ Cf. O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 42.

⁴² Cf. H. Newman, *Callista: A Tale of the Third Century*, (1855), 4th ed. London: 1889, 314. Here “... order implies an orderer, an echo a voice; a voice a speaker....” (J. Keble, *The Christian Year, LyraInnocentium and other Poems*, Oxford: 1914), 489.

⁴³ Cf. H. Newman, *A Letter Addressed to his Grace the Duke of Norfolk on occasion of Mr Gladstone’s Recent Expostulation of 2874*, Diff. II, 247-248.

⁴⁴ E. Hillman, *Toward An African Christianity*, New York: 1993, 23.

action model for those sent by him to function as the leaven of the gospel transforming cultures from within.⁴⁵

The Igbo has an adage according to which what is good for one may not be good for another person. Therefore, the Christian Religion may not see the rich symbolic values in the African Traditional Religion in a positive sense, especially, when she approaches them from European spectrum marked by a superiority complex syndrome in which Christianity is viewed as a perfect religion and, by contrast, African Traditional Religion and its values become either inferior or inadequate to effect human salvation.⁴⁶ Such an approach would only lead to the destruction of the African culture. With regard to African traditional initiation, some of its aspects would call for more serious dialogue between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion.

The execution of this task requires humility on both religions and an attitude and disposition to learn from the wealth of each other's religious values, to treasure what is good and eschew what is bad. The fruits of such a dialogue⁴⁷ would promote mutual co-existence of the two religions and enrichment of their religious values. On the part of Christianity, it could lead to a better expression of the Christian faith and celebration of the Christian sacraments in African context. The Church has the mandate to proclaim the gospel of Christ to all cultures. The mandate does not exclude the task of upholding what is good in the human culture and fulfilment of what is lacking. Any proclamation that is not so-oriented would not only be erroneous, but also endanger the spirit of the 'incarnation', the same spirit which Vatican II Council extols.⁴⁸ The Church should not neglect this area in her evangelising Mission.

1.1.2 Features of African Traditional Religion

Certain basic characteristics mark the African Traditional Religion out and make it unique. Some scholars see this religion as purely monotheistic.⁴⁹ They argue that Africans recognize the existence of one supreme, transcendental Being, who is believed to be the creator of the world and of mankind, with myriads of hierarchically structured beings, who act as his ministers and mediators with the human folk, namely the spirits and the ancestors. Even though, He has these myriads of structured beings, He is not at the same level of being with these deities. He is not one of the deities but one among them. In a very didactic manner, J. O. Kayode, presents the unique nature of this supreme Being whose generic name with the suffix or qualifying word belong primarily to Him and which is not shared by any other being. In his words: "The principal name of the Supreme Being may be the generic name for the deity in general, in which case there is a qualifying suffix or qualifying word to distinguish between the Supreme Being or the deities; and the generic name plus the suffix or qualifying word belong uniquely to the Supreme Being. There are cases where the name for the Supreme Being is uniquely his, and no part of it is shared by any other being. But where the deities share the basic generic name with the Supreme Being, it only serves the fact that the deities derive their being from it."⁵⁰ This means that other deities derive their existence from the Supreme Being.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid 23.

⁴⁶ Cf. Chapter Five.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: 2002, 318.

⁴⁸ Cf. GS. 57, 58.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. R. Smith, *The Ibo People: A Study of Religion and Customs of a Tribe in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria*. (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, n.d). F. A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: 1970; H. Adigwe, (1966), 35; C. O. Obiego, "Igbo Idea of God", in: *Lucerna*, 1 (1978), 26-42, 26; 2.1 (1980); O. I. Igwegbe (1995), 43; J. O. Kayode, & E. D. Adelowo, "Religions in Nigeria", in: R. Olaniyan (ed.), *Nigerian History and Culture*, (1975), 249 -250; E. Ilogu, (1974) 34; P. Bohannan, *Africa And Africans*, New York: 1988, 191.

⁵⁰ Kayode, & E. Adelowo, (1975), 34.

1.1.3 Various Elements

Various Elements are distinguishable in the African Traditional Religion, namely: tales, poetry, songs and music. Tales chiefly derive from oral tradition and play a very functional role in African Religion.⁵¹ Through tales, certain values of this religion are transmitted from generation to generation. It is an important feature of African oral traditions to have a close link with music. Music features prominently in the great religious feasts of the African, and does not only serve to entertain the humans, but also the gods.

There is poetry which exists almost exclusively in chanted form or as songs. Among the peoples of West Africa with tonal languages especially, among the Igbo and the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Akan of Ghana poetry is recited in musical form rather than spoken or sung.

Priests, diviners, parents, elders not only teach their young ones this religion through,⁵² but also live it through the observation of *Nso Ala*.⁵³

The element of ritual also characterizes this religion. Passage through the life cycle is marked with religious ritual. There is the idea that, in some cases, if a man gets ill or misfortune, the reason may be attributed to the omission of a particular ritual, or that a dead parent was not appeased. Birth rites, weddings, burials- moreover, the seasons and the annual schedule are usually marked with religious rites. It is also in this aspect of ritual that initiation rite features very prominently.

There are no elements of formal dogma⁵⁴ or theology or theologians in African Traditional Religion, but it affirms their existence in an informal way. We could say that dogma is enshrined in the rules of conduct known as 'Nso Ala' among the Igbo people of Nigeria.

⁵¹ Nangar Mbitu and Ranchhor Prime report: "Oral tradition is a matter of considerable complexity not one of simple evolution. It is the debris of ancient African mythology where gods, spirits, heroes and heroines, through generations of re-telling, are dislocated from pre-history and brought forward to later eras. The narrative and poetic forms of oral transmission and the Africans are remarkably rich in and varied. They include not only myths in the traditional sense of symbolic accounts of the origins of phenomena (whether the world, particular cultures, lineages, political structures, or gods), but also songs of praise, epic poetry, folk tales, riddles, proverbs and magic spell. The content of the material from these sources varies considerably and includes children's rhymes and oral history, as well as symbolic texts of profound intellectual significance, such as the highly suggestive tale of *Nwambe* and *Kamanu*. Oral tradition, in a nutshell, is an assemblage of African tales, consisting of religion, philosophy, history, politics of the African people transmitted in oral form from one generation to the other". M. Nganga, and P. Ranchhor, *Essential African Mythology: Stories that change the World*, Britain: 1997, xii.

⁵² Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1975), 13.

⁵³ The Igbo people use the word *Omenala* to describe custom. This word sometimes is interpreted as tradition. *Aru* means abomination or pollution. In addition, *Nso Ala* refers to the behaviour contrary to the laws of *Ala*, that is the earth deity. *Nso Ala* or *Aru* are two words used when speaking of contraventions against approved social and religious norms of Ndi Igbo. (cf. E. Ilogu, 1974, 22). In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, Okonkwo Unoka, the Hero of the Novel, "committed a great evil" by beating his youngest wife, Ojiugo (for failing to cook the afternoon meal for him) in the Week of Peace. According to the custom of Umuofia, it is binding on every Umuofia villager that before they plant any crop in the earth they should observe the Week of Peace, a Week in which no one should quarrel with his/her neighbour. They live in peace with their fellow human beings, to honour the great goddess of the earth, which, without its blessing their crops would not grow. The crime Okonkwo committed was "evil". It was an *Nso Ala*, an evil committed against *Ala*, the earth goddess. According to people's belief, an evil could ruin the whole clan. In addition, in order to appease the earth goddess, Okonkwo must bring to the shrine of Ani, "one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries." This shows the weight of the moral law which prevails in African Traditional Religion, a law which derives its binding force from the earth goddess, the goddess of *Ala*, and the violation of which could merit severe punishment (cf. C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: 1958, 21-22).

⁵⁴ The word *dogma*, derived from the Latin word *Dogma*, in Greek, *Dokein* (to seem, seem good), means something held as an established opinion, especially, a tenet held as authoritative. On the side-effect of *Dogma* and dogmatic misunderstanding that gave rise to divisions in the Christian Church, Igwegbe has this to say: "For us Religion and the religious sphere are sacred precincts where devotion but not rivalry. We quarrelled and disagreed over

In African traditional religion, there are no sacred writings as found in the Christian Religion. The absence of this brings about mutations because of the wave of cultural changes and contact with other tribes, through inter-tribal marriages, commerce, wars, migrations, and other world religions. This religion has no missionaries and does not proselytize to convert others. There is no element of 'religious fanaticism', 'Crusades' or 'Holy wars' that result to killing fellow human beings in the name of Religion, religious conversion or defence of one's faith. In the African Traditional Religion, people are born into it, not converted.⁵⁵ That is why this Religion is peculiarly African and remains for Africans.

It is also characteristic of this religion to be community-oriented. The individual practise his religion in communion with the community in which he lives. The individual does not practise religion in isolation of the community, but rather *in* and *with* the community. To the average African, religious cult is an imperative. Religious worship, rituals, and ceremonies involve the whole community.⁵⁶

1.1.4 The Place of Cult

The word, 'cult' which, derives from the Latin word, *cultus*, and from the root word, *colere* – 'to cultivate', worship, means a formal or religious veneration, a system of religious beliefs and ritual or those who practice: It has to do with care, adoration, and worship.⁵⁷ In the African Traditional Religion, people acknowledge God to be near and approachable in cultic acts of worship. This element of worship features very prominently in it. However, when worship to the Supreme Being is clouded with attention to the spirits, it creates the impression of polytheism.⁵⁸ In this sense, either pantheons of gods or a large number of spirits or ancestors or some other kind of divinities stand between human beings and the ultimate God. This aspect, among others, draws a distinctive similarity and difference between African Traditional and Christian Religions. One of the similarities is the fact that both religions recognise the existence of the same God. And the aspect of revelation, among others, differentiates the two. In the African religion, God reveals Himself in nature, but in the Christian Religion, he revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. But man and nature are works of the same God. However, they approach this same God in acts of worship. Worship takes the form of prayers, offerings, sacrifice, observance of certain customs and participation in certain ceremonies. Kayode maintains that the goal of worship in the African Traditional Religion is not oriented to personal salvation or sanctity, but directed to gain favour or to thank God for a favour obtained or to ward off a disaster, and to be looked upon favourably by the spirits and the ancestors.⁵⁹

In Igbo land, in particular, graven images for God are absolutely lacking, if not forbidden. There is no evidence of any painting or carving of the High God. But the representation of God in image is present in the Christian Religion.⁶⁰ The Ashanti people of Ghana, for example, believe that of all the wide earth the Supreme Being is the elder. In order to approach this Supreme Being, the African Traditional Religion developed a manner of worshipping Him, which is

injustices suffered in the community. We never imagined that people could disagree or even fiercely quarrel, hate and kill one another on religious issues. The different Christian denominations, which flocked to the African continent in the 18th and 19th centuries in search of followers, Africans initially saw to be believers in different gods. Of course, these Christian denominations with their differences succeeded in delivering a devastating blow on the natural ties that held African traditional society". (Cf. O. I. Igwegbe, 1995, 44). The falcon could no longer bear the falconer; Things fell apart, the centre could no longer hold. Mere anarchy was loosed upon the African world. Until then, we never dreamt of a people who claimed to believe in the One God, and preach the God of Love fighting and killing one another in the name of religious opinions - an ugly scandal that Africans inherited from the Christian Religion - a religion that preaches forgiveness, peace and love!

⁵⁵ Cf. O. I. Igwegbe (1995), 44.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁷ Webster's New Encyclopaedic Dictionary, New York: 1993, 244.

⁵⁸ Cf. O. I. Igwegbe (1995), 44.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. O. Kayode, & E. D. Adelowo, (1975), 235.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid 202; cf. Ex. 20:1f.

devoid of temples for worship and sacrifices. In their places, they have shrines, which serve as a place for offering sacrifices. These shrines are normally situated at the outskirts and corners of villages, and are constructed with stones and wood. Worship usually takes the form of private and public worship.

1.1.5 Private worship

Private worship takes essentially two dimensions: it could be routine or occasional. In Ihiala, for instance, a community in the western part of Igboland, routine private worship includes the daily offerings made by the head of a household to the ancestors at the *Ndebunze* shrine with *Oji* (Kola-nuts), lines of white chalk and prayers for protection, prosperity and well-being of the family, while holding up the *Ofo* stick.⁶¹ Private worship is occasional when it is made in response to a specific situation. This is, for instance, the case when a diviner passes information or a message believed to be received from the gods, requiring the person concerned to offer some sacrifices. The diviner prescribes what is to be done. The individual concerned goes to the priest of the special deity concerned and offers the prescribed sacrifice, either of *Nwasisi Okuko* (chicken), or *Akwa* (eggs) and *Nkpuru Oji* (kola nuts) with *Ose Oji* (alligator pepper) or *Eghu* (goats), *Mmai* (palm wine) and *Nsu* (chalk), as the case may be. The intentions here vary from seeking favour from the ancestral spirits, protection from evil spirits like witches or evil minded-persons to asking for the gift of children.”⁶²

1.1.6 Public Worship

Two forms of public worship are distinguished, namely: the family and lineage worship, and clan or village worship. Both involve annual or bi-annual celebrations bringing people together to enact aspects of the history of the family, lineage or clan, but more so to celebrate aspects of natural and agricultural manifestations of the local and family gods.⁶³ Occasional public worship includes the sacrifice of atonement. In a case of an outbreak of disease or epidemic, *Ndi Dibia* (the diviners or native doctors) are consulted to know the cause. Where no individual is found to be the cause, the village then takes the responsibility to offer sacrifice, to propitiate the earth goddess.

Among the Igbo of South-East Nigeria, the element of sacrifice is distinctively unique. The Igbo people do not offer sacrifice directly to God as in the Christian Religion, but indirectly through the lesser spirits. Nze puts it very clearly, saying, “There is no single instance when the Igbos perform sacrifices to or worship a single Being of the Christian Concept. Because the Igbo people perform sacrifices as acts of appeasement and or worship and because there exists no occasion when a Supreme Being of the Christian description is appeased or worshipped, it can be said that this being does not exist at all or exists but is not recognised because he is passive. Our fathers worshipped gods and not a God.”⁶⁴ His views neither proves nor disproves the existence of a God in African Traditional Religion. It merely expresses doubt. The fact that the Igbo worshipped gods, and not a God, does not prove that they do not recognize the existence of this “One God”. The case of “Aja Elu” (sacrifice to heaven) that occurs on rare occasions suggests this. For the Igbos, the “One God” is too transcendent to be approached directly. Here, worship of God takes the form of *Igo Muo*. *Igo Muo* is the biggest of the celebrations and takes place during the period of agricultural plenty.⁶⁵ This *Igo* or *Iro Muo* literally means “the feast of pleasing the gods.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 49.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Cf. Ibid 50.

⁶⁴ C. Nze, “The Concept of God in African Culture”, in: *JDPH* 5 (1981), 20-26, 24; reprinted as “Traditional Concept of God in Igbo Culture”, in: *Ugo Magazine*, I. 4 (1981), 35-51.

⁶⁵ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid

These elements of sacrifice⁶⁷ and offerings are unique in the African Traditional Religion. According to J. S. Mbiti, sacrifices and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples.⁶⁸ Thus with the above features of cult in the African Traditional Religion one could see a “genuine reverence for a supreme Being in this religion, despite considerable variations even within the same culture in how this reverence is expressed.”⁶⁹ God is worshipped, though, indirectly. The reason for this indirect worship of God is that the Africans see God as so good that he would never inflict misfortune or illness on anyone. Therefore, one must appeal to lesser spirits who, when honoured in worship, desist from harming humankind, and even aid the devotee.⁷⁰ Moreover, there is an atmosphere of mystery about the supreme God. In the words of F. Arinze, “The more pious pagans are confounded with perplexity as to how to worship God. They are not sure how exactly to worship Him. His awe and majesty perplex them. He is transcendent. Hence they think it more courteous and more within man’s range to appeal to the spirits to obtain requests from God.”⁷¹ Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, there are many types of sacrifices and offerings which constitute the essence of their religion. In addition, they recognize a lot of divinities to which they offer sacrifices. Although these divinities are the recipients, the worshippers eat what is offered to them. In order to invoke blessings, in certain cases, human beings are sacrificed.⁷²

1.2 Documentation of African Traditional Religion

In terms of documentation, African traditional society is essentially oral-based. It has no holy writings. That is far from saying that African Traditional Religion is not documented. Documentation is beyond the level of material writings. This religion, with its doctrine, liturgy, rituals values are documented and preserved in various ways, namely in signs, symbols, music and dances, prayers, ejaculations, proverbs and riddles, customs and beliefs, names of persons and places, rituals and festivals, shrines, sacred places, works of arts. In a very special way, this Religion “...forms the theme of songs, provides topics for minstrels, finds vehicles in myths, folks-lore, proverbs and sayings, and is the basis of African philosophy.”⁷³ For the Africans, these form the ways of remembering the past. They are easily remembered, preserved, and transmitted to new generations. O. Kayode describes this oral tradition as the Scripture of African Traditional Religion. In it are contained the ethos and history of their religious awareness.⁷⁴ African Traditional Religion has a deep inspiration from arts. In arts, the Africans display their ingenuity of representation of symbolism and symbolic values. Although the place of arts in this religion is very profound, it does not make a representation of God in images. For the Africans, just like the Jews,⁷⁵ God is too holy to be represented in fabricated images. Symbols and art works form an essential documentation of African religious experience. That is why when one is initiated into certain cults of this religion, one is introduced to certain rich symbolic cultural elements and values of his village community.

1.2.1 The Knowledge of God in African Traditional Religion

In discussing the knowledge of God in the African Traditional Religion, some pertinent questions that come to mind: How does the African obtain his knowledge of God? What does the concept of God mean to the searching mind of the African religionist? Does the African knowledge of God derive from the empirical observation of nature or has it a metaphysical foundation? H. Adigwe holds that the idea of the existence of God is something

⁶⁷ Cf. the notion of sacrifice in chapter four, 4.4.4.3ff.

⁶⁸ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1969), 58.

⁶⁹ O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 51.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁷¹ F. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: 1970, 10.

⁷² Cf. Ibid

⁷³ O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 45.

⁷⁴ Cf. J. O. Kayode, & E. D. Adelowo, (1975), 23.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ex 19:12-13; 20:19.

characteristically common in the African Traditional Religion.⁷⁶ He maintains that the Africans, have knowledge of a Supreme Being, an ultimate reality, which they call various names. Such names for God, as *Chukwu* (*chi-ukwu*), meaning the Great God, *Chineke*⁷⁷, or *Ezechitoke* – the creator God for the Igbo people, and *Obasi*⁷⁸ for the Effik- have dense theological imports.⁷⁹ They (such names) show what the people understand God to be – a Creator one who orders and brings things into existence. Another scholar in African Traditional Religion, F. Nwaigbo, underlines the concept of God as an important idea and as a vehicle through which the Igbo people understand the notion of creation as a whole, serving as a network of communication in the Igbo Traditional Religion.⁸⁰ They know God through nature. And the names they give testify to their deep knowledge of Him.

1.2.2 The Essence and Existence of God in African Traditional Religion

1.2.2.1 God's Essence in African Traditional Religion

The religious communication about a transcendental being presupposes in the subject some knowledge of God. Like other religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) that have the concept of One God, the idea of a Supreme Being also characterizes African Traditional Religion. Just as G.W.F. Hegel says: “The object of religion...is eternal truth in its objectivity that is God, and nothing but God and the explication of God (...). Religion is itself the standpoint of the consciousness of the True; but of the Absolute Truth, of Truth as the Universal, the All-comprehending, outside of which there lies nothing at all. The content of its own account or in and for itself, which determines itself and is not determined from without.”⁸¹ This Hegelian view implicitly supports the existence of God in African Traditional Religion, but does not take a monotheistic form of Christianity.

Among the black Nubians and Egyptians before the Fifth Dynasty, there is already the affirmation of the knowledge of the existence of God. In the Memphis theology, the god, *Ptah* is designated as the first principle, taking precedence over other recognized gods. The *Memphis* text treats creation in an intellectual sense.⁸² The text accounts: “There came into being as the heart and there came into being as the tongue (something) in the form of *Atum*, The Mighty Great One is *Ptah*, who transmitted life to all gods as well as the to the *kas*, through his tongue, by which *Thoth* became *Ptah*. Thus it happened that the heart and tongue gained control over every other member of the body, by teaching that he is in every body, and in every mouth of all gods, all men, all cattle, all creeping things and everything that lives by thinking and commanding everything that he wishes.”⁸³ The text is a clear manifestation of a belief of the existence of a Supreme Being, a First Principle, the Cause, and Originator of all things in African Religion many thousand years before the advent of Christianity in Africa. Equally, it proves, from African traditional religious perspective, the belief in this God, the Creator, and Source of all things neither originated from the missionaries nor from the religion they brought to Africa. This quest to commune with God in eternity, in the after-life, generated the idea of initiation rite among the Egyptians (a factor we shall see later in the embalment of the Egyptian Mummies).

⁷⁶ Cf. H. Adigwe, (1966), 35; cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 17.

⁷⁷ The designations *Chineke* and *Chukwu* refer to one and the same God and not two Gods. The first refers God by virtue of His creative act, while the second refers to His position, as the Supreme God.

⁷⁸ H. Adigwe, (1966), 35; cf. I. D. Nwoga, *The Supreme God As Stranger Igbo Religious Thought* Enugu: 1984, 15.

⁷⁹ F. Nwaigbo, *Church as a Communion: An African Christian Perspective: Theology of the Local Church in the Light of the Second Vatican Council*, Frankfurt/ M: 1995, 197.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸¹ G. W. F. Hegel in E. J. Smith, *Philosophy of Religion*, London: 1965, 104-106, 105.

⁸² The Fifth dynasty dates about 2500 B.C., the period in which the Memphis theology text was written (Cf. I. C. Onyewuenyi, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism*, Enugu: Nigeria: 1993, 60).

⁸³ Memphis Theology is a theology in its nascent stage that enquires the existence and affirmation of God (cf. J. A. Wilson, “Creation and Myths”, in: B. J. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, (1969), 5; cf. C. I. Onyewuenyi, (1993), 60.

In the African Traditional Religion, there is an affirmation of the existence of God, but the African does not *necessarily* labour himself/herself to offer rational proof of his existence.⁸⁴ This does not suggest that Africans are not rational. For them the proof of God's existence is not a priority. For them, God simply exists. There is no need to doubt, question or even to disprove the truth of this statement. His existence is a reality which the beauty and splendour of nature manifest. God's existence, therefore, is a metaphysical pre-supposition.⁸⁵ They wonder about God's existence. Moreover, the fact that they do not question, doubt or disprove the truth-value of the statement of 'God exists', there is no room for Agnosticism, Scepticism, or even Atheism in African traditional setting. All these are products of doubt and negation of the human mind about God's existence. They are issues that epistemology handle.

The problem of the existence of God has always pre-occupied the attention of human beings in the history of religion. In addition, the problem of evil in the world arouses human curiosity and probe into God's existence. The problem has not only dominated human curiosity in the past, but also in the present; holding sway on the human intellectual enquiry and theological search. This curiosity and search revolve around the central question: how can a good and benevolent God tolerate the reality and presence of evil in the world? Philosophers pre-occupy themselves with such questions as, if God really exists, He must be a good and powerful being. In the light of this pre-supposition, they go on to maintain that there are too many vestiges of evils and sufferings in the world. God is therefore, neither good, since He does not bother about the sufferings, nor powerful, since He cannot do anything to suppress them.⁸⁶ J. P. Lefebvre, puts such question bluntly in a disturbing, but existential manner: "*Would an almighty God ... not bother to create a being in his own image only to abandon him forever to the fate of genetic lottery? This one is born of an Ethiopian mother whose milk is so poor that the infant will leave this world before it even could walk in its native desert. Could an almighty God forget the parable of the talents on Judgment Day and bring back to life those born of good soil, leaving those born in a hellish world to perish in limbo or in the fires of Hell?*"⁸⁷ In this dilemma, human being arrives at the false conclusion that God does not exist or that he is dead. This is the stride which the philosopher, Epicurus, had reached three hundred years before the coming of Jesus Christ on this earth in the human form.

⁸⁴ That Africans do not labour themselves to prove the existence of God neither implies that they are not reflective nor does it suggest that they have no scientific knowledge. We must note that philosophy, the King of source of knowledge originated in Africa, among the Egyptians, the cradle of knowledge and human civilization. Writing about the origin of Philosophy in Africa, New African Magazine writes, "The Greeks travelled to Kemet (Egypt) in search of the knowledge of ancient African mystic systems. In effect, the legacy of scientific and philosophic knowledge was wrongly credited to the Greeks. It was then handed to the Romans who passed it on to Renaissance Europe, and on to the modern world. After nearly 3,000 years of prohibition against the Greeks, they were allowed to enter Kemet to study. This was made possible, first, through the Persian invasion and, secondly, through the invasion of Alexander the Great (from the 6th century BC) to the death of Aristotle (322BC). The Greeks took every opportunity to learn all they could, receiving direct instruction from the African high priests. When Egypt came under Roman control, they looted and ransacked the great libraries of Egypt. This looting of the libraries was the genesis of Western scientific, philosophic and technical knowledge. This continued when Napoleon's invading army arrived in Egypt in 1798 AD. Democritus, another Greek historian accused his fellow Greek, Anaxagora, of having 'stolen' the Egyptian mystical teachings on the sun and moon, and passed it round as his. Socrates, one of the greatest Greek scholars, while awaiting condemnation in prison for teaching African wisdom, and also for his condemnation of corruption, admitted to his pupils for plagiarising (if not word for word) the work of the African philosopher, Aesop, the Ethiopian (560 BC)." "Ancient Egypt: Africa's stolen Legacy" in: B. Ankomah (ed), *New African*, 239 (2000), 25-26, 25; cf. C. I. Onyewuenyi, (1993), 60. The reason that Africans do not labour themselves to prove God's existence is that His existence is vividly made manifest in nature. It is seen as a waste of time to delve into such an exercise, when the facts are there.

⁸⁵ The reality of nature only goes to manifest God's existence and gives support to this fact. His knowledge of God is not one that is merely borne out of humanistic, empirical observation of nature, but one that has a metaphysical foundation.

⁸⁶ C. I. Onyewuenyi, (1993), 60.

⁸⁷ P. J. Lefebvre, *The Empty Cathedral: An Open Letter to the Pope*, New York: 1994, 133-134. My italics.

In contrast, the biblical tradition clearly comes out with a sharp theological understanding of the solution to the presence of evil and suffering in the world, namely the existence of a good God and of a wicked Devil, the Satan.⁸⁸ In the biblical sense, Satan is subjected to God, as a creature, though one that has gone astray. It was he, who tempted Eve and Adam in the guise of a serpent and afflicted Job with sufferings after getting permission from God to carry out his test on Job in order to prove Job's fidelity to God. In the biblical sense, God is beyond good and evil. Therefore, the centre of Jewish religion remains *Da'ath Elohim* – the knowledge of God, knowledge of the evidence of the existence of a good God who is exempt from all evil.⁸⁹ However, a theologian would see and interpret the presence of evil in the world in a deep act of Faith. For him, “the omnipresence of evil is a revolting scandal unless we can take that heartrending step into faith, as Christ did: thy will be done not mine, even if I do not understand the road offered to me.”⁹⁰

The New Testament takes up this idea of God and develops it to its most deep sense. The recognition of the presence of evil still dominates the Christian theology; serving as an appendage to affirming the existence and presence of a Benevolent Creator God in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even though in the teachings of Jesus, he recognized the existence and presence of evil in the world,⁹¹ He Himself demonstrated and preached the love of God to Humanity; a paragon of God's divine love⁹², who came on earth in human form to redeem. God is for Him, the author and foundation of all life.⁹³ He defended his claim on His knowledge of the existence of God, not in

⁸⁸ It is important to observe here that writers of the sixth century B.C.E. used mythological imagery to characterize their struggle against some of their fellow Israelites. However, when Israelite writers excoriated their fellow Jews in mythological terms, the images they chose were usual not the animalistic or monstrous ones they regularly applied to their foreign enemies. Instead of Rahab, Leviathan, or “the dragon,” most often they identified their Jewish enemies with an exalted, if treacherous, member of the divine court whom they called Satan. Satan is not an animal or monster but one of God's angels, a being of superior intelligence and status. Apparently, the Israelites saw their intimate enemies not as beasts and monsters but as superhuman beings whose superior qualities and insider status could make them more dangerous than the alien enemy. In the Hebrew Bible, as in mainstream Judaism to this day, Satan never appears as Western Christendom has come to know him, as the leader of an ‘evil empire’ and of army of hostile spirits who make war on God and humankind alike. As he first appears in the Hebrew Bible, Satan is not necessarily evil, much less opposed to God. On the contrary, he appears in the book of Numbers and in Job as one of God's obedient servants - a messenger, or angel, a word that translates the Hebrew term for messenger, (Mal'ak) into Greek (*angelos*). In Hebrew, the angels were often called ‘sons of God’ (bene ‘elohim), and were envisioned as the hierarchical ranks of a great army, or the staff of a royal court. Thus in biblical sources the Hebrew term, ‘Satan’ describes an adversarial role. It is not the name of a particular character. Although Hebrew storytellers as early as the sixth century B.C.E. occasionally introduced a supernatural character whom they called “Satan”, what they meant was any one of the angels sent by God for the specific purpose of blocking or obstructing human activity. The root *stn* means “one who opposes, obstructs, or acts as adversary.” (The Greek term *diabolos*, later translated ‘devil’, literally means “one who throws something across one's path”). Satan's presence in a story could help account for unexpected obstacles or reversals of fortune. Hebrew storytellers often attribute misfortunes to human sin. Some, however, also invoke this supernatural character, the Satan, who by God's own order or permission, blocks or opposes human plans or desires. But this messenger is not necessarily malevolent.” (E. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan*, New York: 1995, 37-40, 38). God sends him, like the angel of death, to perform a specific task, although one of those human beings may not appreciate, as Neil Forsyth says of the Satan, “If the path is bad, the obstruction is good” (cf. N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton: 1987, 107, 113). This exposition presents an exegetical understanding of the word ‘Satan’.

⁸⁹ F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 198.

⁹⁰ P. J. Lefebvre, (1994), 134; cf. Mt. 26:24.

⁹¹ Cf. Mk 4:15; cf. Lk 10:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; Joh 12:31; 13:27-31; cf. Act 5:3; cf. Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; cf. 2 Th 2: 9; cf. 1 Tim1:20; Rev 2:9, 13, 24; 12:3c-9; 20:7.

⁹² Cf. Mk 4:15; cf. Lk 10:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; cf. Joh 12:31; 13:27-31; cf. Act 5:3; cf. Rom 16:20; cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; cf. 2 Th 2:9; cf. 1 Tim1:20; cf. Rev 2:9, 13, 24; 12:3c-9; 20:7.

⁹³ W. Kasper maintains that for Jesus, God is not an unmoved mover and unchanging principle, but as the living God, who gives life and love. He is the source and foundation of love and life: He writes: “Ganz anders das Sprechen Jesu von Gott. Bei ihm wird Gott nicht als unbewegter Beweger und unveränderlicher Grund, sondern

a theoretical approach, but through a pragmatic one; in the practical experiences and working of miracles.⁹⁴ The systematic analysis of God as is found in the contemporary Christian theology today is quite alien and foreign to Jesus. Jesus understood His God in the line of the history of Israel as God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as Yahweh, who has made Himself known and experienced as *He- Who- Is*.⁹⁵ God, in a special way, revealed Himself in His Son, in the Person of Jesus,⁹⁶ and through Jesus, God had shown His salvation and love to the world. The idea of One God and Father of all men, as we know it, builds on the central theme of the New Testament teaching and its interpretation, as it is confined to the Christian context.⁹⁷

als der lebendige Gott der Liebe bestimmt” (W. Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, Mainz: 1986, 97). In exegetical-theological contexts, L. Müller writes: “Im positiven Sinn ist Jahweh selbst das Heil. Er vermittelt es durch seinen Segen. Er schenkt den Sieg im Kampf über die Feinde seines Volkes. Er verleiht langes Leben und zahlreiche Nachkommen denen, die auf seinem Weg wandeln. Er führt in fruchtbares Land. Er schenkt Gesundheit und Lebensglück. So ist Gott selbst durch die Gaben seines Segens da beim Menschen. Weil Gott sein geschichtliches Dasein in Jesus eschatologisch manifest gemacht hat, kann Simeon im Tempel auch sagen: ‘Meine Augen haben dein Heil geschaut.’ (Lk 2: 30) Und weil nach der Überzeugung der Urkirche in Jesus Tod und Auferstehung Gottes Heil siegreich in der Gegenwart zur Wirksamkeit gekommen, d.h. ‘da’ ist, muß es von Jesus heißen, daß in keinem anderen Namen mehr das Heil zu finden ist (cf. Apg 4: 12). In Jesus ist die in der Geschichte Israels wirksame geschichtliche Heilsgegenwart Gottes unüberbietbar in die eschatologische Herrschaft Gottes, des ewigen Vaters, und seines Sohnes eingemündet (cf. 1 Kor 15:28; Lk 1:33; Offb 1: 8; 21-22). Die definitive Selbstidentifikation Gottes mit der geschichtlichen Daseinsgestalt seines Heilswillens und seiner Lebensgabe in Person, Schicksal und Werk Jesu Christi bedeutet die Offenbarung des fleischgewordenen Sohnes Gottes als das ‘Wort des Lebens’ (1 Joh 1:1) als ‘das ewige Leben, das beim Vater war’. Diese Selbstidentifikation Gottes mit der geschichtlichen Vermittlergestalt seines eschatologischen Daseins in der Welt als Liebe und Leben, wie sie in die Selbstverheißung als ‘Ich bin, der ich für euch da bin’ angekündigt ist, hat nach christlicher Überzeugung in Jesus von Nazaret seine volle Einlösung gefunden: ‘Der Sohn Gottes ist gekommen, und er hat uns Einsicht geschenkt, damit wir Gott, den Wahren, erkennen, und wir sind in diesem Wahren, in seinem Sohn Jesus Christus. Er ist der wahre Gott und das ewige Leben’. 1 Joh 5:20. (L. G. Müller, “Christologie-Die Lehre von Jesus dem Christus”, in: W. Beinert, (ed.), *GLKD 2* (1995), 70-71, 70.

⁹⁴ The central theme of Jesus message is the arrival of God’s Kingdom; a Kingdom that is now in their midst. He demonstrated this in a practical sense through His Words and Deeds: in His preaching and Healings. [(cf. H. Kessler, “Christologie”, in: T. Schneider, (ed.), *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, Düsseldorf: (1992b), 271-272)].

⁹⁵ Cf. Ex 3:13-15; Is. 17:8e; cf. Dt 32:39; 33:3; cf. Is 43:13; 51:16; cf. Wis 3:1; cf. Joh 8: 19; 10:30, 38; cf. Joh 8:24; cf. Rev 1: 4g.

⁹⁶ “The divine name manifests God to the worshipper; but this old name, God of the father, is not adequate for the new age. The name “I am who I am” is the name Yahweh transported into the first person. In addition, it suggests here free choice and unhindered power. In the perspectives of E (and of P in 6:2-7:7, especially, 6:2-4), God revealed himself as Yahweh for the first time to Moses. For J, on the other hand, people had always called upon the name of Yahweh (Gen 4:26). The Etymology of this name is highly disputed. Therefore, there is no common agreement regarding its derivation “I am who I am” is surely a form of the verb “to be” (*haya* in Hebrew) and probably the causative form “cause to be”, “create.” Some scholars maintain that it is a shortened form of a sentence name, (God who) creates (the heavenly host)”. [cf. D. J. McCarthy, *CBQ* 40 (1978), 311-322, in: R. Brown, (ed.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 47; cf. F.M. Cross, *CMHE*, 60-75); cf. B.S.Childs, *Exodus* 60-64]; W. Kasper maintains that God, for Jesus, is like that of the Old Testament, a God of history, who keeps and guarantees new beginning. He is the power of the future. To say that God and time belong together does not mean that God develops in time and comes from it. (cf. W. Kasper, *Jesus Der Christus*, Mainz: 1992, 97.)

⁹⁶ “Die Heilswirkung der Gottesherrschaft hat ihre Mitte darin, daß Gott dem Menschen als Vater nahe kommt. Jesus als der geschichtliche Mittler der endzeitlichen Gottesherrschaft läßt seine Jünger teilhaben an seinem einzigartigen Verhältnis zu Gott als seinem Abba, Vater (Röm 8:15-17, 29; Gal 4:4-7; Joh 17:5). War der Gott des Bundes im Alten Testament schon als Vater, Hirt, König, Freund, Brautgemahl und in seinem mütterlich sorgenden Verhalten den Menschen nahe, so dürfen sie jetzt in einem Verhältnis personaler Unmittelbarkeit Gott selbst als ‚unser Vater‘ ansprechen (Mt 6,9; Lk 11:2). Jesus überträgt sein persönlich-kindliches Vertrauensverhältnis zu seinem Abba (Mk 14:36) auf seine Jünger, ohne jedoch seine besondere Abba-Relation auf eine Stufe mit dem Abba-Verhältnis der Jünger zu stellen”. (L. G. Müller, 1995, 93).

⁹⁷ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 198.

In the medieval period, T. Aquinas, maintained that ultimate reality rests on two basic sources of knowledge, namely, in the intuitive as well as in the rational sense. From this he drew the inference that human beings can acquire the knowledge that God *is*, although we cannot grasp in the confirmative sense *his essence*. He insisted that God's existence is not self-evident to human persons, since we do not know his essence. Aquinas went on to maintain that humanity is not destined to remain silent about the source of his religious experiences. Nevertheless, we can speak of God either in a negative or positive way. Following this thomistic procedure, it becomes self-evident that man can as well speak positively about the nature of God through simple analogies – *via analogical*.⁹⁸ “The most positive way to the knowledge about God is by useful analogies, similes, and metaphors. *Therefore*, in the Christian religion, we designate *God as a heavenly Father or Christ as the Lamb of God*, who takes away the sins of the world (Joh 1:35).”⁹⁹ Christ came into the human world because humanity was lost in the cloudiness of self-love and could not decipher our way unaided and alone without the grace of God. God is to be worshipped by men and women as the Lord and Father of love and adored in the *Spirit of truth*, for God is spirit. Those who worship Him must do so in spirit and truth (cf. Joh 4:24). For Christian religion, God's essence is communion of three divine Persons-*Father, Son, and the Spirit*.¹⁰⁰

In the Jewish religion, sometimes called *Judaism*¹⁰¹ the one and only God has revealed Himself to the people of Israel as Saviour and Deliverer, as Creator and Lord of the universe.¹⁰² His word and will is the Testament of life for human beings, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your

⁹⁸ Cf. T. Aquinas, S. Th. 1, q. 13a. 2c; S. Th. 1, q. 13a. 4; cf. S. Th. 2 IIq. 186 a. 1; W. Breuning highlights this aspect of the knowledge of God through analogy as he writes, “mit der Erkenntnis der Analogizität bot sich für die Theologie ein Instrument an, mittels dessen Aussagen über Gott verantwortet gemacht werden können. Man kann dann über ihn und von ihm zutreffende Urteile fällen ohne ihn als das bleibend unendliche Geheimnis aufzulösen. Vorauszusetzen ist natürlich, daß die Begriffe in sich eindeutig bleiben - sonst sagt man nichts mehr von Gott, sondern raunt nur noch etwas.

Für die Gotteserkenntnis innerhalb der Theologie war die Analogizität vor allem deswegen nutzbar, weil sie davon ausgehen konnte, daß Gott der Urheber aller Dinge ist, diese ihm also nicht absolut und gänzlich unähnlich sein können. Hand in Hand damit mußte immer die negative Theologie dergestalt gehen, daß der radikale Unterschied zwischen Gott und Welt gewahrt bleibt. Diese Funktion konnte der Begriffe Unendlichkeit übernehmen. Er ist eine Negation - das Endliche wird verneint -, doch setzt er ein Positivem, eine Affirmation voraus: in Sein, dem jede Seinschwäche abgesprochen wird...Je mehr man von ihm erkannt hat, um so logisch klarer läßt sich sagen, was er nicht ist”. [(W. Breuning, “Gotteslehre”, in: W. Beinert, (1995), 255-256]. Thus, from Thomistic Theory of knowledge, it is clear that that man can speak of God and know Him not only by means of *Via affirmations*: positive Aussage (“Gott ist gerecht”), but also by *Via negationis*: verneinende Aussage (“Gott ist nicht gerecht”, wenn man nämlich die menschliche Gerechtigkeit als Maßstab anwendet) and *Via (super) eminentiae*: überbietende. Aussage “Gott ist in vollkommener, unvorstellbarer, unausschöpfbarer Weise gerecht”.
Ibid

⁹⁹ F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 199.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid; cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, Ibadan: 1992, 86, art. 232-237; 253-256; cf. Gen 1:2; Nicene Creed (DH 150); cf. Joh 14:17, 26; 16:13; Council of Florence (1439) DH 1302.

¹⁰¹ This term “Judaism” seems to have been coined as a means of giving focus to the determination of the Maccabean patriots to defend the distinctive national identity given them by their ancestral religion. It was not simply a neutral description of “the religion of the Jews”. From its earliest usage it carries overtones of a religious identity shaped and hardened in the fires of persecution, of a religion which identified itself by its determination to maintain its distinctiveness and to remain free from the corruption of other religions and peoples. Judaism is characterized by the observance and maintenance of the Jewish Laws and traditions, especially, that of the traditional feasts, circumcision, and abstinence from eating swine's flesh (cf. 2 Maccabees 6). Judaism defined itself over against the wider Hellenism, including Hellenising Jews. Thus, it defined itself by separating itself from the wider world and understood the Torah in part at least as reinforcing and protecting that separateness (cf. D. G. J. Dunn., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: 1998, 347-349; 50).

¹⁰² Cf. Ex 3:13-15; 17: 6, 26, Is 42: 8e Rev 1:4g.

house, and when you shall walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”¹⁰³ Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God¹⁰⁴, and are called to special a covenant with God. God is faithful to His covenant even when human beings are unfaithful. Moreover, obedience to the law becomes primary in carrying out the will of Yahweh¹⁰⁵, which ensures salvation.

The Islamic religion confesses faith in the one, everlasting and almighty God, who has finally revealed Himself through the Prophet Mohammed - the last of all the Prophets, beginning in the order of the Old Prophets until the time in which Jesus came.¹⁰⁶ God is one and Muhammed is His messenger.¹⁰⁷ It demands absolute devotion to the will of God. And members are obliged to acquire knowledge of the essential teachings of this religion. But some authors contend that Islam is not simply a religion, but a way of life for every believer, whom it guides from cradle to the grave.¹⁰⁸ It is a complete code of life, and a culture-producing factor in that Muslim culture profits from all available sources without jeopardizing its roots – *Quran* and *Sunna*.¹⁰⁹

A Muslim is called to fulfil the will of God in all areas of life – in politics, comings, and social order, etc. The Islamic religion does not demarcate between secular and spiritual, but it rather spiritualises human existence completely and thereby produces a social system that reconstructs human life in its entirety. By so doing, Islam aims at producing a new humanity and a new society, a product that is aided by prayer and worship.¹¹⁰ Above all, this religion does not differentiate between races.¹¹¹

Some authors differentiate these religions as follows: Judaism is essentially based on the fear of God, Christianity on the love of him; and Islam on the knowledge of him. Islam is believed to be not only the primordial religion but also the last religion, which affirms its universal character by emphasizing what the prophets had said over the ages. Moslems believe that Mohammed is the Seal of Prophecy, and there would be none after him. They also believe that history has proved this assertion right. As the last religion, Islam synthesizes, integrates, and absorbs whatever is in conformity with its perspective from previous civilization.¹¹² The Islamic tradition holds that the thirst and pursuit of religious knowledge is atonement for one’s sins.¹¹³

The above show the ways in which these religions manifest knowledge and essence of God. Contrary to the sterile notion of God as one and the only Being, therefore, the African Traditional Religion understands God as manifests Himself as one community of a family,¹¹⁴ Human beings approach Him through mediums and the use of symbols. A typical example is the *Shona* Tribe of East Africa, who believe that God’s unity exists in multiplicity. A form of God’s Trinity or Triad is reported among the *Shona* and *Ndebele* peoples. In certain parts of this country, God is conceived as ‘*Father, Son and Mother*.’ Among the neighbouring *Ndebele*, there is a similar belief in a Trinity of spirits, the Father, the Mother, and the Son.¹¹⁵ From the perspective of theological reflection, the *Ndebele* tradition of God’s nature has certain traits and

¹⁰³ Dt. 6: 4- 7

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Gen 1:27; cf. Col 11:7; cf. Eph 4:24; cf. Col 3: 10; cf. Mt 19:4.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Dt 8: 3; cf. 1 Mich 1:10; 2:24; cf. Joh 4:1a

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Sattler, Dorothea / R. Schneider, “Gotteslehre”, in: T. Schneider, (1992b), 99; cf. NA 2.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. W. M. Watt, “Conditions of Membership of the Islamic Community”, in: C. J. Bleeker (ed.), *Initiation* (1965), 195-198, 196.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. N. Odoemene, “Christianity in Africa and Islam”, in: J. S. Ukpo, et al. (ed.), *CASAS* (1993), 57.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. A. Khushid (ed.), *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, Lagos: 1977, 7-8.

¹¹⁰ Cf. A. N. Odoemene, (1993), 59.

¹¹¹ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 199.

¹¹² Cf. H. N. Seyyed, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, London: 1975, 35, 36, Cf. H. Küng, (et al), *Christentum und Weltreligionen*, 13; cf. A. N. Odoemene, (1993) 59.

¹¹³ Cf. A. K. Mohammed, *What is Islam?* India: 1998, v & vi.

¹¹⁴ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 200.

¹¹⁵ Cf. G. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, Mary Knoll/New York: 1985, 85.

elements in common with the Christian teaching on God's constitution of three divine Persons, and man's approach to Him through symbols and symbolic celebration in the sacraments.¹¹⁶ The essence of God manifest in nature. The universe and nature manifest the presence of the 'Almighty'. In this sense, the universe and all it contains are 'religiously erinaceous' for the Africans. Nature is unlimited. In addition, it is a personal phenomenon. It is fully charged with religious meaning. God's manifestation is felt and experienced in every phenomenon of nature. It is God's creation and manifests his presence.¹¹⁷

What is significant to us in the above exposition is that human beings approaches God through symbols. Symbolic celebration facilitates this approach in both Christianity and in the African Traditional Religion; thus there is the need to explore the symbolic nature of initiation in African Traditional Religion and its relevance to Christianity. Such a task challenges a theologian to widen his/her knowledge of the African Traditional Religion, especially, the symbolisms of initiation in this religion and to seek the possibility of its inculturation in the Church. It calls on the incarnation of the liturgy in African context, taking account of African Traditional Religion, which experts and religious anthropologists have repeatedly described as has never been deaf nor blind to the spiritual dimension of existence, which is so deep, so rich and so beautiful.¹¹⁸ The question then, is: How do Africans conceive of God's existence?

1.2.2.2 God's Existence

The existence of a Supreme Being is not new in the African religious thought and world-view. The early missionaries made the mistake of thinking that the Africans have no idea of a Supreme Being.¹¹⁹ In other words, they were the people who brought the idea of the Supreme Being to the Africans. This erroneous understanding gave rise to the theory of the *Deus Otiosus*, which postulates that God is thought to have withdrawn to the skies and left the administration of the universe in the hands of the spirits who act as his intermediaries.¹²⁰ For this theory, God does not interfere in the affairs of the world and human beings. Thus, God is held to be too remote in the African Traditional Religion and absent from the daily lives of the people. In an atmosphere of this nature, the cult of spirits is revered and substituted for God. Good and evil, salvation and deliverance all rested in the hands of the ancestors.

The above theory is a gross misrepresentation of the true nature of the African Traditional Religion. Eminent African anthropologists and experts in African Traditional Religion see in it a sheer introduction of 'ethnocentric chauvinism' by the Westerners in the African Traditional Religion.¹²¹ According to O. Onwubiko, this misrepresentation, "...technically called the *Deus otiosus* theory in Religious Studies, ...was introduced and is still maintained by those who want to occult and misrepresent the real contents and meaning of African traditional religious and cultural heritage,"¹²² trying to make one to understand that it is only in the non- African Traditional Religion (Christianity) that God is present. Of course, the belief of Ewe people contradicts this theory very sharply, which manifests in their saying that He has not withdrawn from us, the good things he gave to us.¹²³ That is to say that in the African Traditional Religion, God is not believed or thought to have withdrawn into the remote skies. He is present and felt in the daily lives of the people, both in their cultural and religious lives. That is why in the Igbo religion, there are *Nso Ala*¹²⁴ (abominations) which guide the people in maintaining the moral code. Acts

¹¹⁶ Cf. Chapter Four.

¹¹⁷ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, London: 1970, 8.

¹¹⁸ Cf. -, (1969), 57.

¹¹⁹ Cf. F. Nwaigbo (1995), 200.

¹²⁰ Cf. A. E. Wallis Budge, *Legends of the Gods*, London: 1912; Spencer, Taylor, Lang, Frazer, Furlong, etc.

¹²¹ Cf. D. Nwoga, (1984), 23.

¹²² O. A. Onwubiko, *Echoes From the African Synod*, Enungu: 1994, 134.

¹²³ Cf. D. Westermann, *The African Today and Tomorrow*, London: 1949, 197.

¹²⁴ The word, *Nso Ala* (behaviour contrary to the laws of *Ala*, that is, the Earth Deity), sometimes called *Aru* (Abomination or pollution), is used when speaking of contraventions against approved social and religious norms. cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 22.

of abominations contravene the Laws of *Ala*, the Earth's Goddess, who is conceived to be next to 'Chukwu', the 'Great God' of the Christian Religion. Therefore, in the African Traditional Religion, God is present, and manifests himself in a form that apparently differs from his manifestation in the Christian religion. E. Metuh highlights this: "The African traditional religion brought the transcendent God in the sky into everyday life. The transcendent only became immanent. It did this through the innumerable deities who shepherd different aspects of the African life."¹²⁵ A study of the history of the African Traditional Religion and world-views shows that for the African God exists. The African people have designations for God. Many of such designations (as we shall see below) are replete with meanings, showing what the people think of Him. Mbiti holds that "the personal names for God are very ancient, and in many cases their meanings are no longer known or easily traceable through language analysis."¹²⁶ Evidence of this position could be substantiated with the names of God in different Ethnic groups in Africa, as the following table shows:

Areas	Folk	Name	Meaning
Benin	Ewe	Mawu	The Owner of the gods.
Cameroon	Basa	Hilolombi	The Originator.
Ghana	Akan	Nyame	The Highest.
Guinea	Tenda	Hounounga	The Unknown.
Nigeria	Igbo	Chineke	God the Creator.
	Igbo	Chukwu	God the Greatest.
	Igbo	Osebuluwa	God the Sustainer of the World.
Sierra Leone	Yoruba	Oludumare	The Almighty.
	Madi	Leve	The Highest Creator.
South Africa	Madi	Ngewo	The Greater Spirit.
	Sotho	Mothlodi	The Source of Being.
Zimbabwe	Shona	Mwari	The Greatest and Only One Only
Zambia	Bemba	Lesa	The Spirit of All Life.

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With the above diagrammatic illustration, one can see a similarity of understanding of God both in the African Traditional Religion and in the Christian faith. However, in the African Traditional Religion the names for God, as the ethnic groups in Africa indicate, are symbolic,

¹²⁵ E. E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Igbo World View: A Premise for Christian/Traditional Religious Dialogue in West African Religion*, vol. 13, 14 (1972), 51-58; cf. J. S. Mbiti, *African Philosophy and Religion*, London: 1997; cf. E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: 1973.

¹²⁶ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Oxford: 1991, 47.

¹²⁷ F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 201.

manifesting His nature, essence, or creative function. This is evident, for instance, in the use of the name *Chukwu* among the Igbo, South-Eastern Nigeria. In some parts of the land where the word *Chukwu* is used, people sometimes add the word *Okike* – giving God the quality of *okike* – that is *Chukwu-Okike*. The name *Chukwu Okike* becomes the symbolic word for God that creates. In the Onitsha areas where the variant word *Chineke* is used, the emphasis is on the creative activity of the Supreme Being.¹²⁸

Chinua Achebe gave a semantic definition of the word *Chineke* as it is used by the Igbos, saying that *Chineke*:

- a) said with a high tone, *na* means *chi* which creates;
- b) said with a low tone, *na* can mean the auxiliary verb *does*, in which case *Chineke* will mean *chi does create*; and finally
- c) again said with a low tone, *na* can mean the conjunctive *and*. Here something fundamental changes because *eke* is no longer a verb but a noun. *Chineke* then becomes *chi* and *eke*. That in his opinion was the correct version.¹²⁹ However, he failed to justify his preference of the conjunctive use of *Chi na Eke* denoting two coexisting beings rather than the verbal use which defines God by one of his activities, namely creation. However, it must be noted that the concept of *chi* has been a source of theological dispute among some Igbo theologians. Nwaigbo Ferdinand observes that “...the debate springs from the connotation of the term *chi* with *eke*, which means *creating*.”¹³⁰

We can surmise from the above that in the African Traditional Religion, just like in the Christian religion, to give a name is to confer identity. It is to confer an act of power and make an assertion of ownership or some other form of control.¹³¹ Thus, the names for God in the ATR manifest his identity. In addition, to know the names for God is to know the reality of God: the Being, whose reality is manifested in those names. Thus, the reality and knowledge of God in the African Traditional Religion are disclosed in the names given to him.

It forms part of the African traditional religious belief, especially among the Igbo people, that a person receives his/her gifts or talents, character-traits or indeed his/her portion in life generally before he/she comes into the world.¹³² In addition, God is considered to be the source of human life. As the source and sustainer of human life, He gives to each person at birth that person’s particular portion of the divine being called *chi*.¹³³ According to E. Ilogu, it is this idea of *Chi* which leads to the word *Chi-ukwu*. The individual *Chi* which each human being possesses derives from the great *Chi* – the Great Spirit or the world’s soul who is the creator of all that has life and being, and who holds supremacy over all other idol-gods.¹³⁴ Therefore, *Chi* is regarded as a “co-creator” in Igbo religion. Whatever abilities, good or bad fortunes, successes, failures or weaknesses possessed by a human being are often attributed to his personal *Chi*. This is why the Africans express the vicissitudes of life with the term ‘bad’ or ‘good’, according to the good or bad fortunes that comes to man in life, resulting in such expressions among the Igbos as ‘*Chi oma*’ or ‘*Chi ojo*’. If things go well with a person, it is said that he or she has *chi oma* (he has a good *Chi* or *his chi is good*); if the contrary is the case, he or she is said to have *chi ojo* (he has bad *Chi*). As Chinua Achebe highlights, the idea of an intransigent *chi* does exist in Igbo thought-world in the sense of *ajo chi*, literally *bad chi*, but to say that a person has a *bad chi* is to say that he has bad fortune. Therefore, *bad chi* refers to his fortune rather than his character.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 22.

¹²⁹ Cf. Achebe, ‘Chi’ in Igbo Cosmology”, in: C. E. Eze, (1998), 71.

¹³⁰ F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 205.

¹³¹ E. R. Brown, (1999), 1285.

¹³² Cf. C. Achebe, in: C. E. Eze (1998), 69.

¹³³ The Roman concept of *genius* which Servius said was to indicate the natural god of each individual, place, or thing or man which accounted for the difference even between twin brothers (cf. T. R. Glover, *The Conflicts of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, Boston: 1960, 15). This concept of *genius*, which determines each individual pace, and account for the difference even between twin brothers is what could be referred to as *chi* among the Igbo of Nigeria.

¹³⁴ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 36.

¹³⁵ Cf. C. Achebe, in: C. E. Eze (1998), 69.

This means that in Igbo religious thought, *Chi* is more concerned with success and failure rather than with righteousness and wickedness.¹³⁶

Accordingly, children of the same parents are variously endowed with different kinds of *Chi*. The Igbo proverb according to which *Otu Nne na-amu, ma n'obughi otu chi na-eke* (literally translated: *Although one mother gives birth to many children, they are not created by the same spirit*), give credence to this belief. This means that though children are born of the mother, but they have different, individuating characters, temperaments, talents which they received from the Creator-*Chineke*. Through the personal *Chi*, *Chineke* (Creator God) connects himself with all human beings, and the closer individuals are to one ancestor the nearer they are to each other. One can demonstrate the kind of *chi* one has by different economic and social activities. This strong achievement motivation accounts for the industrious nature of Igbo people. Among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, the *Igbo* are known to be industrious and hard-working, always aiming to achieve success in life. This is rooted in their religio-cultural worldview. Parents help their children to discover at the early stages of their life, which of the dead ancestors had possessed the kind of *Chi* with which they are now endowed. When this is determined, it often influences the giving of name (Namegebung) to the child and most especially in a case where there is evidence that the ancestor has re-incarnated in the child. The child may be given the name of the ancestor who is believed to have reincarnated in him or whose kind of *chi* he or she possesses. The place of *Chi* in the African Traditional Religion and among Africans in general is a reality that no one doubts, but which every one believes – Christians and non-Christians alike.

From the fore-going analysis, it becomes evident that the ancestors, a great symbol of communication and communion with the souls of the departed in the African Traditional Religion, can influence a person's *Chi*, and determine his/her success or failure in life just as the Saints in the Christian religion are believed to be able to influence the life of Christians through their intercessory roles. The belief in the ancestors in the African Traditional Religion is as real and existential as the Christian belief in the role of the Saints in the Christian Religion.¹³⁷

Moreover, the Africans generally believe that God created the universe: heaven and earth. Only He possesses the fullness of life which he generously shares to all in creation and providence. For the Bambuti, God sustains the universe and, if God were to die, the whole world would collapse.¹³⁸ He averts calamities, supplies rain, provides fertility, and assures rich harvest and security from evil forces.¹³⁹ The Africans see God as a merciful one. Thus there is this common adage that God drives away flies from a tail-less cow. Among the Igbos, Akamba, Baacongo, Herero, Ila and others, God does good that people have no reason to complain. For this reason, God in the African Traditional Religion possesses certain attributes. Among the Igbos, there are names indicating the attributes of God such as his supremacy, benevolence, all-knowing, etc. Such names include: *Chukwu ka* (God is supreme), *Chi di mma* (God is good, benevolent), *Chukwu ma* (God knows), *Chineke* (God the Creator). He is not only merciful (*Chi di ebere*), but also most wise and powerful. The names and adages of the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, as seen above, and the Yorubas of Western Nigeria confirm this respectively. For the Yorubas, no one but God can put a crown on a lion.¹⁴⁰ The Zulus of South Africa conceive of God's power in political terms. They present God as he who roars so that all nations be struck with terror.¹⁴¹ These names and adages are as old as the people of Africa and their religious beliefs.

¹³⁶ Cf. Ibid

¹³⁷ Cf. the prayer of the Litany of the Saints in the Catholic Church. However, an essential distinction that has to be made here is that even though the Christian prays to the Saints for "Intercession", Christ is recognized as the only Mediator between God and man. The Christian only looks on the Saints as ideal "imitators of Christ", who have trodden the path of faith, and at the same time, urging the Christian, to move on in faith, following Christ.

¹³⁸ Cf. P. Schebesta, *Revisiting my Pygmy Hosts*, London: 1936, 171.

¹³⁹ Cf. O. I. Igwegbe (1995), 47.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare God In Yoruba Belief*, London: 1962, 30.

¹⁴¹ Cf. E. W. Smith, *African Ideas of God*, Edinburgh: 1926, 167.

For Donatus Nwoga, “the contemporary predominance of Chukwu names in Igbo Religion is a post-culture contact phenomenon”.¹⁴² He further denies *Chukwu* the attributes of supremacy, benevolence, all-knowing and creatorship, maintaining they are not part of the Igbo religious thought. He writes: “Before the advent of Christianity in Africa, especially in Ibo area, *Chukwu* was beginning to be present in most of Iboland, though with different characteristics, as *Chukwu Abiami* or *Chukwu Oke Abiama* as a result of the Aro trade and oracular colonialism. Such characteristics came from the Igbo contact with Europeans”.¹⁴³ He came to a conclusion that *Chukwu* had not yet assumed the position of a Supreme Being in African/Igbo traditional ritual or even in the total practice of converts to Christianity, for it takes many generations for a stranger to take over sovereignty, even a stranger as great as *Chukwu*.¹⁴⁴ That means that *Chukwu*, in his understanding, is a stranger in Igbo Religion and continues to remain so. Nwoga’s position contradicts, in general terms, the names and attributes of God among the people of Africa. If such a position were correct, then such names and adages would be products of inter-religious contact, and not purely of African traditional religious origin. To hold such a position implicitly means to support the theory of *Deus Otiosus* which favours the absence of God and invariably of his attributes in the African Traditional Religion. Therefore, to maintain the position of Nwoga could be as dangerously misleading as to understand God to be lacking such attributes in the African traditional religious thought and Philosophy. Nnamdi L. Mbefo evaluates Donatus Nwoga’s claims thus: “His chief argument for denying the Supreme God to our ancestors is pragmatic and utilitarian. What exists is what satisfies a felt need. The Igbo had no need which calls for a Supreme God, therefore such a God does not exist. We do not require any elaboration to uncover the implied fallacy. He himself had disregard with Nze who denied the existence of a God that was not worshipped. Athenians, we are told, did worship a God they did not know. It was not (sic) necessary nor desirable to have a need to ensure the existence of a god who caters for such a need. Such would be a man-made god, dispensable whenever the need is met. Greek philosophy knew of the unmoved mover. He conceded a ‘logical possibility’ to the concept of the Supreme Being. This amounts to a categorical denial of every ignorance on the part of the Igbo of the concept of a Supreme Being (...). Moreover, the dynamism discovered in the growth of concepts and the historical penetration of the Aro’s *Chukwu* can be seen as a way through which a tribal (local) deity could become the Supreme Deity of other religions. He himself mentions that the Hebrew Yahweh slowly but steadily came to be recognized as the only God, creator of heaven and earth. His contention against Christian theologians would then lose its sharpness and rigour.”¹⁴⁵

In the African traditional life there are no atheists. Only a too involved would doubt or negate the existence of God, therefore, would refuse to worship him. The existence of a “strange fellow” as God is a matter that concerns not only the individual, but also the entire community.¹⁴⁶ In the African Religion no one shows a child the Supreme Being.¹⁴⁷ The child learns of it in the early stages of life.¹⁴⁸ For this reason, the community is seriously disturbed by the birth and presence of an ‘abnormal person’ without a conscience and a religious heart, capable of participating in the fundamental obligation of the community in the recognition of a Supreme Being. It is self-evident, therefore, that atheistic mentality alien to Africans. God, for Africans, is sacred (holy) and transcendent. Holiness like faith is not a common word in traditional religious vocabulary, although, they feature prominently in everyday life. The holiness of God and his majesty explain why the Africans, like the Jews, do not approach God directly, but rather

¹⁴² C. D. Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*, Enugu, Nigeria: 1984, 38.

¹⁴³ Ibid 33.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid

¹⁴⁵ N. L. Mbefo, *Theology and Aspects of Igbo Culture*, Enugu: 1997, 14-15; D. Nwoga, (1984), 30.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 46.

¹⁴⁷ This is a typical Ashanti proverb of the people of Ghana in West Africa. (cf. R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs*, Oxford: 1923, 50).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Nairobi: 1986, 101.

through intermediaries such as the deities.¹⁴⁹ Having established the existence and attributes of God in the African Traditional Religion, let us see how God features in the Christian religion.

1.2.2.3 Yahweh: Attributes in Christian Religion

In the Old Testament witness, Yahweh is one who created (*bara*) the heavens and stretched them out. He spread out the earth and what comes from it. Moreover, He gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk it.¹⁵⁰ In the Judeo-Christian belief, the world is characterized according to Yahweh's intention and action as a hospitable, viable place for life, because of Yahweh's will and capacity to evoke and sustain life. Therefore, the Jewish tradition sees God as one who forms (*ysr*); who reveals (*ngd*); who makes (*'sh*); who treads (*drk*); who establishes (*kün*); who stretched out (*nth*); one who utters (*Iqöl*); one who brings out (*ys'*), et cetera.¹⁵¹ Moreover, God is as the *El shadai* – the Almighty God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ called God “Abba Father”¹⁵²; a title which indicates an unmediated and close relationship that exists between him (the Son) and the Father.¹⁵³ In Christ all Christians become adopted children of the Father, hence, we have the courage to address God as “Our Father who art in Heaven.”¹⁵⁴ “Our Father” is one of the attributes of God which manifest the believer's faith in the one, true God.

From these attributes of God in the Judeo-Christian religion and in the African Traditional Religion as seen above, one could observe certain similarities in the ways of thinking and understanding the attributes of God. Such a similarities in the two religions manifested, for instance in their use of names, indicate points of agreement. On the other hand, the use of names and adages by different tribes of Africa show the symbolic character of those names that manifest the adherents' conception of God.

The aspect of symbolism of names for God in African Traditional Religion is a value that could not be overlooked in the Christian theology in Africa, especially among the Igbo of Nigeria. It would be good for the Church in Africa to use the native names for God which are more meaningful to the people in expressing the nature and attributes of God. The Church could use such symbolic images in the African traditional religious thought in her pedagogical teachings to disclose and explain the mystery of God, trinity and the person of Christ. A good application of such symbolic representations of God would not only be relevant in the Trinitarian theology, but also on the question of incarnation of Christology in Africa.

1.2.3 Lesser Spirits

Among the Igbos, there exists a number of “lesser spirits” – predicated “lesser” because of their lower status and position in relation to *Chukwu* – the Great God. Immediately next to

¹⁴⁹ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 19.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, New York: 1997, 145.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ibid 151-153.

¹⁵² Cf. Mk 14:36: The word *Abba* is of Aramaic origin which, on Jesus lips, expresses the familiarity of the Son with Father, cf. Mt 11:25- 26; cf. Joh 3: 35; 5:19-20; 8:28-29. It will be placed on the lips of Christians to express that relationship existing between the Christians as adopted children of God; for it is the Spirit who makes them children. Cf. Rom 5:5e, 8:15; cf. Gal 4:6. Explaining the theological origin of the word, “Abba Father”, P. W. Scheele writes: “Das *Abba*, Vater, ist eines der ersten Worte, das damals die Kinder ebenso lernten wie das *Imma*, die Anrede für die Mutter, so wie hier zulande das “Papa” und “Mama” zu den Worten gehören, die als erste wahrgenommen, angenommen und ausgesprochen werden (...) Das *Abba* der Gottesanrede Jesu enthüllt das Herzstück seines Gottesverhältnisses. So ist es in der Tat. In seinem *Abba* kommt zum Ausdruck, wie er den himmlischen Vater sieht und wie er sich selber versteht (...) Das *Abba* Jesu ist keine feierliche, durch Kunst und Liturgie geformte und festgelegte Gottesanrede. Nicht der durch das Gesetz väterlich oder mütterlich sein Volk lenkende, sondern der unmittelbar begehende und bedrängend nahe Gott ist mit solch einer Anrede gemeint. Gott ist Vater des einen Sohnes. Aber weil er sein Vater ist, ist er auch unser Vater. Und so lehrt Jesus seine Jünger, zu diesem Vater zu beten. Ohne Jesus gibt es eine solche Vaterschaft nicht”. (P. W. Scheele, *Abba-Amen: Urworte Jesu Christi, Grundworte des Christen*, Würzburg: 1998, 19).

¹⁵³ Cf. Joh 14:28

¹⁵⁴ Cf. The Lords Prayer:

Chukwu in the pyramid of being are pantheons of spirits, namely, *Anyanwu* (the sun god), *Igwe* (the sky god), *Amadi-Oha* (the god of thunder and lightening) and *Ala* the (earth goddess, the god of morality, which serve as the Lesser Spirits).¹⁵⁵ In Igbo traditional religion, these spirits are not regarded as “God” or “gods”, but subordinates and messengers of the one God. To designate them as “God” would be a misnomer and amounts to forcing non-existent polytheistic views on the Igbo religious thought.

1.2.3.1 Anyanwu:

Anyanwu is the sun god and is revered prominently in Nsukka Division of the Northern Igbo sub-cultural area. Among these people, both private and public, cult symbols consisting of a plant with earthen bowl placed at the base of the plant, are erected. Sometimes the sun god is worshipped and addressed in prayer as if he were the same as *Chineke*.¹⁵⁶ At other times he is regarded as the messenger of the great creator God (*Chineke*) through whom fowl sacrifice, tied on the top of a long bamboo pole, should reach *Chineke*. A more common way of offering prayers to the sun god is by addressing him as the companion of the king of the heavens (*Anyanwu na eze-elu*). Apart from the old Nsukka Division other parts of Igboland offer prayers and sacrifices to the sun god when demanded by a diviner for special purposes. For instance, during a critical illness, the sun god is prayed to make the sick person recover. The sun god, according to some Igbo belief, can be beneficent.

1.2.3.2 Igwe

In the hierarchy of lesser spirit, the *Igwe* (sky god) comes after the Sun-God. He is believed to be the husband of *Ala* (the Earth Goddess) who sends rain to moisten *Ala* in order that it might be productive. Not much worship is offered to this god as he is often better known through his ‘wife’, the Earth Goddess, who happens to be the most important of these four gods of Igbo religion and life.¹⁵⁷

1.2.3.3 Amadi-Oha:

Amadi-Oha, known as the god of thunder and lightening, is another notable deity. It is sometimes called *Kamalu* among the people of Aro settlements and in the Igbo areas of Afikpo, Bende and Arochukwu. *Amadi-Oha* is principally revered among the people of Owerri. This god is believed to be the wrathful messenger of the supreme God, *Chineke*, who sends *Amadi-Oha* in the form of thunder to punish evildoers. He swears oaths, and priests can curse suspected persons by invoking him. He is a “beneficent god to whom various sacrifices are offered; rather occasional public appeasements are ordered by diviners so as to ward off impending doom from his wrath.”¹⁵⁸ What is not clear in Ilogu’s account is his attribution of wrathfulness and benevolence to *Amadi-Oha*. The clause beginning with “rather occasional” highlights this point. Perhaps, this illustrates similarity of understanding in the Christian and African traditional understanding of God/god, who, despite His/her benevolence, do not fail send His/Her messenger to warn the individual/group of his impending wrath.¹⁵⁹

1.2.3.4 Ala

In the Igbo Religion, *Ala* (the Earth Goddess) is the most important deity that occupies a strategic position and plays a significant role in Igbo religious, moral and social life. She is the guardian of morality, the controller of the minor gods of fortune and economic life. E. Ilogu maintains that she works in conjunction with the spirit of the dead ancestors to order the prohibitions and the ritual avoidances.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, in the Igbo religious setting, many social

¹⁵⁵ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 34.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid 35.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Gen. 18: 16-33; 19: 1-29, cf. Jer. 32: 11ff.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 35.

offences become *aru*, *pollution* or *abominations* because they infringe the laws of the Earth Goddess. In addition, *Ala* plays important role in ensuring health, agricultural fortune and hunting successes. Therefore, various communities offer most public worship, as well as seasonal celebrations, which relate to the various seasons of the year to the Earth Goddess. Furthermore, they dedicate most homes, public squares of any village and shrines to the *Ala*.

1.2.3.5 Other Pantheon Gods

Following the above four pantheons of four gods are innumerable minor deities. Prominent among them are:

Ifejioku – the god of farm work. This receives public sacrifice and command community worship with big celebrations at seed planting and at harvest time.

Agwu Nsi- the god of divination and herbal medicine

Ndebunze (*Ndibunze?*) or *Ndichichie* (*Ndiichie?*) – deified spirits of dead ancestors

Ikenga – the god of adventure in hunting or business enterprise

Akpu, *Oji*, and *Ogbu* – the tree gods

Idemmili, *Ulasi* or *Nwangene* – river gods: River gods like *Idemmili* or *Ulasi* are regarded as ‘patron saints’ in towns like *Obosi* and *Okija*. These goddlings have their cultus symbols in public squares as well as in private homes.¹⁶¹

1.2.4 “Ndi Ichie” (Ancestors)

The Ancestors, otherwise known as *Ndebunze* or *Ndi Ichie*¹⁶² is a prominent feature of the African Traditional Religion. Among the Igbo people, the ancestors¹⁶³ are considered as the last category of the good spirits, and Africans accord them much respect. According to the African traditional religious belief, their role is to transmit life from *Chukwu* in an unbreakable current to their offspring and descendants. Their presence dominates not only the religious life of the people; but also influences their social life.¹⁶⁴ In the African traditional society, not all the dead recognized as ancestors. It is characteristic of an ancestor to possess spiritual and bodily qualities such as super-human powers and nearness to God. By virtue of this quality of nearness to God, the ancestor acts as a mediator between God and his/her earthly relatives. He/she is also believed to be capable of entering into individuals human beings or animals, and to possess anthropomorphic features such as the capacity to consume earthly food or drinks, et cetera.

Ancestorship is based on some basic criteria, namely: (a) It centres on natural relationship which is either consanguineous or non-consanguineous, (b) An ancestor is a model of behaviour, not because of the excellence of his earthly life conduct, but because his or her conduct was such that it is seen as having been endowed with a supernatural condition and power.¹⁶⁵ The idea of ancestors in the African Traditional Religion may be compared to the understanding of the Saints in Christian religion.¹⁶⁶ The Africans believe that the dead ancestors are grand elders who,

¹⁶¹ Cf. Ibid

¹⁶² The word, “Ndiichie” means “the Elders” in the sense of ancestors in Igbo Religion. For the Germans and Austrians, they are called “Ahnen.”

¹⁶³ Ancestors are not just the forefathers as we may tend to understand the term in its first nuance. Nor are they ghosts or simple past or present heroes or patriots like Patrick Lumumba, Jomo Kenyatta, Nelson Mandela, etc. Ancestors are those deceased Africans (men and women) who are believed to have lived well, who feared God, obeyed his laws, and loved their community of brothers and sisters, thus leaving behind examples of a good life, and for whom, above all, proper burial and funeral rites have been performed (cf. O. I. Igwegbe, (1995), 42).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. F. Nwaigbo (1995), 207.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. C. Nyamiti, *Christ our Ancestor*, Gweru, Zimbabwe: 1984, 15-17; cf. O. I. Igwegbe (1995), 49.

¹⁶⁶ Saints are those Christians whom the Church officially proclaimed that during their earthly life they strove to follow Christ in a more deeply committed way, that is, that they lived a holy life. However, the phrase, ‘in a more deeply committed way’ neither removes nor nullifies the aspect of human weakness and imperfections that are characteristic of our earthly life. However, in the weaknesses and imperfections of their human life, the Saints

during their earthly lives, have lived a good and exemplary life.¹⁶⁷ According to C. Nyamiti, a good life according to African traditional moral standards, is also a precondition to attain such status. No one is revered as ancestor unless the one led a morally good life on earth; for an ancestor is also a model of behaviour for the living. The ancestor is, moreover, believed to be the source of tradition and its stability.¹⁶⁸ This means that those who lived a ‘wicked life’ or died a ‘bad death’ are excluded from the rank of the ancestors.¹⁶⁹ They are now in the spirit-world, and live as invisible members of the living community. The Ancestors are the founders of the ‘Umunna community,’ which is central in Igbo traditional society. The establishment and maintenance of the morals and customs of the people are attributed to them. They long for the reunion of their sons and daughters. They are the custodians of morality and take care of their descendants. The Africans believe that a person can through medicine, prayer and sacrifice, especially, to the ancestors, round-off his life more successfully than his or her personal *chi* originally intended.

In Igboland, to qualify as an ancestor, the dead person must attain a good ripe-old age and must have at least a male child. Only those whom society declared to have died honourable deaths could attain ancestorhood. Their death must be without blemish, and accompanied with a proper and befitting burial ceremony.¹⁷⁰ During offerings and services to them, they are addressed and called by their names in a descending order. In addition, their good deeds are echoed with *Ikoro*.¹⁷¹ In this case, it is a moral duty on the part of the living relatives of the dead ancestor to ensure that the burial and mourning ceremonies for the dead are duly carried out. The neglect of the last rites, according to African traditional belief, could cause sickness and misfortune to the relatives.¹⁷² In Igboland, one who commits murder, suicide, or dies through malpractices like witchcraft or sorcery is never regarded as an ancestor, and never receives any befitting burial.

The International Theological Commission has recently acknowledged communion and constant exchange between the living and the dead in the African Traditional Religion. It maintains that the idea of a family union of souls through death is not foreign to many African religions and offers the opportunity for inter-religious dialogue with them.¹⁷³ It could then be said that a typical African family comprises of both the living and the living dead.¹⁷⁴ The ancestral belief in African religion is much rooted in the concept of ‘life after death’.¹⁷⁵ Writing on this, F. Nwaigbo, states: “The origin of this religious belief is anchored in the belief of the *hereafter*; with the notion of soul and spirit force; with prayers and ritual sacrifice: these principles are its primary characteristic features. There is also the speculation that the ancestry system could be a continuation of the household, family lineage and relationship of a people in the supernatural sphere. In this line of thought, the ancestry veneration is to be considered as the

strove right from the moment of their conversion, to give Christ an unalloyed loyalty and commitment that atimes resulted in offering their lives for Christ, as in the case of martyrs. This is the whole centre of the understanding of the doctrine of Christian Saints.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. A. I. Obiakoizu, *The Role of The Ancestors in Igbo Religion In The Light of Christian Mediatorship*, Innsbruck: 1979, 56.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. C. Nyamiti, (1984), 15-17.

¹⁶⁹ Deaths by suicide, as a result of oath-taking or by accident, thunder or lightning, are regarded as “bad deaths” in the Igbo Traditional Religion.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. A. I. Obiakoizu, (1979), 56.

¹⁷¹ *Ikoro* is a big wooden instrument used for announcement in the Igbo traditional society. It is very common, especially in places like Ndi-Okoroukwu, Ndi-Obasi, Ndi-Ugbugbo and Acha-Isiukwuato, to mention but a few.

¹⁷² Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 116.

¹⁷³ Cf. “Current Questions in Eschatology”, in: *IQJ* 58 (1992), 222-223.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 51.

¹⁷⁵ O. I. Igwegbe holds the view that the “belief in reincarnation is widespread, but only the good ones come back to life.” Nevertheless, this assertion posits some philosophical problems. If the statement, “only the good ancestors come back to life” is true, by implication, it affirms that not all the ancestors are good. Then if not all of them are good, how do they attain the status of ancestorship? Does it not contradict Nyamiti’s claim that only good life qualifies one to attain the status of ancestorship?

reflection of this relationship and symbolical expression of *communion* and *communication*.”¹⁷⁶ That is why the “belief in reincarnation (*Ilo Uwa*) is very common, especially, among the Igbo people, but only good ancestors do come back to life. This is possible in the African traditional logic because the ancestors are the patrons of the community, which they never abandon. People believe that only a part of the ancestor’s spirit reincarnate.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, reincarnation among the Igbos is a real phenomenon. It is a belief that people who died in good old aged are recognized ancestors of the ‘Umunna’ – Community – are said to have come back to earth to reincarnate themselves.¹⁷⁸

But the question is: How could the lives of such ancestors be models for the living? Does this not contradict the principle of morality as the basic criterion for ancestorship? Is re-incarnation a factor for distinguishing the good ancestors from the bad ones? Perhaps, the only explanation to this impasse is that ‘a good life’, according to African moral standards, is not the only basic yardstick for meriting the status of ancestorship.¹⁷⁹ We could only infer that Nyamiti maintains an extremely dogmatic-moral position in the justification of ancestorship in the African Traditional Religion.

On incarnation in the African Traditional Religion, Tempels maintains that it is explicable by the philosophy of forces; the ancestor does not create a child. Africans do not hold that, for they know that God does this: It is not strictly the ancestral spirit that is reborn, but the child is supposed to come under his particular influence and to receive part of his vitality and qualities. Therefore, the ancestral name is renewed in the family and the clan has an added advantage.”¹⁸⁰ Despite the problems the concept of ‘life after death’ or reincarnation posits, it is usually a blessing and honour in the African Traditional Religion, especially, when an ancestor is believed to have re-incarnated.¹⁸¹ However, what ever may be the case as regards the social, cultural and institutional factors behind the origin of the belief and foundation of the ancestral veneration, the

¹⁷⁶ F. Nwaigbo (1995), 207.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Ibid

¹⁷⁸ Cf. C. C. Osuji, *The Concept of Salvation in Igbo Traditional Religion*, Rome: 1977, 38.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Criterion (b) above.

¹⁸⁰ P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris: 1948, 18.

¹⁸¹ The phenomenon of re-incarnation is very common in many African traditional societies. J. S. Mbiti testified to this saying: “This belief is reported among many African societies. This is, however, only partial re-incarnation in the sense that only some human features or characteristics of the living-dead are said to be ‘re-born’ in some children. This happens chiefly in the circle of one’s family and relatives. The living-dead who has been re-incarnated continues, however, to have his separate existence and does not cease to be” (J. S. Mbiti, 1984, 159-160). However, this belief was partly the result of externalization of the people’s awareness of the presence of their living-dead, and partly an attempt to explain what is otherwise a purely biological phenomenon which applies not only to human beings but also to animals. For him, those who hold someone to be in the state of personal immortality see biological or character resemblances in a young child, and immediately feel that since the particular living-dead has not returned into the oblivion of what he called ‘Zamani period’, he has ‘returned’ to them. Marriage, according to him, facilitates re-incarnation, since that would give the father a chance to re-incarnate in one of his children grand children. For this reason, it pains a community to see someone die without getting married, since this dwindles the chances of being ‘re-born’. Nevertheless, anybody can be re-incarnated whether married or not, whether young or old. But in some societies, it is believed that those who are not married or who have no children have no chances of re-incarnating. But in practice, only a few people are actually ‘re-born’ in this sense, and some re-incarnate in several individuals simultaneously, without minding the gender of the living-dead. When relatives notice that one of their living-dead has been re-incarnated, they rejoice about it, for this is another way of keeping warm the relationship between the two parties. In this sense, the concept of reincarnation is seen as a blessing in the African Traditional Religion, especially among the Igbos of Nigeria. In such a case, a father or great ancestor could be re-incarnated in (or to) one of his most-beloved sons. As J. Mbiti further highlights, once the living-dead moves into the *Zamani* period and into the state of ordinary spirit, re-incarnation for him also ceases. In this African belief, the human soul is destined to become an ordinary spirit, and once that stage is reached, there is no more possibility of its returning to the human mode of existence. Such is the phenomenon of re-incarnation in the African Traditional Religion (cf. J. S. Mbiti, 1984, 160). But this belief poses lots of philosophical problems concerning the uniqueness of the human personality.

fact remains that the foundation of this system of belief cannot be traced back in anyway to technological, economic or political conformity, but rather to religious system. Their reverence is felt in cultural, structural, and domestic areas of various traditional societies such as Africa, China, Japan, and ancient Rome.¹⁸²

The Ancestors are patrons of the community in the sense that they work with *Ala* (the Earth Deity) in protecting the community from harm such as famine or epidemics like small pox or abominations like the birth of children with a tooth on or the birth of twins.¹⁸³ The ancestors are believed to be the custodians of the laws and customs of the tribe. They punish with sickness or misfortune those who infringe them. Constantly before the Ashanti person and serving to regulate his conduct, is the thought that his ancestors are watching him, and one day, when he rejoins them in the world of spirits, they will ask him to give an account of his conduct, especially of his conduct towards his kinsmen. This thought has the implication of a very potent moral sanction.

Despite the belief that the ancestors are custodians of laws and order in the African society, they are never worshipped or adored. It is a popular opinion that the ancestors are only *venerated* and *revered*, but never *adored* and *worshipped* as God. Adoration and worship are reserved to God. Many people saw the ancestral veneration purely as a secular affair and as lacking any religious import. Thus within the symbolic character of this belief, they maintain that the ancestral veneration is only a social and traditional way of paying honour and respect to the elders and aged people in a society and that this has no obvious religious significance.¹⁸⁴ The justification for this view is that the word, “ancestor,” is used for both the *forefather* and for the living *fathers*, and *grand fathers* and *elders* in any society. Many others maintain, however, that such a view emanates from an inadequate interpretation and knowledge of ethnographical sources, since the existential condition as well as the manner of mechanism of power, which are attributed to the ancestors, are quite different from that which are attributed to the living father of a family or a head of a clan group.

The reverence of any spiritual being that has no descending lineage or who does not belong to the descending line of a clan, is not recognized as ancestry veneration. The ancestors exist in a line of succession just like the Apostles in the Christian religion with the difference that they are not in succession of representing any Founder, for the African Traditional Religion lacks a Founder, akin to the sense of *God-made-Man*. The African Traditional Religion is built on the foundation of the ancestors just as the Christian religion is built on the faith and witness of the Apostles.¹⁸⁵ In this sense, the ancestors could be regarded as the “Apostles”¹⁸⁶ of the African Traditional Religion.

¹⁸² Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *Ibid*

¹⁸³ In the African traditional society, especially among the Igbos, to bear a child with the feet coming out of first or with a developed tooth, or to bear twins were regarded as abomination. Such children were regarded as a “curse” from the Earth Goddess and were never accepted. They were thrown away in the evil forest and allowed to die. Such abominations were cleansed with rituals performed by the Nri priest. Instances of such practices abounded before the advent of Christianity in African Society. (cf. E. Ilogu, 1974, 16, 44; cf. C. A. Obi, *Hundred Years of Christianity in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*, Onitsha: 1985). In this work, the author maintains that *Nri* is the acknowledged original home of many Igbo villages and clans, and the source of many religious rites among the Igbos of the Northern area or the Onitsha Igbo. Recent archeological finds at Igbo Ukwu may have belonged to these former priest kings of Nri. (cf. G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, London: 1963, 30; cf. T. Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu = An Account of Archeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*, in 2 vols. London, and the University of Ibadan: 1970).

¹⁸⁴ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 208.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid* 208.

¹⁸⁶ The word ‘Apostle’, derived from the Hebrew word *schaliach* and rendered into Greek as *apostolos*, refers to a fleet that has been sent out, a group of colonists, or else a passport or bill of delivery. In 1Kg. 14:6, the prophet appears as God’s messenger. In the post-exilic period, *Schaliach* is a technical term for the envoys of Jewish authorities = the name does not appear, however, until the second century A.D. In the case of such a man the fundamental rabbinical principle applies according to which an authorized representative is the same as the person himself. In the New Testament teachings, the word ‘Apostles’ refers to (a) those who are witnesses of the

In this first part of our work, we made effort to discuss the nature of the African Traditional Religion, its principles, fundamentals and features. The intention is to acquaint the reader with overview knowledge of the nature of the African Traditional Religion which forms the background to a discussion of initiation as an integral element of this religion. The next chapter focuses attention on symbol and symbolism, serving as a prelude to an examination of initiation as a symbolic value in the African Traditional Religion.

risen Lord, to whom the crucified Lord has revealed himself; (b) those who have been commissioned by the Lord for missionary preaching (cf. Gal. 1: 15-17; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1f.15:7-11). But it is in the context of those who are witnesses of African Traditional Religion, those who lived and practised African traditional religious-cultural lives, who left a model of behaviour to the living that the word 'Apostle' is analogically used for the Ancestors in the African context.

CHAPTER TWO

2 SYMBOL IN RELIGION

2.1 Introduction

Symbol occupies a prominent place in religion. For one to understand initiation in the African Traditional Religion one has to understand the concept of symbol. This is necessary because initiation is not just a ritual, but a symbolic - representing reality.

2.1.1 Definition of Symbol

Due to symbolic pluralism, there is a proliferation of definitions of symbol. However, some scholars see this plurality as constituting a major impasse to a clear definition of symbol.¹⁸⁷ Jean Chevalier, for instance, is of the opinion that due to the amorphous image of symbol it escapes all definition because by its nature: it breaks all established barriers and reunites the extremes at sight.¹⁸⁸ Definition has many implications and one of this is the possible limitation of conception or notion of something that is defined. Thus, symbol is so universalised that a definition could constitute undue restriction or limitation. In principle, the elastic and dynamic qualities of symbol tend towards infinity. That is why each symbol is regarded as a microcosm, a total cosmos.¹⁸⁹ A.R. Radcliff-Brown defines symbol as whatever has meaning.¹⁹⁰ In a general sense, symbol refers to that which “expresses, represents, stands for, reveals, indicates, or makes known another reality.”¹⁹¹ In a specific sense, it is ordinarily defined as a thing recognised as normally typifying, representing, recalling something of great practical importance by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought. This includes objects, activities, relations, events, gestures, and spatial units in a ritual situation.¹⁹² A clear understanding of symbol requires a trace of its etymological derivation. Such an etymological analysis of symbol places one on a vantage position which reduces the error of confusing ‘symbol’ with another thing, for instance, ‘sign’.

2.1.2 The Evolution of the Word “Symbol”

The word “symbol” derives from the Greek word *συμβολον* (symbolon) – itself a derivative of *συμβαλλειν* – meaning a sign or composition, signal, mark, emblem, convention, *insignia* and omen.¹⁹³ J. O. Ukaegbu maintains that *symbolon* means to approximate; a word, that has provoked a great controversy.¹⁹⁴

Sharing the view of Baumer H. O. Meuffels maintains, in his work, *Kommunikative Sacramententheologie*, that symbol was originally considered as a stranger’s mark of knowing, as fixed signs or, in general, the sign of claim of feat. This accounts for its development into different forms.¹⁹⁵ In the old Egyptian and Greek Laws, *Symbolaion* is considered as a given

¹⁸⁷ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, *Igbo Identity and Personality vis-a-vis Igbo Cultural Symbols*, Salamanca: 1991, 24.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. J. Chevalier, et al (ed.), *Diccionario de los Simbolos, Traducccion Castellana de Manuel Silvary Arturo Rodriguez*, Barcelona: 1986, 31.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu; (1991), 24.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, “Taboo”, in: *SFPS* (London: 1968), 143.

¹⁹¹ J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 17.

¹⁹² Cf. Ibid; cf. R. Firth, *Symbols, Public and Private*, London: 1973, 15.

¹⁹³ Cf. J. M. Pabon, *Diccionario Manual Griego-Espanol*, Barcelona: 1982, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 15.

¹⁹⁵ “...die Gasterkennungs-marke als verabredetes Zeichen oder ganz allgemein das Zeichen für einen Leistungsanspruch. Daraus entwickelten sich verschiedene Abmachungs-Formen” (H. O. Meuffels,

concrete way of proof of a contract or agreement.¹⁹⁶ In the philosophical sense, the use of symbol has much wide meanings and applications. Some philosophers spoke of symbols at a time with using new criteria. In the *Symposium*, for instance, Plato explains *eros* through a myth as a longing for the original unity. The individual human being is seen as a divided part of the former man-woman unity, whereby every man and woman searches for union with his or her original part.¹⁹⁷ In the Greek tradition, human beings can rise to the level of the transcendence through symbol. In the words of W. Müller: “In der griechischen Tradition kann von dem Symbol zum Transzendenten aufgestiegen werden. In dem Symbol selbst klingt der metaphysische Hintergrund an, der immer ein zu interpretierender bleibt.”¹⁹⁸ Heraclitus regards symbol as a quest for the interpretation of the oracle of Delphi.¹⁹⁹

In the early Christian era, especially in the Roman Empire, the use of symbol flourished in symbolic language which arose not out of choice but of necessity. Consequently, during the persecution of the Christians, Christians expressed themselves in depictions on chapel walls with open comment, hiding their epitaphs and other written or depicted statements in forms that would not draw destruction on them. They forced themselves, under circumstance, to use symbols to represent their presence. They used such symbols as the eagle (Roman symbol for Jupiter borrowed from the Zodiac symbols appearing in the pantheistic mysteries) to represent themselves and what they believed in.²⁰⁰ Thus, eagle became the symbol of Christianity. The same applied to the cross (in a half-hidden form, combined with an anchor – a symbol used by the pagans; a crude form of fish, now called *versicle* or a *mandorla*), which became the symbol of Christ, referring to a similarity in sound with *ichtus*, the Greek word for fish. In this period, the word *ichtus* served as the Greek initials of the words: Jesus, Christ, Son of God, and Saviour. Such symbol as vine became the symbol of Christian promise.²⁰¹ Words like the lamb, palm, the Good Shepherd became symbols referring to Christ, “...and would all be understood by the heathen contemporaries in a different sense than that given to these symbols by the early Christians”.²⁰² The early Christians also adopted, among the systems of symbolism, those belonging to the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines as well as the sacred number.²⁰³ In the early period of Christianity, the word “symbol” was often applied to the Creed and still features in the same manner in the Latin Church. It indicated, either in a religious or profane sense, an emblem, figure or type, something that specially distinguishes one regarded as possessing a particular character or as occupying a particular office or holding a special place in legend or mythology, typical of the trident – the symbols of Neptune.

In Medieval period, symbolism experienced dramatic growth and was presented with the breath of the Medieval Thought.²⁰⁴ In this period, the whole world was conceived as a greater symbolic unity which expresses all that could be thought.²⁰⁵ The removal of purpose and order in view of the symbolic reality predominated causal thinking. The world image was not

Kommunikative Sakramententheologie, Freiburg: 1995, 213; cf. I. Baumer, “Interaktion-Zeichen-Symbol. Ansätze zu einer Deutung liturgischen und volksfrommen Tuns”, in: *LJ* 31 (1981), 25-26, 25.

¹⁹⁶ “das konkrete für den Vertrag hingegebene Beweismittel”. H. O. Meuffels, 1995, 213; cf. W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus (ed.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 2. Reihe, 7. Halbband 4 A,1, (Stuttgart: 1931), 1085.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Plato, *Symposion*, 191d, 274.

¹⁹⁸ W. W. Müller, *Das Symbol in der dogmatische Theologie*, Frankfurt: 1990, 26.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. J. Mansfeld, *Vorsokratiker, Griechisch/Deutsch, Auswahl der Fragmente*, Stuttgart: 1987, 253, Fragment 266 (= Fragment 93 bei W. Kranz (ed.), *Die Frage der Vorsokratiker*, 1, Zürich: 14, 1969, 172.

²⁰⁰ Cf. E. N. “Rites of Passage”, in: *The New Encyclopedia Americana*, 6 (New York: 1958), 160.

²⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid*

²⁰² Cf. *Ibid*

²⁰³ Cf. *Ibid*

²⁰⁴ Cf. cf. H.O. Meuffels, (1995), 213; cf. J. Huizinga, *Herbst des Mittelalters. Studien über Lebens- und Geisterformen des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich und in den Niederlanden*. Kurt Köster (ed.), Stuttgart: 1987.

²⁰⁵ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 238.

presented on equal bases with causal natural science which deals with matter.²⁰⁶ In the strict sense, nature and history were integrated in the general symbolic unity which incorporates God and the universe. The same applies to spirit and matter. This way of viewing the world had some consequences. It led to a consideration of communication and law as a unity only to pay the price of strict closeness. This pure mechanism remained more or less artificial phantasm because of an external connection of thought in the sense that what used to be a value lost its meaning.²⁰⁷ This development led in the Medieval Theology to positivistic concentration on the juridical foundation of the sacraments and the authority of Christ as having real connection between grace and the sacrament. In this same period, Augustine attacked the symbolic language and declared it a mark of the Gnostics.²⁰⁸ Following *symbolon* tradition, he holds it to be a sign or indicator which reflects a pact of faith, which merchants make among themselves to sustain their society.²⁰⁹

In the modern times, however, the most accepted interpretation of *symbolum* traces it to Rufinus of Aquileia.²¹⁰ In his exposition of the Creed, he observed that in Greek the word *symbolum* can signify either “token (*indicium* or *signum*)” or *collectio*, that is a whole towards the making of which several people have made contributions.²¹¹ The aspect of *token*, which he so much emphasized, contributed to why the creed was never written down, but committed to memory and maintained as the secret of the apostolic churchmen.²¹² Kelly maintained that even though Rufinus’s theory that *symbolum* originally meant sign or token was taken up by a number of other Church Fathers,²¹³ it was by no means the only or the most widely favoured exegesis.²¹⁴

One must take note of a kind of equivocations arising from the use of the word ‘symbol’, especially the phrase attributed to St. Augustine where he maintains that “symbol in Greek means collation in Latin”.²¹⁵ He suggested that the creed is called a symbol on the analogy of the pacts or agreements which businesspersons enter into with one another.²¹⁶ In its ancient Latin borrowing, *symbolum* had meanings ranging from a signet ring²¹⁷ or the impress of a seal to a legal bond or warrant.²¹⁸ In spite of the equivocations arising from St. Augustine, however, his derivation of the title of the creed harmonized with the current linguistic usage. His position did not stand alone. It had the support of a whole school of writers both before and after his day.²¹⁹

²⁰⁶ Cf. Ibid 241-242.

²⁰⁷ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 213-214.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Ibid

²⁰⁹ J. N. D. Kelly writes: “Augustin leihet das Gewicht seiner Autorität einer andern, viel plausibleren Erklärung. Das Bekenntnis wird Symbol genannt, so ist sein Vorschlag, auf Grund seiner Analogie zu Verträgen oder Vereinbarungen, die Geschäftsleute miteinander abschließen. *Symbolum* war, darauf ist zu achten, ein sehr altes lateinisches Lehnwort und hatte im weltlichen Gebrauch Bedeutungen, die von Siegelring oder Eindruck eines Siegels bis zu gesetzlicher Verpflichtung oder Vollmacht gehen. Daß die letztgenannte Bedeutung in christlicher Zeit die vorherrschende war, wird durch ihr Vorkommen bei Tertullian bewiesen. Augustins Ableitung des Names des Bekenntnisses war daher im Einklang mit zeitgenössischem Sprachgebrauch und stand nicht allein: sie hatte die Unterstützung einer ganzen Richtung unter den Autoren vor wie nach seiner Zeit”. (J.N.D. Kelly, *Altchristliche Glaubensbekenntnisse Geschichte und Theologie*, Göttingen: 1993, 60).

²¹⁰ Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds, Third Edition*, Malaysia, 1999, 53.

²¹¹ Cf. N. Ayo, *Creeds as Symbol*, Notre Dame; 1989, 4; J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, Paris: 1884, 64.

²¹² Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, (1999), 53-54.

²¹³ Cf. St. Augustine, *Serm.* 214 (P.L. 38, 1072); cf. St. Maximus of Turin, Hom. 83 (P.L. 57, 433).

²¹⁴ Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, (1999), 55.

²¹⁵ “Explanatio symboli ad initiandos”: “Symbolum Graece dictur, Latine autem collatio” 17: 1157, in: N. Ayo, (1989), 5.

²¹⁶ Cf. St. Augustine, *Serm.*, 214 (P.L.38, 1072); cf. St Maximus of Turin, Hom. 83 (P.L. 57, 433); *Serm.* 212 (P.L.38, 1058) and *Serm.* 214 (P.L. 38, 1072).

²¹⁷ Cf. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 33, 1, 4.

²¹⁸ Cf. Plautus, *Pseudolus* 1, i, 53; II, ii, 55.

²¹⁹ Cf. Cf. Nicetas Rem., *Explan. Symb. Ad init.* 13 (P.L. 52, 873), St Peter Chrys., *Serm.* 57, 58, 59 (P.L. 52, 360 ff.); *Explan. Symb. Ad init.* 13 (P.L. 17, 1155); St Fulgentius Rusp., Theodor Mops., Kom. Xii, 27.

This peculiar use of symbol created confusion in the medieval period to the extent that when St. Thomas Aquinas came to write his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, it was called 'Collationes Credo in Deum' (Sermon – Conferences on I believe in God).²²⁰ For Thomas Aquinas then, a person cannot come to God unless he or she believes. In his *Summa Theologica*, he writes: "Now a man cannot believe, unless the truth be proposed to him that he may believe it. Hence the need for the truth of the faith to be collected together, so that it might be the more easily proposed to all, lest anyone might stray from the truth through ignorance of the faith. It is from this being a collection of maxims of the faith that the symbol takes its name."²²¹

2.1.3 Origin of Symbolism

In its officially documented form, the origin of symbol can be traced to the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt. The Encyclopaedia Americana maintains: "It is claimed by authorities that the origin of symbolism is traceable to the hieroglyphics or pictorial writings of the ancient Egyptians and was transmitted from them to other nations by the Jews. The Egyptians symbolized their gods with animal forms or combinations of both human and animal form."²²² Examples of such forms are (1) *Horus*, the sun god that took the form of a sparrow hawk; the disk became the hieroglyph of the sun, expressing the victory of the good over evil. (2) The snake (*uraeus*) acquires the symbol of death, and is used as a representation of the Egyptian kings. In this representation, it meant power over capital punishment, just as the handled cross (*ankh*) held by gods and kings signified life. (3) The staff (*uas*) became the Nile king's symbol of authority. It retained that significance with most nations and even the Church.²²³ Of course, the Bishop's use of crosier in the Church has the same symbolic connotation of authority and leadership, as in this ancient Egyptian (non-Christian) religion.²²⁴

These illustrations go to substantiate the fact that symbol, in its officially documented manner, took its origin in Africa. Following this genesis and development of symbolism in Africa, many nations have now acquired certain symbolism in their religions and cultures, which give them unique identity, even though some of them may not be documented. That is to say that the symbolic representation which took its root in ancient Egypt came to have great influence on other cultures and religions in the world.

For example, the *centaur*, which in Greek mythology is a creature that is half man and half horse, is seen also in Roman mythology – a rural deity called *Sylvanus* represented as half man and half goat. The same is seen in Africa, especially in Igbo religion where there is a similar figure "nwa mmadu bu eghu," means man-goat or half man and half goat. This phrase "nwa mmadu bu eghu" is commonly used to indicate abnormal behaviour observed in someone. In this Igbo case, "nwa mmadu bu eghu" symbolizes what is real though abnormal in a person. The point of emphasis is the "... reality of the abnormality observed in someone and consequently less attention is paid to the symbolic medium or instrument of expression or indication of the anomaly."²²⁵ Therefore, the use of these symbols is found to be common to the cultures of Egypt, Greece, Rome and Igbo people of Nigeria, to mention but a few.

It is interesting to note that by coming into contact with the Roman culture, the Christian religion acculturated certain names of the Roman gods and symbolic practices, gave them Christian interpretation and attached values to them. An example is "Sylvanus", the name of a

²²⁰ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu (1991), 15.

²²¹ T. Aquinas, S. Th. II-II, q. I, a. 9.

²²² E. N. "Rites of Passage", in: *The New Encyclopedia Americana*, 6 (1958), 159.

²²³ Cf. *Ibid*

²²⁴ If the Church is able to borrow this symbol of staff (crossier) and other related symbols from the non-Christian religion, that poses a challenge to the Church in Africa on the possibility of the inculturation of the symbolic values in African traditional Initiation Rite into the Christian Faith. However, such a possibility could not be realized without an adequate examination of what such Initiation Rite is and how it relates to the Christian faith in Africa.

²²⁵ J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 18.

pagan Roman deity. The Christians took over this and canonized “Saints” with such a name. The question is: if the Church could baptise Christians with the names of pagan deities what prevents her from baptising Africans with their deities, in other words, incorporating the names of African deities into Christianity? It is encouraging that the Church in Africa is recently awakening to the need of baptising children with the native names. In reacting to this type of attitude of Christianity towards African Traditional Religion, Edward Robin warns against the dangers of neglecting the values of the African Traditional Religion, and solicits effort to be directed to correcting and overturning the prejudiced and negative stereotypes often associated with African traditional values, concepts and symbols.²²⁶

2.1.4 Symbol in the Modern Period

Although, J.N.D. Kelly maintains that the notion of symbol is traced to Ruffinus, it witnesses great change in the modern period.²²⁷ In its original sense, symbol did not begin with or imply imagination, but in its essential nature, has to do with real essences of things, beings; spiritual or corporal. With time, its understanding and domain augmented tremendously.²²⁸ According to J.N.D. Kelly: “Baffled perhaps by the variety of explanations sponsored by the Fathers, modern students have sometimes sought a solution in an entirely different field. It is proposed to derive the Christian application of *symbolum* to the Church’s Creeds from the practice of the mystery religions. Stereotyped formulae, disclosed only to members of the cult, were often employed in these at the initiation ceremonies and as tokens by which the devotees might identify each other; and there are solid grounds for holding that they were technically known as symbols.”²²⁹ Plutarch, for instance, has a sentence referring to the mystic symbols of Dionysiac orgies which the participants shared with one another.²³⁰ St Clement of Alexandria, ridiculing the Attis cult, reproduces²³¹ some of its sacred formulae and calls them symbols. In the rite of Eleusis, Arnobius applies the same term *symbola* to the crude formulae, which the initiates were expected to recite. Here there is a certain parallelism with Christian creeds. The Church’s teachers did not hesitate to exploit the terminology of the mystery cults to explain the Christian doctrines. An example of such words is *Symbolum*, which they appropriated.²³² The impulse of the spirit of modernism created more awareness in the minds of philosophers of the modern period. It made them, especially the philosophers of the German-speaking world to give a new ascent to the understanding of symbol. G. W. Leibniz, through new element, widened the notion of symbol by speaking of it as having the function of transmitting knowledge.²³³ In the Romantic period, symbol experienced a widened expansion, especially with Goethe. In this period, symbol is seen as acquiring the character of representation.²³⁴ G. W. F. Hegels remained devoted to the philosophy of Idealism and made the distinction between Expression (*Ausdruck*) and Meaning (*Bedeutung*).²³⁵

²²⁶ Cf. T. E. Robin Edwards, “African Bishops offer Wish Lists to Synod”, in: *NCR* 29, (1994), 3-5. 3

²²⁷ Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, (1999), 53.

²²⁸ J. Ukaegbu, (1991), 17.

²²⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, (1999), 55-56.

²³⁰ Cf. Ibid

²³¹ Cf. *Protrep.* 2, 15 (Stählin, 13). In 2, 18 (Stählin, 14) and 2, 22 (Stählin, 17) the word stands for cult objects.

²³² Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, (1999), 56.

²³³ Cf. G. W. Leibniz, *Kleine Schriften zur Metaphysik*, H. H. Holz, (ed.) Darmstadt: 1965, 27-47; W. W. Müller, *Das Symbol in der dogmatische Theologie*, Frankfurt: 1990, 27.

²³⁴ Cf. Ibid 26-28.

²³⁵ Cf. *Ästhetik*, Bd. 12, 39ff. “Der Symbolbegriff spielt in der Philosophie Hegels eine untergeordnete Rolle. Der die gesamte Philosophie beherrschende Gedanke ist der des Begriffs. Hegel bestimmt die Definiton gemäß des Axioms ‘omnis determinatio est negatio’. Der Begriff ist folglich die Momente der Allgemeinheit, Besonderheit und Einzelheit. Der Begriff ist folglich die ‘Reflexion-in-sich’ der Bestimmtheiten der Allgemeinheit und Besonderheit, welche negative Einheit mit sich das an und für sich Bestimmte und zugleich mit sich Identische oder Allgemeine ist (cf. *Enzyklopädie*, Bd. 6, 98). Der Begriff stellt das Movens des philosophischen Systems Hegels dar. Das Symbol hat für Hegel drei Momente: (1) Es ist zunächst ein Zeichen, d.h. wie bei einem Zeichen ist die Verknüpfung zwischen Bedeutung und Ausdruck lose. (2) Über das Zeichen hinaus besteht beim Symbol

The modern period witnessed the emergence of various nuances; indication of attempts made by philosophers to define the concept of symbol which derived its origin from the mystery cults. Its use witnessed a transformation ranging from giving it an essential role – one that deals with reality, to a functional one. In summary, in the modern period, symbol refers to that which symbolizes, expresses, represents, reveals and indicates, and cannot signify as in the case of sign.²³⁶

2.1.5 Sources of Symbol

Symbol touches almost all aspects of human culture. Its sources reflect a diversity and multiplicity deriving from theology, liturgy, philosophy, mysticism, anthropology, mythology and history of religions. Others sources include esoteric, emblems, hagiography, psychoanalysis, bestiaries, sermons, music, numbers, poetry, alchemy and lapidaries. Also included in its sources are magic, astrology, science of dreams, of colours, liturgical drama, profane literature, folklore, traditions and diverse influences, superstitions, pictures, sculpture, ornamentation and architecture.²³⁷ This list is far not exhaustive. Consequently, other themes belong to the traditional symbols, though they may not be symbols in the strict sense. They include allegory, attribute, ideogram, and conventional sign. J. Ukaegbu maintains that because of these basic differences concerning the nature of the sources of symbols, it becomes difficult to identify some essential symbols.²³⁸ The obvious nature of some symbols and their multiple characteristics pose great difficulty to an exhaustive treatment of the symbols.

2.2 Difference between Sign and Symbol

A remarkable difference exists between sign and symbol. As distinct from mere signs, symbols stand for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions and impel to action. They occur in stylised patterns such as in rituals, ceremonials, gift exchange and various culture traits.²³⁹ Sign, derives from the Latin word 'signum', and means token, mark, warning and symptom. It permits one to forecast or foresee, to guess, know or recognize something.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, an attempt to make a distinction between sign and symbol poses some problems which are not so easy to resolve. According to J. Hospers: "To avoid the unending polemics over the distinction between sign and symbol, we shall limit ourselves to talk of signs, leaving for the others the election of the types of signs which they prefer to consider as symbols."²⁴¹ This means that the temptation and

zwischen Inhalt und äußerer Darstellung eine Verbindung. (3) Moment der Unangemessenheit zwischen Inhalt und Ausdruck. Es zeigt sich hierbei die fundamentale These Hegelscher Ästhetik: wie die Form vom Inhalt her zu begreifen ist, so ist auch die Absolutheit der klassischen Form, die den Einklang von Realität und Begriff sucht, von der Absolutheit des Inhaltes her zu verstehen. Bei dem Symbol bleibt eine Kluft zwischen Form und Inhalt bestehen, so daß das Symbol dem reinen Begriff gegenüber wesentlich zweideutig bleibt (*Ästhetik* 1, Bd. 12,411). Neben dem Symbol kennt Hegel das Symbolische als Kunstform (cf. *ibid* 434ff), das durch seine unbestimmt-allgemeinen und abstrakten Vorstellungen geprägt wird. Das Symbolische versteht sich als Stufe zur wahrhaften Kunst. Das Symbol kann je nach seiner partiel gelungenen Übereinstimmung der Verhältnisbestimmung zwischen Gestalt und Bedeutung, die sie aller Kunst aufgetragen ist, in unbewußte Symbolik (*ibid* 434ff), Symbolik der Erhabenheit (*ebd.* 485ff) und der bewußten Symbolik der vergleichenden Kunstform (*ibid* 501ff) klassifiziert werden. Die Verbindung zwischen Begriff und Symbol ereignet sich in der Bewegung der Aufhebung. Die symbolische Kunstform als defiziente Klassik strebt auf die klassische Kunst zu (*ibid* 425f). In Kunst, Religion, Philosophie als den Sphären des absoluten Geistes entledigt sich dieser den beengenden Schranken seines Daseins und erschließt sich zur Betrachtung und Vollbringen seines Anundfürsichseins". (G.W.F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, (ed.) H. Glockner, Stuttgart: 1951, 22).

²³⁶ Cf. J. Ukaegbu, (1991), 17.

²³⁷ Cf. J. E. Cirlot, *Diccionario de Simbolos*, Barcelona: 1985, 9-12; Chevalier et al. (ed.), *Diccionario de los Simbolos*, Barcelona: 1986, 159.

²³⁸ Cf. J. Ukaegbu, (1991), 18.

²³⁹ Cf. A. Cohen, *Two-Dimensional man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in A Complex Society*, London: 1974, 23.

²⁴⁰ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 19.

²⁴¹ Cf. J. Hospers, et al, (ed.) *Estetica, Historia y fundamentos*, Madrid: 1986, 142.

the possibility of confusing ‘symbol’ with ‘sign’ are real. The possibility to use one in the place of the other may arise from people’s understanding of each according to their different religious-cultural inclinations. However, no matter the usage, the two are not essentially the same and do not connote the same meaning. Sign is classified into natural and artificial.

2.2.1 Natural Sign

Deriving from the Latin word *natura* and from the verb *nasci* (to be) the word, “natural” means the qualities which a being possesses from birth and those that are potentially developed as against those that are acquired by art with time or by learning.²⁴² It is a quality “born in or with one.”²⁴³ Thus, it refers to the basic quality, character or constitution of a person or thing.²⁴⁴ In terms of sign, it has to do with a relation existing between the sign and what is signified, for example, smoke – a sign of fire; clouds – signify rain. There is always a casual relation in the natural sign.

2.2.2 Conventional / Artificial Sign As Symbols

Conventional signs are “artificial” and such signs are fabricated and, therefore, not natural. They arise out of human conventions and are essentially arbitrary. They belong to the community of human persons who adopted them by their conventions and give them the meanings they serve. The community formulates or creates the uses of symbol. This underlies its conventionality. Symbol and the meaning people attach to it vary from one community to the other and depend largely on the religious and cultural world-view of the people. That is why granted the possibility of individual interpretation of symbol, the idea of conventionality *ipso facto* excludes individual or private verdict over the recognition or appropriation of symbols. Whatever contribution the individual makes to its appropriation, the individual does it in the name of the group. Cultural symbol, therefore, belongs to a given human community. The same applies to religious symbol. In the latter case, it belongs to a particular religious group to interpret and apply it to religious context.²⁴⁵ Thus, T. S. Kuhn states: “The scientific group or community claims the model, which constitutes the worldview of the group or community. This group only owns the model, but does not determine what the community regard, or should regard as a symbol to them.”²⁴⁶ In both cultural and scientific groups, though an individual may help create some data that become symbols or paradigms, these symbols, once approved and appropriated, become common property of the group and do not belong to the individual.

Symbol is imposing, evocative, and stimulating in expression. Because of these qualities of symbol, it requires sharp intelligence to grasp and appreciate its significance. Symbolic operation is an intelligible reality. It is distinguishable from intelligence as one of the mental activities. Therefore, the phenomenology of symbol is intelligible as far as it is the function of the intellect to recognize, interpret, and appreciate such operation.²⁴⁷ Such operation of the intellect is also functional in the area of symbolic values that fall within the ambience of a religious system, but goes beyond that.²⁴⁸ They belong to the order of symbols and may, in a

²⁴² Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 17.

²⁴³ *Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, New York: 1995, 666-667.

²⁴⁴ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 17.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid*

²⁴⁶ Cf. T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: 1977, 170.

²⁴⁷ Ukaegbu, (1991), 25.

²⁴⁸ Even though in the area of religion, the intellect performs such operation, it takes a secondary position in giving the symbols the significance they acquire; for religion is not an act of the intellect but an act of the will and a product of human contact with the reality of the divine. Religion is an aspect of the human spirit, but it is not a creation of the human spirit (spirit with a small “s”) but a gift of the divine Spirit (Spirit with a capital “S”). In philosophical terms, Symbol is a product of the human mind, and man cannot create but only recognizes or discovers reality through scientific quests. The symbolic order in symbolization is generated or created by the human mind as an imitation of the cosmic order. Thus the symbolic power lies on or resides in the symbolic object or symbol but is manipulated by man. Symbolic operation is a logical mental activity for symbol turns out

loose sense, be called signs. Such symbolic practices as initiation rite may correctly be called conventional practice, which is peculiar to a community of human persons or religion.

The place of initiation rites in African Traditional Religion, as conventional symbols, challenges the Church to study what significance they have to the African people in their religious, social, political world-views and to see how best to inculturate them. Its place in the Liturgy would be a pragmatic one as it helps to enrich the Christian Sacrament of initiation. For the Church to achieve this goal, it requires cultural contact, a contact that is filled with the spirit of Christ to make the gospel take flesh in the human (African) culture. This involves inculturation that is focused towards incarnating Christianity in the African culture. Such an approach could benefit the two religions. On the part of the Church it requires humility, openness, readiness, and the ability to learn from the African Traditional Religion and its rites, and involves an appreciation of the people's symbolic rites as a basic method in evangelisation. In the language of the Church, it involves dialogue²⁴⁹, a dialogue that is relation-oriented, involving a sense of friendly meeting, opening of one's mind and heart to the other.²⁵⁰ F. Nwaigbo highlights what it demands from the Church: "It has been observed that one feels inseparable from individual reactions, world views, symbols and myths of African religions, which are deep-rooted in the life of the people. Christianity has still to learn from African world-views, to make that Gospel message more relevant to Africans. Where there is reciprocal of learning from the other, there originates relational enrichment in ritual and liturgical worship of the Church, but more so in the categories and world-views of the people. However, if one is of the opinion that one alone has the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then one is not willing to learn from someone who has different outlook or religious view. *Therefore, the Church needs dialogue, which requires a certain amount of reciprocal communion, but there will be scarcely an inter-personal communion.*"²⁵¹ In relation to initiation in the African Traditional Religion, it requires the need for the resurgence of symbolism to influence the reshaping of theological terminologies of the future, the necessity to re-edit some of the liturgical books which were written when there was no clear-cut distinction between sign and symbol as it is today.²⁵² This does not only involve a theoretical, systematic theological discourse of God: the Trinity, Incarnation, human salvation, et cetera, but on a more practical level, the place of African initiation rites in the sacramental life of the Church.

2.2.3 Major Difference between Sign and Symbol

Sign is one of the constituents of symbol, but is not symbol. Sign and symbol have the capacity to indicate, to serve as a signal. A sign signifies, but does not symbolize. A symbol symbolizes. This is a typical application of circular definition to determine what sign and symbol are. However, the fact remains that symbol surpasses sign with other developed or deeper forms

to be a logically ordered communicative medium or representation. In other words, symbol is an ordered logical representation.

²⁴⁹ Dialogue is a manner of bearing witness to Christ: with sympathy and readiness to listen to a partner = a mutual reciprocity of a personal profound witness of faith [(cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1991), 277)]. It is a conversation between two or more persons, an exchange of ideas and opinions (cf. *Webster's Dictionary*, 1995, 277). However, in the bid to dialogue, certain questions arise: How can we provoke the wish to learn something from the religious experiences and religious values of the other and be able to dialogue even when we claim possession of the fullness of truth? Is our striving for dialogue not tied with the wish to convert the partner in dialogue to our own side? Here few people who believe in a neutral dialogue speak of a partnership without a hidden or ulterior motive, that is, without the intention of proselytising. Others maintain that inter-religious dialogue is always tied with a heavy advantage, which means biblically, understood: "Let us remain in love and hold to the truth. (Eph 4:15). Here we meet a concrete problem as it pertains to the Initiation Rites in African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith. Cf. F. Arinze, "On Interreligious Dialogue And The African Church," in: *EJLR*, 1 (1992), 85-87, 86.

²⁵⁰ Cf. F. Arinze, in: *EJLR*, 1 (1992), 85-87, 86.

²⁵¹ F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 390. My italics.

²⁵² Cf. *Ibid*

of indication.²⁵³ In most cases, it represents a reality. It is obvious that humans are the only being that creates and uses symbols. The human rational faculty helps him to exercise the function of giving symbol a meaning. With the cognitive structure of his being, human being is not a 'closed system'. His cognitive structure is capable of many multiple operations and helps him to do this on the level of symbol.²⁵⁴ J. O. Ukaegbu tries to explain how this operates. He states that syncretic forms operate with the framework of natural or controlled conditions, and adaptation to uncommon situations is usually not easy. Organisms in this group of syncretic form are controlled by instincts. But on the level of variable forms, there is more independence. Animals on the latter group recognize certain signals or signs and try to adapt themselves to the environment.²⁵⁵ Human beings belong to this group of variable forms, but in a higher order. Thus, with the help of his rational faculty and the level of symbolic form proper to human beings alone, 'signal' becomes 'symbol'. By contrast, in animal behaviour "signs always remain signals and never become symbols."²⁵⁶ Human beings transcend this level, and are capable of creating symbols out of phenomenal realities around them. There is a notable improvement on the level of formal organization in human being. Signal or sign becomes a symbol to operate as human being creates meaning out of them; whereas animals, capable only of inferior types of behaviour, merely respond to a signal without realizing its signification. The symbolic behaviour of man is characterized by creativity and novelty.²⁵⁷ Therefore, it is only man who creates symbol in the universe. He is a symbol-creating-being. Without man, there is no symbol. Symbol loses its meaning. It becomes merely an empty 'Ding' (a thing), something *bedingt* (conditioned).²⁵⁸ Even though symbol acquires great meaning through human being, it is never a subject. It does not share in the 'subjectivity' of man in terms of possessing 'selves'. Only 'selves' are bearers of subjectivity. Human beings are selves and bearers subjectivity. However, symbols are not, and do not bear any, no matter the religious meaning man attaches to them. By virtue of the fact that man gives meaning to symbol, the symbolized therefore, influences the determination of choice of symbol.²⁵⁹

However, an object could play a role in the determination of its use as sign or symbol. An example is repeated action in experience. "In variable forms, there is some level of independence that allows some animals to recognize some signals or signs, as in the case of Traffic Light. Red colour can serve as sign and symbol. And it vindicates the 'overlapping' factor in the analysis of 'The Structure of behaviour....'"²⁶⁰ But its symbolic significance is that it symbolizes martyrdom because it is the colour of the shed blood,' and as the colour of blood is also associated with love and hatred.²⁶¹ The cross is another example that one could use to differentiate sign from symbol. According to the Christian religion, Christ died on the cross. The Cross is usually identified with the crucifixion of Christ. Therefore, it becomes the symbol of suffering, trials, even of rejection and/or obstacle to overcome. It becomes for the Christians a symbolic meaning of eternal life. The cross then becomes a symbol and not a sign. This significance of the cross indicates symbol as acquiring meaning with particular human condition, religion and culture. Therefore, no matter the symbolic meaning attached to the cross, the people outside the realm of the Christian religion, for example Buddhists and Moslems, would hardly understand or appreciate its symbolic significance. The same applies to a Christian understanding and appreciation of the Crescent, the symbol of Moslem Religion. This gives credence to the issue of appreciation of symbolic values

²⁵³ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 22.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid 23.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid

²⁵⁶ Cf. F. Ryan, *The Body as Symbol: Merleau-Ponty and Incarnational Theology*, Washington: 1970, 7-10.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid 8-9.

²⁵⁸ Cf. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, London: 1951, 173.

²⁵⁹ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 22.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid cf. B. Malmberg, *La lengua y el hombre: Introduction a los problemas generales de la linguistica*, Madrid: 1949, 42; cf. F. Ryan, (1970), 8.

²⁶¹ Cf. J. A. Perez-Rioja, *Diccionario de simbolos y Mitos, Las Cienciaa y las Artes en su expresion figurada*, Madrid: 1988, 371.

in religion and culture, which only have meaning to the people from the cultural and religious background where it is used.

2.2.4 Symbolism and Phenomenology

Symbolism is the art and doctrine of symbols, knowledge of the treatment of symbols or deciphering the cult of intent of signs or symbols, with special reference to things spiritual, invisible or unable to be pictured, as an idea or quality.²⁶² Phenomenon, on the other hand, is "... an observable fact or event; that can be scientifically described and explained."²⁶³ It derives from the Greek word, *φαινόμενον* phainomenon and from the root word, *phainesthai* meaning to appear. Phenomenology deals with the essences of observable realities. In relation to symbols, it serves as a medium to reach the essences of symbols. Let us see how symbol expresses reality.

2.2.5 Symbol and Reality

Symbol reveals reality. This is its primary object.²⁶⁴ It is inherently bound to the reality it reveals so much that it becomes an authentic reflection of the reality. In the philosophical sense, the knowledge of symbol, Gnosis (Γνωση), which distinguishes it from conceptual knowledge (accumulative or discursive), keeps us in touch with a fundamental ignorance, which Socrates and other philosophers held to be the "objective of philosophy."²⁶⁵

Symbol opens the world of the unknown or ignorance, producing in man "learned ignorance."²⁶⁶ Symbolism, therefore, appears as the effort of the human spirit to look for contact with the invisible world of spirits.²⁶⁷ It is central to an integrated and balanced view of reality. It appeals to experience.²⁶⁸ Moreover, in an unquestionable search for truth, man attempts to create myths as symbols or media. Therefore, every true artist feels, consciously or unconsciously, to be in touch with transcendental truths. This shows that his images are shadows of things seen through the veil.²⁶⁹

This nearness to the transcendental truths determines the validity of scientific knowledge. However, theology concerns itself with the study of God, especially as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.²⁷⁰ Therefore, in the Christian context, symbolism concerns theology as it helps to understand the person of Jesus Christ, as the symbol of the Father.²⁷¹

Symbol as an object, helps man to meet the reality it symbolizes and facilitates such an approach as the movement of the human person to the reality of the divine (God).

²⁶² Cf. E. N. "Rites of Passage", in: *TNEB*, 6 (1998), 159-163.

²⁶³ Webster's *New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 754.

²⁶⁴ Cf. J. C. Rubio, *Simbolos del arte Cristiano*, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca 1985, 66.

²⁶⁵ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 11: cf. J. O. Puig, in the prologue to "Diccionario de los Simbolos", in: J. Chevalier, (1986), 10.

²⁶⁶ J. O. Ukaegbu, (1991), 11.

²⁶⁷ Cf. V. Mulago, *Simbolismo Religioso Africano*, Madrid: 1978, 5.

²⁶⁸ Cf. A. Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, London: 1977, 34.

²⁶⁹ In the quest for truth (*aletheia, Wahrheit*), A. Shorter identifies the universal criteria of truth in symbolism. He writes: "... if there were no universal criteria of truth, people would be incapable of expressing their ideas and beliefs in languages and systems of symbols, and it would be impossible to have any scientific knowledge about such languages and symbol systems". (A. Shorter, 1977, 104, 138). That means that the universal criteria of truth facilitate translations from one language to another. In the absence of the basic element of language, as representing a universal reality of truth, the act of translation is rendered impossible. Even on the scientific level, this plays a great role. And that is why T. Kuhn observed that, to be precise, "We may... relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer to the truth." (T. S. Kuhn, (1977), 170)

²⁷⁰ Cf. Joh 14:6; cf. Eph 2:18; cf. Heb 10:19-20; cf. 1 Tim 2:5; 8: 19; 12:45; cf. 2 Cor 4:4; cf. Ex 33:18g.

²⁷¹ Cf. Col 1:15; cf. Rom 8:29, cf. Heb 1:3; cf. Eph 1:10

2.2.6 Communicative Function of Symbol

Symbol communicates value. The word, *value*, comes from the Latin word, *valere*, which means something having or believed to have real worth or merit.²⁷² It is that reasoned and firm conviction that something is good or bad; that those convictions or beliefs are organized in the human psyche to form scales of preference or scales of values.²⁷³ Value reflects the personality of individuals and expresses the cultural tone, moral, affective, social and spiritual dimensions of the community, marked by the family, the school, the institutions and the society.²⁷⁴ Symbol helps to communicate value in people's culture and religion. In African Traditional Religion, initiation as symbolic rite, therefore, helps to communicate values to Africans.

Because of this function, symbol is said to be essentially communicative in character. Humankind gives this function to symbol. This is because human being is a symbol-communicating being. Without humankind, symbol loses its communicative function. According to C. I. Ejizu, "symbolism is the basis of human communication. For man is, by nature, a *homo symbolicus*, a symbolizing, conceptualising, and meaning-seeking animal. He is capable of using one thing to stand for or represent another."²⁷⁵ The use of symbol is unique to humankind. Therefore, to represent reality, humankind must represent his/her ideas, his/her concepts, his/her vision of the world, realities around him/her and his/her approach to the sacred in symbolic forms.

Language is one of the essential media by which human beings communicate their thoughts, religious ideas and beliefs. It is one of the human indigenous cultural symbols, signs, myths, rites, images, customs, and gestures. It includes the aspirations, riches, limitations, ways of praying, loving, looking at life and the world. Above all, it serves the form of religious communication with any people.²⁷⁶ In this sense, language is one of the most important forms of the universal human process of symbolization. Words stand for other things. Religion itself is basically a cluster of ideas, acts, relationships or linguistic formations woven into some sort of ordered whole. In this wide context of man's innate process, symbols denote many things, take many forms, and have many functions. They are as vital to language and religion as they are to human culture as a whole.²⁷⁷

Language is essentially communicative in character. This character of language is one of its most paradoxical and it is realized in the dynamism of symbolic event. It leads to different possibilities of communication.²⁷⁸ Symbolic communication denotes a boundary drawn between the transcendental and categorical, and the different moments which the symbolic action expresses.²⁷⁹

With its communicative function, symbol concretely expresses itself in arts. It represents realities in the form of images. In this sense, the psychology of images is exceedingly subtle and complex. Images function as symbols in the religious sphere. They speak to man existentially and echo in the depths of his psyche. They communicate through their evocative power and convey latent meanings. Consequently, symbols transform the horizons of human life, integrate man's perception of reality, change his scale of values, and re-orient his loyalties, attachments and aspirations in a manner which far exceeds the powers of abstract conceptual thought.²⁸⁰ Art

²⁷² Cf. *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, (1995), 1150.

²⁷³ Cf. B. Tierno, *Que con los valore?*, art. in *Suplemento Semanal de Ya*, Madrid, 7 de enero de: 1990, 2.

²⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid*

²⁷⁵ C. I. Ejizu, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, Enugu: 1986, 1.

²⁷⁶ Cf. E. Hillman, *Toward An African Christianity*, New York: 1993, 68-69; cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Rome: 1975, no. 63.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid* 69.

²⁷⁸ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 221; W. Jetter writes: "Diese äußerste Möglichkeit der Kommunikation gründet einerseits in der Transzenzbezogenheit, andererseits in der Ganzheitsstruktur, die zwar dargestellt, aber nicht ausgeschöpft werden kann." (W. Jetter, *Symbol und Ritual, Anthropologische Elemente im Gottesdienst*, Göttingen: 1978, 78).

²⁷⁹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 221.

²⁸⁰ Cf. A. Dulles, *The Models of the Church*, New York: 1978, 24.

conveys symbolic meaning in a special way. Symbol does not only express its communicative quality in aesthetics, but also in tradition.²⁸¹

The same function is part of the intellectual faculty and the affective human imagination.²⁸² The language of symbol possesses a great power of connection; arising from the free interpretation of human beings and its wide variations, engendered by an existential-free human decision.²⁸³ Remembrance, hope, freedoms and essentialities form realities and historical connections from which the subject receives the structure of symbolic communication. They are received in anticipation of the transcendence so that new potentialities come into realities. Through them, life is changed and becomes new.²⁸⁴

In the process of knowing, understanding and giving meaning to symbol, the sensory perception perceives it, the intellect conceptualises, interprets and gives meaning to it. Therefore, language helps man to express the values of his symbolic world. And this symbolic language arises from the functional act of speech (performativer Sprechakt).²⁸⁵ The human intellect and affective imagination, which are rooted in the sensory perception, act together to give symbol its meaning. Remove the human intellect and the sensory perception to interpret reality it becomes difficult for symbol to serve its communicative function. This means that it is human beings that create symbols and attach meanings and values to them.

The communicative function of symbol challenges the Church in Africa to make use of the imageries and symbolisms of Africans in the communication of the gospel message. According to A. Dulles, the communication of this message "... can hardly happen when the symbol system is borrowed from the historically and culturally conditioned experience of some other people, ancient or modern ... if they do resonate, ... it is a proof that there is some isomorphism between what the image depicts and the spiritual reality with which the faithful are in existential contact."²⁸⁶ Initiation is one of such big challenges.²⁸⁷

2.2.7 Symbol and Identity

The values of each person determine one's relation and reaction to situations and, to some extent, one's character. Therefore, symbols, as a value of the people invariably determine their identity. According to A. Shorter, "In the countries of independent Africa emotional support has been generated for the values and concepts of traditional religion, so much that they are becoming, in many cases, symbols of national or African identity."²⁸⁸ The change of values into symbols is a way to concretise them and use them as points of departure for academic, political, and religious ends. Thus, symbols become ways of conserving or preserving cultural values such that they do not tarnish the image of social change. This is true not only of social changes but also of cultural changes which expresses vividly the dynamic nature of culture.

As we saw above, the communicative function of symbol unfolds or reveals reality (Wirklichkeit) and helps man to encounter the abstract, the world of reality. Remove symbol from its religious meaning, it loses its significance and the identity it confers on the people and their religious experience. This has practical implication for objects as *Ofo*, *Ogu* and *Omu* which are religious symbols in Igbo Traditional Religion. *Ofo* and *Ogu* acquire the symbols of Oath and Innocence, and *Omu* is the symbol of sacredness and protection. They serve as identity symbols for the Igbo people, something central to their religion. Because of its symbolic character, candidates for initiation wear *Omu* to ward evil spirits from them.

²⁸¹ Cf. J. O. Ofoegbu, (1991), 34.

²⁸² Cf. W. Jetter, (1978), 72. 75. 78/79.

²⁸³ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 222.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid

²⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid

²⁸⁶ A. Dulles, (1978), 25; *The Survival of Dogma: Faith, Authority and Dogma in a Changing World*, New York: 1973, 15

²⁸⁷ Cf. 3.3 below.

²⁸⁸ A. Shorter, (1978), 28.

Because symbols conserve and preserve the cultural values and identity of the people in the face of social or religious changes,²⁸⁹ traditional forms of expressive culture certainly could have been affected by the wide-spread social and cultural changes that have occurred (through cross-cultural-religious contacts) since many of ethnographies were written.²⁹⁰ Because of this wind of change that has blown and is still blowing, P. Ranchor infers as follows: “Today, most of the traditional African religions have virtually ceased to exist. Whether by commitment or by coercion, the majority of Africans have accepted either Islam (especially in North and West Africa, the Sudan and Somalia) or Christianity (in most of central or Southern Africa).”²⁹¹ In addition, this affects initiation in the African Traditional Religion, especially in areas where the government has abolished it through legislation²⁹² or through the influence of the Church. Despite this radical change, however, some areas²⁹³ are still resilient to change, and uphold this cultural, religious practice. The reason for this is the uniqueness of religious symbol that serves as identity of the people.

2.3 Christian Religious Symbol

Religious symbols reveal the sacred. They are said to be essentially hierophanies. They reveal man’s experience of ultimate reality and seek to integrate the various levels of his awareness – the preconscious, the personal, and the transcendental. In addition, they mediate knowledge about the cosmos and man’s place in it.²⁹⁴ C. Ejizu stresses that they are not simply communication media but are also effectively charged, non-neutral in their emotional and intellectual value. They can also be envisaged as possessing a spontaneous power in ‘projecting the mind towards the absolute.’²⁹⁵ Dramatised in rituals or related in myths, they are felt to sum up for those who avail them what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life they support, and the way one ought to behave while in it. Sacred symbols relate to ontology and a cosmology to aesthetics and a morality; their peculiar power emanates from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level.²⁹⁶

Scholars, logicians, metaphysicians, linguists, theologians, art, historians and many other social scientists have over a long period of time preoccupied themselves with symbolism and its related questions. They have been interested to find out much more about the universal process of symbolization and the form it takes in specific historic and cultural situations.²⁹⁷ All poetry is also said to rely greatly upon symbolism. Religious symbols and symbolic acts have aroused the greatest of interest on account of their unique ability to manifest the sacred, encompass a multitude of structures of human existence and cosmic structures. With the unique place of symbols in religion, let us see how Jesus Christ, the Founder of Christianity, made use of symbol in his ministry.

2.3.1 Jesus Christ and the Use of Symbols

A look at the symbolic actions of Christ raises certain questions on the meaning of these actions. Did He actually use symbols in His Ministry of proclaiming the message of the Kingdom? E. P. Sanders submits that Jesus’ actions were probably all symbolic, affirming that

²⁸⁹ An example is initiation rite among the people of Edda.

²⁹⁰ Cf. M. Young, *Signs from the Ancestors: Zuni Cultural Symbolism and Perceptions of Books Art*, Uni. Mexico: 1988, 6.

²⁹¹ P. Ranchor, *Essential African Mythology: Stories that change the World*, Britain: 1997, vii-viii.

²⁹² An example of such areas is Kenya where the female initiation rite has been abolished.

²⁹³ “Of very few nations that have maintained a particularly culture, religious consciousness, there are the Yoruba in Nigeria, the Fon of Benin, the Ashanti in Ghana, and a few tribes in the Sudan, who have been resilient to change and have managed to preserve their old beliefs, symbols and pantheons.” (P. Ranchor, 1997, vii-viii).

²⁹⁴ Cf. C. I. Ejizu, (1986), 2.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid; cf. R. Firth, (1973), 49.

²⁹⁶ Cf. C. Geertz, *Religion As a Cultural System, The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays*, New York: 1973, 97

²⁹⁷ Cf. C. I. Ejizu, (1986), 2.

He made use of symbols.²⁹⁸ Symbolic actions were part of the prophet's vocabulary. They simultaneously drew attention and conveyed information.²⁹⁹ In the Old Testament, the Prophets made use of symbols to convey divine messages.³⁰⁰ Similarly, following the pattern of the prophets, Jesus made use of symbols in his divine ministry, but with special power to realize the actions of God.³⁰¹ These symbolic actions of Christ are not just analogies, but identity characteristic of the given events. In the view of M. Trautmann, the symbolic actions of Jesus and the eschatological presence of God move the temporal and the qualitative so closely together that the symbolic actions of Jesus and the eschatological presence of God could only be understood as identical.³⁰² On the other hand, H. Schürmann speaks of the eschatological fulfilment of the signs when the primary sense does not lie on the action itself (example, the Healing in Luke 10: 9), but actually on the underlining *eschaton*.³⁰³ He therefore maintains that it is within the context of the representation of the *eschaton* that Christ's death on the Cross could be interpreted as a fulfilment of all his symbolic actions.³⁰⁴

In the examination of symbolism in Jesus' Ministry, we wish to examine three (eschatological) symbolic actions, namely: The Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners, The Call of the Twelve Apostles, and The Cure of the Paralytic.

2.3.2 Jesus Eating With Tax Collectors and Sinners

In Judaism, the action of meal was *per se* a sign of closer community life, a sharing of life together. Through the action of Christ, it took an eschatological dimension. It became a meal shared in anticipation of the banquet in God's Kingdom.³⁰⁵ Therefore, through the action of Christ, the event of a meal, which was a mere sharing of life together, took a christological form by becoming a Christ-centred event. The constitution of a table community, expressed in the gathering of the saving community, therefore, became an eschatological reality. It took a concept of future meal and a fulfilment of a messianic time.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁸ Cf. E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, England: 1993, 253. O. Meuffels sees it this way: "Von der Wortkündigung Jesu zu seinen Zeichenhandlungen überzugehen, bedarf es nur eines kleinen Schrittes, da nach E. Fuchs 'Jesu Verhalten ... der eigentliche Rahmen seiner Verkündigung war', wie Jesu Wort schon in sich selber Tat ist. Zudem kann erst das deutende Wort Jesu die eigentliche Zeichenhaftigkeit einer Handlung bestätigen und den impliziten Sinnüberschuß freilegen". (H. O. Meuffels, 1995, 97); cf. E. Fuchs, *Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus: Ders., Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus. Gesammelte Aufsätze II*, Tübingen: 1960, 115; Cf. ders., *Was heißt, du sollst deinen Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst? ders., Gesammelte Aufsätze 13/15*, 19; Cf. M. Trautmann, "Zeichenhafte Handlungen Jesu. Ein Beitrag zu Frage nach dem geschichtlichen Jesus", in: R. J. Schnackenburg, Schreiner (ed.), *FZB*, 37, Würzburg: 1980, 74-75.

²⁹⁹ Cf. E. P. Sanders, (1993), 253.

³⁰⁰ Examples are: "Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of portent against Egypt and Ethiopia" (cf. Isa. 20:3). God commanded Jeremiah to break a pot and proclaim that the Temple would be destroyed (cf. Jer. 19.1-13). Jeremiah also wore a yoke to indicate that Judah should submit to Babylon (cf. chapters, 27-8). Ezekiel performed much more complicated actions, which required a good deal of explanation, such as lying for long periods of time first on one side and then on the other (cf. Ezek. chs.4-5; 12. 1-16; 24:15-24). These actions convey deep symbolic meanings, namely: wearing a yoke symbolizes submission; breaking a pot symbolizes destruction; and going naked and barefoot symbolizes protest." (E. P. Sanders, 1993, 253.).

³⁰¹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 98.

³⁰² Cf. M. Trautmann, *Zeichenhafte Handlungen Jesu. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem geschichtlichen Jesus*, in: Schnackenburg, Josef (Hg.), *Forschungen zur Bibel*, Bd. 37, Würzburg: 1980, 387; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 98.

³⁰³ Cf. H. Schürmann, *Die Symbolhandlungen Jesu als eschatologische Erfüllungszeichen. Eine Rückfrage nach dem historische Jesus: Bibel und Leben II*, 1970, 35.

³⁰⁴ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 98.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Mk. 6:34-43; 8:1-10; Miraculous Healing is noticeable.

³⁰⁶ Cf. J. Roloff, *Heil als Gemeinschaft. Kommunikative Faktoren im urchristlichen Herrenmahl*: P Cornehl, H. E. Bahr, (eds.), *Konkretione = Beiträge zur Lehre von der handelnden Kirche*, Bd. 8 (Hamburg: 1970), 97; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 99.

When a tax collector³⁰⁷ or another sinner³⁰⁸ is called to a communal meal, he is not only called to a meal, but also to experience God's love. By participation in the meal, he accepts God's healing invitation extended to all people. Therefore, in Jesus Christ, this action of invitation to and sharing of a meal, acquires a symbolic character. Later, the invitation to meal community extends to the whole Israel that enjoins them to accept God's Healing offer. It acquires its universal dimension in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the sacrifice, which perpetuates the single offering of Christ to the Father for humanity.³⁰⁹

2.3.3 The Call of the Twelve Apostles

The call of the Twelve Apostles³¹⁰ demonstrates another symbolic action of Christ. Explaining the symbolic character of this action, E. P. Sanders. Maintains: "... all the four gospels, Acts and Paul agree that there were twelve special disciples (often referred collectively as 'the Twelve'), they do not agree precisely on their names."³¹¹ However, it could be that Jesus himself used the term symbolically.³¹² The symbolic meaning of the number "twelve" represents the twelve tribes of Israel.³¹³ Jesus chose the twelve Apostles and sent them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel³¹⁴ to bring healing and salvation to them.³¹⁵ In calling the disciples and using the number 'Twelve', Jesus intended to show that he had in view the restoration of the people of Israel. The symbolic value of this number is especially clear in Matthew³¹⁶, where the twelve disciples will judge the twelve tribes of Israel.³¹⁷

From historical perspective, the ten of the tribes had disappeared centuries before Christ when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom. Many Jews, at this time, continued to hope, however, that God would some day restore the lost ten tribes. 'Twelve' therefore points to the expectation of an eschatological miracle, a decisive act by God to redeem his people.³¹⁸ The constitution of the twelve apostles by Jesus, as a saving medium for his people Israel, manifests a break and the realization of the eschatological kingdom of God that had already begun to realize.³¹⁹

2.3.4 The Healing of the Cripple and the Forgiveness of Sin

The story of healing is understood as a symbolic action, especially when we read Mk 2:5 not in the context of the added redaction of the quarrel with the Scribes³²⁰, but in the context of its earliest, original tradition.³²¹ In his commentary on Mark's gospel, O. Oko observes that the healing of the paralytic takes place because of or at least in conjunction with the actual forgiveness of sins is not coincidental, but intentional. At the basis of the anticipated therapeutic effect of forgiveness is a world-view according to which an intrinsic or integral causal relationship is presumed between sin and sickness and correspondingly between forgiveness as the remission of sin and the removal of its effects on the other hand, and healing as the restoration of health and wholeness on the other. The close causal connection presumed between sickness

³⁰⁷ Cf. Mk 2:13-17.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Mk 2:16.

³⁰⁹ Cf. M. Trautmann, (1980), 162-164.

³¹⁰ Cf. Mk 3:14; cf. Mt 10: 1-4; cf. Lk 6:12-16.

³¹¹ Cf. E. P. Sanders, (1993), 120.

³¹² Cf. Ibid

³¹³ Cf. Lk 22:28-30.

³¹⁴ Cf. Mt 10:6

³¹⁵ Cf. M. Trautmann, (1980), 232.

³¹⁶ Cf. Mt 19:28

³¹⁷ Cf. Mt 19:28

³¹⁸ Cf. E. P. Sanders, (1993), 120.

³¹⁹ Cf. H. O. Meuffesl, (1995), 100; cf. T. Trautmann, (1980), 232.

³²⁰ Cf. Mk 2:6-10

³²¹ Cf. Mk 2:1; 2:3-5,11ff.; cf. H-J. Klauck, *Gemeinde. Amt. Sakrament. Neutestamentliche Perspektiven*, Würzburg: 1989, 305-306.

and sin and between healing and forgiveness assures the integral unity and theological impact of Mark's text.³²² The event of the healing symbolically signifies the nearness of the kingdom among human beings, which the actions of Christ demonstrate. This is evident in the connection between healing and forgiveness of sin. The God whom Jesus Christ preaches and whom his actions manifest now takes care of the healing of the completely human person. Thus, the works of Jesus Christ, as manifestation of the great power of God, go to break the chain sin imposes on human nature. Jesus himself could understand the healing of the cripple as a symbolic action with an eschatological purpose. In this event, there is communication. The occurring communication contains three elements, namely: 1) the intention of Jesus himself as symbolic, to act, and to forgive; 2) the Faith of the cripple as a basis of communication and de-ordination, and 3) the theme of the Kingdom of God, which the preaching and actions of Jesus effect, and should be understood on the action of the healed cripple.³²³ To achieve the goal, the narrator employs a rhetorical device in v.9 on the question about what is easier (or more difficult), perhaps in light of Ps 103: 3 to maintain or highlight, on the one hand, the corresponding union of forgiveness and healing, none of which is conceivable or realisable without the other. The narrator expresses the conviction that without the forgiveness of sins there can be no real healing. It is, therefore important as well as consistent with the rhetorical plan of the narrator that Jesus counters the accusation of blasphemy levelled against him by appealing to the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins on earth and that he demonstrates or proves this by the ensuing healing of the cripple. For the narrator, the healing reveals demonstrably and indubitably the authority of Jesus to forgive sins. Thus, the narrator is able to bridge the obvious narrative gap and tension created by the apparently disruptive controversy over the forgiveness of sins and thus to give the text its unique thematic congruence and narrative integrity, unity and force.³²⁴

Obviously, the development of these texts on the forgiveness of sins presents some problems. Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that Mark did not devote much attention to the issue of the forgiveness of sins. His narrative aim is to emphasize the power of Jesus to forgive sins and to heal is a direct consequence of his dignity and status as the Son of Man, an enigmatic and oblique self-referential term that at one and the same time unveils and disguises the identity of the referent but invariably reflects and represents a constant though indirect self-designation and self-understanding of Jesus in a unique way. The passage represents for the first time in Mark's Gospel that has spoken of himself as the Son of Man.³²⁵ In Luke, however, the authority of Christ and the forgiveness of sins are understood as an extension of the healing.³²⁶ The proclaimed Kingdom of God, Jesus' healings, and claim of authority to forgive sins, as well as faith and repentance, form a unity. Matthew, on the other hand, pays more attention to the power of forgiveness of sins, which is given to human beings³²⁷, whereby the ecclesiological interest of the evangelist, appears to affect the forgiveness of sins.³²⁸ John, in his own part, trusts the eschatological forgiveness of sins to human beings.³²⁹ However, this power is founded on word and the works of Jesus, and the last acting subject is God himself.³³⁰ Other symbolic actions of Christ are the turning over the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons³³¹, which symbolise "destruction rather than cleansing."³³²

³²² Cf. O. I. Oko, "Who then is this?" *A Narrative Study of the Role of the Question of the Identity of Jesus in the Plot of Mark's Gospel*, Berlin: 2004, 118.

³²³ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 100.

³²⁴ Cf. O. I. Oko, (2004), 118.

³²⁵ Cf. *ibid* 119.

³²⁶ Cf. LK 5:31-32, 24: 47.

³²⁷ Mt 9:8.

³²⁸ Mt 16:19 = the power to bind and to loose.

³²⁹ Joh 20:23

³³⁰ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 111.

³³¹ Cf. Mk 11:15ff

³³² Cf. E. P. Sanders, (1993), 256.

Symbols, which originated in Africa and which the Jews carried over into Judaism, were functional at the time of Jesus. Jesus Christ himself, applying the symbolic actions in His ministry to bring about the message of the Kingdom, shows very well the importance of religious symbolism in unfolding divine mystery – the mystery of God and of His Kingdom. It shows its fundamental place in the Christian Religion. However, how do we understand symbol in African perspective?

2.4 Symbol in the African Society

To the Africans, symbolism occupies ‘a position of signal importance.’³³³ For them, symbol is understood in its religious context. Symbols are mostly religious since they point to something real or to the structure of the world. The real, that is, the powerful, the meaningful, the living, is equivalent to the sacred.³³⁴ Perhaps R. R. Marret may have over-stated the obvious when he said that the African man dances out his ideas.³³⁵ This statement and its interpretation are based on reality. The power of the image and the spoken word, the prevalence of the dramatic and ritual expression of ideas through symbolic action over verbalization, are some of the major factors underlying the power and importance of symbolism in the traditional African thought and life. In addition, “the reliance on oral rather than literary sources for preservation and transmission of the cumulative experiences, play a decisive role.”³³⁶ The African mind perceives the universe as a “forest of symbols.”³³⁷ Visible things stand for invisible things. For instance, the *Mmawu, Ekpo* (Masquerades) evoke and represent the ancestral spirits who are invisible.

The understanding of symbol and the reality it represents is borne neither out of sheer ignorance and superstition nor is it due to pre-logical conceptualisation, as some Western writers maintain. Rather it is actually sensible and time rational. C. I. Ejizu corroborated this in his work: “Contrary to the biased Victorian stereotype of many European and North-American adventurers, traders, missionaries and colonisers to Africa in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, which depicted African religious beliefs and practises (*sic*) as borne out of ignorance, superstition, magic, childish and pre-logical mentality, serious scholars like E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt, Edwin W. Smith, E. G. Parrinder, John S. Mbiti, E. B. Idowu, H. Sawyerr, G. Gaba and J.O.Awolalu, *Eugene Hillman, among others*, have systematically demonstrated that such religious beliefs and ritual symbolic performances are acutely sensible and rational. Besides, they are coherent with the generally accepted fact that religious symbolism has an inherent logic.”³³⁸

2.4.1 Symbol in African Traditional Religion

In the African Traditional Religion, religious symbols are potent storehouses of information and the crucial factors in the activity field. The totality of the ritual symbols, whether they are gods, ancestors, sacred actions or objects which make up the traditional universe, provides a network of symbolic forms uniting social, ecological, and conceptual elements into locally bounded systems. To re-enact the deeds of the gods, become possessed by divinities, manipulate sacred objects, speak sacred words, is to conform experience to normative patterns of meaning and thereby to control and renew the shape and destiny of the world.³³⁹ In this religion of the Africans, four types of symbols can be distinguished namely, (1) “direct symbols” – symbols whose material image express what they mean ideologically; (2) “indirect symbols” – symbols whose material object signifies a different thing which is not immediately

³³³ Cf. Ibid

³³⁴ Cf. M. Eliade, “Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism”, in: M. Eliade and Kitagawa, (eds.), *The History of Religions: Essays In Methodology*, (Chicago: 1959), 97.

³³⁵ Cf. W. A. Lessa, & E. Z. Vogt, *Readers in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th ed., New York: 1979, v.; cf. C. I. Ejizu, (1986), 3.

³³⁶ C. I. Ejizu, Ibid

³³⁷ Ibid; cf. W. C. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols, Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, New York: 1968, 25f.

³³⁸ Cf. C. I. Ejizu, (1986), 3. My italics.

³³⁹ B. Ray, *African Religions, Symbols, Ritual, and Community*, New Jersey: 1976, 33.

observable in the material; (3) the “non-material symbols” such as those expressed in gesticulations; and (4) “linguistic symbols” which are forms of expression in which the actual meaning of the signs and words are known through an in-depth reflection.³⁴⁰ One could notice these symbols in the written literatures (the glyph system) of ancient Nubia/Egypt that “provides us with typically African settings and pattern of thought,”³⁴¹ something that is present in almost all African societies. It could be found in the scripts of the Mende (Sierra Leone), Loma (Liberia), Bamum (Cameroon), the Sona (Zambia and Angola), Gicandi of Gikuyu, Adinkra system of Akan (Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire), Nsibidi and the use of Proverbs (among the Efik and Igbo tribes of Nigeria).³⁴² The peculiarity of the pattern of thought shows the place of linguistic symbols to Africans. Proverbs, in particular, for the Igbos “are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.”³⁴³ They are “language wrapped in symbols, to guard against its abuse or misuse.”³⁴⁴ Africans, therefore, are conscious of the importance of symbols and symbolism in life. For them old age and grey hairs are all symbolic. They may symbolise a fulfilled life and may earn one the right to courtesy and politeness. Proverbs, gestures, facial marks and so on are significant symbols and may speak directly or indirectly to people.³⁴⁵

Symbol can also have a conventional meaning which may be individually or subjectively constructed. Such conventional symbols acquire different meanings to different people. And here, it could create some cultural and religious problems. To some, for whom a particular conventional symbol is not a part of their religious or cultural system, it may have or acquire a different meaning. Consequently, this may lead to devaluation or relativizing of the real meaning it has for other particular group of people. One notices this especially, in the case of the crises that arise in the encounter between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion.³⁴⁶

Despite the crises, certain religious symbolisms in the African Traditional Religion need to be studied and revalued. In the words of C. Ejizu: “Besides of the current vogue for religious symbolism in the systematic study of African traditional religion, certain religious symbols and *practices* more readily recommend themselves to analysis, on account of their centrality in their religious systems. Such are the *Mudyi tree* in the *Nkang’a* ritual of the North-western Zambian Ndembu, the *cattle* among the Dinka and the Nuer of the Southern Sudan, the *golden stool* among the Akan, *Ashanti of Ghana*, Omu, the *Ofo tree* and such symbolic practices as *Ichi Ozo*, *Iba Ekpe* and *Initiation rite* among the Igbos of Nigeria.”³⁴⁷

Different categories of symbols have been variously referred to as ‘core symbols’, which appear in many ritual contexts. They telescope an inter-connected web of meanings into one ritual focus which each ritual context extends. Such dominant symbols and symbolic practices are considered pillar ritual phenomena in certain religious system and they serve to virtually reveal an aspect of religion, if not the entire religion respectively, and what the adherents tenaciously hold on to as a value to them. The examples of great scholars, such as Turner’s remarkable and insightful analysis of Ndembu ritual symbols³⁴⁸, are highly instructive of the kind of approach which could prove very viable in the investigation of the religious symbols and symbolic practices of traditional African religious system.

The Golden Stool, in particular, the core symbol of the Ashanti Nation, is believed to contain the *Sunsun* or soul of the Ashanti. It is a religious as well as political symbol of the Ashanti. The British, who colonized this African nation, did not understand its cultus symbolic relevance to the people of Ashanti. O. Onwubiko describes the character of this “Golden Stool”

³⁴⁰ Cf. O. A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Vol 1, Enugu: 1991, 35.

³⁴¹ Editorial, “Religion: Africa’s Gift to the World”, in: *New African*, 395 (2001), 20-21.

³⁴² Cf. Ibid

³⁴³ C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: 1958, xiv.

³⁴⁴ Cf. O. A. Onwubiko, (1991), 35.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid

³⁴⁶ Cf. C. Achebe, (1958), 135-141, 159-164.

³⁴⁷ C. C. I. Ejizu, (1986), 3-4. My italics.

³⁴⁸ Cf. W. C. Turner, (1968), 26.

in the following words: “The Golden Stool is considered so sacred that no person strictly is allowed to sit on it. It is securely guarded. It is taken outside only on exceptionally grand occasions. Never must it meet the ground. It is always lying on its own stool or on the skin of an animal such as the leopard. The Ashanti, have on many occasions, made great sacrifices to defend it when its safety was threatened. In 1896, they submitted to the deportation of their king, Prempeh I, rather than go to war in which they feared they might suffer defeat and risk the loss of the Golden Stool. They deemed it more saving their Golden Stool. In March 1900, the Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Fredrich Hodgson went to Kumasi to demand the surrender of the Stool, thinking it to be a throne of a king on which he should sit as their new king. However, he did not know the symbolism of the Stool as the soul of the Ashanti. Three days after this demand, war broke out between the British and the Ashanti and the Ashanti were subdued. However, they claimed victory because they fought only to preserve the Golden Stool, and that they achieved. When the British began to study the Ashanti political structure, it was after painstaking investigations that they found out if they were to understand the politico-cultural system of the Ashanti, they needed to penetrate and comprehend fully the symbolism of the Golden Stool.”³⁴⁹ Apparently, the British did not understand the symbolic significance of the Golden Stool, even though they claimed to know more and to be more powerful than the people they selfishly came to colonize. To understand the Ashanti – their religious, cultural, and political aspects – therefore, the British had to study the Golden Stool. They had to submit themselves to study and understand the conventional meaning it has for the people. It is a sacred object the meaning of which goes beyond the level of material religious to substantially spiritual one. It is the soul of the Ashanti Nation. To rub the people of Ashanti of the Golden Stool is to rub them of their soul. It is to destabilise and destroy them. The symbolism of the “Golden Stool” goes to express profoundly the significance of religious symbol in the people’s culture. The conflict that arises is an effect of understanding and interpreting a material object from totally a different cultural, religious background. Such could always lead to distortion or, at times, to a destruction of the original and essential meaning it has for the people. It could also lead to culture, religious or even political conflict. The British did not know it was not an ordinary seat. It was a type of “indirect symbol,” a “culminating of beliefs.”³⁵⁰ When the Ashanti defended it, they were not defending a material object, but concepts and ideas of the people. Thus, to understand the symbolism of the Golden Stool, one must go beyond the material stool to what it represents.³⁵¹

Therefore, *cultus* symbols as could be seen in the case of the Ashanti Golden Stool, have essentially religious and cultural significance. They play social as well as political roles. Sacred objects as symbolic values of the people form essentially part of African religion and culture. Often, they are “political emblems, or religious elements concretising a people’s belief systems in which case they embody religious concepts.”³⁵² They are often associated with the “core values” of a culture. They symbolically express cultural meanings as well as their interpretation. Placed in their socio-ritual contexts, they express ideas through symbolic actions and transmit these ideas in non-literate cultures from generation to generation, thereby preserving through specific actions, the cumulative experience, and belief and thought pattern of a traditional culture. They are of such value to the people that when they are tampered with, radically changed or displaced, it usually results to culture as well as religious crisis. Such a crisis normally leaves no small room for bloodshed and great loss of human lives. The effect of such a crisis, as witnessed in the case of Ashanti Golden Stool, could be a stiking lesson for the Church in Africa in her missionary approach to people’s cultural and religious values. The success of missionary evangelisation in Africa, therefore, could depend to a large scale on the Church’s approach to people’s culture and how much the Church is able to integrate and appropriate the people’s good cultural values.

³⁴⁹ O. A. Onwubiko, (1991), 36.

³⁵⁰ Ibid

³⁵¹ Cf. Ibid

³⁵² Ibid

In religion and culture, ‘dominant symbol’, ‘core symbols’ or ‘key symbols’ dominate sacred symbols. They operate in both the social and spiritual dimensions of people’s religious culture, serving as instruments of the expression of core values, their interpretation and communication. In a sense they have functions of “social and value control.”³⁵³ This is peculiar to Traditional African Religion.

Such symbols as the “diamond” and the “nude girl” can have rich symbolic significance to the people of Africa. Expressing the impression these two symbols made on him at his departure for England, a British Sailor, William Conton writes: “I had spent the last fortnight before sailing with my family in Lokko, and one of my brothers had come down to Sagresa to see me off (my father and my mother preferring to bid me farewell in their own house). As I squeezed my brother’s hand for the last time, he left in mine a large, uncut diamond. He told me that it was my father’s wish that I should keep this always with me in my journey away from home, to remind me that the whole treasure of my people’s faith and affection went with me.... Now, as I write, part of that same stone, still uncut and undistinguished in appearance, is before me, the material possession I hold most dear. In it, I see hidden the glorious flame of Africa’s spirit, the richness of her wealth and the sharp edge of her energy.”³⁵⁴ About the “nude girl”, he writes: “Africans are very conscious of the importance of symbolism in life; and that happy bathing girl has always summed up for me all that has (sic) been worth returning to Africa for. My last farewell was also for me, my most meaningful. I have never, so far as I know, set eyes on this particular girl again, but neither have ever forgotten the intensity of her happiness or the utter purity and innocence of its source.”³⁵⁵ In the above passage, the author identifies the diamond as symbol of the richness of African wealth, and nude girl as symbol of purity and innocence, thus bringing out the profundity of symbol and symbolism in African culture. All these show the significance of symbol in the African context. In the light of the above exposition, the question is: What is the place of initiation as a symbolic value? This is the subject of the next chapter.

³⁵³ Ibid

³⁵⁴ W. Conton, *The African*, London: 1966, 21; cf. O. A. Onwubiko, (1991), 38.

³⁵⁵ O. A. Onwubiko, (1991), 37.

CHAPTER THREE

3 INITIATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

3.1 Definition of Term

Initiation represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity. Coined from the Latin word *initiare*, to begin or beginning, “initiation” means to ‘enter upon’, ‘to introduce’, or ‘set going’. It means to admit with necessary introductory rites or forms into some society or observance, especially, of occult character. In the Christian parlance, initiation designates the complex of sacramental rites which comprises the final stages of becoming a fully enfranchised Christian a member of the Church, one of the faithful.³⁵⁶

It is a universal rite, an archetypal form that surfaces and influences events that have the spirit of beginning or the weight of an end.³⁵⁷ Initiation exists, in one form or the other, almost in every culture and religion. It features in different and diversified forms, which aims, in the religious sense, to bring the individual (the initiate) in contact with the sacred. It involves not only the religious life (in the modern meaning of the word “religion”); but also the entire life of the individual. It indicates a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person.³⁵⁸ In order to determine its various types, there is need to distinguish between an inexpressible mystery and an esoteric truth. In the Christian religion, for instance, the believers are initiated in the ineffable mystery of faith. Yet, this is an open secret, which one understands by faith. One who believes and accepts the Christian faith is baptized and taught the mystery of the kingdom. In the fifth century, only the initiated possess the knowledge of the Christian mysteries.

Initiation integrates, involves and incorporates the initiate existentially in the mystery. It makes one an active member or partaker of the mystery. By undergoing the process of initiation, one acquires the knowledge of the secret mysteries of a religion. This consists in the privilege of attending the actualisation of a certain religious truth in the cult, giving a person the right to behold and participate in certain dramatic acts of mysterious character. The aspect of secrecy occurs in most initiations. In these religions, everybody knows the truth which is dramatized in the cult. Nevertheless, it is a mysterious truth. Its actualisation is so holy and so secret, that only a limited number of people are allowed to attend to it. Moreover, it is strictly forbidden to depict or describe the cultic act in question.³⁵⁹ However, it can mean the disclosure of an esoteric truth in the sense of a secret doctrine which is taught or exemplified by dramatic action. In the latter

³⁵⁶ Cf. *The New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: 1983, 299.

³⁵⁷ Cf. M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Woodstock: 1995, xix.

³⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid* x.

³⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid* 18; To justify this position of M. Eliade, confer the secret nature of the Christian Sacraments which featured in the Christian religion in the form of the *Arcana disciplina*. This was a practice common in the Christian religion in the fifth century. It was a primitive Christian custom, a ‘secret teaching’, known through cultural actions which indicate that the Christian mysteries are to be kept secret to the uninitiated. Hugo Rahner brought this out in his commentary on the Christian baptism: “The mysteries of baptism and of the sacrificial altar were surrounded with a ritual of awe and secrecy, and soon the iconostasis concealed the holy of holies from the eyes of the non-initiate: these became ... ‘mysteries that make men freeze with awe.’ - ‘This is known to the initiates’ is a phrase running through all the Greek sermon, and as late a writer as the Pseudo-Areopagite warns the Christian initiate who has experienced the divine mystagogy to keep silence: ‘Take care that you do not reveal the holy of holies, preserve the mysteries of the hidden God so that the profane may not partake of them and in your sacred illuminations speak of the sacred only to saints.’” H. Rahner, “The Christian Mystery, and the Pagan Mysteries”, in: *The Mysteries, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, 11 New York: 1955, 337-401; cf. G. Anrich, *Antike Mysterienreligionen und Urchristentum*, Münster: 1932, 157-158.

case, the secret doctrine is mostly in the possession of a more or less closed society. One can witness such possession of esoteric truth in secret societies such as the Rosicrucian Order, Ogboni, Inkankar, Olumba Olumba, et cetera.

It is not easy to arrive at a clear definition of initiation. Thus, attempts to arrive at a clear definition of initiation produce multiple interpretations. Therefore, “many interpretations of initiation are possible, according to the different races.”³⁶⁰ A social interpretation places the accent on the passage from adolescence to the adult age. A psychological interpretation places it on “allaying personal anxiety.”³⁶¹ Similarly, a metaphysical and religious interpretations lay emphasis on the ending of the sexual ambiguity achieved by the circumcision of boys and the excision of girls. The adolescent boys and girls later become centres of ambivalent principles. With the removal by circumcision of a feminine “principle,” the adolescent boy sees himself committed to his virility and therefore fit for marriage. In the philosophical sense, initiation refers to a basic change in existential condition. From it, the novice emerges from his/her ordeal and is endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed prior his initiation; he becomes *another*.³⁶² It effects change in an individual. The *change* is a by-product of initiation and it affects both the religious and social status of the individual (the initiate). The change results from the death the initiate symbolically undergoes during the process of the initiation. In all this, initiation indicates a whole way of viewing the world, which sees death as part of the fabric of life.³⁶³ In it, death is seen as the opposite of birth not the opposite of life. Life includes both and the spirit of life regenerates in the land of death. Initiation, therefore, includes death and rebirth, a total change of a person’s way of living, a shattering, and shaking all the way to the ground of the soul. The initiate becomes as another person: more fully in life emotionally and more spiritually aware. Loss of identity and even feeling betrayal of one’s self characterize initiation³⁶⁴ Initiation causes a funeral and a rebirth, mourning appropriate to death and a joyous celebration for the restoration of full life. Without conscious rituals of loss and renewal, individuals and societies lose the ability to experience the sorrows and joy that are necessary for feeling fully human. Without them life flattens out, and meaning drains from both living and dying.³⁶⁵

In the African context, initiation deals with rites of passage that are handed down by ancestors to generations after them. It shows basic pattern for genuine change. According to M. Eliade, for any transformation to be meaningful it must be thorough and, to be thorough, it needs both the ache of loss and a spirit of restoration. Consequently, this form of experiencing death gives initiation a characteristic symbol. More than an empty tomb, death becomes also the womb of change. In dreams and dramas of initiation, death represents change for the entire psyche and life of a person. It means change inside and out, not a simple adaptation or switch in lifestyle. In African Traditional Religion, therefore, puberty rite actualizes this transformation and transition into another stage in life. Such transition is mandatory for the youth.³⁶⁶ To gain the right to be admitted among the adults, the adolescent has to pass through series of ordeal tests and to undergo initiatory. By virtue of these rites, and of the revelations that they entail, the individual will be recognized as a responsible member of the society. Therefore, initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and the worlds of spirits and the ancestors. The individual learns behaviour patterns, techniques, and the institutions of adult life. He / she also learns sacred myths and traditions of the community, the names of the deities and the history of their works. In addition, he / she learns mystical relations between the community and supernatural Beings, as

³⁶⁰ C. D. Isizoh (ed.), *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*, Rome: 1998, 111.

³⁶¹ E. N. “Rites of passage”, in: *NEB 26* (London: 1998), 800-803, 801.

³⁶² Cf. M. Eliade, (1995), xix.

³⁶³ Cf. *Ibid*

³⁶⁴ Cf. E. N. “Rites of passage”, in: *NEB 26* (London: 1998), 801.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid*

³⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid*

established at the beginning of Time.³⁶⁷ Finally, initiation reveals the almost awesome seriousness with which the individual assumes responsibility of receiving and transmitting spiritual values.³⁶⁸

Above all, every religious society possesses a consistent corpus of traditions, comprising religious beliefs and *Welt-Anschauungen* (world-views). These religious beliefs and *Welt-Anschauungen* are gradually revealed and transmitted to the novice at initiation. During this time, the novice receives instructions on the fundamental principles of African religion. According to E. Eliade: "...from the fact that man was created, and civilized by Supernatural Beings, it follows that the sum of his behaviour and activities belongs to sacred history; and this history must be carefully preserved and transmitted intact to succeeding generations."³⁶⁹ Africans are conscious of this, and try to preserve their sacred history, and transmit it to future generations. Initiation helps them tremendously to realize this. This is not simply instruction. It is rather more of sacred teaching and schooling in the customs, traditions and religious values of the community. Before one is considered worthy to receive the sacred teaching, one must first be prepared spiritually. What the individual learns concerning the world and of human life does not constitute knowledge in the modern sense of the term, objective, and compartmentalized information, subject to indefinite correction and addition.³⁷⁰

Africans believe that the world is the work of Supernatural Beings – a divine work – and hence sacred in its very structure. Human beings live in a sacred universe that has a supernatural origin. It is about this universe that novices acquire traditional knowledge. They receive prolonged instruction from their teachers, and witness secret ceremonies.³⁷¹ The ordeals, which they undergo, constitute the religious experience of the traditional initiation-encounter with the sacred. Most of initiatory ordeals more or less clearly involve a ritual death, followed by resurrection or a new birth. The central moment of every initiation is marked by the ceremony symbolizing the death of the novice and his / her return to the fellowship of the living. The individual returns as a new person, assuming another mode of being. The symbolism of initiatory death is the end at once of childhood, ignorance, and of the profane condition. But as it pertains to the rite of rebirth or resurrection, as in initiation, the symbols they imply indicate that the novice has attained to another mode of existence, inaccessible to those who have not undergone the initiatory ordeal and tasted death.³⁷² Initiation has different forms.

3.1.1 Types of Initiation

The history of religion distinguishes three different groups of initiation, namely:

(1) *Puberty Rites*: This comprises collective rituals whose function is to effect the transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood, and which are obligatory for all members of a particular society. Ethnologists call this type of initiation "tribal initiation" or "initiation into an age group."³⁷³

(2) *Initiation into a secret society / Spirit Initiation*: This type of initiation occurs in the spirit cult. It venerates deified shades and effects union between the spirit and its adept, as manifested in the *Beschwezi* sect of Bunyoro, the *Imandwa* in Rwanda and in Kiivu, the *Bishegu* in Urundi.³⁷⁴ Through practices, which are spiritistic and mediumistic, the spirit takes possession of the recipient, makes him his tool, and moves his personality into him. This spiritual possession is only transitory because it only happens and last through the ceremony, but the consecration of the initiate to the spirit is permanent. With it, the individual will be one of the close associates of the

³⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid

³⁶⁸ Cf. M. Eliade, (1995), xv.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. xi.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid x.

³⁷¹ Cf. Ibid xix.

³⁷² Cf. Ibid xiii.

³⁷³ Ibid 2.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Secretariat of Non-Christians, *Bulletin*, 18, 1971, 6th Year/3, Rome: 1971, 173.

spirit and his personal safety is assured. Such initiation assures the individual protection against evil spells, annoyance in this life, and happiness and joy in the next.³⁷⁵

In this form of initiation, the initiate lives in association with the prerogatives of the spirit to whom he is consecrated. He is made to become a new man, living in the style, with the spirit and dignity and privileges of the spirit. That is to say that he is totally in possession and is totally possessed by the spirit into which he is initiated. The spirit inserts himself so completely into him and absorbs him so completely that he takes his side in everything and ensures that he triumphs.³⁷⁶ The transformation of the whole person occurs in the process of the initiation ceremony.

While it has at its disposal certain ritualistic forms, which are in a way reserved to it, this type of initiation uses for the most part themes which belong to the rites of puberty. These specialised initiations are undertaken by certain people in order to transcend their human condition and become the protégés, the *alter egos*, and the fellow creatures of superior spirits.³⁷⁷ This form of initiation differs essentially from puberty initiations in that it is not binding on all members of the community. It is performed individually or for comparatively small groups. It includes all types of rites for entering into a secret society, *Bund* or a confraternity. It features mostly in secret societies and is limited to one sex³⁷⁸, and is very much jealous of their respective secrets. Examples are the Greco-Oriental mysteries, the *Ogboni cult*, the *Inkankar*, the society of Lyangombe (among the people of Rwanda), or the *Ekpe Cult* of certain Igbo areas of Nigeria, et cetera. Among the Rwandan people, this initiation is called *kubandwa* (to be taken possession of by the spirit of Lyangombe), and the initiates become *imandwa*, a title which is also given to their heavenly patrons, a coterie of about thirty people grouped around the cult with the appearance of a clan. The society of Lyangombe in particular has no hierarchy of jurisdiction but is founded constitutionally on essential hierarchical order in two degrees: the mere initiates or novices and the adepts or those whose original initiation has been consummated by the second-degree rite. It is from the last that officiating ministers are recruited. The initiation reaches a high peak in this form: The solemn moment is when the Spirit, through the mediation of the sponsor, his representative, forms an unbreakable alliance with the neophyte. This occurs by the rite of the blood pact, his spouse by the rite of initiation, and his table companion by the rite of the meal as communion. In the course of this the Spirit, the initiating medium, and the recipient put food into each other's mouth; the initiate becomes another self of the Spirit.

(3) *Initiation with a Mystical Vocation*: This occurs in connection with a mystical vocation.

On the level of primitive religions, the vocation of the medicine man, *Nwadibia* (native doctor or *Shaman*) falls within this third type of initiation. A specific characteristic of this third group is the importance which personal experience assumes in it.³⁷⁹ However, those who submit themselves to the ordeals typical of this category of initiation are -whether voluntarily or involuntarily³⁸⁰ - destined to participate in a more intense religious experience than is accessible to the rest of the community. This form of initiation also occurs in the Christian Religion, example, in the ordination to the catholic priesthood. We may note that the last two forms of initiation – initiation required for admission a secret society and the initiation requisite for obtaining a higher religious status – have a good deal in common, and may be regarded as “two

³⁷⁵ Cf. Ibid

³⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid

³⁷⁷ Cf. L. Heusch, *The Bwanda and Lacustrine Civilisation*, Institute of Sociology of the Free University of Brussels: 1966, 33.

³⁷⁸ Although, there is also the *Ogboni cult* for women, initiation into some other secret cults like the *Ekpe* is specifically restricted to men.

³⁷⁹ Secretariat of Non-Christians, *Bulletin*, 18, Rome: 1971, 173-174.

³⁸⁰ Here, the words ‘voluntarily’ or ‘involuntarily’ are used because a member of a community can become a medicine man, a priest or priestess, “Nwadibia” or indigenous doctor, not only in consequence of a personal decision to acquire religious powers but through vocation (“the call”), that is, because the person has been invited by Supernatural Beings to become a medicine man or indigenous doctor.

varieties of a single class.”³⁸¹ What distinguishes them is the element of ecstasy which is very central in shamanic initiation.

In his approach to the theme of initiation, C. J. Bleeker, an ethnologist, classifies it into the following headings, namely:

1) *Initiation into the tribal community*: All young people, both boys and usually girls, participate in this form of initiation. The initiate are introduced to the knowledge of the myth and the rules and the customs of the tribe.

2) *Initiation into certain societies of men or women*: This ceremony is generally celebrated by rites which have either a symbolic or a realistic character; in the latter case they can consist of cruel ordeals.

3) *Initiation into a closed society* which possesses an esoteric truth, sometimes in the form of a secret doctrine.

4) *Participation in a type of cult* which dramatizes a religious truth of such a mysterious character that only privileged people are allowed to attend to it.

5) *Initiation into an office* which requires certain personal or extraordinary knowledge, such as the function of the shaman, the king, or the prophet.

6) *Initiation into religious truth* which happens when a man embraces a certain belief or is converted.³⁸²

3.1.2 The Phenomenology of Initiation

The phenomenology of initiation, especially as it concerns circumcision, presents four phases, namely: (a) the circumcision in the strict sense, (b) a period of strict seclusion lasting from several weeks to several months in a male environment, (C) periods of study of secret languages and key-words, and (D) occasionally very liberal glimpses at the life of the adults. The initiation finally takes place normally through a rite of passage intended to symbolise the death of the former juvenile life and the life with new forces in the tribe.

Secrecy characterizes some forms of initiation in the African Traditional Religion, especially those ones that mark passage into adulthood. This is binding on all initiates. To disclose the secrets often merits severe punishment on the offender. During the process of initiation, candidates experience some psychological shock.³⁸³

There are also similar rites of passage for young girls and young women in certain tribes of Africa. This often occurs in the form of marriage rite. It takes place at the time of marriage and is more secret than that of the young men. The passing from the paternal home to that of the husband represents a ‘passage’ to a completely new life, especially, in those tribes where marriage was achieved by effective or ritual kidnapping. The rite consists in “seeking” a mask, this being also a manifestation of an ancestor or a Spirit. The rite may involve the invocation of the goddess of fecundity, the planet of feminine rhythms or the moon, inserted symbolically between the horns of an ox as found in the ancient temples of Egypt. The viewing of masks seems to have been so important that any woman who had not seen it was unable to be present at other ritual ceremonies held for women. The examples of the rite taken from West Africa show the value of systematic study of the religious phenomenology of each racial group for a better understanding of the religion practised at the popular level.

In M. Eliade’s view, the entire social and economic life of the community derives its rhythms from these customary initiatory rituals and ceremonies, rites of fecundity and of birth, of suckling and of weaning, rites of passing and initiation, rites of marriage, funeral rites. They serve to open and close the sacralised cycles and are performed under the auspices of God and the ancestral spirit.³⁸⁴ In addition, the operations of seed sowing and harvesting, even in African

³⁸¹ Secretariat of Non-Christians, *Bulletin*, 18, Rome: 1971, 173.

³⁸² Cf. C. J. Bleeker, “Initiation in Ancient Egypt”, in: C. J. Bleeker (ed.), *Initiation: Contributions to the theme of the study Conference of the International Association for the history of religions held at Straßburg*, Sept. 17th to 22nd 1964, Netherlands: 1965, 49.

³⁸³ Cf. C. D. Isizoh, (1998), 112.

³⁸⁴ Cf. M. Eliade, (1995), 2.

civilisations of agricultural type, have a liturgical character. They play great role of determining the date of traditional initiation. In this way, they serve to determine the seasonal cycle.

For Africans, the religious feeling does not always have the same intensity and the ritual oscillates between phases of sacralisation and desacralisation. That is why if we wish to interpret rightly certain ceremonies which appear to be profane we must not lose sight of the fact that religious feeling impregnates the whole life and conceptions of the African. In the agricultural circle, the significance of first-fruits is equally religiously symbolic: through them the African proclaims that the fruits of the earth belong to God³⁸⁵ and the ancestors, and that these must be first served before human beings can serve themselves.³⁸⁶ The manifestations which seem at first to be folkloristic, such as the ritual hunting and fights, are capable of constituting a catharsis, that is, purification from the evil spirits of the universe is how human being behaves in the presence of divinity in his religious universe with a feeling of confidence and the observation of the rites inherited from the ancestors. Therefore, by performing the rites of initiation, human beings function in an environment of festivity in which they express their joy in living in the society that is best for them.

Dance and song characterize the phenomenology of initiation and have symbolic roles. Through them, man enters into contact with the ancestors and the spirits, and communicates with the cosmic forces. In dance and song, the African levels off the social differences. He has an impression of entering into communication with the invisible world in a movement which transports him, body and soul, by some correlation existing between words and actions, between the sound waves and the cries of the heart, between the pulsation of muscles and the stirrings of the soul.³⁸⁷ All these form the phenomenology of initiation in African context which acquire distinct roles. Let us see how it occurs in ancient Nubia/Egypt in which the individual is placed in a state of eternal beatitude beyond the destructive touch of Time.

3.1.3 Initiation in Ancient Nubia/Egypt

An Anthropological study of man reveals that man is a being that is conscious of Time. To operate then, to be conscious is to be aware of Time, in its three-fold aspect of past, present and future, and of one's personal involvement in its process.³⁸⁸ It requires the ability to draw upon the memory of experience, to deal with future situations. This is truly the 'first cause' of all civilisations, which took its root in ancient Kemet (black) Nubia, later called Egypt.³⁸⁹ It is a principle that underlines the process of civilisation, which human beings witnessed in the past, the present and the future. Time consciousness motivated the Palaeolithic hunter who sat in his cave, fashioning a stone axe to use in some future hunt, employing in his primitive way the same basic ability as that which lies behind the complex scientific and technological planning required to send a rocket to the moon.³⁹⁰

Time-consciousness is very important to human beings. It does not only help human beings to plan, but also to be aware of the inevitability of one's personal end, for he/she knows that at some time in the future he/she must die. Thus, time-consciousness involves consciousness of one's own immortality. Human beings know that they are subject to time's inexorable law of decay and death. Faced with this grim threat to his very existence, they have instinctively sought for immunity or security from time. Thus, S. G. Brandon holds the opinion that man's conceptions of such immunity or security, of the cause of his/her subjection to time, and of the

³⁸⁵ This has great consequence for the Church, especially with regard to the celebration of the New Yam Festival. Could Christians not celebrate this feast on the same day with the non-Christians? What role does it play for such a separation? Does such separation facilitate evangelization or foster division in the community? Perhaps, the Church in Igboland has to look more into the consequences of such separation in the community.

³⁸⁶ Cf. M. Eliade, (1995), 2.

³⁸⁷ C. D. Isizoh, (1998), 112.

³⁸⁸ Cf. S. G. F. Brandon, "The Significance of Time in some Ancient initiatory rituals", in: C. J. Bleeker, (1965), 40.

³⁸⁹ Armah, A. K., "The Identity of the creators of Ancient Egypt," in: *New African*, 450 (2006), 16-20, 17.

³⁹⁰ Cf. S. G. F. Brandon, "The Significance of Time in some Ancient initiatory rituals", in: C. J. Bleeker, (1965), 40.

means to escape from its power, have found expression in his/her religions. Thus he posits the *raison d'être* of religion as “the seeking for salvation from Time and its dread consequences.”³⁹¹ This means human being’s religion arises out of fear and is built on fear – fear of the vicissitudes and calamities that arises from the human nature which is conditioned by time.

There are many ways that human beings have sought deliverance or security from time. The ancient black Nubians and Egyptians, for examples, this found expressions in the mortuary ritual, a form of initiation rite. This served to initiate or introduce those, on whose behalf it is performed, to a new form of life. The *Pyramid Texts*³⁹² provide useful evidence on this. The texts testify the Egyptian belief that the sun god unceasingly made a voyage across the sky each day, and then through the underworld each night. It was an eternally repeated journey, untouched by the change and decay wrought by time. The ancient Egyptians believed that if a man secures a place with the sun god, he/she would be forever safe with him on his/her eternal journey. Mercer maintains that this Egyptian belief influenced tremendously the Christian concept of eternity in God’s Kingdom.³⁹³ In the ancient Egyptian religion, initiation took the form of mortuary initiatory ritual, expressed in the conception of time - a common practice many centuries before the birth of Christ.³⁹⁴

The ritual action in the ancient Egyptian religion effects union with the sun god. One finds the complex nature of the rite in *Osiris* – classic pattern of Egyptian mortuary ritual.³⁹⁵ In the *Osiris cult*, initiation occurs in the form of embalmment of the dead, which facilitates transition into a new life, an eternal happiness. It takes place in the form of a burial rite - a typical early recorded form of initiation rite in Africa. But this does not remove the possibility of other forms of initiation rites existing in other parts of Africa. The ancient Egyptian mortuary ritual is a typical example of the early recorded form of initiation in Africa. Its symbolic significance is tremendous. It initiates the dead into a new and eternal life. Its process develops along three distinctive lines, each designed to achieve a specific end in the post-mortem life, namely:

- (i) The body had to be secure from the decay and corruption occasioned by death.
- (ii) The dead person had to be raised to life again, or rather, to a new life.
- (iii) He had to be declared morally worthy of enjoying eternal happiness.

The embalmment is necessary to render the body eternally secure from corruption. Brandon maintains that the act and the process it undergoes is not a practical measure to prevent chemical decomposition; rather, as ritually accomplishing on behalf of the deceased what had once been done, as was believed by the deities of *Isis*, *Neophytes* and *Anubis* to save the dead body of *Osiris* from physical disintegration. The concluding ceremony of this part of the funerary ritual constitutes a striking instance of ‘rite de passage’.³⁹⁶ After the body has been embalmed and before it was actually placed in its ‘eternal house’ (the tomb), the so-called ceremony of ‘Opening the Mouth’ was performed. This has practical symbolic significance. The ritual embalmment and its chemical effect serve to preserve the body for eternity. For the new life in the tomb, it was considered necessary that “the body should be able to see, hear, breathe, and take nourishment, thus, the need for the embalmment.”³⁹⁷ The rite of ‘Opening the Mouth’ aims to

³⁹¹ Ibid

³⁹² These texts are great corpus of spells and prayers, hymns and incantations, compiled by the priests of Mediapolis during the third millennium, about 2500 B.C., to secure the safe passage of the dead Pharaohs from this life to the next. They undoubtedly formed part of the funeral liturgy. In addition, it seemed that the various sections were inscribed in the chambers and passages of the pyramids where the corresponding ritual was performed. Cf. H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, (Berlin: 1952²), 620b-623a; cf. E. I. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, Harmondsworth: 1947, 151-154; cf. A. B. S. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts*, New York: 1952, 1-7.

³⁹³ Cf. A. B. S. Mercer, (1952), 1-7.

³⁹⁴ Cf. C. J. Bleeker, “Initiation in Ancient Egypt”, in: C. J. Bleeker, (1965), 49; cf. G. J. Lawrence, *The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt*, (Yale Dissertation, 1988), 33.

³⁹⁵ Cf. G. J. Lawrence, (1988), 33.

³⁹⁶ Ibid

³⁹⁷ Ibid

restore these faculties, thus initiating it to its new mode of being.³⁹⁸ To raise the deceased person himself from death and endow him with a new and eternal life, he/she had to be ritually assimilated to, and identified with *Osiris* in his resurrection from death. In addition, the corpse has to experience the lustral bathing. This is a ritual bathing of the corpse which effects rejuvenation in the life-after-death. According to Egyptian thought, the character of the dead person's life had to be tested and vindicated. There is post mortem judgment and the vindication, which introduces the dead into the presence of the *Osiris*, which enables the dead to enjoy the beatitude of the everlasting kingdom. The Egyptian religion conceives time as a cyclic and not a linear process in which all existence in the phenomenal world was involved. The initiation into the Orphic mysteries leads to ultimate deliverance from Time.

This Egyptian thought influenced Christianity, where Christ's death on the Cross won freedom for man from the dreaded consequences of sin. One could point out that the aspect of "identifying the dead to enjoying eternal vision marked with post mortem judgment" and the "vindication" in the Egyptian religion are analogous to the beatification and canonization processes in the Christian religion, marked with the testimony of the people of God and the official declaration of the dead as a Saint in the Church. Very interestingly, in relation to the Christian initiation, an element of similarity exists with reference to "conception of time" in the two religions. In the Christian initiatory rite of baptism, there is an involvement which is two-fold in character and which indicates two different conceptions of Time. The earliest and classical statement of St. Paul on Christian baptism reveals this³⁹⁹, which Brandon interprets as "The ritual Perpetuation of the Past."⁴⁰⁰ This is equivalent to the Egyptian Osirian ritual where it took the form of the ritual re-presentation of various events in the legendary history of Osiris.⁴⁰¹ The Osirian ritual involves a magical efficacy of ritual simulation, that is, by miming a past action, with a clear statement of intention, the virtue or power of which action could be reproduced and utilized. In the Christian rite of baptism, the neophyte is ritually assimilated to Christ in his death by immersion in water. The primitive custom of baptismal nudity and descent into the water symbolically signified "death and the going down into the grave" which Christ had once experienced. Thus, it was believed that the ritual of baptism perpetuated the virtue or efficacy of a past event, namely, the resurrection of Christ, so that the baptised person should also be raised to a new and glorious life.⁴⁰²

From the Christian context, the other aspect of the conception of time, as the rite of baptism expresses, is the more fundamentally significant rite of deliverance from time's menace of personal extinction. The Christian, by dying with Christ, rises with Him to a new and immortal life. Paul describes this new life as living 'in Christ'; so that one is created anew.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Cf. S. G. F. Brandon, "The Significance of Time in some Ancient initiatory rituals," in: C. J. Bleeker, (1965), 42.

³⁹⁹ Cf. Rom 6:3-9: In this text, Paul says: "You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. We were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realising that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Someone who has died, of course, no longer has to answer for sin. But we believe that, if we died with Christ, then we shall live with him too, we know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more." (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, London: 1985, 1874-1875).

⁴⁰⁰ S. G. F. Brandon, *Time and Mankind*, London: 1951, 17-18.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid*

⁴⁰² Cf. M. Werner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*, Bern: 1941, 423; cf. L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship*, London: 1927, 308-316.

⁴⁰³ Baptism ensures eternal life of the recipients which is realized in union with Christ (cf. Joh 3:6; cf. Mt3:5; 28:19; cf. Rom 6:4.), St. Paul presents the baptismal rite as symbolically representing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and of the convert who receives this sacrament (cf. Rom 6:4). The symbolism is brought out in the act of descending into the baptismal bath, being covered with waters of baptism, and emerging to a new life. Here, one experiences in a sacramental form dying to sin, being buried with Christ, and rising to a new life as Christ did. Paul uses one of the favourite compound verbs, *synthaptein*, a compound of *syn-*, and 'with' (co-buried), to express this. The preposition *syn-* "with" is not only used with the object "Christ" but also is compound words with adjectives and can, in these constructions, express a double relation of the Christian with the pre-eminently

That is, the neophyte becomes incorporated with Christ whose very nature placed him beyond time. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ is proclaimed as being “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”.⁴⁰⁴ Thus, the initiation of baptism united the neophyte with one who both comprehended the whole time-process and transcended it. Therefore, the Christian could claim in Christ, as the African, the Egyptian Osirian devotee, “I am Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.”

In what seems to be a critic of Christian baptism, Brandon maintains that it only anticipated the physical death of the neophyte and was designed to introduce him, while in this world, to a new state of life which presupposed a dying to his former state of existence. Thus, the essential purpose of the Osirian mortuary ritual and Christian baptism, according to him, was to place the initiate into a state of eternal beatitude beyond the destructive touch of time. Referring to the Pauline idea of an eternal incorruptible spiritual body, he maintains that it would replace the physical one, an idea that significantly parallels the ancient Egyptian embalment ritual of rendering the body impervious to decay.⁴⁰⁵ Thus, the reason behind both the Osirian mortuary ritual and Christian baptism is found the desire for security from time’s threat of personal extinction. Each in effect was symbolically a ‘rite de passage’ “to a state of eternal blessedness, beyond the power of Time and its Doppelgänger, Death.”⁴⁰⁶

Nevertheless, from a Christian standpoint, one would maintain that despite the similarity, apparent differences exist. The Egyptian initiation rite is a rite for the dead, while baptism (even though in the Early Church, baptism for the dead was practised)⁴⁰⁷, is administered to the living. Moreover, the Christian baptism opens a new way, a union with Christ, a dying to sin in Him, and a rising into new life. It is a sacrament which reveals God’s power of forgiveness, the communication of the glory of God’s grace, and nature, and of the reception of the interior and permanent capacity to believe, to hope, and to love God and humankind.⁴⁰⁸ K. Rahner puts it this way: “In baptism a person dies into the death of Christ in a sacramental, social and tangible way in time and space. He is incorporated into the Church with an appeal and in the name of the trinitarian God: in the name of the Father who calls, and of the Son who is the word of the Father to mankind, and of the Holy Spirit in whom this offer of the Father in the Son really comes to man to sanctify and to redeem.”⁴⁰⁹ When one compares the notions of *time* and *space* in Rahner’s definition of Christian baptism with the Egyptian mortuary rite, it becomes obvious that both rites effect the *incorporation* of the individual into the community – the former into the Church, while the latter, in the community of the living and the true God.⁴¹⁰ Both of them

salvific acts of the Christ-event, or it can denote an association of the Christian with Christ in eschatological glory. In using it in relation to Christ, Paul goes to demonstrate that a Christian lives now through baptism in union with the this risen Christ; a union that finds or will one day find its fulfilment in union with Christ in glory (*syn-Christo*, with Christ, through the Father’s glory). The efficiency of the resurrection is ascribed to the Father, and especially to his *Doxa*, glory. The *syn-Christo* is a typical Pauline theology, which gives baptism an essentially eschatological character. just as in the OT, exodus miracles were ascribed to Yahweh’s *kabod* (cf. Exod 15:7, 11; 16:7, 10), so is the raising of Christ. The *doxa* shines on the face of the risen Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6) and invests him with ‘power’ (Rom 1:4) that is “life-giving” (1 Cor 15:45). Similarly, this transforms the Christian (cf. 2 Cor 3:18), who is glorified together with Christ (cf. Rom 8:17), enabling him to live a new life. Baptism, therefore, brings about an identification of the Christian with the glorified Christ, enabling him or her to live actually with the life of Christ himself (Gal 2:20); which involves a ‘new creation.’ St. Paul uses another favourite term, ‘To walk,’ which he borrowed from the OT to show the conscious ethical conduct of the Christian (cf. 2 Kg 20:3, cf. Prov 8:20). One also finds the element of ethical demands in the Ezza Ritual Circumcision and Puberty rite in Edda, Afikpo.

⁴⁰⁴ Heb 13: 8

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. S. G. F. Brandon, (1951), 48.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 15:29; cf. Dinker, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol, 958.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York: 1978, 415; cf. chapter four on Christian baptism.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid 416-417.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. The effects of traditional initiation below.

appeal to God. But the question is whether the concept of the “true God” is typically a Christian one or the product of the influence of the ancient (Egyptian) religion on Christianity.⁴¹¹

3.2 The “Isis-Osiris” Mythical Foundation of African Initiation

A study of the ancient Egyptian *Isis* and *Osiris* cult reveal eloquent evidence of its historical and mythical foundations of African initiation rites. In this connection, E. Mveng maintains, in his comparative study of African/Christian spiritualities, that the African rites of death and rebirth derive their source from the ancient Egyptian and truly African myth of *Isis-Osiris*.⁴¹² In the ancient Egyptian myth, the Propator, *Geb* (Earth) and the Mother-principle, *Nut* (Heaven) have four children – *Osiris* and *Seth*, being males, while *Isis* and *Nephty* were females. *Osiris* and *Isis* paired (good, life, light, love) while *Seth* and *Nephty* formed another couple (evil, darkness, death, hatred). *Osiris*, the eldest, is black, tall and handsome, and loved music, dance, and the arts. He possessed the secret of healing and went around the world spreading goodness, love, and civilization. When he succeeded his father, the jealous *Seth* and *Nephty* killed him, cut him into little bits and threw him into the sea. *Isis* went around the world and gathered the pieces of her brother. Through magical incantations and prayers, she brought him back to life. To give this same occasion of life to men, she established the *Isis-Osiris* cult which is a reproduction of the drama of *Osiris*’ life in the neophyte. There is first a revelation of and apprenticeship to the *Osiris* mystery (gnosis); then a reproduction in the neophyte of the passion and death of *Osiris*; and finally a return to a new type of life (immortality through identification with *Osiris*).⁴¹³ Whether all African initiation rites truly derived from the ancient Egyptian myth is debatable. Nevertheless, the symbol of death-resurrection dominates in most African initiation rites.⁴¹⁴ Let us see its symbolism in African initiation rites.

3.2.1 Death-Resurrection: Central Part of African Initiation Rites

The death-resurrection nucleus of the African initiation rites demands that the new situation ‘lives’ while the former must ‘die’. The central principle of this view is that “in order to be created anew, the old world must first be annihilated.”⁴¹⁵ The dying takes place at the liminal period – the crucial point ‘between’ “... a point representing the condition after the old state of affairs has come to an end and before the new one has actually begun. And this occurs in terms of the shape of the ritual process, the moment of real change and the pivotal moment, which has no movement of itself, but permits movement to take place.”⁴¹⁶ In most cases, the death of neophytes is symbolic. There is total or partial seclusion from the normal life of the community. In rare cases, however, the death is reported to be real. In the case of spirit possession, there is a situation of temporary or permanent life as a liminal entity. E. E. Uzukwu maintains that initiation into the cult of *Sakpata* (the divinity of Smallpox) among the people of Lower Dahomey, the present Republic of Benin, presents the hard-to-believe experience of the real death of the neophyte.⁴¹⁷ The body of the neophyte is not only wrapped with cloth in which it stays as corpse for many days, but people already see that the body has reached the stage of

⁴¹¹ The concept of the *Triune God* already existed in the ancient Egyptian religion. Here, God already designated himself as “I am he who evolved himself ... no heaven existed and no earth, and no terrestrial animal or reptiles had come into being. I formed them out of the inert mass of watery matter. I found no place where on to stand (...) I was alone ... no other worked with me. I laid the foundation of all things by my will, and all things evolved themselves therefrom (...) I united myself to my shadow and I sent forth *Shu* and *Tefnut* gave birth to *Nut* and *Geb*’ (...) etc (...) and their children multiplied upon this earth.” (B. Walis, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Budge, 8.

⁴¹² Cf. E. Mveng, “Spiritualité africaine et Spiritualité chrétienne”, in: *L’Afrique Et Ses Formes de Vie Spirituelle*, (Paris: 1983), 263-279, 263; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, “Anthropological and Religious Viewpoint”, in: *AWACC* (1985), 69-71, 70.

⁴¹³ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 70.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid*

⁴¹⁵ Cf. M. Eliade, (1995), xiii.

⁴¹⁶ R. Grainger, *The Language of the Rite*, London: 1974, 215-216.

⁴¹⁷ E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 71.

decomposition. The body is displayed in view of all; witch doctors collect the white worms falling from the body. The unpleasant odour fills the air but no one must notice. The resurrection takes place in view of all. Rising, the initiate is fully responsive to the biddings of *Sakpata*.⁴¹⁸ How does it occur among the Igbo people of Nigeria?

3.2.1.1 The Igbos of Nigeria

Among the Igbo people, the initiation of the *Eze Nri* highlights the place of symbolic death as an important point of transition. Especially among the *Nri* community, the *Eze Nri* has overwhelmingly ritual-political powers. The unique nature of the office make the spirits and men to act together to choose the candidate. *Chukwu* (the Supreme God) and spirits must show that the candidate is the re-emergence of *Eri* (the original ancestor of *Nri*) through a divinely imposed pre-election liminality. For one to qualify for this office, one must fulfil some conditions, namely: 1) The candidate's father must be dead. 2) There must be visions and revelations confirmed by three diviners in the presence of all, testifying that he is the chosen one of the spirits. 3) The person suffers psychological destabilization, and experiences inexplicable calamities (such as deaths in his family, collapsing of his compound walls in the dry season, and so on).⁴¹⁹ Having been elected to this office, the candidate enters the liminal stage proper which is marked with visiting all the prescribed *arusi* (spirit forces), journeying to obtain the lump of clay from the bottom of Anambra river for making the ritual pot (*odudu*) for the shrine of *Nri Menri* (corporate ancestor of *Nri* who has been *Eze Nri*), and going into one year seclusion. After this, he is crowned the *Eze Nri*. At the entrance of his coronation, he undergoes a ritual death and burial. He is buried in a shallow grave and then rises at sunset in a shining body (whitened all over in *nzu* – white chalk). Rising, he becomes *muo* (spirit), a living *arusi* (saluted Igwe, sky).⁴²⁰ The *Eze Nri*, a re-emergence of *Eri* (the primordial ancestor) leaves the human condition for the extra-human. With his assumption of this Office, he observes certain rules. He assumes the status of a spirit. For this reason, it becomes a taboo for him to set eyes on a corpse, see any *arusi* (spirit force), or offer any sacrifice. His assuming a spiritual nature indicates that the world of the *Nri* is permanently placed under the banner of *Chukwu* and the spiritual forces, and his office makes him the embodiment of *Nri* religion.⁴²¹

With this description of *Uzukwu*, an important question arises: Why is the candidate buried in a shallow grave instead of normal one for the dead, to determine the possibility of his rising at sunset? The act simply explains the symbolism of the ritual. It is a symbolic act, which presents death as a point of change that qualifies one to assume the office of *Nri*. “The symbolism of death-resurrection derives from the various roles of the *Sakpata* priest and *Eze Nri* in their respective communities. The roles demand a heightened spirituality. The experience of the spirit of smallpox destabilises the human condition; his spirit abandons the human condition to be much immersed in the luminous in order to serve and manipulate it.”⁴²² However, J. Cazeneuve interprets this as magical response; and initiation of magicians in Africa and elsewhere in the world, which involves death or being bound to a dead body double personality, which explains the beliefs that magicians could metamorphose.⁴²³

Generally, initiations into age-groups, manhood, or womanhood (e.g. *ima muo* for boys and *nkpu* for girls) are common to the Igbo people, but do not stretch the liminal experience into total identification with the numinous. In most initiations, seclusion (symbolic death), the experience of being ‘neither here nor there’, ‘neither this nor that, and yet both’, betwixt and between’, characterize them.⁴²⁴ In adult initiation, the candidates are subjected to all sorts of

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Ibid cf. I. Lalaye, “De la Quête spirituelle de l’Afrique contemporains. Reperage des dondemnants pur une évaluation critique” in: *L’Afrique et ses Formes de Vie Cahiers des Religions africaines*, 17(nn.3S-34): 263-279.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 71.

⁴²⁰ Cf. M. A. Omejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization, Nri Kingdom and Hegemony*, London: 1981, 10; cf. M.D.W. Jeffrey, “Additional Steps in the Umundri Coronation Ceremony”, in: *AS* 8 (1936), 22-24; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 72.

⁴²¹ Cf. cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 72.

⁴²² Ibid

⁴²³ Cf. J. Cazeneuve, *Sociologie du Rite*, Paris: 1971, 184.

⁴²⁴ W. Turner, (1977), 94.

tests and intimidation, and instructed in the lore of the society and the truth about the fort-coming state. They experience the dread confronting the human condition in the unstructured luminosity. This is a symbolic face-to-face encounter with primordial chaos.⁴²⁵ Initiation makes the neophytes have a mastery of dread and chaos through the repetition (ritual) of the dreaded reality. It also brings neophytes into close contact with the deity or superhuman power, the unbounded, the infinite – the realm of the gods. The laminal experience of initiation opens a person to the “beat of the universe.”⁴²⁶ If the body is dead (symbolic or real death), if it is made to submit to the authority of the community through flogging, or attacked through cutting (circumcision) or facial scarification, it is not to assert its inferiority (fallen-ness) or to declare it a prison, rather through its asepsis (or catharsis), the body as symbol shines out. This is a point of revelation in gesture of the totality of person.

Most African initiations instil discipline on the candidates. It is not just the body that is brought under control, but the entire human person – body and soul. One is opened up bodily to be awake to the depth of life in the universe. The spirituality of initiation in African context, “...marks an expansion of the depth of the self – a deepening effected through openness lived in a non-structured way in the transitional or lamina stage of initiation.”⁴²⁷ This account illustrates African initiation rites. Let us examine birth rite as a particular initiation in Africa

3.2.2 Birth rite

Birth rite is one form of the initiation rites. Birth, a most sacred event in the religions of the world, is celebrated by rites and festivities which appear to be incongruous or inconsistent in many religions. The child in the womb is very much part of the pregnant mother. Beliefs among the peoples like the Mande, Yoruba, and Ewe show that one’s destiny is already imprinted in the placenta. “What are referred to as ‘spiritual principles’ are signs written in the placenta; what one would become depends on what is written in the substance attaching one to one’s mother.”⁴²⁸ Birth rite contains rich symbolic elements. Various social and ritual ceremonies⁴²⁹ relate to birth rite. Pregnancy rituals, which mainly are purificatory in their nature, and taboos, are good for mother and child, and some of the rituals associated with them are magical in nature, and serve as rites of passage. Among the Igbo, prayers are usually offered for the safe delivery of the child. This may involve the following ritual: “The head of kindred of the husband’s family may take a seed-yam with which he draws a straight line down the woman’s forehead and abdomen saying, ‘*Obasi di n’elu, n’Ala, nyere nwanyi a aka k’O muo nwa ya nke oma, n’enweghi nsogbu obula.*’ (God and earth mother help this woman deliver freely; italics mine).”⁴³⁰ This shows the element of prayers which features in the African Traditional Religion in the form of libation. During delivery, the child is expected to come out with the head first. To come out with the leg or arm first is considered abnormal because of the threat it may pose to the life of the mother. Mothers of newborn children are considered both as participants of the sacred by having brought forth a new being into the world and as persons who are ritually unclean (example among the Israelites and Zoroastrians), probably because of the presence of blood at birth, the loss of which may symbolize the loss of some of the life-sustaining force. Among the native Brazilian Indians, for instance, both the father and the mother participate in a ceremony of seclusion for five days

⁴²⁵ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 72.

⁴²⁶ Cf. Ibid 72.

⁴²⁷ Ibid 72.

⁴²⁸ E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 74.

⁴²⁹ Among these ceremonies are *Asa Nwa* or naming ceremony of the child and its presentation to the people which is done after seven native weeks or 56 days; *Igba Agu* = ceremony of finding out the ancestral archetype of the newborn child through divination. This is usually done by a diviner who consults with his oracle to reveal which of the dead ancestors has re-incarnated in the newborn child. When this is determined, a big dumbbell-shaped piece of wood called *Okpesi* is prepared, to represent the presence of this dead ancestor who now lives again in this new little child. The little child can then be presented with the *Ofo* stick, a religious symbol with which he offers prayers and meal offerings to the gods and ancestors. Cf. E. Ilogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture*, Leiden: 1974. 45-46.

⁴³⁰ Cf. I. E. Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion*, London: 1981, 113.

(eating only certain foods) in order to protect the sacredness and health of the new mother and child. This seclusion has a positive meaning.⁴³¹ For the Kikuyu people of East Africa, the Dogon and Igbo, West Africa, only the mother undergoes seclusion, which lasts about seven weeks (twenty eight days).⁴³² The seclusion is indicated with the dread associated with birth, and symbolizes death and resurrection. The mother and the child symbolically die and rise again during and after a ceremony of seclusion, after which a feast is held; goat is sacrificed, and prayers are said. The community rejoices that a new child has become a part of the family of man.⁴³³

The birth of twins arouses dread among the Igbo of Nigeria. In this tribe, twins were never welcomed. There was usually a mythical meaning as well the superstitious belief associated with the delivery of twins. “Twins incarnate the mythic ideal, representing ontological perfection.”⁴³⁴ E. E. Uzukwu submits that the first creatures were twins of opposite sex, and it is only through the fault of an ancestor that people are now punished by being born single.⁴³⁵ Therefore, the birth of twins triggered dread in the community and they were usually killed immediately. Before the advent of Christianity, twins were never welcomed in Igboland. They were considered an abomination. However, a new light has dawned on the understanding of twins in Igbo culture. They are no longer held as taboos, but rather as source of blessings. Therefore, they are received with joy in the family. The Ewe people look at twins as eruption of disorder. They should not to be left on their own or else they would take over human habitation. Therefore, they place them under the control of satanic forces. The rites surrounding the placenta and umbilical cord indicate separation from the former world of the new born. The Igbo and Yoruba people usually bury them. However, for the Dogon, they are left to decompose in a pot filled with water. A tree is usually planted in a place where the umbilical cord is buried, and carefully tended by the owner. The water inside the pot into which this has been placed indicates the beliefs in the significance of the placenta to one’s life. Very significant in the birth rite is the naming ceremony. This concludes the period of transition and incorporation of the newborn in the community of the human family. Naming has symbolic meaning to Africans. It defines the past, the future of the new born and confers identity. “It is the name which marks the true entrance of the child into the life the life of the society. The naming ceremony among the Igbo brings out the rich symbolism of the act. It signifies the individuation of the child and its incorporation into the society.”⁴³⁶ In the birth rite, the child is circumcised, receives a new name and integrated into the community. Let us see marriage as a rite of passage.

3.2.3 Marriage Rite

Marriage is a focus of existence. It is a point of convergence where the members of the community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born.⁴³⁷ In marriage, all the dimensions of time meet, and the whole drama of history repeats, renews, and rejuvenates itself. Marriage helps to bring the human sexuality to its purpose – the ushering in of new life into the human society. In the African traditional society, the life of a girl is not a coincidence, rather is essentially a preparation for marriage, which is the goal of her life. When a girl does not reach this goal, her life is considered to have been useless. The glory of a woman lies on her children, and children are born through the union of man and woman in marriage.

Ilogu describes marriage in African society as a drama into which no spectator is admitted. Each party plays either as a man or a woman player. Therefore, together with the various customs associated with it, marriage is another avenue through which an individual shares in the

⁴³¹ Cf. A. G. Ha., “The Concept and Forms of Ritual”, in: *NEB* 26 (Chicago: 1988), 779-790, 780.

⁴³² Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 74.

⁴³³ Cf. L. F. “Feasts and Festivals”, in: *NEB* 26 (Chicago: 1998), 836-840, 838.

⁴³⁴ E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 74

⁴³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Cf. C. O. Onuh, *Christianity and Igbo Rites of Passage*, Frankfurt: 1991, 152.

⁴³⁷ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1999), 130.

group life of the African community.⁴³⁸ Certain features characterise marriage. Some of the less significant ones include betrothal from an early age of a girl to a boy, residence at intervals by the girl with the family of her future husband during which the girl's character and personality are observed. This involves a familiarisation process which goes on between the families of the boy and the girl. Its major characters include bride-wealth which is presented by the family of the boy to that of the girl, and various gifts from the girl's extended family to the girl on the day she goes finally to settle down in a new home with the husband. Such gifts could be in the form of land, livestock, and/or in the olden days, slaves to work for the new bride.⁴³⁹ Some call this dowry, bride wealth, bride price, or bride gift.⁴⁴⁰

Most African marriage system is strictly exogamous. Marriage between members of the same lineage is forbidden. If any kind of kinship relationship is established, such a marriage is forbidden. However, in case where a mistake occurs and one unknowingly marries a relation, owing to the remoteness of the relationship, when it is established, no matter how vaguely, a sacrifice for the removal of *aru* (pollution or abomination) is performed.⁴⁴¹ The nature of sacrifice varies according to custom. With the performance of the sacrifice, the marriage is allowed to continue.

In Africa, one is considered ripe for marriage after the rite of initiation into manhood has been performed. The act of contraction of marriage, in African society, is not a child's affair. It is a state of life of couples entered by adults for the purpose of transmission of life. It usually involves not only the couples, but also the entire community, especially the extended families of the prospective husband and wife.⁴⁴² They play major roles in the success of marriage.⁴⁴³ Like in every human society, marriage ushers in great joy to both the couples and their relatives. The contraction of marriage in Africa usually marks a turning point in the life of persons. It marks the life of passing from the stage of adolescence to the assumption of a marital status. Therefore, one who contracts marriage is no longer considered a child, but an adult member of the society. Thus, in Africa, marriage serves as rite of passage into adulthood.

In Igbo land, before marriage is contracted, firstly, the boy, and the girl usually have to perform the puberty rite, which initiates them into adulthood, and qualifies them to marriage. This rite varies from one locality to another. The girls observe fattening period,⁴⁴⁴ which of varying lengths of time follows the appearance of a girl's first menstruation period with the accompanying sacrifices of chickens to various gods. In *Nri* Town of Igbo land, for instance, the *Ufe Akwali*, a yearly festival for maidens, takes a special turn for all such maidens who have reached the age of puberty and are about to move over to their husband's homes. Sacrifices and prayers offered during this puberty rite observance are intended to secure the goodwill of the gods to grant happy home life to the young woman, especially through the gift of children. The market parade of young maidens at the end of various puberty rites and ceremonies are great

⁴³⁸ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 28-29.

⁴³⁹ Cf. Ibid

⁴⁴⁰ Dowry is negotiated and paid in order to marry a girl. Where the dowry is not paid, a child born through the coming together of a man and a woman belongs to the woman's patrilineage. In addition, where divorce occurs, it is effected not only by the woman deserting her husband to live with another man, but the second man must refund all the bride-wealth and other expenses incurred by the first husband. Failure to do this, any child born by the second man, legitimately belongs to the former husband.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 29.

⁴⁴² Cf. K. Appiah-Kubi, "Some West African Initiation Rites and their Related Values", in: *Awacc* (1985), 19-21, 20.

⁴⁴³ Cf. J. Odey, *Ritual Circumcision in Ezza and the Christian Faith*, Ibadan: 1986, 100.

⁴⁴⁴ This means the time when girls go into seclusion, leave off all manner of work, including cooking, decorate their bodies with calm-wood-lotion, and learn the lessons of motherhood. Psychologically such rest periods ranging from two to six months, help girls to get over the shock of their first menstruation experience, physically they fatten to prepare for childbearing. Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 46.

social occasions.⁴⁴⁵ The girls' ceremony eventually ends with the celebration of marriage, with marriage songs and expression of good wishes and hopes.⁴⁴⁶ In many African societies, residence in marriage is generally patrilocal. The girl leaves her parent's home and joins the husband to create a home.

In Africa, the duty to marry and bear children is a requirement that generates from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate.⁴⁴⁷ One who does not participate and play along with, is considered a stranger, an alien to the human society. The person is a rebel and Law Breaker. The person is not only considered as abnormal, but also subhuman.

3.2.3.1 Significance of Marriage

For Africans, marriage is not just a social event. It is not just a coming together of both partners, but rather, an essential cultic event. For the Igbo people, it is oriented to having children. This is why should a marriage fail to fulfil its goal - to get a child, the pressure is brought to bear on either the man or the woman to try his or her luck elsewhere. Among the men, this often results to Polygamous marriage. A few women may venture to leave and try their luck somewhere else.⁴⁴⁸ A man's worth in the community is sometimes not measured on how much wealth he possesses, rather on how many mouths he is able to feed.⁴⁴⁹ To the Igbo people, marriage and further transmission of life are unique events. Life implies the ability to further beget life. It means the ability to transmit this costly value, and care for it. Only one who has a child lives a truly human life. Therefore, life and participation in life become the essential principal values in the social structure of the people.⁴⁵⁰ Both marriage and procreation form a unity. Without procreation, marriage is incomplete. In addition, outside marriage, procreation is considered a taboo. Marriage, therefore, confers respect, honour, and recognition in the community.⁴⁵¹ The religious obligation to marry arises from the need to re-capture the lost gift of immortality. The individual contributes in marriage, the seeds of life towards man's struggle against the loss of original immortality. Conversely, the urge to marriage lies on the biological understanding that both husband and wife reproduce themselves in their children, thus perpetuating the chain of humanity. In some African societies, it is believed that the living-dead is reincarnated in part, so that aspects of their personalities or physical characteristics are 'reborn' in their descendants. A person who has no descendants, quenches the fire of life, and becomes forever dead since his line of physical continuation is blocked if the one does not get married and bear children. This accounts for the reason why, when an individual reaches an adult age, and fails to marry, he is accorded no respect in the community. Worse still, if he should die without a child, he is not accorded any burial rites, but thrown into the evil forest.⁴⁵²

To Africans, the consummation of marriage does not only designate marriage as lust of the sensual love, but that which is most important, the valuable gift of God to human beings, that is, life. That is why it means for them, a continuity of life, insofar as it undergoes a change in the land of "ala mmuo" (spirit world), and returns through rebirth. This ensures the respect the woman acquires in Igbo society. She is seen not only as a wife, but a carrier of new life, a mother, and source of "in-coming generations."⁴⁵³ In marriage, the human body union is fulfilled, and children are born. To remove the understanding of marriage from this context, it

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 46; In Ezza, Abakaliki, pre-marital rite into adulthood takes the form of ritual circumcision (see sub-section 3.5 below) In Owutu Edda, Afikpo, it takes the form of *Ndagha*, while in Nri Town, it features in the form of *Ufe Akwali*.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. J. P. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, Dublin: 1949, 210.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 30.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid 31.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. J. P. Esomonu, *Respect for Human Life in Igbo Religion and Morality*, Rome: 1981, 178-180.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Ibid

⁴⁵² This practice of "being thrown into the evil forest" is overtaken by modern life.

⁴⁵³ J. P. Esomonu (1981), 179.

loses its meaning, as the “Tree of Life” from which children come.⁴⁵⁴ It withers, and becomes nothing.

Consequently, the primary intention of contracting marriage in the African setup could be designated as namely as the Fulfilment of Divine Will. Africans believe that God created human beings and blessed them to marry and have children.⁴⁵⁵ That is why marriage is a holy duty which every normal person must fulfil. To fail to fulfil this obligation is to break the flow of life and thereby to endanger the continuous existence of human beings on earth. Therefore, in African context, by refusing to marry and have children, one commits evil. The person acts against the will of God and continuous existence of human community on earth.

3.2.3.2 Process

The process of marriage in African traditional religion could be categorized under the following headings:

- a) *The preparation*: This is a long process marked by rituals and initiations into adulthood.
- b) *Choice of partners*: In some African societies like Sudan or the Hausas of Nigeria, the choice is made by parents, and it is sometimes done even before the children are born. Here, the parents and relatives of the young man approach the parents of a particular girl and start marriage negotiations. In some other societies, the young people themselves make the choice and later inform their parents.
- c) *The betrothal and Courtship*: There is no definite rite surrounding these two elements. However, betrothal often goes with the notification of the parents of the bride and bridegroom,⁴⁵⁶ which gradually leads the girl into the family of the bridegroom.
- d) *The settlement of the Bride Gift and Wedding Ceremony*:⁴⁵⁷ Because of its symbolism, this particular stage needs an elaborate exposition.

3.2.3.3 The Bride Gift and Wedding Ceremony

Many people have different names for this. Some call it the ‘bride-gift;’ others call it ‘bride-price,’ ‘dowry’ or ‘lobola.’ The Igbo people call it ‘ikwu ugwo isi nwanyi’ (literally: paying for the head of the woman). This custom of presenting a gift to the bride’s people is an essential part of the marriage rite and varies in degree in different parts of Africa. In some parts of Africa, this could be in the form of cattle, money, foodstuffs, and other articles. In some other societies, the families concerned may exchange brides. In others, the bridegroom and his relatives must in addition contribute labour; and in matri-local societies, the man lives with his parents-in-law, and work for them for some years in order to ‘earn’ his wife.⁴⁵⁸

The symbolism of marriage gift is unique. “It is a symbol of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom’s people to those of the bride, for their care over their daughter, and for allowing her to become the bridegroom’s wife. The gift ‘replaces’ her in the parental home, reminding the family that she will leave or has left and yet she is not dead. This expresses her value not only to her family but also to her husband’s people. At marriage, she is not stolen but given away under mutual agreement between the two families. The gift elevates her status both as a person and as a wife. Moreover, it legalises her value and the marriage contract. The institution of this practice is the most concrete symbol of the marriage covenant and security. Consequently, under no circumstance is this custom a form of ‘payment,’ as outsiders mistakenly interpret it.”⁴⁵⁹ In Igboland, if marriage breaks down completely and there is no divorce, the husband may get back some of the gifts he had given to his wife’s people, but in some others, nothing is returned to him. Marriage is always realized with an intention symbolizing a union of husband and wife, and the

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Gen 2:18, 21-25; cf. C. 1055 § 1.

⁴⁵⁶ There is an Igbo adage according to which “a gwa bu mma nwanyi” (character is the beauty of a woman).

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. E. L. Esomonu, (1981), 184-188.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1999), 137.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid

mandate to bear children and bring them up. Additionally, it incorporates couples into membership with the community of the married people.

3.2.3.4 Marriage Forms

The marriage rite occurs in two forms. Here is an account given by Nzekwu Onuora:

First Form: “Then Udemba takes Nneka’s right hand, and places it in the uncle’s hand. Here is your wife’, he said to the uncle. “May God bless you two. We seek in the vegetable soup the head of the root of a yam. May God bless you with children.” (It follows the symbolic description of the sexual organs). “When your penis touches her, may she bring out fruit. When he releases the sperm, Nneka, hold it firm. Protect it well, for that is the joy of marriage.”⁴⁶⁰

Second Form: The second form occurs in the following marital rite of the Ijaw and the Igbo of Bony. “The bride and bridegroom sit, and place their feet on Odiri wood, the symbol of ‘chi’⁴⁶¹. The Priest weds them at this place, in which he sprinkles the blood of a Hen on their feet, and the wooden stock. Similarly, sacrifice, *Nzu* (white chalk), *Akwa* (egg), *Mmanu* (palm oil) and other food items are brought. The bride and the bridegroom, with *Nzu* rubbed all over their bodies, pray to the great goddess for protection and welfare on their lives.”⁴⁶² This It occurs in a similar form in Ezza, Abakaliki. “During the first stage of the ceremony, the father of the bride takes a cola-nut, prays over it, asks God, the ancestral spirits, the gods of the land, including the god of fertility, to bless the marriage that is just beginning. Having said the prayer, he breaks it and gives it to the bridegroom and the bride, who then proceed to eat it. This is normally accompanied by eating of food prepared specially for them. After they have eaten the food, anybody in the family who has any marriage gift presents it to the bride to help in settling her in her new home. She is then taken amidst great joy to live together with the husband until the last stage of the ceremony – the ‘Ibu-Uhu...’⁴⁶³ The “Ibu Uhu” is the consummation, consolidation and confirmation of the marriage ceremony.⁴⁶⁴ What is also significant in the ceremony are the elements of “eating together”, “throwing rice of wheat on the head of the couples,” “imparting paternal blessings” and “prayers” for the couple. These are symbolic gestures. They encourage communality, help to promote the fertility of the union and, at the same time, ensure abundance of food for the household.⁴⁶⁵ The “eating together” symbolizes African community life (*Gemeinschaft*). It could be interpreted as the Eucharist in the African. It is ‘coinonia’ – a great value in African culture. Moreover, much joy and feasting characterise ‘Ibu Uhu’. Usually, the most senior person in the extended family performs the ceremony. However, some other person can act on his behalf. When everything is ready, “the person to perform the ceremony takes cola-nut, dried meat, wine, leaves of a local plant called ‘Akpu Utu,’ and the leaves of a local shrub called ‘Oboroto’. With cola-nut, wine, and the dried meat, he prays to the god of fertility to bless the marriage and make it fruitful. The local leaves are mixed with cold water to make the latter slippery. The concoction is then sprinkled on the palms of both the bride and the bridegroom.”⁴⁶⁶

In other African societies,⁴⁶⁷ another essential element that features in marriage rite is water. Water is provided at the occasion for bathing. The bride and the bridegroom wash themselves in the cold water, which is placed in the courtyard enclosure and guarded by the bride’s sister. When they come to this water they undress themselves and each splashes the other with water. This symbolises a ritual binding themselves to each other, and of cleansing themselves from the former state of unmarried life which is considered to be the state of unproductivity. It symbolises purification, sanctifies the state of responsible maturity and the intention to procreate. The

⁴⁶⁰ O. Nzekwu, *Wand of Noble Wood*, London: 185; cf. L. Esomonu, (1981), 188.

⁴⁶¹ *Chi* is a personal god.

⁴⁶² A. P. Tablot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 4, London: 1969, 446.

⁴⁶³ J. Odey, (1986), 101.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 102.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. O. Onuh, (1991), 156.

⁴⁶⁶ J. O. Odey, (1986), 102-103.

⁴⁶⁷ A typical example is the Batoro tribe of East Africa.

sprinkling or washing removes the stain of the blood of virginity.⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, it makes the couple ready to procreate.

These marriage forms are valid forms in the traditional African society. With their performance, couples are recognised as husband and wife with legitimate rights and duties resulting from marriage including the mandate to raise children. Moreover, the man acquires the right to own personal possessions such as a plot of land or some other possessions in the family and community.⁴⁶⁹

3.2.3.5 Virginity

Another essential aspect of marriage is the place of virginity. The blood of virginity is a special symbol in African culture – a symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives have preserved the sanctity of human reproduction. Only marriage may shed this sacred blood, for in so doing it unlocks the door for members of the family in the loins to come forward and join both the living and the living-dead. Virginity symbolises purity of the body and moral life. A virgin bride is the greatest glory and crown to her parents, husband and relatives.⁴⁷⁰ It is a golden gift which the bride gives to the husband at the consummation of their marriage. The prohibition of pre-marital sex⁴⁷¹ and the preservation of this value in the African traditional society help Africans not only to cherish chastity as a value in the marital life, but also in non-marital one.

3.2.4 Death and Funeral Rite

Earlier, we saw birth as the first rhythm of a new generation and that the rite of birth is performed in order to make the child a corporate and social being. Initiation rites continue that process and make the child a mature, responsible, and active member of a society. Marriage makes him a creative and reproductive being, linking him with both the departed and the generations to come. Finally, death, which seems inevitable and which in many societies, is considered to be the most disrupting phenomenon of all, comes. It stands between the worlds of human beings and of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible.⁴⁷²

In Africa, death is considered to be a passage to a new level of existence, a transition to a new life. It is a return home. It marks a physical separation of the individual from other living human beings. In Igbo culture, the presence of death marks a radical change in the life of the individual, and leaves an impact on the lives of relatives, friends, and well-wishers, and the community at large. It usually leaves a vacuum which could never be filled. The inevitability of death is expressed in the saying, ‘Onwu diri Onye?’ – to whom does death belong? “Death strikes a mixed feeling among the Africans. It usually leaves an aura of fear and dread in the minds of the living. Africans believe that no one dies a natural death, unless the individual is very old and is believed to have finished his earthly duties; otherwise, no death is considered normal.”⁴⁷³ Abnormal deaths resulting from accidents or incurable diseases generalize the threat of numinous so that society expels the dead from its midst,⁴⁷⁴ purifies itself, and a funeral could rarely be organized. I. Metuh sees the ‘dirt’ of death and its contagion as a “dominant symbol for the initiation ritual process.”⁴⁷⁵ When death occurs, the close and distant relatives of the dead along with his possession are isolated. Such a taboo probably arises from the fact that death is not seen as a part of human society. It belongs to the other world.⁴⁷⁶ Nevertheless, reintegration of the

⁴⁶⁸ J. S. Mbiti, (1999), 136.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 103.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1999), 138.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. E. U. Igboaja, *In Love With Sex*, Enugu: 2000, 39-46.

⁴⁷² For more detailed study on death. Cf. M. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship Among the Nyakyusa: 1957*; J. R. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestor*, 1962, and S. Yokoo, *Death Among the Abaluyia* (Dissertation at Makerere University College, Kampala: 1966; cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1990), 145; cf. L. A. Esomonu, (1981), 145.

⁴⁷³ E. I. Metuh, (1981), 76.

⁴⁷⁴ Such a dead person is usually thrown into the ‘bad bush’. Cf. C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: 1958, 178.

⁴⁷⁵ E. I. Metuh, (1981), 76.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid

relatives occurs only through the transitional period of purification. Among the Igbo people, the death of the old members of the community is usually accepted with thanks and hope for the continuity of the given group. Through such noble deaths, the ancestors who are the custodians of law and morality emerge. They are symbols of unity, respect and fortitude. Among the Akan of Ghana, for instance, the ancestors are said to be real owners of the land, the living do not actually own the land but have the right to the use of the land.⁴⁷⁷ This belief expresses the African understanding that life does not terminate in death, rather it continues in another world. Death, therefore, is a move from the living to join the noble and enviable world of bliss and joy of the ancestors. Only those who lived a good and commendable earthly life can become renowned ancestors. Those who commit suicide or who die young do not become ancestors. Those who have not finished their earthly duties keep coming to be born again as re-incarnated.⁴⁷⁸

Death is celebrated with funeral rites and ceremonies.⁴⁷⁹ Such complicated ceremonies include burials, funerals, inheritance, the living dead, the world of the departed, visit of the living-dead to their human families, reincarnation. They vary from one country to another and from tribe to tribe. Nevertheless, the motive remains the same: It expresses the beginning of a journey into another life.⁴⁸⁰ The rite occurs in the following forms:

a) First Burial Rite

As the corpse decomposes quickly due to the climatic condition in African, the burial ceremony usually takes place with 24 hours.⁴⁸¹ The rite of passage of both the dead and his relatives begins immediately with the burial of the dead person in a coffin or wrapped in a mat. The dead is put into grave with his belonging (or at least those to which he is most attached). L. Esomonu reports: "In Onitsha area, where the Obi lives, it was customary to postpone his burial to a latter date. Within the time, the corpse was dried with smoke. Town criers later announced to the people the event."⁴⁸²

At the preparation of burial, the body is ritually washed and shaved. The dead is dressed with his/her best clothes and ornaments of traditional titles. On the place where the dead sat or washed during his/her last moments, a goat or a fowl is killed. The blood is then smeared all over the place and stuck with feathers. This rite precedes aggregation.⁴⁸³ With it, the living prepare the way of the dead or send the herald ahead, which should announce to the ancestors that a new member is on the way, therefore, they should be prepared to receive him.⁴⁸⁴ The fowl or the goat is the dead person's first gifts to the ancestors. The dead is usually buried with their possession, but their belongings are left on top of the grave. Such articles like machete, hoe, gun, fisher-net or axe which typify the dead person's occupation are put in the grave. This could have two possible symbolic meanings, namely: It could be a way of providing them with their needs to avoid their return and witch-hunt of the living, or it could be an act of purification, a way of removing unclean things from the midst of the living.⁴⁸⁵ For L. Esomonu, it purely facilitates a practise of one's occupation in another world. And dressing the corpse forms rite of incorporation.⁴⁸⁶ However, E. Uzukwu holds the view that full incorporation does not occur at this stage, rather, it comes later at the second burial, that is, the ceremony of induction.⁴⁸⁷ As ritual entities, relatives of the dead undergo separation from the society and proceed (like their

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. K. Appiah-Kubbi, (1985), 22

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. chapter One, subsection 1.2.4

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, Stanford: 1962; cf. M. Fortes, *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*, Cambridge: 1981; Nukunya, G. K., "Some Underlying Beliefs in ancestor worship and Mortuary Rites among Ewe," in: "*La Notion de Personne en Afrique noire*", (1981), 283-313.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. L. E. Esomonu, (1981), 199.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Ibid

⁴⁸² Ibid

⁴⁸³ Cf. E. E. Metuh, (1981), 119; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 76.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. L. E. Esomonu, (1981), 200.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. J. Cazeneuve, *Sociologie du Rite*, Paris: 1971; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 76.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. L. E. Esomonu, (1981), 200; cf. G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, London: 1966, 113.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid 76.

dead relative) into the liminal period marked by ritual purification. The widow is considered more unclean than the other relatives. On the day of the husband's death, the *Isi Ada* (eldest sister) of the husband, washes the widow's hands with water and rubs them with an unbroken egg which is thrown into the 'bad bush'. The widow then goes into seclusion for one month (four weeks) during which time she must abstain from washing.⁴⁸⁸ Within this period of mourning, which lasts for a year, she wears black cloth, symbolising sorrow and mourning for the dead. This is 'igba mkpe', mourning for the dead in Igbo culture. At the end of this, the widow becomes purified and re-incorporated into the society.

b) 'Ikwa Ozu' or Last Funeral Ceremony

"Ikwa Ozu", (the so-called second burial) takes place usually a year after the first funeral rite. It takes almost the same pattern as the first. The only difference is that heavy celebration accompanies it. The second burial rite has rich symbolism for the Igbo people of Nigeria. It is more of a cultic act in which the relations of the dead commemorate the life of their dead relative and, in so doing, free the dead from the pangs of death. Failure to perform this ritual of induction would result to the dead coming back to disturb the living. Some of them might even turn into an evil spirit.⁴⁸⁹ The Igbos believe that: without the celebration of this second burial rite, no human soul could reach the peaceful dwelling place of the ancestors.⁴⁹⁰

The actual ceremony of the second burial rite is always a joyful event. Guns and Canons are shut to announce to the soul that the hour of its triumph has come. *Mmai Nkwu* (Palm wine) flows in abundance. *Eghu* (Goats), *Aturu*, (sheep), and *Okuko*, (fowls) are slaughtered in great numbers. The ceremony lasts often a whole week or even more. With it the Igbo people show that the soul is awaiting its liberation.⁴⁹¹ At the end of the ceremony, sacrifices to *Ala* (Earth-mother), the dead's personal *chi*, and the ancestors (to receive the dead into the spirit land) are performed before the *Ikenga* (symbol of a man's personal *chi*) or *Ogbu chi* (for a woman) are broken and other celebrations take place. A male family member appears, masked and dressed with long dress. All present declare that from then on the cloth should be revered as the true spirit of the dead person. This is later kept and preserved as a sacred relic. In the following night, a coffin made of wood, in the same size as the dead, is placed in the same grave where the corpse already lies. The dead is said to have received a dignified burial. The incorporated dead is bound to remain in the land of spirits. From then on, it could rest in peace. If the dead returns in a newborn, it is not the 'real self' (*Muo*, which is permanently in the land of the spirits after death) but the *eke* (the ancestral guardian linking the individual to the life-force of his patroclan) which returns.

This rite has great symbolic significance to the Igbo people. Birth and death make such deep impression on human/Igbo culture that they have become symbolic representations of the human life struggle. Initiation into a social status or into a society assumes deeper meaning when one sees it from the point of view of human struggle to live and to overcome death. Since birth and death challenge the very survival of human societies, it is not surprising that human societies base these core realities on actions of divine and semi-divine beings. Life crisis and rites of initiation thus become social and religious actions.⁴⁹² The burial rite expresses initiation as a passage into another world. That is why Peter Ebigbo rightly observes: "the non-celebration of the second burial by the Africans, especially those who later became Christians, and who are forbidden to celebrate it, accounts for a lot of psychical disorder."⁴⁹³

The burial rite presents great challenge to the Church for inculturation. Let us see initiation in Edda, Afikpo.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1981), 121.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 77.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. L. E. Esomonu, (1981), 201.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. Ibid 202.

⁴⁹² Ibid

⁴⁹³ P. Ebigbo, *Psychology Today*, April, Enugu: 1982, 3.

3.3 Initiation as Symbolic Value

Under this sub-section, we intend to highlight the symbolisms of initiation rites. We shall take Edda in the former Afikpo Division (now Afikpo North and South Local Government Areas) and Ezza, Abakaliki, Igboland, South East of Nigeria as our particular cases of study. Our choice is centred, first, on the roles they play in the promotion of traditional initiation and their composition as the two deaneries (Afikpo and Abakaliki) of Abakaliki Diocese of Nigeria.

3.3.1 Initiation/Puberty Rite in Edda

Edda is a community in Igboland which belongs to the former Afikpo Division (now Afikpo South Local Government Area) in South Eastern of Nigeria. It is located at the southern part of Afikpo, and shares common boundaries with Amasiri, Afikpo in the North, Unwana and Erei (Cross River State) in the East, Ohafia and Abiriba in the South, and Nkporo and Akaze in the West.⁴⁹⁴

In this community, initiation into manhood or puberty rite features in the form of 'ipu ogo' and has deep symbolic meanings. This initiation is usually for adolescent boys, which is both extensive and expensive. It separates the boys from a childhood of emulating adults such that they become like those that they have been emulating, and in turn will be emulated in the future by yet younger males. In his book, *Boyhood Rituals In An African Society*, S. Ottenberg describes its major characteristic functions as follows: "The initiations bring them more fully into adult life in their compounds and agnatic groupings, establish a life-long pattern of a loving but separate adult relationship with their mothers, are an early prelude to marriage, and are a prerequisite to full relationships with the boys' matrilineal kin."⁴⁹⁵ Therefore, it serves as a prelude to marriage.

In Edda, it features in the following three different stages, namely: (a) *itu elu* or the infant initiation, (b) the *ibi isugwu* or *ipu ogo umirima enna* (juvenile initiation), or *isibu* Afikpo dialect, and (c) the *ipu ogo ndishina* or Adult initiation. In Afikpo, a neighbouring town to Edda, it features in the form of *isibu edda* and *ikwum*.⁴⁹⁶ Very central at the initiation into manhood in Edda is the Egbela Cult. Let us have a closer look at this cult.

3.3.2 The Egbela Cult

The Egbela cult occupies a central place in the religious, social and political lives of the people of Edda. E. Arunsi affirms: "Over the years, the Egbela cult has become synonymous with Edda clan as a cultural entity all-year-round, the traditional schedules of the Edda man are regulated by the tenets of the cult which is seen by the average Edda as all powerful, omnipresent and omnipotent."⁴⁹⁷ It plays protective role in the community, which however, is only limited to members or initiates. In addition, it is a warring god which demands strict ethical and moral purity on its subjects. In Edda, women are not allowed to participate in the 'ipu ogo' initiation rituals, except the wives of "Ndi Eze Erusi" (Chief priests of Egbela) who could have insight into the worship and secrets mystery of the cult, under strict oath. Also the oath binds initiates, which applies especially to the rituals.

The Egbala cult exerts overwhelming influence on Edda community. It also features in Afikpo, Akpoha, Amasiri and Unwana (Afikpo Local Government Area), Nkporo (Ohafia Local Government Area), Mgbede, Ihenta, Umobo, and Iyioji Communities of Akaeze, Ivo Local Government Area, South East of Nigeria, where it exists in modified forms. In these latter communities, it goes with the name 'Egbela Edda' or 'Erisi Edda', while in Edda proper, they call it 'Egbela Jew'.⁴⁹⁸ It is not certain how historians, anthropologists, and the people of Edda

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. C. Agwu, *Ipu Ogo: Traditional Rites of Initiation into Manhood in Edda*, Owerri: 1994, 2.

⁴⁹⁵ S. Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals in An African Society: An Interpretation*, Washington: 1989, 135.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid 136.

⁴⁹⁷ E. I. S. Arunsi, et al, (ed.), *Edda Heritage*, Lagos: 1994, 85.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid

associated the Cult with the name, 'Jew'.⁴⁹⁹ In Arunsi's view, the Egbela cult has almost the same attributes with the Christian God. It is all-powerful and omnipotent. No wonder then, it dictates the moral rectitude of Edda people and serves the function of granting religious, political, or economic status in the community.⁵⁰⁰

In a unique way it marks the rite of transition into manhood. In addition, it provides sources of informal education and military training. The rigorous spiritual and ritual activities that qualify one for this, lasts a period of nine or eight years.⁵⁰¹ It is a type of schooling and military training in Edda culture, equivalent to the eight year school period of the English man.⁵⁰² A. O Udu explains: "The strenuous training exposes the candidates to the art of traditional warfare, and use of herbs. The hard drilling steels them against hazardous task of defence. War veterans are invited continually to give the neophytes lectures, which dispose to acquire these skills."⁵⁰³ Therefore, at the end of their training, they emerge as groomed soldiers capable of defending their land in time of military aggression. The possess courage, patience, endurance, and the ability to withstand hunger, as they endure hardship and unfavourable weather with

⁴⁹⁹ Perhaps this may be connected with the common belief that the Igbo tribe of Nigeria originated from the Jews and the Egbe. Therefore, this cult of Egbela may be a carry-over of iconographic practice of the people of the ancient Near East which the Jews adopted. In the ancient Near Eastern iconography, bulls figure prominently either as representations of gods, example, Bull *El* in the Ugaritic texts or as animal thrones of deities standing upon their backs. The images represent Yahweh contrary to Israel's aniconic tradition. In 1Kg 12:28, Jeroboam I, in about 930 B.C., (employing bull for political end) used it to lead the people into apostasy, an act that to the deuteronomistic historian nullifies the divine promise given earlier to Jeroboam's dynasty in 1Kg 11:31-39. This is iconography - a form of worship, which is offered to the false representation of Yahweh, marked with eating and drinking before the deity. It forms a rite of sharing the hospitality of the great one, becoming his client, and rejection of the rite in Ex 12:1-14; 24:1-11; where blood is used as a symbol for God. (cf. *NJBC*. 55,59). One could understand why the name 'Jew' is applied to the 'Edda Egbela Cult. Like the Jewish God, it is *all-powerful, omnipresent and omnipotent* - the supreme god of the Edda people. The justification of the attribution of the name "Jew" to the Edda cult is only hypothetical, as it lacks historical basis. Conversely, the Egbela cult is like the Jewish "Bar/Bat Mitzvah," - a rite of passage that determines the age of boys and girls in Israel. "Bar Mitzvah" or "Bat Mitzvah," literally meaning "commandment age" or "age of majority", is an important cycle event for a young Jewish boy or girl. A boy is *Bar Mitzvah* when he reaches thirteenth birthday, while girls are *Bat Mitzvah* when they are twelve. The girls' ceremony can be postponed till they reach the age of thirteen. Historically, *Bar Mitzvah* and later *Bat Mitzvah* is the ceremonial occasion that marks the time when a young person is recognized as an adult in the Jewish community and is responsible for performing *mitzvot*. Before children are *Bar/bat Mitzvah*, they do not need to fast on *Yom Kippur*. After *bar/bat mitzvah*, they are required to celebrate this *mitzvah*. At *bar/bat mitzvah* they are also counted in the *minyan* (a quorum of ten required to conduct a service). The *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony consists of the young person chanting the blessings and his/her *Torah* portion, which is the *Torah* portion of the week. One also reads the *Haftarah* portion. There are many traditions that accompany the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* experience. While the actual day is important and memorable, the years of preparation before are just as enlightening and vital. Over time the custom of *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* has evolved to serve a special meal to commemorate the *mitzvah*. It offers the extended families the opportunity to reunite and spend time together. Children begin for their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* by going to Hebrew/Religious school some years before they actually turn *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* age. But some children begin attending afternoon religious school from the time they enter Nursery School. The purpose of the religious school is to learn the Jewish customs, holidays, history, and the Hebrew language. In the year leading up to the event the person begins more intense training focused specifically on their *Torah* portion and the accompanying prayers. The day the young person is *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is the first time he/she will have ever been called to the *Torah*. To say the blessings over the *Torah* one must be *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* age. In addition to preparing one's *Torah* portion the preparatory year serves as a chance for the young person to begin thinking about what being a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* really means. In some synagogues, the young person may make a commentary on their portion and try to apply the teachings of *Torah* to their lives. (cf. http://collections.ic.gc.ca/art_context/tbar.htm)

⁵⁰⁰ E. I. S. Arunsi, (1994), 85.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. A. O. Udu, "Oral Interview" in Owutu Edda; cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 6.

⁵⁰² Cf. G. Eseni, "Oral Interview" in Amangwu Edda; cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 6.

⁵⁰³ A. O. Udu, *Ibid*.

manly spirit. This is why mothers, at the end of the initiation, address their children as *agu Nna* (his father's lion), *Nwoke ike* (strong man), et cetera.⁵⁰⁴

In addition, it helps initiates to acquire moral conduct and the discipline to keep secrets. As a mark of religious identity, it instils the spirit of pride on initiates who regard themselves as superior to other men who are non-initiates, and their religion as superior to others.

Initiation into manhood in Edda ushers one into communion with the ancestors. With the fulfilment of this religious obligation, it confers on one the status of full-fledged membership in the community. The person is regarded as *Nde Ishina*.⁵⁰⁵ The worth of every Edda man is accessed by the ability to perform this initiatory rite. It serves an identity symbol in the community. No wonder then it makes a dangerous appeal to every Edda man.

3.3.3 Process of Initiation

Initiation into manhood in Edda takes place in three major stages, namely: *itu elu* (infant initiation), *ibi isugwu umirima enna* (the Junior Egbela rites), and *ibi isiugwu nde ishina* (the senior Egbela rites).

3.3.3.1 'Itu Elu' (Infant Initiation)

This is the first stage of the process in initiation that usually begins with the presentation of a male child at the age of one or more to *Ikwom ocha* masquerade. In the evening of the day in which *itu elu* takes place (usually on an Orié day) a piece of cloth is tied on the child's waist before the presentation. A masquerade, the representative of Egbela spirit, comes to claim the innocent child, reminding the parents that the child belongs to the Egbela.⁵⁰⁶ In other parts of Igboland, such masquerades are symbolic representations of the dead ancestors of the village.⁵⁰⁷ As the masquerade receives the child, it throws it up and down four times and hands him over to his sponsor. (This ritual may account for why it is called 'itu enu' - throwing up). The latter quickly runs with the child to *onu mkpu* (the village gate) where *nja mmiri* (a pot of water) is kept for washing and purification called *ima ughu*.⁵⁰⁸ With this rite, the child is completely dedicated to the Egbela.⁵⁰⁹ Some people in Edda believe that until the rite of *ima ughu* is concluded, no woman, even the child's mother is allowed to touch the child.⁵¹⁰

3.3.3.2 "Ipu Ogo Umirima Enna" (Juvenile Initiation)

The "Ipu Ogo Umirima Enna" forms the second stage of initiation, and begins when a male child reaches the age seven. As a preparation for the ceremony, the neophyte shaves his hair, and ties the *aji* (a well beaten bark of a fig tree) around the waist. On the appointed day, he marches into to the *Eko* (the oracle of Egbela Umirima Ena). Here, a candidate observes certain prohibitions. He restrains from taking certain foods, associating with non-initiates, and mingling with females. He abstains from putting on shirts and shorts. Instead he wears a narrow and soft tree fibre (*azi*), tied across the waist and between the bottoms to cover his genitals. He then heavily coats his whole body with *uhie* (the cam wood dye).⁵¹¹ These mark the solemnity of the rite, which is a turning point in the life of the candidate. The candidate is then presented to the Egbela with small *oku* (an earthen ware container), *ogu nzu* and *righirighi* (a small fish in Edda dialect). This symbolizes the handing over of the child to Egbela whose spirit is invoked upon him. The child continues to wear the *aji* until the *Nkwo ebiayi* day when the *aji* is replaced with a

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 8.

⁵⁰⁵ It is a title for the initiate.

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 8.

⁵⁰⁷ C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: 1958, 63.

⁵⁰⁸ This aspect of *ima Uhu*, washing with water on the pot, designates the rite as purification. One can compare this with the presence of water and its efficacy in Christian baptism. Therefore, the presence of this element designates the whole 'ipu Ogo' rite as "traditional or Natural baptism" of the Edda people.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 8.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁵¹¹ Cf. E. I. S. Arunsi, (1994), 85.

towel. After a month or less, the neophyte is led to *ofia umurima ena* (the *umurima ena* sacred bush) for the actual initiation ceremony.⁵¹² This is a solemn moment that is marked by absolute separation and retreat in the bush, which culminates in the initiation proper, and the candidate emerging from the ceremony as a newly initiated young man. At the initiation ground, the master of initiation takes the *ogu nzu*, the skull of *arira* (small fish), swings them over the candidate, invokes the Egbela and ancestral spirits on the child and then throws them into the shrine. The candidate undergoes excruciating tortures. As he crawls through a small opening, the initiates' masters give him severe beatings. The beating serves a test of manhood, which prepares the neophyte for actual initiation, and prepares him to face the hazards of adult life. After four days, the initiates could now participate in the masquerade rites, called *ikom umirima ena* or *Orie m̄ye*. The masquerade ceremony marks the end of *ipu ogo umiriman ena* or (Juvenile initiation)⁵¹³. When the initiation is over, the mothers of the initiates, in the company of other women, receive their lads with dances, and presentation of gifts to the *Ikwom*. This marks the end of the Juvenile initiation that prepares the candidate to the main initiation into adulthood.⁵¹⁴

3.3.3.3 “Ipu Ogo Ndishina” (Senior/Adult initiation)

The performance of the final initiation depends on the readiness of the parents. Actually, financial factor plays major role, as it demands much expenses. The Edda man could labour for years only to spend all his earnings on this final ceremony. The reason for this may be the prestige it holds in Edda society. On the other hand, it could be the spirit of squandermania that has become a way of life in Edda. The last two stages of initiation occur in two forms, namely: *Ogo isi ji* and *ibi isi ugwu*.

3.3.3.4 Ogo Isi Ji

In Edda, the *Isi Ji* ceremony features during the rainy season (*udumiri*). When the *Eko*⁵¹⁵ is ready, the father or a representative leads the candidates to the *Ogo* (village square) at the time when non-initiates and females are not expected to be around. This act of leading them to the *Ogo* is known as *ipu* or *iba ogo*. They reside in the *obi ogo* where they stay and receive training into the Egbela Cult.

During the adult initiation (*ipu ogo ndishina*), similar acts of shaving and tying an *aji* on the waist are repeated, just like in the Juvenal initiation ceremony. Candidates retreat into the *eko ndishina*⁵¹⁶, where they receive instructions, and advanced endurance training. Such training includes guerrilla warfare that prepares them for the effective defence of their fatherland.⁵¹⁷ They emerge from such trainings as potential soldiers. No wonder then, the history of Edda people is linked with the history of wars in Igboland, in the 19th Century.⁵¹⁸ The training session has rich meanings. “In the traditional setting (and prior to the introduction of Western form of education), the Egbela training sessions offered the media for oral historical rehearsals, cultural socialization as well as schooling in aspects of Edda polity, economy, religion, judiciary and military.”⁵¹⁹

In addition, candidates take up some community roles like cleaning the village square and general toilets. They also learn traditional medicine, the use of certain potent herbs for healings,

⁵¹² Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 9.

⁵¹³ Ibid

⁵¹⁴ Cf. subsection 4.4.2 on Christian Baptism in the next chapter.

⁵¹⁵ *Eko* is a sacred place, a fence made with palm fronds usually constructed a month after the *Oriri Ike Ji* (New Yam festival). It is a secret place where initiates receive their trainings to help preserve the secrecy of the rite which is never revealed to non-initiates.

⁵¹⁶ This is an enclosure or fence for the adult initiation known as the shrine of *egbela* or *erusi udumini*.

⁵¹⁷ Compare this with Tertulian's (*ca. 160 in Carthage, + 220) use of metaphor of a soldier of the imperial army taking his oath to describe what happens at Baptism (cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, New York: 1982, 44).

⁵¹⁸ Cf. E. I. S. Arunsi, (1994), 166; cf. Isichei, *The History of Igbo People*, London: 1976, cf. K. O. Dike, F. I. Ekejuba, *The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980*, Ibadan: 1990, 176.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. E. I. S. Arunsi, (1994), 89.

and immunity from machete-cuts and diseases as well as magical acts of invisibility and casting of evil spells (distance death-wish).⁵²⁰ They provide costumes and masks for the preparation of the graduating masquerade. They also learn local arts, crafts and weavery. Both the candidates and the *isiji* live a community life where they take care of themselves. Tradition grants them the right to enter any farm and harvest crops for their own use.

On *ubochi eke itu ji* (a day for the collection of yam), the initiates rub *ntu* (ash)⁵²¹ on their bodies, cut some sticks and dance around the villages. The ceremony reaches its peak with the initiation proper which takes place on *Nkwo Ofia* or *Eke Ofia* depending on the village concerned. A cane fighting is declared by the *Nze* for the *Efu*,⁵²² to usher in the initiation proper, which usually takes place on *Orie Amoso* day. On that day, the initiates march into the bush where the *Isiji*⁵²³ conducts the rituals. At this time, the *Ogo* is closed for non-initiates and women whose freedom of movement is restricted. Within this period, which lasts between three to seven market days, that is, fifteen to twenty eight days, it is said that *Ogo echiela* or *Ogo amarele okara*.⁵²⁴ This shows that it is purely a male affair. “It is an all-male affair, and no female (no matter how young or old) is seen in the village square or along the route to *Ofia*, bush of Edda where the initiation proper takes place. The female folk are not to come out of their compound without male escorts whither; and the escorts must be initiated adults!⁵²⁵ The seriousness of the ceremony becomes very dramatic. The tensed nature of the ceremony: the clapping and tapping of their feet, the frenzied singing and echoing of the war songs of “Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!” and ‘Orie mee’, “need not to remind a deaf man that there is a stampede in the market square” – “ekwesighi ichetara ochi nti n’ahia esula.” The echoing of the war songs is enough to send even a bravest man to his heels. A violation of such solemn moments, either by intrusion or stepping out without an escort, could attract violence and reprisal on the culprit. The penalty could be as severe as one could not imagine. In the olden days, it could lead to killing. The only way to avoid such confrontation is to stay clear. This aspect of limitation of one’s freedom of movement calls for a proper review of the rite especially in the modern period. The rites could be performed in a secluded place, but women and non-initiates should be allowed to go about their normal business.

3.3.3.5 Ibi Isi Ugwu

The senior initiation reaches its peak with “ibi isi ugwu” or initiation proper. C. Agwu states that at the final day of the preparatory stage, the candidates and sponsors remain stark naked. The sponsor may cover his waist with some leaves or branches of palm. Initiation or war songs are chanted in readiness for the struggle to take the candidates to *Ofia* (the oracle of Egbela). These songs exalt the name and power of Egbela, the ancestors and those killed by Egbela. The men dance with different kinds of weapons in the hands. The movement to the *ofia* is a real battle. There is usually a struggle to determine who will be the first, second and third to

⁵²⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁵²¹ The ash has the symbolic significance of protection from evil spirit, union with the ancestors, consecration of the candidate to the Egbela cult, and transition to the adult stage of life. On the other hand, the dancing around the village square marks the celebrative aspect of the initiation rite.

⁵²² This is a name for the newly initiated boys in the first or second years. It can also apply to one’s servant - a boy or girl under one’s instruction or apprenticeship. cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 9.

⁵²³ The *Isiji* are Masters of initiation and are grouped into the *Nze Afo Toolu*: This is the most senior in rank. He is usually one with nine years in office; the *Nze Afo Asaa* is less in rank to the former. He is usually one with seven to eight years in office, and the *Nze Afo Iso*: He is the *Nze* with about six years in office, and *Nze Ato* - one with up to four years in office. This classification of the office of *Nze* in the traditional religious lives of the Edda people indicates the existence of a high level of hierarchy. Each is grouped and respected according to the number of years each has put up in the office. In this order of hierarchy, the *Nze* of the same rank cannot issue punishment or exercise authority over each other. Moreover, Rank rather than age is the principal consideration in the affairs of *Isiji*. cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 9.

⁵²⁴ The village square is closed to women and non-initiates.

⁵²⁵ Cf. E. I. S. Arunsi, (1994), 90. When this falls on a Sunday, it makes a spectacular scene in the Churches. Worship becomes merely a male affair as no woman is allowed to venture out, not even to attend worship.

be initiated. According to Edda tradition, every Edda man honours these three positions.⁵²⁶ As the candidates struggle to get in, they may use knives, daggers, logs, and so on, to get rid of their opponents. Eventually, deaths result in such a struggle. If any one is killed or wounded, the matter is kept secret. “The corpses of such initiates are dumped into the *Ofia Ojoo* (bad bush). They are not mourned and if their mothers have to weep, they do so in secret... Their fathers realize the implications of such deaths – that Egbela has taken its toll in revenge of a wrong done it by an ‘unfaithful’ adherent.”⁵²⁷ *Ndi Eze Arusi*, the high priest, and their assistants perform the actual rites of initiation. The priests hit *ikara*, a strong wooden drum, on the forehead of the candidates as they lie down with their eyes closed. After this, they give the candidates a specially prepared charm called *nri*. Some leaves are then put in their mouths and they are forced to run very fast with their sponsors. The sponsors ensure that their wards do not fall on the way. To fall on the way is regarded as a weakness and a defilement of the initiation which requires a repetition of the ritual. Such a person is called *ola abali*, the son who returns late, in other words, a weakling. On the following day, the candidates appear as *ikwom* or *Orie mee*⁵²⁸. They unmask in the evening and on the next day, having being ritually purified⁵²⁹ with *ofia*, a well-prepared charm for cleansing people from their contact and defilement with Egbela spirit, they dance round the village square. The latter is a celebrative part of the ceremony which marks the end of the *isi ji* initiation. With the conclusion of the rite, the candidates become fully initiated members of *egbela udumini* cult and adult members of the Edda community.⁵³⁰ From then on, they acquire all the rights and privileges of being an Edda man. What is most significant here is the religious symbolism of the rite in Edda. It is an initiation into a religious cult, which effects communion with the ancestors. In addition, it confers on the initiate the status of adulthood. But what implication does it have to a Christian?

3.3.4 “Ipu Ogo” and the Christian

In Edda community, the *Ipu Ogo* initiation occupies a unique place. It is a legitimate means of religious experience and communion with God. It conforms to I. Metuh’s view that “for Africans, especially, those who have not embraced Christianity, there are no other means of expression and realisation of their relation to God than through their religions, which could be said to be legitimate and to have a proper place in God’s salvific place.”⁵³¹ Therefore, for the Edda man, the “*ipu Ogo*” initiation is not only a means of relating with God, but also a way to acquire political and social rights in the community. In addition, it confers the individual the right to own a land and build a home. This is why at the end of the initiation, parents give each initiate *nwanyi nta* (a wife), *ulo nta*, (a small house) and *ubi nta* (a small farm).⁵³² With the small farm, the initiate can start a living and take proper care of his family. Failure to carry out this rite strips one of the right of full membership in the community. The person becomes *nwata isi ulo*, an infant, or ‘okoro usokwu’ (a Cook).⁵³³ Therefore, with this function, the “*ipu Ogo*” initiation serves as a religious, cultural, political, and social symbol in Edda community. As the Christian fails to participate in this rite he/she experiences marginalization in the community. He/she becomes a foreigner in his/her own land with no rights and privileges. Let us, at this point, turn our attention to circumcision; another form of initiation in African traditional religion

⁵²⁶ Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 10.

⁵²⁷ E. I. S. Egbebu, (1994), 91.

⁵²⁸ They are the two types of Masquerades in which the initiates appear after the initiation.

⁵²⁹ Very important here is the word “purified”. This act of purification after contact with a deity does not pertain to the goodness or evilness of the deity, but to the person who has made such a contact. In contacting a deity, the initiate swerves sort of in an in-between [*Zwischenstand*] that is conceived to be dangerous. In such a state, the initiate could be a danger to the living. In order to return to his / her former state, he / she needs to be “purified” of awesome encounter – to become normal again. The purification is ritual.

⁵³⁰ Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 10.

⁵³¹ I. E. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, Jos, Nigeria: 1985, 135.

⁵³² Cf. C. Agwu, (1994), 10.

⁵³³ Cf. *Ibid* 13.

3.4 Circumcision

3.4.1 What is Circumcision?

Circumcision is a wide-world phenomenon. The ritual of the removal of the foreskin in diverse traditional cultures could be a sign of civilisation in the sense that human society acquired the ability to control, through education and religion, the age at which sexual intercourse could begin.⁵³⁴ Different human groups and cultures that live in the desert or other hot environments have adopted the ritualization of circumcision's prophylactic effects as part of their customs. B. Moris explains that infections, aggravated by dirt and sand, are not uncommon under such conditions and crippled whole armies, where it is difficult to achieve sanitation during prolonged battle. Historically, it was not uncommon for soldiers to be circumcised in preparation for active service.⁵³⁵ Circumcision is common in Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cameroon, South Africa, Zambia, Nigeria, the Malay Archipelago and Aborigine New Guinea, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and various Islamic Countries of Middle East, Western Asia and India.⁵³⁶ It is also common in the West, where Medical report shows that it has been on the increase.⁵³⁷

Methods of operation vary from one culture to another. Some practise Gynaecological circumcision, which involves the physical cutting of the foreskin of the male sexual organ, or the female clitoris, while some, in addition to Gynaecological operation, practise religious or ritual circumcision.⁵³⁸ A. V. Genep maintains that to understand circumcision properly, one has to explain it through a principle that all rites of mutilation are justified. This includes rites that involve cutting, tension and mutilation of parts of the body that change the personality of the individual.⁵³⁹ Generally, the rite considers the human body as an entity.⁵⁴⁰

In males, the operation involves the surgical cutting or removal of the foreskin (prepuce, the sleeve of skin and mucosal tissue that normally covers the glands or head) of the penis.⁵⁴¹ And in women, a midwife or village woman usually performs it. She uses no anaesthetic, rather simply cuts the clitoris using whatever instruments she can lay her hand on, for instance, razor blades, knives, scissors, broken glass, sharp stones, and in some regions, her teeth. This causes complications in some cases. The most minimal damage is cutting away the hood of the clitoris, which will prohibit the girl from enjoying sex for the rest of her life.⁵⁴²

In the religious sense, circumcision is like other different rites that involve the sharpening of the teeth, opening of the ears, tattoo, perforation of the Vagina of a Virgin and the nasal Septum.⁵⁴³ A common principle governing all the above-named practices is that one does not take life simply as one receives it at birth. One changes ones body, mutilates it, to enable it receive divine power. The reason for this is that human beings always search for religious experience, to enter the realm of the sacred and experience divine life. This confers it its religious character.

The mutilation in initiation is a new creation, which the individual person takes to identify with the ancestors of his social groups. It is a discovery of the ancestral life of the community. The circumcision of the sexual organs, therefore, becomes a consecration and union with the ancestors.

⁵³⁴ Cf. B. Moris, *Medical Benefits of Circumcision*, New York: 1999, 12.

⁵³⁵ Cf. Ibid 12-13.

⁵³⁶ Cf. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 3, *Micropaedia*, Chicago: 1998, 328, 390.

⁵³⁷ Cf. H. Patel, "The Problem of routine Infant Circumcision", in: *CMJ*, (1966), 95: 576-581.

⁵³⁸ Examples are Bakoko, Basa of Cameroon and the Ezza, Abakaliki of Igbo land, Nigeria.

⁵³⁹ Cf. A. V. Genep, *Les rites de passage*, Paris: 1909, 102.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Ibid 104.

⁵⁴¹ B. Moris, (1999), 1.

⁵⁴² Cf. Ibid

⁵⁴³ Cf. G.v.d. Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen: 1956, 213.

Moreover, the human sexual organs are regarded as symbols of life.⁵⁴⁴ One, who circumcises, is believed to consecrate ones organs of life. As man or woman performs initiation, he/she consecrates the organs of life along with his/her whole person. By becoming a sacred individual, he/she now becomes worthy to participate in religious and political lives of the community. He/she receives recognition in the community he/she lives. This is why J. Soustelle states that humanity participates in the Jewish imagination in two categories, namely, the circumcised and the un-circumcised.⁵⁴⁵

Circumcision takes place at different ages. Because of these differences, it is difficult to talk of a common meaning circumcision acquires to different people in their different cultures. From psychological point of view, to remove the Oedipus complex, to receive castration from theories of psychoanalysis underlying it and the development of the human complexes, therefore, it has to be carried out at definite moment of child's development.⁵⁴⁶

3.4.2 Origin of Circumcision

African Origin: Circumcision is actually an extra-cultural rite. Different tribes and nations of the world practise it. It is an old practice (cf. Ex 4: 25; Josh 5:2ff). However, it is not clear where this practice originated and what its tradition was. One could not trace its origin in Israel as the Israelites inherited it from another culture. Joshua 5:2-9 indicates an adoption of the rite of circumcision from another culture⁵⁴⁷ together with change in the lifestyle, experienced through the crossing of the Red Sea to settlement in the Promised Land. As it is clear that Israelites practised the rite as they came to the land of Canaan, it is also could be assumed that they probably inherited the rite from the Egyptians where the rite was practised or from the Midianites. Nevertheless, evidence is lacking on her inheriting it from the latter. The Patriachs would not have been likely to adopt circumcision before their arrival in Canaan.

In the early times, circumcision was a widespread phenomenon in the Middle Asia, Africa, America, and Australia, nevertheless, not with the Mongolese or the Indogermans. In the ancient Near East it was a common phenomenon among many of Israel's neighbours, among them the Egyptians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and certain nomadic peoples, that is, the pre-Islamic Arabs. The Book of Jeremiah reports that the Egyptians, Edomites, Amorites, and Moabites were circumcised.⁵⁴⁸ However, the Philistines (cf. II Sam i20), "Hivites" (Horites) of Central Palestine (xxxiv 15), and the Mesopotamia did not practise it. The Semitic neighbours of Israel does not account for its source either. Originally, with its adoption in Israel, it neither had any religious meaning nor acquired any legal status in the early Jewish legal corpus. Only the book of Lev 12:3 once mentions it as rite of purification.

B. Moris traces the Judeo-Muslim practice of circumcision to the Egyptian/African civilization, noting that the illustrations of its operation and of circumcised Pharaohs dates back to 3000 BC. One possible reason the Egyptians could have circumcised themselves and their slaves might have been to prevent *schistosomal* infection. Urinary tract obstruction and haematuria are common in localities such as the Nile Valley that are inhabited by the blood fluke, *Schistosoma haematobium*, and the foreskin would undoubtedly possess the adverse ability of being able to hold water infected with the cercaria stage of the life cycle of this parasite and so facilitate its entry into the body. The Jews borrowed it from them. And their Jews' perpetuation of the procedure may have subsequently been driven by a desire to maintain cleanliness in an

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. E. Durkheim, *Les Formés élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*, Paris: 1973, 450.

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. J. Soustelle, "L'homme et le Surnaturel", in: *Encyclopédie Française*, viii (Paris: 1936), 16-20, 18.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. J. Cazeneuve *Les rites et la condition humaine*, Paris: 1961, 352.

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. Gen 34 and 17.

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. Jer 9:24

arid, sandy desert environment. Such considerations could also explain why it is practiced in multiple other cultures that live in such conditions.⁵⁴⁹

But a mythology in the Central African Republic traces the origin of circumcision to fighting. According to this myth, there was once a fight between two brothers. During the fighting the prepuce of one was cut. For it to heal, it had to be removed. The brother did the same to the other. Later on, when women had sexual intercourse with the two brothers whose foreskins were cut, they derived more sexual satisfaction from them than other men whose fore-skins were not cut. From then on, every man wants his foreskin to be removed.⁵⁵⁰ Could this explain why circumcision today goes with the notions of violence and aggression in the human society?⁵⁵¹ Let us see circumcision in the Scripture.

3.4.3 Circumcision in the Scripture

3.4.3.1 Circumcision in Old Testament

In the scripture, circumcision acquired a symbolic meaning. Originally in Israel, it (circumcision) had no link with the worship of God. However, with the fall of Israel and Judah it acquired a different meaning. Then, it acquired the symbol of membership to the people of Israel and the Yahwehistic covenant. With the political decay and in the exilic period, it acquired the status of profession of act of faith and religious symbolism of belonging to the people of Yahweh. Within this period, legal agreement developed.⁵⁵² Eventually, the rite became a cultural and spiritual symbol. It became a “covenant sign” and a religious symbol for Israel, the people of the Covenant, which the priestly account of Gen.17 presents. To the priestly account (*P*), it became an essential proof of adherence to the covenant.⁵⁵³

The priestly account of Gen. 17:1- 14, gives an account on the dignity and context of God’s word to Abraham, presenting it as a rule in the form of a direct speech.⁵⁵⁴ When the priestly tradition presents circumcision in strict relationship with Yahweh, it serves a function in the covenant as a prolongation of the concept of Yahweh.⁵⁵⁵ Covenant became an interchangeable action between God and his people who have to keep his ordinances. Should the above interpretation be

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. B. Moris, (1999), 2; cf. The terse passage of Exod 4:24-26 suggests a primitive religious connection. In addition, from the ethnological overview, the Old Testament writings indicate circumcision as a widespread phenomenon and trace it back to the time of clan and tribes.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. M. A. Vergt, *Les sites secrets des primitifs de L’Oubangui*, Paris: 1951, 69-70.

⁵⁵¹ W. Dirie, *Desert Flower, The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad*, Britain: 1998, 351.

⁵⁵² Cf. Gen 10b and 11a: 12-13; 14a.

⁵⁵³ Cf. C. Westermann, “Genesis 12-36”, in: *BK* 1,2 (1981), 318-340, 318; cf. E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible, Genesis: Introduction, Translation And Notes*, New York: 1964, 126.

⁵⁵⁴ C. Westermann maintains that Gen 17:1-14 suggests a biblical foundation of circumcoion. In the passage, God established a covenant with Abraham. The “covenant in flesh” has much in common with the “covenant between the pieces” of chapter 15, presupposing and supplementing it in various ways. The covenant ceremony there described is the basis for the key term *berit*, “covenant,” which the narrator employs more than adozen times in this chapter. Here, moreover, the covenant is thrice redefined as an “everlasting covenant” (vv. 7,13,19). In the earlier passage, Abram is a passive recipient of God’s unilateral obligation. Now God summons him to be an active partner in the covenant. In both sections the revelation opens with the divine, self-introductory formula “I am...” Specifically in vv. 9-14, the law of circumcision is specified. God’s promises demand an active response from their recipients. Circumcision is both a token of God’s covenant and a symbol of Jew’s consecration and commitment to a life lived in the consciousness of that covenant. The law of circumcision that now follows is the first *mitsvah* in the Torah that is specifically directed to Abraham and his descendants. The section comprising verses 10-14 appears to derive from a collection of laws. The introductory phrase, “Such...” (Heb *Zo’t*, “This is...”) is characteristic of scores of laws in ritual texts (cf. Exod 12:43; cf. Lev 6:2, 18), while the formulation in the second person plural shows that the section originally belonged in a legal setting, addressed to an entire community and not to an individual. One thing clear in the text is that the latter were added to the original when the legal extract was incorporated intact into the narrative. cf. C. Westermann, (1981), 318; cf. M. Senah, Nahum, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, Jerusalem: 1989, 123-125.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Gen 10: 7.

accepted to be correct, Chapter 17 of Genesis, therefore, is an impressive model of the principal theological conception of the priestly writing about what God is to the people of Israel, that is, promise (cf. Gen 9:17) and order. Therefore, the stay of the people of Israel in Egypt and the Exodus event form the background for reading and understanding God's actions to the people of Israel especially with reference to circumcision, and how it came to be a sign of the covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendants (cf. Gen 17:10ff). Such a background reading also should dispose one to better appreciate other Old Testament passages that make mention of circumcision.⁵⁵⁶ In addition, such background reading forms the basis of understanding what Yahweh meant to the people of Israel – a saving God, and a national One.⁵⁵⁷

3.4.3.2 New Testament:

In the New Testament, St. Paul allows the Gentile Christians in Rome to overhear a scriptural defence of the claims he was making for faith in the interest of a truly inclusive presentation of the gospel (cf. Rom 1:18-4:25). In Chapter 4, which is more a deduction rather than proof, he seeks to show that the pattern of faith could be traced in the scriptures. The scripture confirms rather than grounds the view of faith (cf. Gal 3:1-9). His exposition of the scripture centres on the figure of Abraham (cf. Gen 15-17) as the model of faith (cf. Rom 4:16-17). Within this symbolic world Abraham is not simply a biblical figure chosen among many, not even a notably suitable example. He is a symbol of faith. The scriptural proof, which Paul adduced, will be complete only when Paul succeeds in breaking the nexus between the community-defining rite of circumcision and the experience of justification by faith just described. Therefore, in the third part of his scriptural proof, retaining the language of “blessing” to denote the experience of being found righteous, he reverts to his primary text, Gen 15:6, to break through the barrier of circumcision and bring out the truly universal significance of what “our father” Abraham found (v 1).⁵⁵⁸

In Pauline thought, therefore, circumcision came only subsequently (cf. Gen 17: 9-14) and its function depicts a “sign” or “seal” of the righteousness already received through faith. He finds a value for circumcision (cf. 3:1-2), albeit in a limited and subordinate sense. No longer can it be seen as a badge denoting the status enjoyed exclusively by one people (the Jews). Rather, it points beyond itself to a righteousness that is far more universally available and which in fact overthrows that exclusivity. Paul attaches less value to physical circumcision. For him, it is an outward expression of a “circumcision of the heart,” the moral renewal wrought eschatologically by the spirit. (cf. 2:28-29).⁵⁵⁹

What differs in the New Testament is that in the long constituted community of Judaism the necessity of child circumcision is naturally more frequent than the Christian baptism. Paul proclaims the holiness of children on the ground of their natural birth (cf. 1 Cor 7:14). He consequently does not consider their baptism as necessary and he implicitly but completely precludes a supplementary adult Baptism of those children already born into the covenant of the saints. Just so in Judaism the adult circumcision of the children of circumcised fathers was precluded though adult circumcision did exist.⁵⁶⁰ With the Jews, moreover, the act of reception of the children of the circumcised consisted hitherto in the one operation of circumcision. For Proselytes coming over from heathenism, both adults and their children, there were added to this proper reception also the second operation, the baptism of purification. A difference between reception on the basis of birth and reception on the basis of personal decision seems only in this connection.⁵⁶¹ Thus: If in the view of the New Testament, circumcision is the seal of this faith of Abraham, thus from the outset it foresees the inclusion of the heathen world, then it is incompatible with the New Testament view of circumcision to see in this act only the reception

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. Gen 34:15-16, 26-39; cf. Ex 12:30; cf. Lev 12:1-3; 19:23; cf. Dt 30:6; cf. Jos 5:2-3; 5:5-7; cf. 1 Sam 14:6; 31: 4; cf. 2 Sam 1:20; cf. Jer 4:4; 9:25-26; cf. Ezek 32:19, 32, etc.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. C. Westermann, (1981), 319.

⁵⁵⁸ D. Harrington (ed.), “Romans”, in: B. Byrne, *SPS*, 6 (Minnesota: 1996), 141-142.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid* 147.

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, London: 1950, 61.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid* 62.

into the natural succession. Actually, circumcision is reception into the covenant, which God made with Abraham and his successors to whom even the heathen belong, just as Christian Baptism is reception into the Body of Christ.⁵⁶²

The fact remains that John the Baptist took over only one part of what for Jews was a double act in the reception of proselytes. He took over the purifying bath as he was primarily concerned with the circumcised and considered that their unfaithfulness consisted in their conception of purity. Therefore, he must demand a purifying of all, even of those who were not proselytes. But since his baptism implies at the same time the reception into the divine covenant of all who penitently prepare themselves for the fulfilment of the ancient promise, the function of divine reception, hitherto discharged by circumcision, is now also accorded to the purifying bath. In this sense, John's baptism prepared the way for Christian Baptism.⁵⁶³

O. Culmann observes that although, now in the New Testament, baptism into Christ's death and resurrection (the New Covenant) replaces the old one (Circumcision), it (Baptism) is no radically a new gift of grace. That is to say, whether Baptism or circumcision, what is at the basis is faith. The meaning of 'seal' at one decisive point cannot be radically different from that at another. The successors of Abraham, the natural like the proselyte, are all to exercise the same faith in God's resurrection power both before and after the appearing of the Messiah. They owe their existence as believers to this faith of Abraham in the divine miracle which even without them can raise up successors, if need be, 'out of stones'.⁵⁶⁴ Whether circumcision or Baptism, what is emphasized in both Covenants is Faith. Thus, the place of faith remains the same: all successors of Abraham are to respond in faith to the divine grace which is offered to them without their co-operation, and which has set them, whether in virtue of circumcision or of Baptism, at the place appointed in salvation-history for the divine covenant, just as Abraham responded with faith to the promise of God. Such argument also justifies circumcision among the non-Christians, as an act of expression of faith and religious experience.⁵⁶⁵ Baptism now becomes decisive in constituting one a follower of Christ. Let us see, in the general sense, reasons for Circumcision.

3.4.4 Reasons for Circumcision

There are various reasons for circumcision. We discuss some of them briefly.

(1) *Sexual Reasons*: Some circumcise primarily to elicit sexual act. A report from the National Health and social Life Survey (NHSLs) in USA maintains circumcised men engage in more elaborate set of sexual practices. Uncircumcised men, on the other hand, experience more sexual dysfunctions.⁵⁶⁶ "Contrary to anti-circumcision propaganda, circumcision was not used to reduce masturbation, but rather to prevent smegma and itching, so stopping males scratching their genitalia, which co-incidentally sometimes let to arousal."⁵⁶⁷ The earlier-cited myth from the Central African Republic supports the above report.⁵⁶⁸

In African traditional societies, people circumcise for various reasons, namely: (1) to pay a blood debt to Earth from which man came from. (2) To give human beings sexual powers, and (3) to give all a definite sex, expressed especially, in the woman's circumcision. Circumcision does not only change the part of the sexual organ, but also the personality of the individual.⁵⁶⁹

Afikpo community, circumcision acquires sexual reason. The rite, which occurs about four days after birth or early adolescence, precedes adult initiation. In this community, it is

⁵⁶² Cf. Ibid 57-59.

⁵⁶³ Cf. O. Cullmann, (1950), 64.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8; cf. Rom 4:19; cf. Gal 4:21.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. O. Cullmann, (1950), 64.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. E. O. Laumann et al, *Circumcision in the United States. Prevalence, prophylactic effects, and sexual practice*, New York: 1997, 277.

⁵⁶⁷ B. Moris, (1999), 2.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. sub-section 3.4.2, par. 4.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. M. Griaule, *Dieu d'Eau*, Paris: 1966, 118.

usually a custom to circumcise the male and female children. In addition, it is a taboo for a boy or a girl to have sexual intercourse before the excision of the foreskin. The violation of this custom usually arouses the anger of the spirit of *Ala* (the earth-goddess). Therefore, circumcision helps to control male's sexual urges and check promiscuity on the part of women. In this community, people believe that to circumcise a woman makes her less volatile in behaviour and less sexual, therefore, less likely to stray from the husband's bed.⁵⁷⁰ S. Ottenberg highlights that circumcision never reduces male sexual feelings or behaviour. In both cases, the excision is a symbolic castration, initiated by the father for the boy and the mother for the girl. In the suggestion that clitodectomy is done to keep the woman's sexuality under control there is a hint that men are concerned about female sexuality, seeing it as dangerous to men. This is clear especially, in Afikpo life, where a woman's adultery is believed to cause harm to her husband's patrilineage through the action of angered spirits, often-ancestral ones. Men at Afikpo feel that they have a problem in keeping women under control, despite living in a largely male-dominated society. This probably reflects the role of the strong, dominant mother in the boy's infancy, although it also appears to have basis in fact.⁵⁷¹

(2) *Rite of passage*: Circumcision marks transition to the stage of adulthood in life and qualifies the person circumcised for marriage.⁵⁷² In addition, it serves the symbolic function of integration in the community. It leads a man into puberty, normally between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

(3) *Religious rite*: Circumcision, in its original sense, is a sacrificial act – an act of pouring of blood. This could produce an apotropaic effect (cf. Ex 4:24-26). Some link it with ancestor cult and others with fruitfulness. With circumcision later acquiring the status of a religious symbol (cf. Gen 17:10f), it is postponed till the eight-day after birth (Gen 21:4). There is, however, variation in time. Ishmael and Isaac were circumcised at different ages.⁵⁷³

We could say that although there are various reasons for circumcision, they (reasons) are accepted without some reservations. However, it is good for the individual to know which reason he/she has for accepting circumcision. At this point, let us see how it serves as an initiation rite in Ezza, Abakaliki in Nigeria.

3.5 Ritual Circumcision in Ezza, Abakaliki

In Ezza, a community in Igboland, South-East of Nigeria, circumcision occurs in the form of adult circumcision, popularly known as "Ibu Ugvu Ogirinya". Like "ipu Ogo" in Edda, the "Ibu Ugvu Ogirinya" has various reasons for its practice among the Ezza people. These reasons range from religious, social, political to psychological-sexual ones. It is initiation proper into the life of adulthood that integrates one fully in the life of the community. For J. Odey, it is the bedrock of the Ezza society; a social institution and compendium of the people's life history, experiences, moral values, social sanctions, aspirations, fears, likes and dislikes. In addition, it is a means of preservation of the Ezza custom and tradition, and above all, a school for personality formation of the new life of the community.⁵⁷⁴ How does circumcision originate in Ezza?

3.5.1 Origin

Oral tradition provides the basic source of information on the origin of circumcision in Ezza: It traces its early practice to Ezekunna, the progenitor of Ezza people. Although, Ezekunna might not have descended from heaven, but migrated from some place, J. Odey holds the view that Ezekunna might have borrowed the art of physical circumcision from another culture (from where he migrated into Ezza) and transferred it to Ezza people, as he is not the progenitor of

⁵⁷⁰ It guarantees this, atleast, in principle.

⁵⁷¹ Cf. S. Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals in An African Society: An Interpretation*, Washington: 1989, 39-40.

⁵⁷² Cf. The marriage of an Israeli girl in Gen 34; cf. Ex 4:24-26.

⁵⁷³ Cf. Gen 17:25 – Ishmael was circumcised at the age of thirteen, while Isaac at eight (cf. Gen 21:4).

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 6.

humanity, but only of the Ezza people. For him, ritual circumcision in Ezza is a typical case of cultural transmission.⁵⁷⁵

However, some basic questions remain unanswered in positing Ezekunna's as the founding father of circumcision in Ezza: At what age did he carry out the operation of circumcision? Did he go beyond the ordinary ritual of cutting of the foreskin in the case of the males, as practised by the Ezza people? Did he inseparably attach what we understand here as ritual circumcision with the actual physical operation? Before his death, what form of initiation did he recommend to his children up to the present Ezza generations? However, since there are no credible evidence to disprove the authority of Ezekunna in establishing circumcision in Ezza', it is reasonable enough to credit him with its origin. Matthew Isukpa presents Abraham as a biblical model (as regards its divine mandate) for Ezekunna's practise of ritual circumcision in Ezza: "Like in the case of Abraham, *Okuke Uwa* (the God he worshipped) inspired Ezekunna to carry out the operation of circumcision on himself at adult age."⁵⁷⁶ J. Odey saw such a position as "being liberal with the use of biblical analogies and (...) theological comparison."⁵⁷⁷ Despite such error of liberalism the author might have committed, we credit him for his scholarly effort to recognize the theological basis of initiation in African Traditional Religion.⁵⁷⁸ Let us see its various methods.

3.5.2 The Procedure of Circumcision

Circumcision has different methods of operation.

Surgical Operation: Under surgical operation, the most commonly used methods are the GOMCO clamp, MOGEN clamp and PlastiBell. The PlastiBell clamps the foreskin which then falls off after a few days and so removes the need to actually cut the foreskin off. Some of these methods take up to 15-30 min to perform, therefore, expose the baby to a greater period of discomfort.⁵⁷⁹ H. J. Stang holds that circumcision can be completed in 15-30 seconds by a competent practioner using more traditional approaches. Rather than tightly strapping the baby down, swaddling and a pacifier is recommended. A specially padded 'physiological' restraint chair has been devised and shown to reduce distress scores by more than 50%.⁵⁸⁰

Dr. B. Mori disproves any fear of psychological effect of this medical procedure, stating: "There is no evidence of any long-term psychological harm arising from circumcision. The risk of damage to the penis is extremely rare and avoidable by using a competent and experienced doctor. For effective operation, parents or patients need to have some re-assurance about the competence of the operator. Also the teaching of circumcision to medical students and practitioners needs to be given greater attention because it is so commonly performed and needs to be done well."⁵⁸¹

In Ezza, Abakaliki, the original method operation, believed to originate from Ezekunna, is lost to antiquity. A common practice today is the adult circumcision.⁵⁸² At the pre-scientific age, it was normal for people to apply leaves of some local shrubs soaked in hot water on the wounds as first aid. Red and yellow cam wood, called 'Ufie' and 'Odo' respectively, were applied to the wounds. These serve as healing agent. With the passage of time, it gradually became usual not only to rub cam wood on the wound left by circumcision, but also the entire body. To avoid the risk of circumcising at adult age, people resorted to circumcising at the childhood. This brought a change in the rite of circumcision. Since one is already circumcised at childhood, the people took to symbolic cutting of the foreskin or clitoris to mark the ritual. The ceremonial rubbing of

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. Ibid 2.

⁵⁷⁶ M. Isukpa in: J. Odey, (1986), 4.

⁵⁷⁷ J. Odey, (1986), 2.

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. "African Foundations of World Religions", in: B. Ankomah (ed.), *New African*, 395 (2001), 18f.

⁵⁷⁹ H. J. Stang et al, (ed.), "Beyond dorsal penile nerve block: A more humane circumcision", in: *The American Academy of Pediatrics*, 100 (New York: 1997), <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/100/2/e3>.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁵⁸¹ B. Moris, (1999), 2.

⁵⁸² Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 4.

the red and yellow cam wood (a practice known as ‘Ohu-Iwhe’) then follows.⁵⁸³ This gives a brief account of the method of circumcision in Ezza, Abakaliki. However, we may remark that while performing circumcision whether on children or adults, they should adopt the modern form of circumcision, to be performed in the hospitals by qualified medical doctors. The use of sterilized instruments and tranquilizer would reduce the risks of much bleeding, pains, infections, and consequent death. The rite of circumcision has various symbolisms. Among them are the symbolisms of ‘Uhie’ and ‘Odo’, which indicate transition into adulthood. What interests us here, however, is not a detailed analysis of the method of ritual circumcision, rather a systematic analysis of its symbolism. In Ezza, ritual circumcision occurs in various stages. Let us see these stages and some symbolisms that accompany them.

3.5.2.1 First Stage

The first stage begins in the barn. This has symbolic significance. The barn is the abode of the fertility god and the personal “uwa” (guardian god of the members of the family). It is a sacred sanctuary for the Ezza people. They believe that the god of fertility grants fertility to adherents who approach him there.⁵⁸⁴ This is why the rite of “Ugvu Ogirinya” and the ritual bathing start in the barn as they mark preparations for marriage.⁵⁸⁵ Here, an elderly man, woman or the father of the candidate acts as a doctor. The doctor touches the male or female sex organ solemnly with a knife or razor blade. This is a symbolic gesture to mark the ritual circumcision. The candidate is then rubbed with camwood. In addition, the person ties fresh palm leaves around the waist, ankles, and the arms, which serve the purpose of protection from evil spirits.⁵⁸⁶ This act of robbing the body with camwood gives ritual circumcision its name of *Ohu-Iwhe*. After this, those already circumcised receive the newly circumcised into their fold in accordance with the Igbo adage “Nwata kwuo aka, O soro ndi Eze rie nri”.⁵⁸⁷ The circumcised then enters into the fattening room. In the olden days, he used to stay there for months; today, it does not last so long. “When a girl is pronounced mature for circumcision, her husband carries wine, yam, cola-nuts and dry meat to her parents. Some sacrifice is offered to her female goddess, known as Egwaochi. Where she has no such ‘juju’, her mother’s goddess is sacrificed too. The second stage of circumcision immediately begins.”⁵⁸⁸

3.5.2.2 Second Stage

The second stage of initiation lasts four days. On the last day, the candidate takes a bath in the barn where, thereafter she collects some soil from the barn, which she deposits under the drinking pot of her mother-in-law. This signifies formally the handing over of the activities of the initiate, now a matured woman, to the god of land – ‘Ani’.⁵⁸⁹ The bathing ceremony (“Isa

⁵⁸³ Cf. Ibid 4-5.

⁵⁸⁴ Matthew Isukpa’s qualification of the earth-goddess with the pronoun ‘him’ creates confusion and contradicts the Igbo idea of *Ala* or *Ani* (earth goddess) as female. E. Ilogu substantiates this view stating: “Ala, the earth goddess is the most important deity in Ibo social life. She is the guardian of morality, the controller of the minor gods of fortune and economic life (...). She works in conjunction with the spirit of dead ancestors to order the prohibitions and the ritual avoidances. Many social offences become *aru*, pollution, or abominations because they infringe the laws of the earth goddess. Because of her importance in ensuring health, agricultural fortune and hunting successes, she is well known all over Iboland. Most public worship of various communities is offered to the earth goddess as well as seasonal celebrations, which relate to the various seasons of the year. Her shrine is found in most homes and public squares of any village”. E. Ilogu, (1974), 35.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Isukpa, in J. Odey, (1986), 8.

⁵⁸⁶ The practice of tying palm leaves around the waist is common during the adult circumcision. The bleeding that goes with this circumcision is attributed to the evil spirit and the illwill of enemies, whose machinations and powers the palm leaves were to neutralize. However, this practice is fading with time, perhaps because of the influence of modern civilization on Ezza culture.

⁵⁸⁷ If a child washes his/her hands, he/she eats with the Kings.

⁵⁸⁸ J. Odey, (1986), 9.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. An unknown author in Ibid 19.

Ahu”) could be compared with lustral bathing in ancient Egyptian religion⁵⁹⁰ and baptism⁵⁹¹ in the Christian religion. Because of its purificatory function, it is known as native baptism in Ezza. It washes away uncleanness. In the olden days, the candidate was not allowed to bathe as long as he/she is confined to the fattening room, but was only allowed to rob “uhie” or “odo” (native pomades) on their bodies. Today, this tradition has changed as the candidate is now allowed to bathe as long as he/she wishes.⁵⁹²

On the appointed day, relatives, in-laws, friends and well wishers grace the occasion. They lead the candidate in a solemn procession into the barn. A special person is assigned to bathe him/her. After the bathe, the candidate, well dressed, is led out of the barn in a dignified manner. He/she is greeted with jubilation by those waiting outside. He/she sits in a strategic position in the compound amidst a crowd of admirers. Then jubilation and presentation of gifts follow. For a female candidate, preparation for her journey to her husband’s place begins immediately.

At the Bridegroom’s Home: As the bride arrives at the bridegroom’s place, they re-enact the ceremony of bathing and application of “Ohu-Iwhe.” The repetition symbolises acceptance and full integration of the bride into the family of the husband to which she now belongs.⁵⁹³ This act confers ritual circumcision the character of marriage rite in Ezza. During the “Isa Ahu” or bathing ceremony, the female candidate sits on a wooden box. This marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. After the bath, the bride is solemnly led out of the barn and sits on a wooden box specially constructed for this occasion – a practice known as ‘isuohu-le-okpoko’ (placing the genitals on the wooden box).⁵⁹⁴ The husband or another person delegated by him covers the bride with a brand new cloth. This act symbolises a new birth and transition into womanhood.⁵⁹⁵ An elderly man prays over her. He prays for a peaceful, fruitful and successful marital life. All the wrongs she may have committed at childhood is overlooked and regarded as a child’s affair. She is now made to become conscious of herself and is held responsible for her moral conducts. Covering the candidate with cloth signifies entry into adulthood. The woman is now a full-fledged woman. Her body now belongs solely to her husband who covered her nudity. No other person has right over her.

The ritual bathing concludes the female ritual circumcision. Celebration follows. In the company of her husband, the woman goes into the bush, and collects three stones to build a cooking tripod stand (‘Ekwu’). On this, she prepares her first meal as a married woman.⁵⁹⁶ And parents, members of the family and other neighbours share in the meal. The act of sharing symbolises communion with the members of the new home.⁵⁹⁷ On the one hand, it indicates solidarity and willingness of the neighbours to assist the couples to live their family life in the community. In addition, it expresses on the part of the couple, their readiness to positively contribute to the building up of the community. It expresses the spirit of communality and communion in the African culture.

After the meal, the woman now assumes marital role in the new home. She observes certain traditional norms. The custom now places certain obligations on her. It forbids her from

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Initiation in Ancient Egypt.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Chapter Four, sub-section 4.4.2

⁵⁹² Cf. J. Odey, (1986). 9.

⁵⁹³ Cf. Ibid 10.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Ibid

⁵⁹⁵ Compare this with the baptismal cloth which the newly baptised puts on, signifying purity and a putting on a new life in Christ. Here the rite rightly acquires the title of native baptism (cf. natural sacrament in Chapter Four, sub-section 4.5).

⁵⁹⁶ This explains, in Igbo culture, only women prepare meals, while men provide them. Although, this express their respective roles, it would be good if both of them would join hands to prepare this first meal. It would help to expresses marriage more as union of husband and wife, which involves mutual co-optation, love and unity in bearing responsibilities in the home.

⁵⁹⁷ Compare this with *utara Ogo* (foo-foo, specially prepared food) for initiates in Edda. Cf. Chapter Three.

taking part in the hide and seeks games of the girlhood days.”⁵⁹⁸ Before the ritual circumcision, the woman has no visual representation of her personal god (Ochi or uwa)⁵⁹⁹ - the “Chi” in Igbo Traditional Religion). But after circumcision, she has the right to do this, by installing her *Ochi*. She now moves to her father’s home to collect it. As she return to her new home, some women members of her father’s family would accompany her. At a special point, at the entrance or exit from the father’s compound or near the father’s ‘ali obu’ shrine, one of her escorts takes a little quantity of sand from the ground and secretly puts it into the ‘Ochi’ she is carrying.⁶⁰⁰ This act of carrying the ‘ali’ (the earth goddess) on her head, shows that, from now on, though she could conceal any wrong deed from the human eyes she could not do that to the earth goddess.⁶⁰¹ It indicates the place of morality in Ezza custom in particular and African Traditional Religion in general. The earth goddess is the final judge in moral matters.⁶⁰² On reaching home, she installs the ‘Ochi’ in a small hole she dug beneath the eaves of her house. Immediately, she sacrifices a fowl. Where she could not afford it now, she can offer it later. Circumcision confers on the woman the status of adulthood, and the privileges to participate actively in the social and religious lives of the community.⁶⁰³

In the male circumcision, the man is handed over a loaded Dane gun after ritual bath, and solemnly led out of the barn. He either fires the gun himself at a suitable spot in the compound or delegates another person to do it for him.⁶⁰⁴ The firing of the Dane gun announces to the people that the man is now circumcised. He becomes an adult at this moment. After this, he sits on a special chair placed for him. The father gives him presents: ‘Nkpa Igwe’ (iron staff) and ‘Oji’ (kola-nut) –symbols of authority, responsibility and manhood. This is the climax and unique transformation point in the life of the candidate, when the father hands over to the child a staff, which symbolises authority and responsibility to carve out a home. Through this gesture, the father shows the public that his son is now matured to live on his own, and take care of family responsibilities. After this, the mother, friends, and well-wishers also make their own presents.⁶⁰⁵

⁵⁹⁸ J. Odey, (1986), 11.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰⁰ Could the same ritual not also apply to the husband?

⁶⁰¹ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 11.

⁶⁰² Cf. Ibid 12. This belief warrants such practice among the Igbos, especially, when someone is accused of committing evil and denies it, the person is forced to swear an oath, to prove his/her innocence. The accused swears in the name of ‘Ala’ (earth goddess), saying, “O buru na-obu m mere ihe a a-na-ebo m, Ala gbuo m” (If I am the one who committed this crime of which I am accused, let the earth goddess kill me). In such a case, the persons’s innocence is proved if he/she is not befallen by any of these calamities: ‘Onwu ike’ (sudden death), ‘Afo otuto’ (swelling of the stomach), ‘Ikpu Isi’ (blindness), ‘Ida Ogbi n’ike’ (sudden dumbness) or the protrusion of the tongue. On the other hand, if any of these happenes, it is enough evidence to prove that the accused was guilty. The occurrence of such phenomena, which may be coincidental and explained in medical and scientific terms, show the belief of Africans that certain sicknesses and deaths have not only natural but also supernatural causes.

⁶⁰³ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 12.

⁶⁰⁴ In African Traditional Religion, to fire a gun on occasions of feasts or celebrations, has the symbolic significance of announcing or indicating the greatness of an occasion or an event; in the case of a great personalities, it serves the function of salutation. It is in this sense of “announcing” that it is fired in the case of a newly circumcised, to announce the great moment of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is also to add glamour to the ceremony. Firing of guns, in African Traditional Religion, is also reserved for great men, that is, those who have done great things or made history. In the case of the circumcised, it indicates that the person has made an achievement. He has been initiated in the group of the circumcised. The person will no longer be regarded as a child but as an adult. In the sense of “salutation,” gun is fired to welcome a great personality. It is in this sense of indicating ‘great achievement’ that gun is fired in the case of the dead of a great man in the African society. It also sends a message to the land of spirits, announcing to them the advent and urging them to welcome such a noble soul. The gun is never fired for instance, in the case of one who committed suicide.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 12.

3.5.3 Third Stage

The visit to the community's central market place marks the third and final stage of ritual circumcision. According to Ezza custom, after ritual bath, males and females are expected to visit the market place as consummation of the ritual ceremony.⁶⁰⁶ On the fixed day, the man who makes the visit, dressed magnificently in the approved circumcision fashion, walks majestically to the market place. A boy, who plays the role of 'akakpo' (a servant or one who accompanies a chief) accompanies him. The circumcised carries a Dane gun on his shoulder. As he reaches the market, he walks around it. Relations, friends and well wishers offer presents to him. The *akakpo* has the duty to collect the presents. After going round the market, he sits at a strategic place at the edge of the market where people admire him, and present him with more gifts. The visit to the market place has unique symbolism: It is the most effective open declaration of the manhood (and womanhood in case of females) of the circumcised. In recent times, however, some people, especially Christians do not accomplish this last part of the ceremony. They maintain that it does not conform to "Christian principles."⁶⁰⁷ But the true story remains that parading with a Dane gun in open market⁶⁰⁸ does not compute with the modern social convention.

3.5.4 Religious Symbolism

The ritual circumcision in Ezza has deep religious symbolism. It is the foundation of the Ezza society and religion. It expresses their belief system and method of worship.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, it unites Ezza people with God, ancestors and the living members of their community. In Ezza, religion is not a systematised and synthesised one, rather it is circumstantial and communal.⁶¹⁰ It arises out of circumstance. The individual searches for God by the mysteries. In every society and culture, the exigencies of life, the quest for a child, life and good health; protection from evil ones and spirits, natural catastrophes, sickness, pain and death, et cetera, compel the individual to search for God. The same applies to the Ezza man and woman. In Ezza, one's relationship with God is determined by communal and individual situations and events.⁶¹¹ They play major roles and compel the Ezza man and woman to perform the ritual circumcision.

Failure to perform this religious rite could be consequent to losing one's rights and privileges in the community. And to perform it, automatically grants one those rights and privileges. As far as Ezza religion is concerned, one acquires the right to keep the personal god (aliobu) or for a woman (the Ochi). According to Ezza tradition, before one is circumcised, one was not allowed to consult the gods of the land directly, rather through the mediation of the circumcised. But once one ritually circumcises, one acquires the right to directly consult with the gods. The person can now offer sacrifices to the gods of the land – one of the function of a priest.⁶¹² Husband and wife, who are ritually circumcised, bring food, wine, money, et cetera,

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Ibid 13.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid

⁶⁰⁸ The ritual circumcision should not be allowed to lose its significant character

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 19.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. Ibid 16.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Ibid

⁶¹² In Igbo land, the notion of the "Priest" is understood in three different senses, namely: the *witch-doctor*- a doctor who cures those who have been bewitched, *the herbalist*- a doctor who mainly treats in the European sense of the word. He is often a hunter and knows the curative powers of many roots and leaves. Besides the general doctors, there are also specialists who cure sores, heal fevers or blood ailments, jaundice, bone fractures, etc; *the dibia* - or diviner- one who tells fortune, and is consulted before many sacrifices, and offers the joyless sacrifices to the evil spirits. A herbalist and even a witch doctor, can fall within this category and *the Priest* in the real sense. He is usually called *eze-arusi*. He is the official servant of a determined spirit, who offers sacrifice to the spirit and in general ministers at his or her shrine. A priest is usually a priest of one spirit, for example, *Udo*, and of no other. In Igbo Religion, many priests may also be diviners, but not many diviners are priests (cf. A. F. Arinze, 1970, 62-63). As regards initiation in Ezza, Abakaliki, once one is initiated, one can perform any of these roles, especially the role of a priest, to offer sacrifices to the gods of the land. But despite the presence of priests in Ezza religion,

prescribed by the community gods. It is a rite of passage, and admittance into the Ezza traditional religious life.⁶¹³

3.5.5 Socio-Sexual Significance

The ritual circumcision in Ezza also plays socio-sexual roles. On the sexual role of circumcision, B. Moris observes as follows: “Higher sexual activity is witnessed in circumcised men. There is no difference in frequency in sexual intercourse for older uncircumcised vs. circumcised men. Men, circumcised as adults were very happy that they were circumcised, instead of being left uncircumcised. Women, on the other hand, with circumcised lovers were more likely to reach a simultaneous climax. Women who fail to reach orgasm are three times more likely to have an uncircumcised lover.”⁶¹⁴ Although the author fails to provide a statistical data to support his assertion, women would be at a better position to evaluate his position. In Igbo culture, however, uncircumcised people are vulnerable to insults from their peers.⁶¹⁵ The same thing applies to Ezza culture.

On its social context, circumcision serves the function of title-taking. In Ezza, it admits one into the ‘Ogbo Ishi’, ‘Nze’, or ‘Ozo’ (titled men). In other parts of Igboland, title-taking takes other forms. At Awka, it takes the forms of *Ime Amanwulu*, *Ime Chi* and *Ajigirija* (junior title-taking) and *Ime Ekwu*, *Ime-Ozo-Uno* and *Nnekwa-Ozo* (senior title-taking), when the initiate wears cotton strings on his ankles as the status symbol of his new social and religious standing. In Nri, it takes the form of *Amanwelu*, *Imachi*, *Nninwamadu*, *Ife-Akamkpisi*, *Ife-Agukwu*, and the highest title, which is *Ozo*. In Osu, Ala-Miri clan of Orlu, this takes the forms of *Uko*, *Ichi Ozo* and *Ahia Ozo*, while in Nsukka, it takes the form of *Ele*, *Owa* and *Ozo*, followed by *Ichi* incision. In Owerri it takes the form of *Onumonu*, while in Onitsha town there are the *Ozo* and *Nzele* title groups.⁶¹⁶

Against the “Ogbo Ishi” in Ezza culture, which derives from circumcision, the *Ozo* (title-taking) in most other parts of Igboland, on the other hand, grew out of the need for priests to preside at extended family and lineage worship, supervise the cult of the ancestors and to keep the family Ofo stick.⁶¹⁷ Moreover, “it grew out of the economic needs of the peasant society and economy wherein young men could invest their agricultural wealth in the form of crops and livestock into the taking of the title from which they derive much dividend from the new entrants.”⁶¹⁸ This establishes the nature of title-taking in Ezza, which ritual circumcision offers on the individual.

As “Ogbo Ishi” accords one the privilege of belonging to Ezza society, therefore, only those who perform ritual circumcision in Ezza belong to Ezza community proper. They are the *caucus* who make laws and take important decisions that affect the community. It bestows on the individual “the enviable status of social belonging in the over-all social activities of the people. In this way, it serves as an emblem of social identity.”⁶¹⁹ As a social symbol, failure to perform ritual circumcision in Ezza could merit one ostracism from the community. The person is prohibited from holding any important position in the community. His/her views are neither sought nor recognized in the family circle. If a junior brother first ritually circumcised before the senior, the former acquires the status of seniority over the latter. Thus, circumcision denies one

circumcision confers on every ritually circumcised Ezza male the function to offer sacrifices to the gods of the land, as need arises.

⁶¹³ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 18.

⁶¹⁴ B. Moris, (1999), 10.

⁶¹⁵ For instance, the uncircumcised males are described as “epingolongo epingo,” an onomatopoeic description of the lengthy nature of the male’s uncircumcised sex organ.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 30-31.

⁶¹⁷ Cf. Ibid 31.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid

⁶¹⁹ J. Odey, 14.

(the uncircumcised) one's birthright, and transfers it to the the circumcised.⁶²⁰ In addition, the person loses the rights of ownership of land, home and economic trees, et cetera. The person could be allowed to squat on any possible piece of land, only to expect ejection at any moment. Furthermore, the Ezza custom forbids a ritually uncircumcised man from digging a grave. The person cannot touch a corpse. He/she is free to visit a bereaved family, mourn the dead, but not free to do anything more than that.⁶²¹

The right to dig a grave is specifically reserved to the first son, whether circumcised or not. Thus, in Ezza custom, where the uncircumcised is the first son of a dead father, two aspects of the same custom come into conflict, each contesting for supremacy. In this case, the right of digging the grave overrides the right, which circumcision confers on the individual. The custom requires that no other person should dig the grave first except the first son as long as the person is alive and available. Myth holds that Ezekuna, the traditional Progenitor of Ezza community used ritual circumcision to determine which of his three sons (Ezechimkpuru, Oroke-Onuoha and Kpakpaji) was the most senior. This could explain why the right to dig the grave is never denied the first son.⁶²²

Despite the rich symbolisms of ritual circumcision in Ezza, its social function needs a review in the modern time, especially where it involves the infringement of the rights and privileges of the individual in the community.⁶²³

3.5.6 Political and Economic Significance

Ritual circumcision plays great political and economic roles in Ezza. It confers on the circumcised the right to participate actively in political and economic lives of the people. The person is eligible to contest for leadership position in the community. Moreover, it helps to maintain the family link, infuses a sense of responsibility and the maintenance of order in the community.⁶²⁴ For one to fail to circumcise results to stripping one of some basic human rights in the society. The person concerned could not contest for or hold any political position in Ezza community. Therefore, it makes a strong appeal to every Ezza man to perform the rite of ritual circumcision.⁶²⁵ Because of its unique roles in the Ezza community, they make strong appeal to the Ezza people to hold strongly to the tradition of "Ibu Ugvu Ogirinya" (adult circumcision). Could this not be reason enough for the Church to initiate dialogue with Ezza culture and, in so doing, seek a way to make ritual circumcision in Ezza authentic Christian? Such a move would not only win the hearts of Ezza people, but also promote evangelization in Abakaliki Diocese. This duty confronts the Church in a tremendous way. Let us "Igu Aha" as another form of initiation in the African traditional religion.

3.6 "Igu Aha" (The Giving of Name/Naming Ceremony)

"Igu Aha" (the giving of name) is another form of initiation. In some cultures, name conveys not only ethical and conventional meanings. It is just not an empty sound. Name is a thoughtful concept that characterizes a thing or person. The Hebrew people, for instance, talk of personal names as something intimate to a person or the bearer of the name. For them, every name has a meaning.⁶²⁶ G. Leonard maintains that every name has deep meaning and is embedded with values which we may not be able to explore or understand unless one considers the circumstances that give rise to it. A name, therefore, does not only have to do with the personal life experience, but also the memory of persons and events intimately connected with the names, which took place either at the time of birth, the social condition of the parents, family actions, or any

⁶²⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁶²¹ Cf. Ibid 14-15.

⁶²² Cf. Ibid

⁶²³ Cf. Chapter Six, 6.1.2.

⁶²⁴ Cf. Odey, J., (1986), 16.

⁶²⁵ Ibid 17

⁶²⁶ Examples, *Jacob* means 'Usurpator' (cf. Gen 27:36), and *Nabal* means "brute, a fool, one whose conduct displeases both God and people, a godless, and malicious person". (cf. 1 Sam 25:25).

memorable event that took place either at the place the child is born or in the big and wider world.⁶²⁷

For the Africans, name conveys deep symbolic, metaphysical, philosophical and existential meanings. It expresses the essence of a thing or person and establishes a union between it and the bearer. A name is not a conventional sign, but marks a change of the essence of a person or thing. First, a name is valid when it expresses the true nature of the thing it represents. Name has a creative power.⁶²⁸ Name also serves as cultural identity expressing the personality of the individual as a leader of his people. Such name raises the bearer to a higher status.⁶²⁹ In addition, it is a cultural identity. It expresses the personality of the individual as a leader of his people. Such name raises the bearer to a higher status.⁶³⁰ Among the Igbo people, a name expresses the essence of a thing or person, which it signifies. It reveals feelings, longings and hopes, and expresses people's belief, moral concepts, and life styles.⁶³¹ In addition, names ratify direct relationship of the bearer with the ancestors and the community.⁶³² A name raises the bearer from the masses and consolidates his worth.⁶³³ Therefore, parents perpetuate their names in their children. In some African families, children derive their names either from their ancestors, parents, or uncles. Africans believe that life force or blood is received from God and transmitted from generation to generation, through the ancestors. The life force in a child, the newborn child is not yet ritually activated.⁶³⁴ The child is given a name either at the birth rite, or in the case of an adult initiation, at circumcision, which ritualizes the life force. At birth rite, the ritual of "Igu Aha" (naming ceremony) confers a child a name that integrates him or her into the family, the living members of the community and the ancestors. "The child can now proceed on the road of achieving personhood as defined by the society and as embodied in the society's process."⁶³⁵

Among the people of Bakoko of Cameroon, the giving of name takes this form. A god father holds the child in his two hands, pours water on his head and says the following blessings: "You N.N. will be strong like me. You will work hard like me. You will have wealth. You will get, fight, marry women, have children and long life."⁶³⁶ Every time the god-father pours water on the child, he says each blessing. Participants echo 'Yes' after every statement. In Ezza, too, an

⁶²⁷ Cf. A. G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, 48; cf. L. E. Esomonu, (1981), 138.

⁶²⁸ "Der Name drückt das, was er besagt, nicht nur aus, sondern soll es bewirken. Beim Abendländer stimmt der Name mit der Wirklichkeit nicht zwangsläufig überein, er ist nicht unbedingt sinnvoll. Man kann Groß heißen und doch zeitlebens ein Zwerg bleiben und ein Herr Braun ist zuweilen blond wie ein Nordländer. Anders beim haitischen Bauern: 'Der Vorname'...ist er in tiefster Seele mystisch veranlagt". J. C. Bajweux, "Afrikanische und biblische Geisteshaltung", in: A. Diop, (ed.), *Schwarze Priester melden sich*, (1960), 55.

⁶²⁹ Cf. J. Ittmann, *Über Kameruner Personennamen: Afrika und Übersee*, Bd. XXXIX (1954-55), 20.

⁶³⁰ Cf. N. Mandela, *An Autobiography*, London: 1998, 3.

⁶³¹ For instance, in a case where the parents experience misfortune in a family before the birth of a child, they could give such a child the names *Chidiebere* = God is merciful; *Iheanyichukwu* = Nothing surpasses God; *Chukwu di* - God is there for me/us. Such names as *Onyebuchiibeya* - Who is his/her fellows' God?, or *Mmaduabuchiibeya* - No one is another person's God, express the circumstances that surround the birth of a child or current of past events that took place in the family

⁶³² The name of an ancestor which one takes, places the person in a special relationship with the said ancestor. The traditional initiation integrates the initiate in communion with the ancestors and the living, that is, in the *corpus mysticum* of the community (cf. M. Ntetem, *Die negro-afrikanische Stammesinitiation*, Münsterschwarzach: 1983, 91). "Dieses vitale Gemeinschaftsband, in dem der Muntu sein Leben gründet, prägt den einzelnen; er kann nicht wagen, aus ihm herauszutreten, ohne die Basis seines Selbstverständnisses zu zerstören. Dieses *Corpus mysticum* der Stammesgemeinschaft wird in besonderer Weise akzentuiert, ja geradezu dramatisch auf die Spitze in den Stammesinitiationsriten". (H. Bürkle, *Das überzeitliche Korporative in afrikanischen Stammesreligionen*, in: *ZMR* 60 (1976), 3-15.

⁶³³ Cf. M. Ntetem, (1983), 87.

⁶³⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 94.

⁶³⁵ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1985), 75.

⁶³⁶ Skolaster, *Die Pallottiner in Kamerun*, 302.

individual receives a new name at ritual circumcision. For this reason, they regard it as native baptism.

3.6.1 The Secret Character of Initiation

Initiation, in African Traditional Religion, has secret character. It is mostly conducted in secrecy, either in the bush or another secluded area. Initiates are forbidden to reveal the secrets. Consequently, women and non-initiates are forbidden to enter into the scene of initiation. Its secret character makes it more a mystery, and serves a meeting point between the individual and the sacred.

3.6.2 Effects of Initiation in African Traditional Religion

Almost every initiation in African Traditional Religion produces the following effects:

3.6.2.1 Acquisition of Rights

It confers rights and privileges to the individual. That is why M. Ntetem writes that among the Wamwere, Bantu, East Africa, when a child who did not perform the 'Unyago' (tribal initiation) dies, it loses the burial rights. Such a child is not yet regarded as a human being. But with performing the *Unyago* rite, the child automatically acquires the status of an adult and receives full rites at burial.⁶³⁷ The same applies to Ezza and Edda people of Nigeria.

3.6.2.2 Integration into the Community of the Living

Initiation integrates one into the community.⁶³⁸ The person becomes a full-fledged member of the community.⁶³⁹ The integration is a complex reality, which indicates that the community belongs to God, the ancestors⁶⁴⁰ and the living members. This integration is not only a social reality it has also ontological and religious foundations.⁶⁴¹ Let us highlight more briefly the root basis of this integration.

3.6.2.3 Integration in the Kinship of 'Umunna'

At the basis of any communal integration in Africa, especially among the Igbo of Nigeria, is the kingship. First of all, one is part of one's kingship before one is integrated into the community. The individual is regarded as an integral part of the whole. This whole derives from the lineage-system called *Umunna*.⁶⁴² The lineage-system plays enormous role in the communal life of the people. It is the source of unity and togetherness, and serves the strongest cohesive force and power in African traditional life.⁶⁴³ It is a constitutive part of a net-social structure.⁶⁴⁴ In Africa, the lineage-system and social structure (the hierarchy) are intimately connected with one another. It controls social relationships between people in a given community, governs marital customs and regulations, and determines the behaviour of one individual towards another. It binds the entire life of the tribe. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationship are understood and interpreted through this system. Moreover, it governs the behaviour, thinking

⁶³⁷ Cf. M. Ntetem, (1983), 97-98.

⁶³⁸ Cf. subsection 6.1.3.

⁶³⁹ Cf. Mvuanda, Jean de Dieu, *Inculturer pour évangéliser en profondeur. Des initiations traditionnelles africains a une initiation chrétienne engageante*, Frankfurt: 1998, 294.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1975b), 83.

⁶⁴¹ O. Bischöfberger, „Die Wiedergeburt zu neuem Leben in der christlichen Taufe und in der traditionellen afrikanischen Initiation“, in: *NZM*, 27 (1971), 247- 250.

⁶⁴² The concept of "Umunna" is the same as *Verwandtschaftssystemen* of German people. Different parts of Igboland have various words for *Umunna*. Whereas the Orlu people call it *Onu Ama*, some others call it *Agburu*, *ndi be Ikwu* - Whatever terminology is used to describe it, common characteristics govern it, namely: allegiance to an ancestor "father," one shrine, one totem animal and no intermarriage among the members. cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 11.

⁶⁴³ Cf. J. Mbiti, (1975b), 103; cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 11-15.

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. A. R. Radcliff-Brown et al, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London/New York: 1964, 13; cf. H. H. Bürkle, *Theologie und Kirche in Afrika*, Stuttgart: 1968, 55.

and whole life of the individual in the society.⁶⁴⁵ The kinship system has a vertical dimension which embraces everybody in any given local group.⁶⁴⁶ In it, each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, cousin, brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else. Therefore, whatever affects one, affects the other. This system equally plays a key role in marriage. One of the duties of one who is in love with the other is to avoid getting into marriage or sexually involved with one from the same lineage-system (*Ikwu or Umunna*). Consequently, the kinship system is more of a biological relationship, as it transcends the existence. For Africans no one is an isolated individual. The individual has meaning only in relation to the community. Therefore, as an integral part of the community, the individual has the obligation to participate in the inner life of the *Umunna* system. To isolate oneself from community function (s) is automatically to isolate oneself from the community life. It is to live alone in the community life. Of course, this leads to self-alienation. The kinship system plays a horizontal role in the religious-cultural world of Africans, especially in relation to traditional initiation. It also has a vertical dimension.

3.6.2.4 Vertical Dimension of Kinship

This aspect deals with God, the ancestors and the unborn.⁶⁴⁷ Initiation in African Traditional Religion opens the way to commune with God and the ancestors. Among the Igbo people in particular, it is part of the traditional education for children to learn the genealogies of their descent. They discover their origin which comes from *Chukwu Okike* (God the Creator and Source of all that exists). They trace their genealogy to the ancestors. In addition, life is regarded as a sacred gift of God and every person is a part of the human community. The life of the individual has link with the ancestors and the community at large. Therefore, it obliges the individual not only to take part in the community life, but also maintain this vertical relationship that exists between the society, God, the ancestors and the unborn. Through the ancestors, life is strengthened and sustained in the society. This relationship plays a decisive role in the phases of life, namely: birth, marriage and death, each phase of which is marked by an initiation. The ancestors enable the individual to realize the will of God.⁶⁴⁸ Consequently, from the horizontal and vertical dimensions some aspects of the African community become manifest. The social order depends on the life order from where the influence of life, the dead ancestors on the living generation emanates. The ancestors live in their descendants.⁶⁴⁹ In the way described above, all forms of close participation of the community living, the family, clan, and the tribe are intimately bound together. The hierarchy of community life and social order of the individuals depend on this. It manifests in a special way in the lives of the Igbo people.⁶⁵⁰ The participation does not only have a social dimension, but also a religious connotation. In initiation, one is ritually circumcised and initiated into adulthood. The person qualifies for full membership in the community and becomes an outstanding personality in the community.⁶⁵¹

3.7 Evaluation of Initiation in African Traditional Religion

Our study of initiation in the African Traditional Religion reveals its multidimensional aspects, types, phenomenology, methods and symbolisms. Being a rite that marks transition from one state of life to another, in its various forms it generally and usually has deep socio-religious symbolisms. With regard to circumcision as an initiatory rite, a careful study and appraisal is required in order for one to be in a position to pass a good and balanced judgment. There is, therefore, the need for a critical evaluation of this rite.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. J. S. Mbiti, (1975b), 103.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 11-16.

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. V. Mulago, "Die Lebensnotwendige Teilhabe. Strukturprinzipien der Bantu-Gemeinschaft", in: H. Bürkle, *ThKA* (1968), 33-55.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid 57.

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. E. Ilogu, (1974), 24-26.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. H. Straube, *Tierverkleidungen der afrikanischen Völker*, Wiesbaden: 1955, 5.

3.7.1 Demerits

a) *Psychological Trauma*: Circumcision leaves a psychological trauma, especially on the women. W. Dirie elaborates this fact from her personal experience: “I will never know the pleasure of sex that have [sic] been denied me. I feel incomplete, crippled, and knowing that there’s nothing I can do to change that is the most hopeless feeling of all.”⁶⁵² In addition, it violates the freedom and rights of women, and leaves serious guilt in them. W. Dirie maintains, “*Like war, circumcision* is brought about by the ego, selfishness, and aggression of men. Both acts stem from their obsession with their territory - their possessions- and women fall into that category both culturally and legally.”⁶⁵³

b) *Acute Pain*: Furthermore, it generates acute pain and trauma in the initiates. The non application of anaesthesia worsens the pain. In addition, the complications from the mutilation of the female genital part, produces great difficulty to some women during urination and delivery, especially where the rite is observed in its strict form.⁶⁵⁴ W. Dirie reports: “It is responsible for a 12-fold higher risk of urinary tract infections. Risk = 1 in 20. Moreover, it carries a higher risk of death in the first year of life (from complications of urinary tract infections: viz, kidney failure, meningitis, and infection of bone marrow).”⁶⁵⁵ Due to the tiny opening left, the baby can suffocate during delivery, trying to exit the tight opening, or the mother can bleed to dead.⁶⁵⁶ Additionally, in some areas where infibulation accompanies circumcision, it leads to shock, infection, damage to the urethra or anus, scar formation, tetanus, bladder infections, septicaemia, HIV and hepatitis.⁶⁵⁷ The long-term complications may include chronic and recurrent urinary and pelvic infections that can lead to sterility, cysts and abscesses around the vulva, painful neuromas, increasingly difficult urination, dysmenorrhea, the pooling of menstrual blood in the abdomen, frigidity, depression, and death.⁶⁵⁸ On its effect on delivery, B. Moris writes: “It must be recognised that there are many painful experiences encountered by the child before, during and after birth. Circumcision, if performed without anaesthetic is one of these Cortisol levels have registered an increase during and shortly after the procedure, indicating that the baby is not conscious of having had something painful done in its unanaesthetized state. Nevertheless, some babies show no signs of distress at all. Most do, however, and this may be contributed by the restraining procedure, as well as the surgery itself. In the past doctors and parents had to weigh up the need to inflict this short term pain in the context of a lifetime of gain from prevention or reduction of subsequent problems. However, today, effective anaesthetic procedures are available that make circumcision virtually pain-free. This is just the case.”⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵² Cf. W. Dirie, and C. Miller, *Desert Flower, The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad*, Britain: 1998, 351.

⁶⁵³ Ibid 367-368.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid 348.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid 345.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid 343.

⁶⁵⁷ From medical findings, it is discovered that women stand at a higher risk of being infected with AIDS through sexual intercourse as men, although there are other possible areas one could be infected. (cf. E. I. Oko, *To Love And To Cherish: A Handbook for Pre-marriage Course*, Lagos: 1994, 11).

⁶⁵⁸ Here W. Dirie adds a personal testimony: “Even though I suffered as a result of my circumcision, I was lucky. Things could have been much worse, as they frequently were for other girls. As we travelled throughout Somalia, we met families and I played with their daughters. When we visited them again, the girls were missing. No one spoke the truth about their absence, or even spoke of them at all. They had died as a result of their mutilation-from bleeding to death, shock, infection, or tetanus”. (W. Dirie, 1998, 76-77). Although this is the case, the aspect of stitching the vagina after circumcision in order to prevent the penetration of the penis until after marriage is not a general practice in most African traditional societies. But it is peculiar to societies as Somalia that practises the extreme form of circumcision. Who a woman, would under normal circumstance, submit herself to such an unbearable pain in the name of circumcision, if not for the taboo and isolation associated with it if she refuses to practise it? (cf. W. Dirie, Ibid. 76-77, 358). This calls for a review of circumcision as rite of passage in African Traditional Religion, and the need for the application of anaesthetic during its operation.

⁶⁵⁹ B. Moris, (1999), 4; cf. N. McIntosh, *Pain in the Newborn, A possible New starting Point. Eur J Pediatric Aspects. Arch Sexual Behaviour*, New York: 1981, 10, 383-393.

c) *Promotion of Tradition*: Circumcision promotes traditionalism. Those who practise it only do what was handed on to them by tradition. Waris Dirie corroborated this fact: “My parents were both victims of their own up-bringing, cultural practices that have continued for thousands of years. But just as we know today that we can avoid disease and death by vaccination, and maintaining a healthy living, we know that women, and those who practice genital circumcision are not animals in heat, and their loyalty has to be earned with trust and affection rather than barbaric rituals. The time has come to leave the old ways of suffering behind.”⁶⁶⁰ But it is necessary to perform circumcision in a decent way through medical means, its religious significance in African context needs re-evaluation.

d) *Contradiction to Christian Faith*: T. Ohm and S. Knack maintain that initiation in African religion contradicts the Christian faith and morals: It is a Confirmation of the Spirit of Paganism, the Spirit of darkness.⁶⁶¹ T. Ohm maintains that it is inferior to Christianity, and introduces the young one into relationship with the ancestors. It initiates the young man into membership with a particular “nation”, thereby makes one “national,” instead of “international.”⁶⁶² Not only this, he maintains that circumcision only has external, social and symbolic meanings, and is a “religiös-magisch-soziale” act.⁶⁶³ But he fails to qualify what he meant by the use of the word “magic”⁶⁶⁴ in relation to circumcision in African Traditional Religion. He proposes a substitution of circumcision either with baptism, confirmation or communion.⁶⁶⁵

With the above views of T. Ohm, we may ask: What is the basis of judgment in granting African Traditional Religion an inferior status in relation to Christianity? Again what is wrong with introducing young people into relationship with their own ancestors? Is it not a similar practice in Christianity, especially, when Christians pray to the Saints, and visit the graves of the dead members of their families? What is the justification of substituting one cultural element for another? Actually, circumcision does not contradict the Christian faith. Rather, it contradicts the European life-style, its way of seeing, judging and evaluation of other people’s cultures. His judgment clearly reflects superiority complex, typically euro-centric, that undermines other

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid 268-269.

⁶⁶¹ Cf. T. Ohm, *Stammesreligionen im südlichen Tangayika-Territorium*, Köln-Opladen: 1955, 65; cf. J. Ammann, Former Abbot of the Ndanda Monastery in Tanzania, who died in 1981; cf. S. Knack, *Schwischen Nil und Tafelbai*, Berlin: 1931, 281; cf. J. Odey, (1986), xxiv; My italics.

⁶⁶² Cf. T. Ohm, “Die Afrika-Mission und die Beschneidung”, in: *ZMR* 23(1934), 253.

⁶⁶³ Here T. Ohm writes: “Als Motiv der Beschneidung wird ferner wohl auch die Stammesbezeichnung hingestellt. Die Beschneidung soll Erkennungszeichen für die Stammesmitglieder sein. Indes, alle bisher genannten Erklärungen befriedigen nicht. Die einzig befriedigende ist wohl die religiös-magisch-soziale. Allerdings wohl auch nicht jede Form dieser letzteren. So ist es etwa mit der These, daß die Beschneidung eine Kastration des sexuellen Lebens sei, zu dem der Mann durch ein blutiges Opfer zugelassen würde. Am richtigsten dürfte die Auffassung sein, daß es sich bei der Beschneidung um einen Teil des großen Ritus der Einführung in die Gemeinschaft des Stammes und der Ahnen, um ein Sterben des alten und ein Auferstehen des neuen Menschen, also um eine Art Wiedergeburt handelt. Bezeichnend für den religiösen Charakter der Beschneidung ist ein Ritus bei den Dsaggas. Hier werden die Mädchen vor deren Beschneidung mit Wasser besprengt, und man spricht dabei die Worte: ‘Wir waschen dich von aller bisherigen Unreinheit; wir reinigen dich jetzt von aller Unreinheit der Kindheit, so daß du einem neuen Weg bis zum Tode folgst!’ (T. Ohm, 1955, 250). This aspect of the initiation rite of the people of Dscaggas is significant. It brings out a similarity between the African initiation and the Christian sacrament of initiation, especially baptism, as sacrament that washes away Original Sin, and makes one a new person in Christ; an adopted son/daughter of God becomes a “partaker of the divine nature”. (cf. C. 1265). The ritual of African initiation expresses this in the following formula: “We wash you now from all uncleanness of your childhood, so that you follow a new way till death” (T. Ohm, 1955, 250).

⁶⁶⁴ “Magic” is the art of persons who claim to be able to do things by the help of supernatural creatures or by their own knowledge of nature’s secrets; something that charms; seemingly hidden or secret power (cf. *Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, New York: 1995, 601).

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. T. Ohm, 1955, 253.

people's cultures.⁶⁶⁶ Moreover, his position squarely contradicts the Church's position on people's culture, and the incorporation of cultural elements into the liturgy.⁶⁶⁷

Similarly, F. S. Schäppi sees circumcision as immoral.⁶⁶⁸ He maintains that no one should compare it with the Christian baptism without first considering its primary religious significance.⁶⁶⁹ Again what is the basis of this utterly negative judgment? Because of these negative ways of evaluating circumcision, B. Bürki sees no possibility of its (circumcision) survival in Africa.⁶⁷⁰ According to him, the influence of Western education, opposition of the Colonial masters and missionaries, and the role of urbanisation played much roles in the demise of initiation in African Traditional Religion. What only remains today, especially, in circumcision is the chirurgical operation.⁶⁷¹ His view, more jaundiced than objective, is typically euro-centric in approach, and reflects an extreme form of ethnocentric chauvinism. The fact remains: a visitor is always a visitor, as far as African Traditional Religion and culture are concerned. One's cultural and religious backgrounds always colour one's perception, views, evaluation other people's culture. Such is the case with B. Bürki and his ilk.

3.7.2 Merits

(1) *Hygiene*: Initiation in African Traditional Religion enjoys some merits. With particular reference to circumcision, medicine provides genuine reasons for its practice. The major benefits at that time were seen as improved lifetime genital hygiene, elimination of phimosis (inability to retract the foreskin) and prevention of penile cancer. One Medical report maintains that the medical operation, which involves the cutting of the foreskin, allows free retraction behind the glans penis (the conical head). The foreskin consists of a double layer of skin, which without circumcision more or less completely covers the glans penis. Under the inner layer of foreskin are situated a number of glands that secrete a cheeselike substance called smegma. The

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. "Superiority complex in Religion", Chapter Five, subsection 5.3.

⁶⁶⁷ Paul VI, *African Terrarum, A.A.S.* LIX, Rome: 1967, 1076-1080, nn.7-14; cf. *SCNC, Bulletin*, Rome: 1984, 197.

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. F. S. Schäppi, "Kampf gegen die heidnischen Pubertätsriten", in: *Die katholische Missionarsschule im ehemaligen Deutsch-Ostafrika*, (Paderbon: 1973), 67.

⁶⁶⁹ He writes: "Selbst die theatralischen und zereemoniellen Darstellungen des Sterbens und Totseins des Knaben und dessen Namens müssen nicht analog unserer christlich-geistigen Tauf-Wiedergeburt ohne weiteres in primär-religiösem Sinne gedeutet werden; sie dürften doch ursprünglich einfachhin das Aufhören des Knabenalters und das Eintreten in das reife Mannesalter mit seiner neuen Zeugungs- und Lebenskraft in natürlich-naiver Art versinnbildlichen, wobei für solche wesentliche und natürliche Lebenswandlungen die Naturerscheinungen des Absterbens Wiederwachens zu neuem Leben dem Primitivem am nächsten gelangen sein müssten." (F. S. Schäppi, 1973, 60-61). S. Knack raises the question: When the young men remove the old nature and put on a new one, through African initiation, what remains for Baptism? (cf. S. Knack, *Zwischen Nil und Tafelbai*, Berlin: 1931, 23). Perhaps he is afraid of the Sacrament of Baptism losing its sacramental meaning in the Church in Africa, but he does not see the reason for making this Sacrament relevant to the people, taking account of their cultural context. Here, one would observe that if Christ were an African, he would have undergone the African initiation and thereby giving it a 'Christly' character; just as he took part in the celebration of the Jewish ritual of the Passover Meal, giving it a Paschal, Eucharistic tone. If the Sacraments of the Church are administered or interpreted within the context of the African cultural milieu, it would neither lose its efficacy nor salvific role.

⁶⁷⁰ "Die traditionelle Initiation in Afrika, Begleitzeremonien sind wegfallen und manchmal bleibt nur noch die chirurgische Beschneidung, die auch in einem Krankenhaus vorgenommen werden kann. Oft muß man die ältesten Leute fragen, wie es früher bei der Initiation zugeing. Das Einströmen abendländischer Schulbildung, der Einspruch der Kolonialherren und Missionare gegen die alte Weise der Initiation und vor allem die Zersetzung der afrikanischen traditionellen Gesellschaftsstrukturen durch die heutige Verstädterung haben die überlieferten Initiationsriten stark verdrängt und manchmal sogar ausgelöscht" (B. Bürki, *Die traditionelle Initiation in Afrika*, *LJB* 28 (1978), 29.

⁶⁷¹ "Diese sind solcher Art, daß die Mission unmöglich die Beschneidung gestatten kann: Die Beschneidung ist ein heidnisch-religiöser Akt und hat üble Folgen für die Religion und Sittlichkeit. Die Mission kann die Beschneidung daher nicht billigen. Sie kann es nur, wo jener Charakter und jene Folgen nicht gegeben sind. Aber einen solchen Fall wird kaum jemand aufzeigen können". (B. Bürki, 1978, 252); cf. J. Thaurén, *die Akkomodation im Katholischen Heidenapostolat: MAT* 8 (Münster: 1927, 81).

accumulation of sebum under the foreskin may result in great discomfort and may serve as the source of a rather penetrating odour, if cleanliness and hygiene are not maintained.⁶⁷² Moreover, the foreskin might allow viruses and other microorganisms to survive longer on the skin and thus give the organisms more time to enter the body. Equally, cancer of the penis is rare in circumcised males compared to uncircumcised males with high standards of hygiene.⁶⁷³

(2) *Less Risk to Infection*: According to medical report, uncircumcised men are exposed to balanitis (inflammation of the glans), and carcinoma of the penis, posthitis (inflammation of the foreskin), phimosis (inability to retract the foreskin) and paraphimosis (constriction of the penis by a tight foreskin). It is discovered that up to 18% of uncircumcised men will develop one of these by 8 years of age, whereas all are unknown in the circumcised. Risk of balanoposthitis = 1 in 6. Obstruction to urine flow = 1 in 10-50.⁶⁷⁴ Additionally, “in one of every 400 to 900 uncircumcised men will get cancer of the penis. A quarter of these will die from it and the rest will require at least partial penile amputation as a result. (In contrast, penile cancer never occurs or is infinitesimally rare in men circumcised at birth.)”⁶⁷⁵

Uncircumcision provides a biggest risk factor for hetero-sexually-acquired AIDS virus infection, Syphilis, and other sexually transmitted disease in men. 8-times higher risk by itself and even higher when lesions from STDs are added in. Risk per exposure = 1 in 300. Circumcision causes lower risk of urinary tract infections. In addition, it is almost a complete elimination of the risk of penile cancer, which produces more sexual function on average. In addition, it improves hygiene and makes the penis more beautiful and attractive.⁶⁷⁶

(3) *Controls promiscuity in Women*: On the women’s side, circumcision reduces a woman’s sexual drive and helps to control promiscuity.

(4) *Rich Symbolism*: Initiation in African Traditional Religion has rich symbolisms. It accompanies one’s spiritual growth, enables one to attain religious development and transition into adulthood. It also confers one political and social rights in the community.

Promotion of Moral Order: Initiation helps the initiate to understand the basis of the moral order. This order manifests itself, especially in marriage. Like the Christian, the African sees marriage as deriving from God’s creative injunction to increase and multiply. J. Amman highlights: “What God said to man from the beginning, in the Judeo-Christian Religion ‘to increase, multiply and fill the earth,’⁶⁷⁷ a similar creative word exists in African traditional Religion.”⁶⁷⁸ Through the observance of prohibition of pre-marital sex, Africans express concretely the belief that the Creator orders the human sexual urges towards procreation rather than destruction. That is why He established the whole order of Marriage and Family life. Therefore, Africans regard the marriage and family institution as a sacred order where sanctity and sanity are observed. An abuse of this sacred order is usually considered as an offence to the Earth Goddess, especially where it has to do with sex outside wedlock or sexual intercourse between close relations, for instance sex between a brother and sister.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷² B. Moris, (1999), 2.

⁶⁷³ Cf. T. F. Sandeman, *Carcinoma of the Penis. Australasian Radion*, 1990, 34: 12-6; cf. C. Maden, et al, “History of circumcision, Medical Conditions, and Sexual Activity and Risk of penile Cancer”, in: *NAT* (1993); 85: 19- 24; cf. B. Moris, (1999), 13.

⁶⁷⁴ B. Moris, (1999), 13.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid 13.

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid

⁶⁷⁷ Gen. 1:28.

⁶⁷⁸ J. Amman, *Die Pubertätsweihe*, Unyango (Manuscript), 10f.

⁶⁷⁹ The seriousness of the observance of this act is a strong one in Igbo religion, such that in certain Igbo societies, a man is not supposed to cross the leg of his brother’s wife, not to talk of sleeping with her. “To sleep,” a euphemistic term refers to having sexual intercourse with a brother’s wife, rather than merely sleeping beside her. Such an act is an ‘*Aru*’ (an abomination) in Igbo culture. Therefore, the act must to be purified with *ikwa ala* (sacrifice to appease the earth). It would not be overstatement to say that the strictness of the prohibition and the penalty accompanying it is stronger in African Traditional Religion than in the Christian Religion, therefore, raising a question mark on the high moral standard of the Christian Religion.

Summary

In this chapter we treated extensively initiation in the African Traditional Religion. We examined its various forms, patterns and symbolic importance in the African Traditional Religion. Its aspects of merits and demerits, with particular reference to circumcision, offer an individual the freedom to make a choice. As the risks and advantages involved in circumcision are enormous, whatever choice the individual makes, is completely one's responsibility. Nonetheless, we advocate a law guiding the practice of circumcision in African countries. And where this is allowed, it should never be subject to quackery. On another note, elements and symbolisms of initiation in the African Traditional Religion are profound. They call for careful, critical study and adequate inculturation in the Christian liturgy.⁶⁸⁰ For a gradual realization of this, the next chapter examines initiation in the Christian context.

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. Chapter Six, 6.1.2.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 INITIATION IN THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

4.1 Jesus Instituted the Christian Initiation

An attempt to trace the origin of the Christian initiation on the historical Jesus posits enormous problems. The problems are not only exegetical, but also theological and historical. It is even more glaring when we know that the definition of the concept of the sacraments (which is missing in the New Testament), lasts till the fifth century and beyond.⁶⁸¹ This becomes obvious when we know that the number of sacraments, which lies, at least, between two to the maximum of thirty⁶⁸², arranged in hierarchical order was formed in the medieval era. Consequently, one knows very well now, what human being achieved in and with the name of Jesus. Moreover, it is difficult to locate in the scripture, words of the institution of all the sacramental actions.⁶⁸³

T. Aquinas, following unwritten tradition of the Apostles, places the institution of the sacraments on the spoken words of Jesus.⁶⁸⁴ A typical example is one most Christians quote to substantiate Jesus' foundation of baptism: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember that I am with you, to the end of the age" (Mk 16:14-16; Mt 28:16-28).⁶⁸⁵ Reacting to the literary interpretation of these passages, scriptural scholars warn against the danger of making such excessive claim on the historical principle, since it is inconsistent with biblical evidence. Because of the lack of this historical evidence on all the Sacraments, Protestants reject all the sacraments, with the exception of baptism and the Lord's Supper. They regard these two as the only valid sacraments.⁶⁸⁶ The famous Protestant Protagonist, M. Luther, rejects Penance (Sacrament of Reconciliation). Similarly, Melancthon and Calvin reject Ordination as Sacrament.⁶⁸⁷

The Council of Trent, in order to counteract the Protestant claims, came out with a Decree on the sacraments, and taught that Jesus Christ founded the seven sacraments.⁶⁸⁸ Klauck maintains that dogmatic historians, today, are reserved and approach with care, any discussion on this formulation of the Council.⁶⁸⁹

E. M. Johnson, in his analysis of the above-cited text of Matthew's gospel, interprets it as a Jesus' missionary mandate to the Church directed to his followers to continue the process of evangelization, of making disciples, teaching (catechesis), and Baptism.⁶⁹⁰ He emphasizes the

⁶⁸¹ Cf. H-J. Klauck, *Gemeinde. Amt. Sakrament: Neutestamentliche Perspektiven*, Würzburg: 1989, 273.

⁶⁸² Cf. A. Ganonozcy, *Einführung in die Katholische Sakramentenlehre*, Darmstadt: 1979, 39.

⁶⁸³ Cf. J-H. Klauck, (1989), 273.

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. S. Th. Q. 60, a.7. obj. 3.

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 273; cf. U. Luz, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus", in: *EKK 1/4* (Düsseldorf: 2002), 429-458.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 273.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. M. Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimarer Ausgabe, Weimar, 6, 1883, 15f; cf. J. Klauck, (1989), 273.

⁶⁸⁸ "Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novae Legis non fuisse omnia a Jesu Christo Domino nostro institute, aut esse plura vel pauciora, quam eptem, videlicet baptismum, confirmationem, Eucharistiam, paenitentiam, extremam unctionem, ordinem et matrimonium, aut etiam aliquod horum septem non esse vere et proprie sacramentum: anathema sit". (DH 1601,1).

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 273; For more on Council of Trent, cf. sub-section 4.2.8.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. E. M. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Minoisota: 1999, 1.

need to observe considerable caution while reading the two cited passages of Matthew and Mark's gospels, to use them to substantiate Christ's foundation of the Christian initiation. He maintains that this is necessary, especially, as scholars hold that the referred passages of Mark and Matthew were not part of Mark's original text, but a latter addition, meant to harmonise with the post-resurrection accounts, which appeared in the other Gospels.⁶⁹¹ Moreover, doubts surround the reliability of the exact details in the passage from Matthew 28: 16-20, which constitutes a problem to reconciling the formulaic-sounding language of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and the special missionary focus on "all nations" with the historical Jesus himself.⁶⁹² Since both this type of early Trinitarian language and the shift in emphasis from a predominantly Jewish to an almost exclusive Gentile mission seem to reflect a later development in the life of the primitive Church, it would possibly be erroneous to take Matthew 28: 16-20 as a source for what Jesus actually said and represented. Rather, this was catechetical and liturgical practice of Matthew's own community in the late 80s, placed on the lips of Jesus and on how that community understood its missionary and evangelical responsibilities.⁶⁹³

R. Schnackenburg, citing John 4, 2, uses it to disprove the Christian base of the origin of baptism on the historical Jesus. He maintains that the text belonged to the group of post-gospel redaction.⁶⁹⁴ For Karl Rahner, if we consider the sacraments from the point of view of the essence of the Church, and the fact that today, in contrast to the time of the Reformation, it is difficult to trace baptism on a verbal institution by the historical Jesus, the problem of basing the institution of the sacraments on the historical Jesus does not only apply to the Lord's Supper, but also other sacraments. The origin of the institution of the sacraments, according to him, is understood in an analogous sense with the institution of the Church by Jesus himself.⁶⁹⁵ J-H Klauck holds the opinion that Exegesis provided evidence that Christian baptism derives from John's baptism. John's baptism serves as the paradigm for the Christian baptism. The early Christians, according to him, took up the baptismal act after the Easter event and added new meaning to it, especially, the rite of penitential baptism of water. From then on, baptism takes place in the name of Jesus and in the same name, baptismal act makes present the works of Christ and incorporates the baptized into the kingdom of the risen Lord. The baptized is incorporated into the death of Jesus (Rom 6) who mediates the Spirit (Πνεύμα) and is confirmed by the works of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:13).⁶⁹⁶ Acts of the Apostles 19:1-7 provides evidence that John's disciples at Ephesus received baptism but not yet the Holy Spirit. The early Christian tradition accounts that this Spirit was poured on the disciples after the Easter event. Therefore, it appears theologically convincing to say the Evangelist places the trinitarian baptismal act on the lips of the risen Lord, and not on the historical Jesus (Mt 28:19).⁶⁹⁷ There is no unbroken continuity between trinitarian baptismal act and risen Lord. Jesus receives John's baptism and probably practised it, but later relinquished it. H-J. Klauck maintains that the inner basis of the origin of the Christian baptism is the Easter event.⁶⁹⁸ This seems to provide the theological and hermeneutical basis of the origin of Christian baptism based on the experience of the resurrection. When we take for granted that the Christian initiation originated from Christ, at least in the theological sense, it posits enormous problems on the historical and anthropological senses. How do we then account for the origin of the Christian initiation from the historical and anthropological senses?

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Ibid; cf. D. H. Morna, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark, Black's New Testament Commentaries 2* Peabody, Mass: 1993, 43-48.

⁶⁹² Cf. E. M. Johnson, (1999), 2; cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Michigan: 1962, 77-92.

⁶⁹³ Cf. E. M. Johnson, (1999), 2.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, "Das Johannesevangelium", in: *HThK* 4,1 (Freiburg: 1979), 458; cf. H-J. Klauck, *Gemeinde. Amt. Sakrament: Neutestamentliche Perspektiven*, Würzburg, 1989, 275.

⁶⁹⁵ Cf. K. Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, Freiburg: 1976, 400f; *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York: 2000, 413.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 276; cf. T. Schneider, *Zeichen der Nähe Gottes, Grundriss der Sakramentheologie*, Mainz: 1979, 85.

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 276.

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid

4.1.1 Table Companionship

Jesus did not only through his words, but also through actions demonstrated God's joyful acceptance of sinners. The Gospel of Mark presents an account where the healing of the cripple is immediately followed by the feast with sinners and tax collectors (cf. Mk 2:13-17). This is one of the meal events of Jesus that give him a historical reproach, which Matthew recounts (cf. Mt. 11:19). Others interpret it as metaphoric; indicating entrance into the eschatological meal. In the image of words, parables, and symbolic actions, the wonder of meal is probably arranged here to indicate a fulfilled future meal in God's kingdom, in the form of the marriage feast. The present community meal, which the earthly one guarantees, is based on the announcement of the kingdom (Βασιλεία).⁶⁹⁹

In an anticipatory practice, the reality of the end is practically realised in the social milieu. This accounts for the reason when Jesus, at the Last Supper expects his disciples to be servants at Table; he opens to them the symbolic dimension of his love- an eminent eschatological phenomenon (cf. Mk 14: 25). With the action of the meal, Jesus opens the possibility of a lasting communion in a new dimension. The earthly meal foreshadows a lasting union with Him in the eternal kingdom of God. With the offering of Jesus' life, which the meal instituted, his reconciliatory death will be 'for many', a guarantee for the renewal of the broken community, a lasting forgiveness of sins, and the proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom in the Table meal with Jesus.⁷⁰⁰ This action could be understood as a potential sacrament, which the words and earthly gestures express. In addition, the impulse of the resurrection and the witness of the first disciples will mark a break of the final End. The texts give evidence on the Easter Appearances at Meal: The risen Lord speaks with his disciples on the narrative unfolding of the proclamation of the Easter.⁷⁰¹ With his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses the Eucharistic sacrifice in the New Testament as spiritual food and spiritual drink.⁷⁰² By 'spiritual', he means it is affected and mediated by the spirit. All the qualities, which this sacrament possesses (like baptism), come into existence after the Easter (Pentecost) events.⁷⁰³ In his commentary on the Last Supper or "Table Companionship", N. Mitchell states: "[Jesus] sat at table not as the charming, but as a vulnerable vagrant willing to share potluch with a household of strangers. Normally, a table's prime function is to establish social ranking and hierarchy (...). Normally, a meal is about social identification, status, and power. But the very *randomness* of Jesus' table habits challenged this system of social relations modelled on meals and manners (...) It was not simply that Jesus ate with objectionable persons - outcasts and sinners - but that he ate with anyone, indiscriminately. Hence his reputation: He has no honor! He has no shame! (Such) commensality was 'a strategy for building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage.' For Jesus, *healing* (the gift he brings to a home) calls forth *hospitality* (those healed offer refreshment, food and drink, a place at table). The table companionship practised by Jesus (...) recreated the world, redrew all of society's maps and flow charts. Instead of symbolizing social rank and order, it blurred the distinctions between hosts and guests, need and plenty. Instead of reinforcing rules of etiquette, it subverted them, making the last first and the first last."⁷⁰⁴ He maintains that the central feature of the ministry of Jesus remained the primary characteristic of the earliest Christian communities, which is witnessed in the post-resurrection accounts of the Gospels.⁷⁰⁵

As regards initiation' into such a diverse and inclusive 'table companionship,' the Gospels provide no specific rites of entrance or preparation for this meal sharing with Jesus. The meal itself did not serve as the *culmination* of initiation but seems, rather, as the *inception*, that is, the

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. Ibid 281.

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁷⁰¹ Cf. Lk 24: 30; cf. Acts 1:4; cf. Joh 21:13.

⁷⁰² Cf. 1 Cor 10:3.

⁷⁰³ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 282.

⁷⁰⁴ N. Mitchell, *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation, Forum Essays*, Chicago: ²1994, 89-90.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. Ibid; cf. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: 1976, 107.

very *beginning* of *initiation*, the “sacrament” of initiation, or the rite of incorporation into Christ.⁷⁰⁶

It is *apparent* that the baptism, to which Jesus submitted himself at the beginning of his public ministry,⁷⁰⁷ provided the basis and paradigm for the development of typically Christian practices of baptismal initiation.⁷⁰⁸ That means there is lack of certainty. Nevertheless, to say that Jesus’ baptism by John at the Jordan was a historical event does not imply that the Gospel accounts of this event provide an objective record of what really took place. The evangelists painted here a rather biased theological portrait, which reflects their own Easter faith in the identity of the crucified and risen Christ. From this faith perspective, the evangelists proclaim the identity of Christ, the beloved Son of God, as revealed now already at the Jordan and, hence, draw attention to the significance of this event for Christian faith, life, and practice.⁷⁰⁹ Two major keys stand out with particular emphasis in the developing life of the Church, namely: (i) Christian initiation as new birth through water of the Holy Spirit (cf. Joh 3:5f), and (ii) Christian initiation as being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-11). Christians would maintain that the first of these found its foundation in Jesus’ own baptism by John in the Jordan while the second in the ultimate completion of that baptism in his death on the cross.⁷¹⁰ However, what is not evident from the New Testament account is the genesis or historical origin of the rite of initiation. As regards the origin of John’s baptism, from which Jesus’ baptism derives, N. Mitchell maintains that there was not one clear or certain answer.⁷¹¹ Several theories emerge on this as possibilities. Traditional scholarship maintains that the origins of John’s practice derived either from the baptism of the Essene community at Qumran near the Dead Sea⁷¹², a parallel to Jewish “baptismal” rituals or from the tradition of Jewish “proselyte” baptism as an initiatory rite for Gentile converts to Judaism.⁷¹³ But some scholars do not only see in the ritual washings a close parallel to John’s practice – because John’s own lifestyle was so clearly ascetic itself (cf. Mk 1:6) and his baptismal proclamation related to a withdrawal into the desert, prepare the way of the Lord (cf. Mk 1:2-3) – and go so far as to suggest that John himself may have been a member of this community, therefore, may have derived his baptism from the Essene.⁷¹⁴

Therefore, if one goes by way of traditional scholarship, one would be right to infer that the origin of John’s baptism goes beyond the confines of Judaism (from where the Essenes derived their initiation) to the ancient Egyptian religion, especially, the rite of purification, as it is clear that the Jews were in Egypt as slaves⁷¹⁵, from where they derived most of their religious practices and symbolisms⁷¹⁶, including the rite of purification.⁷¹⁷ History provides evidence on early

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. M. Johnson, (1999), 6.

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. The baptism of Jesus at River Jordan (cf. Mt 3:13-17; cf. Mk 1:19-11; cf. Lk 3:21-22).

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. N. Mitchell, (1994), 14.

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid

⁷¹⁰ Cf. Ibid 31.

⁷¹¹ Cf. N. Mitchell, (1994), 92.

⁷¹² Among the Essenes, a first-century quasi-monastic Jewish community that had withdrawn to the desert to live lives of purity in preparation and eschatological expectation for the coming day of the Lord, and whose ritual practices are known to us both from the *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and the writings of the pro-Roman, Jewish historian Josephus, it is obvious that ritual washings, immersions, or ritual baths were a common practice (cf. G. Lathrop, “Baptism in the New Testament and Its Cultural Settings”, in: A. S. Stauffer (ed.), *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, (1994), 25-26; cf. C. J. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, Michigan: 1994, 71.

⁷¹³ Cf. E. M. Johnson, (1999), 7.

⁷¹⁴ Cf. Ibid

⁷¹⁵ Cf. I. Finkelstein, (et al), *The Bible Unearthed*, New York: 2001, 55.

⁷¹⁶ Cf. Ibid 104.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Gen 46:1-27; Ex 1:1-7. The Bible accounts that Abraham was living in Canaan in about 1850 BC. Joseph was active in Egypt and other ‘sons of Jacob’ joined him there after 1700 BC. In addition, the Hebrews worked on the construction of the store-cities of Pithom and Rameses II, who founded the city of that name (cf. *NJB, Introduction to the Pentateuch*, London: 1985, 1-2). But Archeology disproves this biblical account, presenting the patriarchal narratives as merely a saga - primarily a literary devise to redefine the unity of the people of Israel

existence of the rite of purification among Blacks, the ancient Nubia now called Egypt before the reign of *Amenhotep IV*, later known as *Neferkheprure Akhenaton*, who ruled Egypt from 1353-1336 BC, when the conceptions of God, which emerged in the urban centres worldwide, tended towards a certain singularity of all reality.⁷¹⁸ There is no doubt that the ancient Egyptian religion, including its rite of purification, influenced Judaism⁷¹⁹ and invariably Christianity in her rite of purification, known today as Christian Baptism.

Thus, a close examination of the Christian baptism would reveal, on the one hand, great similarity in symbolisms between the Christian and ancient Egyptian initiatory rite, on the other hand, the enormous success Christianity made in changing the ancient (Egyptian) meaning of initiation⁷²⁰ (as rite of purification which is, however, still retained by the Church),⁷²¹ to a typically Christian-oriented one – as an incorporation of the baptized in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6)⁷²² and union with the triune God.⁷²³ Thus, it could be said that Christianity had suppressed the ancient Egyptian (African) roots of her concepts and practice of baptismal initiation. This line of argument finds support in the pictures below. These provide the historical evidence on the Egyptian/African influence/origin of Christian baptism as initiation.

- rather than as an accurate record of the lives of historical characters living more than a millennium before. Cf. I. Finkelstein, (2001), 45.

⁷¹⁸ Cf. C. Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of A Race From 4500 B. C. To 2000 A. D.* Chicago: 1987, 59-69; cf. *New African*, 396 (2001), 35; cf. Hornung, *Akhenaton And The Religion of Light*: 1999, 23; cf. C. I. Onyewuenyi, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism*, Enugu: 1993, 18f.

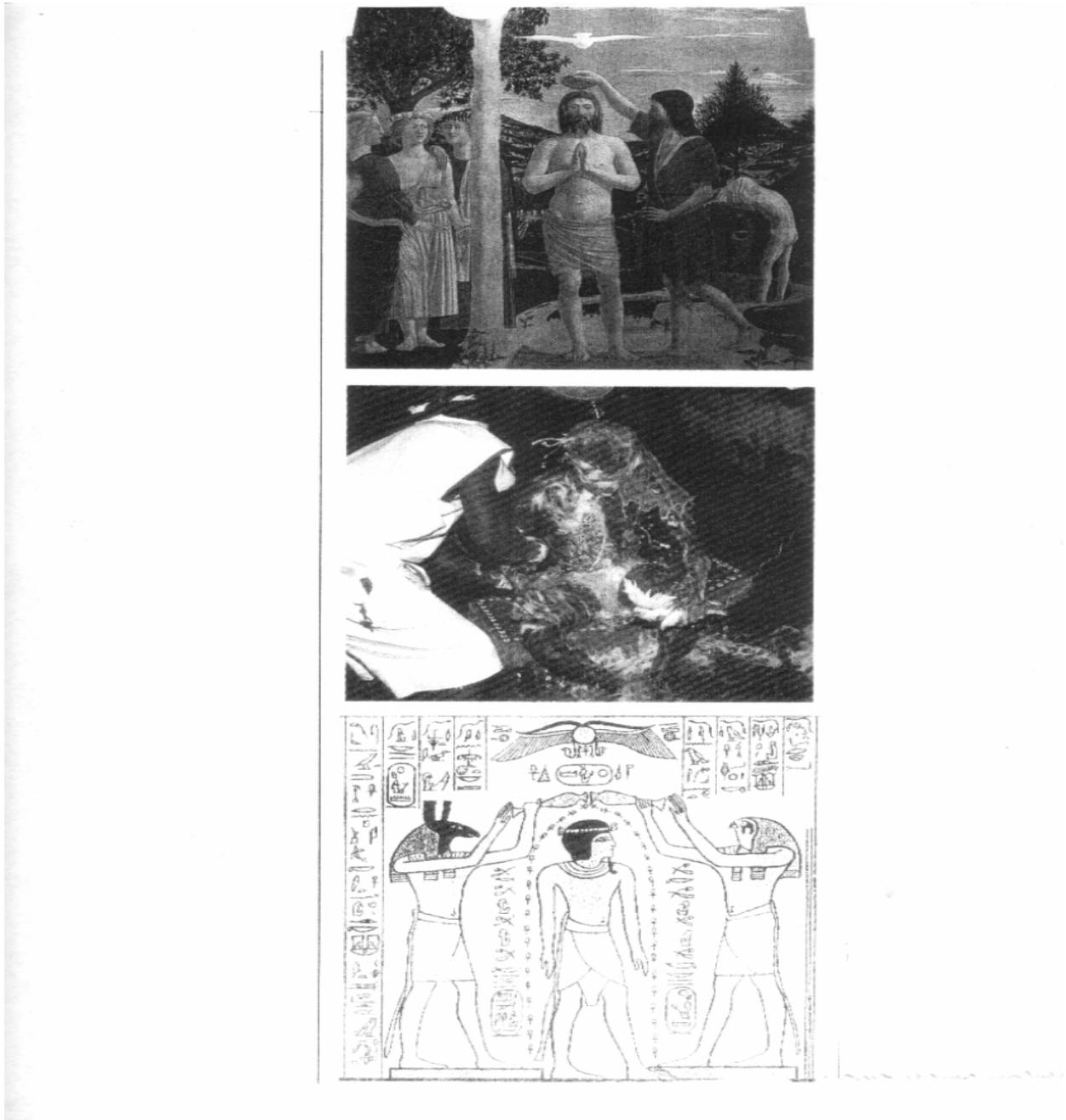
⁷¹⁹ Cf. 3.2; 3.4.2 above.

⁷²⁰ Cf. Sub-section 3.1.3

⁷²¹ Cf. CCC, 1213-1214.

⁷²² H-J. Klauck, (1989), 276; cf. T. Schneider, *Zeichen der Nähe Gottes, Grundriss der Sakramenttheologie*, Mainz: 1979, 85.

⁷²³ CCC. 1225.



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Look at these Photos from bottom up, and compare the symbols. This is an Ancient Egyptian baptism scene, as seen in the tomb of Seti 1, showing the ritual purification with the fabric of life-water, symbolised by the *Ankh*.⁷²⁵ Take note of the falcon on top of Seti's head, and compare the white chicken in the hand of the young initiate undergoing purification as part of initiation in the African system and the dove over the head of Jesus at his baptism.⁷²⁶ In the ancient Orient, the dove was the bird of the goddess of love. Among the symbols of the Babylonian Ishtar, the west-

⁷²⁴ Cf. *New African*, 396 (2001), 35. The dove and the falcon in the Egyptian and Christian "Baptisms" are symbols of Divine presence. But the fowl in the Igbo ritual is an object of sacrifice. It is a victim used to cleanse the initiate, and stands as a symbol of purification.

⁷²⁵ *Ankh* is a staff of office held by gods and kings, and signifies life.

⁷²⁶ Cf. *New African*, 396 (2001), 35.

Semitic Astarte and the Greek goddess Aphrodite was a dove. In the Old Testament the dove was a symbol of love, reconciliation, and peace.⁷²⁷ Also it was a symbol of breath of fertility and peace.⁷²⁸ At Jesus' baptism at Jordan, the dove symbolizes the breath of life and of fertility, of love and beauty; manifesting a new disclosure of the God Yahweh.⁷²⁹ The above image from the ancient Egyptian rite of purification presents initiation as a phenomenon that already existed many centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ,⁷³⁰ and which, perhaps, may have influenced the Christian initiation, at least, in the historical and anthropological senses.

But the Church teaches that Jesus instituted the Christian initiation of baptism. It is a solemn and constant teaching of the Church.⁷³¹ Even though the institution by Christ has been constantly held by Roman Catholics, theologians have not been united in clarifying exactly when such an institution took place. Therefore, there is no official teaching by the Church as to time and place when baptism as part of Christian initiation was instituted by Christ. That baptism was instituted by Jesus Christ is a solemn Church teaching; when Jesus instituted it is a matter of theological opinion.⁷³² The Church's position is that baptism does not originate as a human institution, but that it comes from Jesus through revelation. Baptism, then, is a matter of faith. It is not merely an historically and humanly established ritual. It is precisely in this area of God's work, not human work, in which the Church officially focuses the faith of believers, and to go against it would indeed be heretical.⁷³³ This is a dogmatic claim and not biblical!

From the above fact, M. Kehl states that the Church by basing her theological origin on the self-revelation of the Triune God, and her historical foundation on the Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, without providing any classical evidence to support the theory of institution (=Lat. *institutio*), has only the consequence of using it to protect herself and her sacraments. The Church will now be, from its foundation, a perfect and indestructible saving institution (*societas perfecta*) that mediates God's salvation to human beings through her institutional and hierarchical structures.⁷³⁴ This is illuminating!

For a deeper understanding of the Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) and its development in the Church, however, let us examine some basic concepts, namely, *mysterion* (mystery), *typoi* (image) and *sacramentum* (sacrament).

4.1.2 Μυστήριον: Cultic Practice

The etymological derivation of the word *μυστήριον* (in English, mystery) is not certain. It is accepted that the word comes from the verb *myein*, to close, to be shut (mouth or eyes). *Myein* means to initiate into the mysteries. The *mysteria* were sacred rites of worship in which the lot of some god was represented before the initiate by means of sacred actions in order that the initiate might share this lot. *Epitelein*, *hieropoiein*, *leitourgein*, *poiein* are technical words used for the performance of the *mysteria*. They are also called *tele*, *telete*, *orgia*.⁷³⁵ Only initiates (*mytheis*, *mystes*) could take part in the sacred mysteries which were forbidden to the non-initiated. In the whole mystic rite some ceremonies were preparatory, referring directly to the initiation. But in many cases it is not clear where the line of demarcation was drawn between initiation and the

⁷²⁷ Cf. Gen 8:21.

⁷²⁸ Cf. Cant 1:15; 2:14.

⁷²⁹ Cf. G. Baudler, *God and Violence*, Illinois: 1989, 160-161.

⁷³⁰ Cf. A. Scheer, *The Influence of Culture on the Liturgy as Shown in the History of the Initiation Rites*, London: 1969, 30; cf. P. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, Alcuin/Grow *Liturgical Study* 8. Bramcote, Nottingham, 1989; cf. A. Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism", in: *Studia Liturgica* 19,1 (1989), 28-46; cf. R. Burnish, *The Meaning of Baptism: A Comparison of the Teaching and Practice of the Fourth Century with the Present Day*. London: 1985; cf. G. Kretschmar, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Liturgie, insbesondere der Tauf liturgie in Ägypten", in: *JLH* 8 (1963), 1- 54; cf. M. Johnson, (1999) 7-22.

⁷³¹ Cf. K. Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation*, New York: 1987, 13; cf. DH 1601 § 1.

⁷³² Cf. K. Osborne, (1987), 13.

⁷³³ Cf. *Ibid* 14; cf. DH 1614.

⁷³⁴ Cf. M. Kehl, *Die Kirche. Eine Katholische Ekklesiologie*, Würzburg: 2001, 269.

⁷³⁵ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, *The Christian Sacrament*, Rome: 1992, 32.

subsequent ceremonies. Therefore, *mysis* sometimes means initiation, and sometimes the entire sacred action. The initiate constituted a sacred society, bound to secrecy, and they were distinguished from others by symbolic signs.⁷³⁶

However, the plural form *mysteria*, indicates a whole list of secret cults which were practised since the 7th Century B.C among the Greeks and the Hellenistic Orient (*Adonis*, *Attis* and *Cybele*, the Egyptian *Osiris* cults and in many religions.⁷³⁷ All mystery cults develop from the archaic cults of fertility. Their purpose was to promote fertility or vitality. They express themselves in celebration in the faces of divine union. The celebration mediated a sharing in the experience of the sacred dramas, which facilitated a participation in the sacred.⁷³⁸

Mystery cults effect the consecration of a person or thing, and the initiation of an individual into a religion or cult. There are mysteries of membership to mystics and mystagoges. These play a priestly role. Whoever is once consecrated, enjoys the solidarity or “goodwill” of his/her fellow mystics, and is bound to maintain the secrets of the cult. To break the rules or the Archadian discipline is a sacrilege. The mystery cults offer salvation (*soteria*) through communication of cosmic life. The gods of the mystery cults belong to the cycle of life-death-life in the vegetative and human nature. Their sufferings (*pathe*) which the initiate experiences through participation in the symbolic rites, express themselves in a manner of the mythic personification of the elements of the rites. The sacred character of these ceremonies effects union of the suffering god with the initiate, realized in symbolic actions, that includes sacred meals, marriage, fertility and generative rites, immersions, rites of death and rebirth. The divine-human communication mediates rebirth and salvation. Salvation (*soteria*) is promised to those who remain faithful to the cult, just as in the Christian mysteries. Already, the salvation has to do with “before and after death.”⁷³⁹ W. A. Van Roo claims today the ordained (initiates) experience the communication of divine power which Gnostics call Enlightenment and the Christians, Baptism or Rebirth. Rites are celebrated in sacred actions, drama, and the vision of sacred objects (*epopteia*).⁷⁴⁰ In the Christian context, the union of the individual with God that takes place in sacred symbols is celebrated in different sacramental actions, namely: Holy Eucharist, marriage, fruitfulness (birth rites or baptism), death and resurrection.⁷⁴¹

The concept of “cultic mystery” applies to two other kinds of mystery, namely: philosophic and Gnostic. In Plato, it applies to the contemplation of the supreme truth, the true being. Thus, *mysteria* are no longer understood as rites of worship, but hidden doctrines, from which the uninitiated are excluded.⁷⁴² In analogy with the ancient non-Christian cultic mysteries, it demands preparation and purification - a sort of discipline which prepares the intellect for the good. The individual is assimilated into the divine and acquires certain immortality.⁷⁴³ Philo, Pseudo-Dionysius and neo-platonic tradition uphold this mystical conception. With the incorporation of the word in Plato’s philosophy,⁷⁴⁴ it achieves an essential change. In Plato, it rises to the status of essence, devoid of its sacramental characters. The cults remain mysteries that are received in a secret teaching. Thus, *μυστήριον* (mystery) is no longer understood as a cultic event of meeting with the sacred, rather as a sacred foundation of the world. In the place of the contingency of the earthly, interest is now shifted to the divine transcendence of the

⁷³⁶ Cf. Ibid

⁷³⁷ Cf. A. Ganoczy, *Einführung in die Katholischen Sakramente*, Darmstadt: 1991, 5.

⁷³⁸ Cf. Ibid 6.

⁷³⁹ Cf. Ibid

⁷⁴⁰ W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 32.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 247.

⁷⁴² Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 32.

⁷⁴³ Cf. Ibid 42; cf. A. J. Festugiere, *L’deal religieux des Grecs et l’Evangile*, Paris: 1932, 43-53, 116-142; Compare this with initiations in ancient Egypt and in Africa traditional society today.

⁷⁴⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 210a-212c.

Cosmos.⁷⁴⁵ This understanding of mystery would greatly influence Judaism and Christianity in the designation of her mystery cults.

4.1.3 Μυστήριον in the Scripture

A) *Old Testament*: The word mystery (*μυστήριον*) occurs twenty times in the *Septuagint*, in later books of the Hellenistic period.⁷⁴⁶ Often it means a “secret” or “secret plan.”⁷⁴⁷ In the wisdom books, it means a divine secret, God’s plan of salvation for men and women, concerning blessings to be given in the last days.⁷⁴⁸ It also refers to divine wisdom itself, which is not hidden but revealed.⁷⁴⁹ The notion of mystery in the Old Testament writing has a profane meaning (cf. Job 12:7, 11; cf. Judith 2:2). It always refers to divine ministry (cf. Wis 12:5) for both the just and the unjust.⁷⁵⁰ In the Apocalypse of Daniel (cf. Dan 2:28f; 2:47), mystery has an eschatological meaning. It signifies a hidden announcement of future events which directly comes from God, and the Spirit of God inspires its revelation and meaning.⁷⁵¹ Wisdom belongs to God alone (cf. Dt 2:28, 44-45). He gives wisdom to the wise and reveals to him/her its hidden realities (cf. v. 21-22) or mysteries (cf. vv.29-30). The Jewish Apocalyptic writings, especially, Enoch and the Fourth book of Esdra developed the two-fold meaning of mystery, namely: the divine plan concerning final salvation, and its obscure revelation. In these writings, *mystery* actually refers to symbolic revelation of final salvation, which divine interpretation and manifestation, will manifest at the end of time.⁷⁵² What was hidden is revealed, so that the seer would know what the world and its totality mean. Both the Apocalyptic and Semantic uses of the word contain evidence of mystery cults and Gnosis. G. Bornkamm makes the following distinctions, namely: (1) The apocalyptic mysteries not only express the destiny that God sustains, but also make it available. (2) The reception of the mystery does not in any way imply holiness. (3) The mysteries of Apocalypse are oriented towards revelation.⁷⁵³

B) *New Testament*: The New Testament uses the word *mystery* more in the eschatological sense. Mark’s Gospel uses it to express Jesus’ last preaching of the *Βασιλεια*, the “Kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11),⁷⁵⁴ which is revealed to the disciples and not to the outsiders (cf. Mk 4:12). In its apocalyptic meaning, God alone can reveal to the believers the mysteries of the Kingdom *basileia*.⁷⁵⁵ With St. Paul, the word took a new meaning. He identifies the effect of grace with the person of Jesus Christ, so that for him, mystery essentially indicates the event of Christ:⁷⁵⁶ the divine plan, the mystery that was hidden or kept secret for long ages. Even now that it has been revealed and realized in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:23) in the community (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-7), it is still a mystery. This is because it has been revealed by the Spirit and communicated only by words taught by the hidden. In general sense, mystery directly refers in Paul’s understanding to human knowledge of the sacred. One thing is clear in the doctrinal context of Paul’s usage of mystery. It is closely connected with the notion of the mystery in the Old Testament texts and the Jewish Apocalyptic writings. Moreover, Paul never uses the word, *mystery* to refer to baptism, the Eucharist, or any other Christian rite. When he calls matrimony a mystery (cf. Eph. 5:32), he is hardly referring to it as a mystery or sacrament as we understand it today. Rather, he meant that

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 247; cf. G. Bornkamm, “Art. Mysterion”, in: *TWNT*, Bd. IV, 812, 823-834.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 29.

⁷⁴⁷ Cf. Judit 2:2.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Wis 2:22-23; cf. Num 25: 5.

⁷⁴⁹ Cf. Wis 6: 22

⁷⁵⁰ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 247; cf. F. Courth, *Die Sacramente, Ein Lehrbuch für Studium und Praxis der Theologie*, Freiburg: 1995, 4.

⁷⁵¹ Cf. G. Bornkamm, “Art. Mysterion”, 821.

⁷⁵² Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 31; cf. F. -J. Nocke, “Allgemeine Sakramentenlehre”, in: T. Schneider, (ed.), *HD 2* (1992), 191.

⁷⁵³ Cf. G. Bornkamm, *Art. Mysterion*, 822/823.

⁷⁵⁴ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 9.

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. G. Bornkamm, “Art. Mysterion”, 825.

⁷⁵⁶ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 248.

from the beginning, matrimony was a mystery, a type, which foreshadows the union of Christ and the Church, a reality the hidden meaning of which has now been revealed.⁷⁵⁷

To St. Paul, a minister of the mysteries of God (cf. 1Cor 4:1) and close to Mark (cf. Mk 4:11), the word has a strong eschatological meaning (cf. 1Cor 15:50f; Rom. 11:25).⁷⁵⁸ The *mystery* that is outside Christ (cf. Eph 3:4), but relates to God (cf. Col 2:2) and divine will (Eph 1:9) is already hidden in God (cf. Eph 3:9; cf. Col 1:26). The Holy Spirit, whom the *mystery* of the Apostles and Prophets reveals (cf. Eph 3:5), will be proclaimed later by human beings (cf. Eph 6:19) to the glory of God (cf. Col 3:4). Similarly, in the Pauline thought, *mystery* is always intimately united with revelation (cf. Rom 16:25; cf. 1 Cor 2:10; cf. Eph 3:3). It finds its fulfilment in Christ, in his death and resurrection. This is the principal basis of the eschatological attainment of divine salvation, which occurred in human history and which God, out of his free grace, sealed with human beings.⁷⁵⁹ This aspect reveals a communion between God and human beings. H. O. Meuffels maintains that the dynamism of *mystery* and its communicative structure of word and symbol express its actual foundation and hermeneutic concept.⁷⁶⁰ But an important question is, when *mystery* is used in relation to Baptism and Eucharist, could its characteristics be understood in terms of the full dynamic communicative act of God's initiative to remain in Agape-union with human beings? Perhaps, such understanding could inspire a new concept of *mystery*. Moreover, it could lead to a presentation of a close link between the sacraments and Christ's event and the mystery of his presence in the Church (cf. Eph 5:29-32). The Church that became a historical *mystery* is that comprehensible "whole" which is more than the individual symbolic actions. The sacramental celebration of the mystical act is the realization of salvation in its fullness.⁷⁶¹ When *mystery* designates the whole structure of movement of God's love (agape), the Church and sacraments become two moments of this structure that express it. The whole is the objectification and mediation of this love (agape). Both the Church and sacraments are founded on Christ's event, in his death and resurrection. They express an unmediated and full structure of salvation.⁷⁶²

4.1.4 Μυστήριον in the Early Church

The Fathers of the Church, especially Ignatius of Antioch, incorporated the pagan term *mysteria* and applies it to Christ, his incarnation, suffering, and the presentation of his mystery in the Church. Therefore, Christ became a mystery. For Ignatius, both baptism and the Lord's Supper had a close union with the Church and *mystery*.⁷⁶³ During this time of the Church Fathers, the word *mystery* had still an incomprehensible meaning.⁷⁶⁴ The works of Clement of Alexandria contain the first extensive adaptation of mystery terminology by Christians. Here, gnostic-neo-platonic terminology is applied to the truths of the Christian religion.⁷⁶⁵ Clement of Alexandria distinguished between minor and major mysteries. While the former are revealed to all, the later are communicated only to the well-informed (Gnostic).⁷⁶⁶ In his own usage, *mystery* (μυστήριον) refers to allegorical exegesis and implies divine knowledge which is hidden under eternal form where truth is presented and revealed only to a few. He neither applies the word *mystery* to baptism nor to the Eucharist. Rather, he uses the adjective and adverb (*mysticos* and *mysticos*), to refer to the Eucharistic "symbols" of bread and the holy blood.⁷⁶⁷ The notion of

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 191.

⁷⁵⁸ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 248.

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid 249; cf. J. Ratzinger, "Zum Begriff des Sakramentes", in: *Eichstätter Hochschulreden*, 15 (München: 1979), 56.

⁷⁶¹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 249.

⁷⁶² Cf. Ibid

⁷⁶³ Cf. *Didache*, 11, 11. (Fontes Christiani 1, 130/131 Schöllgen); cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 249.

⁷⁶⁴ H. Soden, "Mysterion und Sacramentum in den ersten zwei Jahrhunderten der Kirche": *ZNW* 12 (1911) 188-127.

⁷⁶⁵ Cf. Strom IV, 3, 1 (GCS 2, Stom IV, 1, 249 Früchtel).

⁷⁶⁶ Cf. Strom V 57, 2 (GCS 2, V, IX, 364 Früchtel); cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 250.

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. G. H. Marsh, "The Use of mysterion in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria with Special Reference to his Sacramental Doctrine", in: *JTS* 37 (1936), 64- 66.

mystery is fundamental to Origen's Christian Gnosticism.⁷⁶⁸ The word mystery (μυστήριον) is associated with such terms as *ainigma*, *eikon* (image, likeness), *symbolon*, *skia* (shadow), *semeion* (sign), *typos* (type), and Latin translations, *argumentum*, *species*, *forma*, *sacramentum*.⁷⁶⁹ A distinction arises in Origen's doctrine of Mystery and mysteries. The great Mystery refers to the threefold manifestation of the Word: in the incarnation, the Church, and the Scripture. In his neo-Platonic conception, Baptism and the Eucharist, rites of Christian religion, became certain derived mysteries that somehow participate in the great generic-concrete Mystery.⁷⁷⁰ Later, the terminology of cult mystery was applied to Christian rites. Clement, while condemning the cruder mysteries, acknowledged a similarity between the higher forms of mystery and the Christian rites.⁷⁷¹ In the fourth and fifth centuries, due to the danger of contamination of the mystery religions, it was considered remote. The Fathers adapted a full mystery terminology to Christian worship. An outstanding example was John Chrysostom.⁷⁷²

By way of summary, *mystery* has various meanings. It means secret, awesome, marvellous, paradoxical and venerable. Essentially, it indicates a relationship to knowledge. From eternity, God alone knows the mystery which has been revealed to his saints, but not to all human beings. It has been known by angels and heavenly powers only since the incarnation. Those to whom it has been revealed know it only imperfectly. The following are known as mysteries: God's plan of salvation in Christ, Christ himself and all he did and suffered, the Church, Christian dogmas, Christ in his faithful, the Christian rites of baptism and the Eucharist. God's plan itself, as it is in him eternally, is unknown to others. But the mystery of faith is open to all. *Ἀσθητόν* (sensibly perceptible) and the *νοετόν* (intelligible) are two elements of mystery and manifestation of divine saving plan and action.⁷⁷³ This is a theological distinction that indicates that only the Holy Spirit gives the power by which the believer believes and sees with spiritual eyes. Only 160 out of 200 of the texts, in which the plural *mysteria* is used, deal with the cult mysteries of baptism and Eucharist. One finds a full cult mystery terminology in these texts.⁷⁷⁴ These elements of the efficacy of the Christian cultic mysteries, moral demands on the part of the participants, necessity of faith and worthy response, refer to the doctrinal context of Chrysostom's *mystery*.⁷⁷⁵

The above considerations show the influence of paganism on Christianity on the use of the term mystery, its various connotations and the contributions of the Church fathers to the understanding of the term, especially in relation to the Christian sacraments of initiation (baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist).⁷⁷⁶ In the Christian context, the usage ranges from the divine plan for man's salvation in Christ, through every stage of its manifestation and realization, to the final fulfilment. The manifestations of the hidden sacred reality became mysteries not because they are manifestations, but because the hidden revelation itself is a mystery. Here, three elements constitute essential points of mystery that become manifest in the communication between God and man. God communicates Himself to man in His Son, Jesus Christ. In him, communication achieves great efficacy. In this communication, God remains a primary communicator. And in his Son, Jesus Christ (the spoken Word), man (who is called to answer as a creature) become authorised partner in God's communication.⁷⁷⁷ The sacraments celebrate the mysteries of God, namely: God's plan of salvation as revealed in Christ; the incarnation, birth, death and resurrection of Christ. The self-sacrifice of Christ is re-enacted in the Eucharist in a

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 32.

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. H. U. Balthasar, "Le mystère d'Origène", in: *Recherches de science religieuse* 26 (1936), 38-42.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. *Protrepticus (Exhortation to the Gentiles)* ix (PG 8.240b-241a).

⁷⁷² Cf. J. Chrysostom, *Homily* 19 on Rom 11:25; cf. G. Fittkau, *Der Begriff des Mysteriums bei Johannes Chrysostomus*, Bonn: 1953, 117.

⁷⁷³ Cf. G. Fittkau, (1953), 118.

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. Ibid 100.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. J. Chrysostom, *Homily*, 11 on 1Tim 3:8ff (PG 62.55ac); cf. Fittkau, (1953), 118-123.

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 35.

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 247.

symbolic manner for the good of the participant.⁷⁷⁸ The church incorporated the pagan, Platonic dual meanings of type and antitype to indicate the mystical presence of Christ's saving actions. The Eucharist represents the real antitype of the great mysteries.⁷⁷⁹ We shall, at this point, examine the word "Sacrament" and how not only the Christian initiation, that is, Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist, but also the Church became designated as Sacraments.

4.2 The Word "Sacrament"

The word "Sacrament," derives from the Latin word, "sacramentum," a translation of the Greek word *μυστήριον*. W. A. Roo holds that the biblical *mysterion*, translated in Latin as *sacramentum*, is itself, a mystery.⁷⁸⁰ What matters is that it appears that the Latin translators wanted to avoid words as *mysteria*, *sacra*, *arcana*, *initia*, which were in use in the pagan mystery cults and which might bias the meaning of Christian texts.⁷⁸¹ But *sacramentum*, a translation of mystery, has the same meaning as the biblical *mystery*. The biblical usage has great terminological influence on the later Latin doctrine and theology of sacramentum.⁷⁸²

4.2.1 Sacrament in the 'Pagan' Religion

The word *sacramentum* was already in use among the pagan Romans. From its etymological sense, the word derives from the Latin word, *sacrare* – to constitute (a thing or person) holy of divine right, performed through a public authority. The suffix – *mentum* – could also be traced to the Latin *mens*, that is, mind stand for the agent or action, or the object, which was made sacred, or the means by which it was made sacred.⁷⁸³ To the pagan Romans, there are two basic classical understandings of the term "sacrament", namely: military *sacramentum* and civil *sacramentum* – the former deals with oath by which soldiers, invoking the gods, bound themselves to loyalty and obedience. The man who swore truly therefore implored divine favour and help. One who would knowingly take the oath falsely would consign his life and home to the anger of the gods. Thus, for them, *sacramentum* had the binding of a religious initiation or consecration.⁷⁸⁴ Secondly, in the civil process of the Roman law, the *sacramentum* was the money to be deposited in a sacred place by the litigants. The winner in the process received his money back. The loser left it for sacred use. In this sense, it applies to religious invocation of the gods to witness to the truth of what was said in the trial, and a certain consecration of the one who swore.⁷⁸⁵

4.2.2 Tertullian (2nd Century AD)

Tertullian of Carthage, from North Africa, appropriated the pagan word "sacramentum" and applied it to the Christian mysteries. With him, the word acquired a variety of meanings. In the first place, his use of the word "sacramentum" corresponds with the biblical usage as he retains *sacramentum*, the common translation of *mysterion*. A significant landmark was made in Tertullian's use of the word. He compares the Christian initiation with the Roman military oath. He understands a Christian as one who, because of his baptismal promise, makes effort to maintain a personal relationship with Christ, which involves personal witness of life and faith. The baptismal obligation is consequential to reaching a personal goal. This means that the obligation gives the individual the chance to discover his personality, uniting himself to God and fellow human beings. He designates a Christian as a "servus Christi" (servant of Christ) or "miles Christi" (soldier of Christ). As a servant or soldier of Christ, the Christian lives out Christ

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Eusebius, "Demonstratio evangelica 1 10, 38", in: J. P. Migne (ed.), *PG* (1857), 22, 90.

⁷⁷⁹ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 15; cf. Sub-section 4.4.2 on the Eucharist.

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 36.

⁷⁸¹ Cf. Ibid; cf. A. Kolping, *Sacramentum Tertullianum*, Regensburg-Münster: 1948, 21-43.

⁷⁸² Cf. W. A. Van Roo, Ibid 36.

⁷⁸³ Cf. C. Mohrmann, "Sacramentum dans les plus anciens textes chretiens", in: *HTR* 47 (1992), 145-147.

⁷⁸⁴ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 37.

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid

and the community in the sacrament of baptism. Therefore, the independence of dogma from discipline and faith becomes an expression of the sacrament of the Christian personality.⁷⁸⁶

The writings of Tertullian present him as a practical theologian, who tries to make his theological work practically relevant in the human society. In his practical orientation, faith (in relation to initiation) becomes a public action, in which God is not only a mystery (hidden), but also a sacrament. He is the one who reveals and grants salvation to man. And in response to communication, man receives baptism and proclaims faith in a dialectical question and answer manner. These become essential elements of baptism. Since the baptismal act is sacramental, it is dialectic. It is an interactive act that involves dialogue between God and man. A. Ganoczy interprets Tertullian's baptismal act as a correlative response to faith that acquires a new meaning of *sacramentum* in the Roman social terminology. It has a biblical foundation where God always speaks to human beings to maintain a life of witness of faith (cf. Heb 1:1-2; 2:1). Tertullian frequently applies the word to the persons in God, the plan of salvation in Christ, death and resurrection of Christ, the hidden prediction and pre-figuration of Christ in the Old Testament. In addition, he applies it to religion: religious truth or teaching, the rule of faith, and the rites of Christian initiation.⁷⁸⁷ In relation to contemporary theory of communication, not only did Tertullian designate the form of sacramental communication, in all its richness, (of incalculability and incomprehensibility) to personal relation and interaction but also to the content (symbol of faith).⁷⁸⁸

4.2.3 Cyprian (200/210-258 AD):

Another outstanding Patristic writer, Cyprian from North Africa, did not only designate faith, but also the single sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist (the sacrament of ecclesial unity) as *sacramentum*.⁷⁸⁹ Often, he presents a figurative designation of the word, sign or a thing, which expresses another thing, a past or future event, as *Sacramentum*.⁷⁹⁰

4.2.4 St. Ambrose (339-397 AD)

St. Ambrose, an eminent Church Father, who contributed much to the Christian understanding of the Sacrament, immediately introduces us to St. Augustine. He actually designates Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist as *sacramenta*.⁷⁹¹ To Ambrose, *mysterion* or *sacramentum* has always the meanings of *typus*, symbol, saving truths and saving acts.⁷⁹² As for baptism, he differentiates what is typically Augustinian, namely: externals and internal, visible and invisible, element and divine actions. They lead to the appropriate comprehension of the human person who is made up of body and soul.⁷⁹³

4.2.5 St. Augustine (354-430 AD)

In Augustine, a true epochal change emerged in the Christian understanding of "Sacrament."⁷⁹⁴ He did not write any tract on the mysteries or the sacraments as St. Ambrose of Milan did. His teachings, *De Magistra* of signs, remain a fundamental theology of the Sacraments. St. Augustine produces a neo-platonic theory of signs. He made a distinction

⁷⁸⁶ Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*: CChrSL 2, 1120, 14-16.

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 16.

⁷⁸⁸ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 121.

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. J. Finkenzeller, "Lehre von den Sakramenten im Allgemeinen. Von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart", in: *HDG* IV,1a, (Freiburg: ²1981), 32, 3-49; cf. W. Simonis, "Ecclesia visibilis et invisibilis. Untersuchung zur Ekklesiologie und Sakramentenlehre in der afrikanischen Tradition von Cyprian bis Augustinus", in: *FTS* 5 (Frankfurt: 1970), 12-13.

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. 4.4.3.2; J. Finkenzeller, in: *HDG*, IV, 1 a (Freiburg: ²1981), 31.

⁷⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid* 33-34.

⁷⁹² Cf. *Ibid* 33.

⁷⁹³ Cf. Augustine, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 2: 79 (CChrSL 14, 65/66, Adrian), cf. *De Myst* 4, 19-20 (CSEL 73m 96/97 Faller); cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 124.

⁷⁹⁴ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 15.

between “things” and “signs.”⁷⁹⁵ For him, “all teachings are of things and signs, but things are learned through signs.”⁷⁹⁶ He defines a “sign” as that, which besides the appearance causes something else to come to thought,⁷⁹⁷ and “word” as that, which expresses the underlying healing power of sacrament and the power of Christ. He writes: “... among the signs, words hold the chief place.”⁷⁹⁸ It expresses an element, and builds the essence of sacramental actions as visible words.⁷⁹⁹ That means that he defined “word” in relation to sacrament. For Augustine, sacraments are usually things which relate to the sacred. And visible sacrifice is a sacrament. “Sacrament” is a *sacrae rei signum* (a sign of a sacred thing). Although Augustine usually makes use of the word “sacrament”, his distinction between *sacrament* and *mysterion* is not clear. The word “sacrament” is associated with *allegoria, figura, prophetia, velamen, and symbolum*.

In the Greek Patristic *mysterion*, emphasis is on the hidden, but Augustine shifted emphasis from the “hidden” to “meaning” where *sacramentum, mysterium* and *figura* become related words. He defines sacraments as signs that cause something else to come to thought. Difficulty exists in Augustinian differentiation of the various types of *sacramentum* and the corresponding class of things known as sacraments. Following Augustine, three major classes are distinguishable, namely: (1) rites or ceremonies of the Old Testament or the New, or of any religion; (2) symbols or figures; (3) mysteries, in the sense of revealed dogmas of the Christian religion.⁸⁰⁰ The first group is wide. In the Old Testament, *sacramentum* embraces Sabbath, circumcision, sacrifices, victims, altar anointing, ceremonies, feasts, priesthood, and ritual observation concerning food. In the New Testament, it includes baptism, Eucharist, Easter, Ordination, anointing, the sign of Christ, the laying of hands, religious profession, faith, scripture, the Lord’s Prayer, feasts, Amen, and Alleluia.⁸⁰¹ The second class, *sacramentum-figura-symbolum*, extends practically to the whole of Scripture. With allegorical exegesis Augustine finds symbolism in practically all persons, things and events. Generally, symbolism refers to the mystery of Christ and his Church. The third class are the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. In general sense, it refers to the mystery of Christ about whom the whole of Scripture speaks. One could come to an understanding of the Augustinian theory of signs through knowledge, ontological and theological usages and efficacy of the Sacraments.⁸⁰²

4.2.6 Ecclesial Integration in Augustine

Augustine appropriates the word, *sacramentum* and applies it to the Church. For him, God effects the real content of the sacrament. God’s action is extended to the external structure of the Church, with its trinitarian principle: Christ, the author of sacrament, God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He designates the human race as a Church - a “living saving Organism”. The term “Church” does not only refer to the official structure of the Church, but also includes the invisible communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*). The Spirit is the active principle in the saving mission of the Church.⁸⁰³ The work of God and actions of the Church are inseparable. The Church, in her sacramental structure, is personal, divine-human love and life of communion. For him, the knowledge of the actual sacramental acts in the institutional and whole Church is a way to understanding the Fathers of the Church. In them, the “official sacramental celebration”

⁷⁹⁵ “Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discutur”. (Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Bk. 1.2.2: PL 34,19; cf. *CChrSL*, II/III, 4.

⁷⁹⁶ A. Ganoczy, (1991), 15.

⁷⁹⁷ “Signum est enim res, praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.” (Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Bk. 1.1.1; cf. PL 34, 35; cf. *CChrSL*, II/III, 4.

⁷⁹⁸ Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana, De Doktrina Christiana*, BK. 1.2.2; cf. PL. 34,19 cf. *CChrSL*, II/III, 4.

⁷⁹⁹ “Detrahe verbum, et quid est axqua nisi aqua? Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum, etiam ipsum tanquam visibile verbum”. (Augustine, *Tract.Gospel of John*, 26:11; cf. PL 35, 1611; cf. H. R. Schlette, “Sakramentum”, in: *HthG*, II (München: 1963), 458-459.

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. A. Ganozcy, (1991), 14.

⁸⁰¹ Cf. C. Couturier, in: H. Rondet, *Etudes Augustiniennes*, (1953), 181-182.

⁸⁰² Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 15.

⁸⁰³ Cf. P. Hofmann, *Der Kirchenbegriff des Hl. Augustinus in seinen Grundlagen und in seiner Entwicklung*, München: 1933, 256, 274; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 137.

is the expression of the love of the church (*communio* or communication between God and man). He uses the horizontal dimension of the Church to understand the latter (Church) as a principle of unity that manifests in love.⁸⁰⁴

In these Church Fathers, especially Augustine, we see the enormous impact made in the understanding of the sacraments and consequent designation of the Church as sacrament. H. O. Meuffels substantiates this when he said that it was from the Church Father, Augustine, that a tremendous neo-platonic metaphysical connection was tied to salvation history. The members of the Church now apply it to express and discuss the mystical body of Christ as real mystical union of Christ and the Church.⁸⁰⁵ Similarly, Augustine influenced the Christian idea of sin and its entry into then Christian theology. H. Küng corroborates: In a number of points the self-critical reflection of Christian theology today is largely open to such an interchange of ideas; for instance, in its criticism of a solidly Hellenistic-physicistic understanding of Jesus' divine sonship. The same is true of the criticism of the mythological idea of a sin transmitted through physical generation, an idea spread in the Western Church since Augustine's time.⁸⁰⁶ Augustine sees Christ, the head and the whole body as an organic entity, with different human functions. The Saviour, Jesus Christ, is the absolute active life principle of the Church, and human beings share this by participation.⁸⁰⁷ God is the one who grants unity, and from him, through Christ in Spirit to human beings, the Church has deep triad realities, namely: (i) the visible Catholic Church, (ii) the invisible Holy Church and (iii) the predestined Church. The visible Catholic Church, the earthly Church, is not only an "ecclesial mystery (with good and bad), but also the one Church with contradictions."⁸⁰⁸ The ecclesiology of the Body of Christ of the Bishop of Hippo is the reason for the above present differentiation. Nevertheless, it could only be seen in the light of his theology of grace which preserves the distance between God and human persons. God, for Augustine, is the Father of the faithful, and Christ alone justifies the Godless. The Holy Spirit, in love, is the cause of unity of the Church.⁸⁰⁹ He further expresses the *minister ecclesia* as an active dispenser of holiness, and all Christians live in the one priesthood of Christ. God is the only primary guarantor of grace in the external celebration of Word and Sacrament.⁸¹⁰

4.2.7 Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD)

St. Thomas Aquinas also made a great impact on the understanding of the *sacramentum*. With him, the word witnessed a further change. In his sacramental theology, he did not build a synthesis on the basis of Platonic idealism, but rather on empirical and Aristotelian realism. In Thomas, realism on symbolism witnessed great triumph.⁸¹¹ What remains at the basis of the proof of the cultic acts is no longer the theory of knowledge, but the metaphysical reality of the participant. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Books of Sentences*, St. Thomas Aquinas regarded Lombard's definition as the most comprehensive.⁸¹² The difference between the Sacraments of the Old Law and the New are clear. They are not species of the same genus, but rather analogous. He defines sacrament as what causes sanctity. St. Thomas gives no personal definition of sacrament. Rather, he repeats in his work on the Articles of Faith and the Sacraments of the Church (1261-1268) some classic formulae, and in this work and in his *On the Form of Absolution in Sacramental Penance* (1269-1272), he insists especially on the efficacy of

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 137.

⁸⁰⁵ Cf. Ibid. "Nihil est autem esse, quam unum esse. Itaque in quantum quidque unitatem adipiscitur, in tantum est." (Augustine, *De mor eccl*, II, 6, 8; cf. *PL* 32, 1348).

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. H. Küng, *Christsein*, 84; cf. C. F. Wesling, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colours*, Chicago: 1991, 64, 68, 163.

⁸⁰⁷ Cf. *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, II, 8, 15, (*CSEL* 51, 60/61 Petscheni).

⁸⁰⁸ "Seperationes enim sunt iam etiam corporaliter segregati quam illi, qui interius carnaliter et animaliter uiuunt et spiritaliter serarati sunt." (Augustine, *De bapt* 7, 51, 99; cf. *CSEL* 51,1, 371, 19-22 Petschenig; cf. H. O. Meuffels, 1995, 139).

⁸⁰⁹ Cf. *Coll. Maxim*, 12 (*PL* 42,715); *Serm Caes pleb* 1 (*CSEL* 53, 167/168 Petschenig), W. Simonis, (1970), 80.

⁸¹⁰ P. Hofmann, *Kirchenbegriff*, 266-268, 274.

⁸¹¹ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 19.

⁸¹² T. Aquinas, *S. Th. IV Sent. D. 1, q. 1, q. 1, qqc. 3 resp.*

the sacraments of the New Law, which differs in this respect from those of the Old.⁸¹³ The sacraments of the Old Law merely signify the grace of Christ: they did not cause it; while those of the New Law contain and confer grace.⁸¹⁴ They effect what they signify by both the matter and the form of words. They are not like the sacraments of the Old Law which only signified, but produced no sanctifying effect. He illustrates this with the ministry of the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If the priest only discerned and pronounced the sinner's absolution, he does nothing, but only signify. He does something by applying his ministry of absolution: the sacramental words effect what they signify.⁸¹⁵

Precisely, what we should underscore in Thomas' understanding of sacrament is this: *sacramentum* can be analogous to anything which has a relationship to holiness. It is called *sacramentum*, in the sense of *sacrum secretum*, if it has some hidden holiness in itself. However, a thing can be referred to as *sacramentum* if it has the relationship of cause or sign, or any other kind of relationship to such holiness. In the case of the sacraments of the New Law, according to Thomas, we refer to them as sacraments especially as they involve the relationship of sign. Therefore, sacrament, in his understanding, is put in the genus of sign.⁸¹⁶ In addition, causality constitutes a principal cause of the sacrament. For Thomas, not every sign is a sacrament. However, a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing considered precisely as it sanctifies human beings. Signs are given to men who approach the unknown through what is known. Accordingly, sacrament is the sign of a sacred thing that pertains to men. Therefore, sacrament *per se*, as we understand it today, is the sign of a sacred thing insofar as it sanctifies men (*signum rei sacrae in quantum est sanctificans homines*). Sensibly perceptible creatures signify sacred essences, namely: divine wisdom and goodness. They are sacred in themselves but we are not sanctified by them. Therefore, they cannot be called sacraments in the sense we speak of them today. Some things pertaining to the Old Testament signified Christ's holiness insofar as he is holy in himself. Some things, on the contrary, signified his holiness insofar as through them we are sanctified: such as the immolation of the paschal lamb signified the immolation of Christ: by which we have been sanctified. Such things are properly called sacraments of the Old Law. St. Thomas, speaks of sacrament as "*causa instrumentalis*,"⁸¹⁷ thereby drawing special attention to the relationship existing between sign and symbol.⁸¹⁸ The sacraments have a three-fold relationship to one another, namely: Christ and his cross as the foundation of salvation, grace and virtues as essence, and present reality of the salvation and eternal life as eschatological end of salvation.⁸¹⁹ Therefore, sacrament is a sign of what precedes the passion of Christ. It expresses what is effected in us through the passion of Christ (grace) and prognostic, that is, predicting future sign. It signifies many things as far as they have a certain unity of order.⁸²⁰ Very significant to St. Thomas' treatment of sacrament is the tension that exists in his theology between sign and cause (though his understanding emphasizes sign rather than cause). For him, the sacraments of the New Law cause grace instrumentally.⁸²¹ They contain grace in two ways: in signs and in a cause.⁸²² They derive power⁸²³ from the passion of Christ. Therefore, they differ from the sacrament of the Old Law which could neither confer grace by their own power nor the power of the passion of Christ, but only signified faith by which men were being justified.⁸²⁴ Other significant elements in Thomas' understanding of sacrament are the place of

⁸¹³ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 55.

⁸¹⁴ Cf. "De Articulis Fidei et Ecclesiae Sacramentis", in: R. Verardo, (ed.), *S. Thomas Aquinatis Opuscula Theologica*, 1 (1954), 139-151, n. 612.

⁸¹⁵ Cf. "De Forma Absolutionis Poentiae Sacramentalis", in: R. Verardo, (1954), 169-180, nn. 678, 699.

⁸¹⁶ T. Aquinas, S. Th. III, 60, a. 1 resp. and ad 3.

⁸¹⁷ Cf. T. Aquinas, S. Th. III, q. 62, a.1, 3-4; III, q. 64, a. 1. objection 1-3; *De veritate*, q. 27 a. 4.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 266.

⁸¹⁹ Cf. T. Aquinas, S. Th. III, q. 60, a. 3.

⁸²⁰ Cf. *Ibid*

⁸²¹ Cf. *Ibid* 62, 1, resp.ad. 1.

⁸²² Cf. *Ibid* 62, 3.

⁸²³ Cf. W. A. Roo Van, (1992), 49.

⁸²⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 64, 4.

cultus and *sanctification*, key concepts in Thomistic sacramental theology. O. H. Pesch maintains that the label of the New Testament sacraments lies in the fact that it concentrates on cult as community action of the church, personal healing, in the sense of “to be made holy”, and transcendental presence of the historical saving work of Jesus in one event.⁸²⁵ Sacrament, in its quality of sign and being ordered from God, comprises cultic reality, not only the element, but also the element of the received cultic action where word has a firm embodiment. Word does not only signify the mystery of the incarnation, but also the essential structure of human beings (as spirit and body). It raises them to sign in the senses of sacramental reality. The term does not act in the sense of a wrong understanding of *opus operatum*, when spoken alone, but to external use. From Thomas treatment of sacrament in the *Summa Theologia*, we could deduce two essential elements, namely: (i) His relation of the sacraments to the whole mystery of the plan of incarnation and redemption, and (ii) his intimate relation of the sacraments to his general theology of worship.⁸²⁶

The above analysis helps us to understand the roles the terms (*mysterium* and *sacrament*) played in the formation of sacraments of the Christian initiation. In addition, it helps us to understand the contribution of each of the Church Fathers considered in the incorporation of “sacrament” (something of pagan origin) into Christian theology, and the Church’s later designation of not only initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), but also herself as sacrament. Let us see further the period of the Reformation to substantiate our point.

4.2.8 Sacrament in the Reformation and Church’s Reaction

In the period of the Reformation, the theological application of the word “Sacrament” received serious attack, especially as regards its usage in the Church. The Reformers: Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin saw the biblical and Augustinian translation of “the Word of God” as basis of the Christian actions and life. It became the principal criterion of their critique on the actual realism of the sacraments. They also condemned the sacrifice of the Mass, Confession and sacramental Blessings. They insisted that the biblical witness of the Word of revelation, as pure human invention, must be separated from tradition. The same applies to the sacraments, which in the New Testament, do not have any biblical foundation and do not form the commission and promised word of Jesus Christ.⁸²⁷ Let us see, briefly, the roles of each of these Reformers on the sacrament.

Martin Luther (-1546): Martin Luther sees the word of salvation as independent of the sacramental mediation of salvation that awakens justified faith. He maintains that not sacrament but faith that justifies a Christian.⁸²⁸ For him, one who does not believe, but only places his trust on the Sacrament, does not receive any grace. Only the Word of God, in an unmediated form, in the living, personal faith, guarantees the salvation of the believer.

A. Ganoczy criticizes the position of Martin Luther, maintaining that it leads to “salvation personalism.” It produces the consequence of human beings now having direct, a personal relationship with the living God, instead of through the mediation of the Church that hinders the individual from direct access to God who calls him, to discover Him in an unmediated form.⁸²⁹

Martin Luther and Melancthon represent realistic theologians, although not in an objective sense. For them, the sacraments possess an effective character. God’s effective word receives the element in the service and brings to human beings the real, that is, what the sacramental constitutive word rejects. The human subject is called to open himself/herself, and receive it – what no work can achieve. God alone works in his word, be it in the proclaimed Word or the Sacramental. He alone awakens faith and gives the individual the consciousness of salvation.

⁸²⁵ Cf. H. O. Pesch, *Dogmatik im Fragment, Gesammelte Studien*, Mainz: 1987, 327.

⁸²⁶ Cf. W. A. Roo Van, (1992), 49.

⁸²⁷ Cf. M. Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimarer Ausgabe, Weimar, 6, 1883, 572, 10; cf. E. Roth, *Sakramente nach Luther*, Berlin, 1952, 20; cf. W. Beinert, (ed.), *GLKD* (Paderborn: 1995), 342-343.

⁸²⁸ “Nicht das Sakrament, sondern der Glaube des Sakramentes ist es, der rechtfertigt”. (M. Luther, *WA* 57, 169).

⁸²⁹ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 21.

For them, authority and form of the sacramental reality widen so apart from each other that especially, neophytes, through baptism and in the Last Supper are made “believers”. In addition, through them, unbelievers are confronted with the gift of the Body and Blood of Christ.⁸³⁰

Huldrych Zwingli (-1531), another famous Protestant theologian, saw the word *Sacramentum* as non-biblical. He propounded a distinct symbolic teaching on Baptism and the Last Supper. He holds the position that cultic actions serve to symbolize spiritual salvation. They commemorate Christ’s saving actions and serve as signs of faith to the believers. Despite these enormous roles they play, they have nothing to do with awakening or strengthening the faith of the receiver, as it places in the latter and the Christian community, the already catechetical, awakened-faith.⁸³¹

John Calvin (-1564), on the other hand, took a middle course between the positions of Martin Luther and Zwingli. He rejected Zwingli’s claims on the subjects of Baptism and the Last Supper as the believers and Christian community. For him, God alone is the subject of the sacraments and uses them for confirmation of his promises and for strengthening of faith.⁸³² Therefore, as He ordains and uses them, they could also be acts of proclamation of human faith.⁸³³ Furthermore, Calvin distanced himself from Martin Luther, as he radically subordinated the Sacraments to the proclaimed Word for the mediation of salvation. They only serve as confirmation of the already granted grace of God through the Word. The actual contribution of Calvin is his re-evaluation of the roles that the Holy Spirit plays as “Mediator” between the heavenly Christ and the believing human beings who receive the earthly elements.⁸³⁴ According to Calvin, without the activity of God’s Spirit, there is no presence of Christ. Moreover, without an activated faith by the Spirit, the Sacrament remains for the receiver an empty sign.

The Reformers could not arrive at a consensus, especially with regard to the relation between the Word of Jesus Christ and the Sacraments of baptism, the Last Supper and Reconciliation. In addition, one finds in them various distortions of Augustine’s inheritance of realism and symbolism.⁸³⁵ But the positions of these Reformers challenged the Teaching Office of the Catholic Church, both on the positive and negative senses that resulted to the convocation of the Council of Trent.

4.2.9 The Council of Trent (13th Dec. 1545 – 4th Dec. 1563)

The Council of Trent (19th Ecumenical Church Council), confronted the issue of the Reformation in its seventh sitting of 3rd March 1547 and came out, for the first time, with a formulation of a comprehensive Dogmatic Teaching on the Sacraments.⁸³⁶ This Council did not produce any new teaching on the sacraments, but only centred attention on condemning the errors of the Reformers. In addition, it focused attention on redressing the practical and theoretical abuses of the Sacraments.⁸³⁷ Therefore, the Council did not only define the Sacrament, but also its reality and efficacy in the life of the Christian. The Council declared *anathema* on anyone who holds that the sacraments of the New Law, through the sacramental laying on of hand, do not justify, but only faith on God’s promise.⁸³⁸ In addition, the Council gave the church full power to make certain changes in the sacramental rites without touching on the substance that would

⁸³⁰ Cf. M. Luther, (1883), 1325.

⁸³¹ Cf. G. Schrenk, “Zwingli’s Hauptmotiv in der Abendmahlslehre und das Neue Testament”, in *Zwingliana* 5, 1930/2, 176-185; cf. T. Schneider, (ed.), *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, Düsseldorf: 1992, 205.

⁸³² Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, IV 14, 1; cf. G. Wenz, *Einführung in die evangelische Sakramentenlehre*, Darmstadt: 1998, 45; cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 22.

⁸³³ Cf. J. Calvin, *Inst.* IV, 14, 1.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.* IV, 14, 9. ; Cf. A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans. Dienende Kirche und kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1968, 75-94; cf. U. Kühn, *Sakramente, Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, 11 Gütersloh: 21990, 103.

⁸³⁵ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 21; H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 148.

⁸³⁶ On the Teaching of the Council on the Sacraments, cf. DH 1600-1813.

⁸³⁷ Cf. J. Finkenzeller, (Freiburg: 21981), 54, 3-59.

⁸³⁸ Cf. DH. 1608; 1610, can. 10; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 151.

remove the power of the church. The position of the Reformers is clear. It contradicts: (a) the seven Sacraments as founded by Jesus Christ, (b) the quality on the saving necessity of the sacraments, (c) the efficacy of the sacraments in view of faith, (d) the church on her teaching on *ex opera operatum*, (e) the sacramental character and (f) the minister of the Sacraments.⁸³⁹

From all these, we could say the reflection of Martin Luther on orientation, which partly centres on the misunderstanding of the sacramental practice of the time, actually led to a one-sided polemics that gave rise to the writing of the sacraments. On the Catholic side, it did not give any room for dialogue, rather, sought for a drawing of line.⁸⁴⁰ The Church continued to make systematic progress in the understanding of what we have today as *sacraments*. The Church continued to make systematic progress in the understanding of what we have today as *sacraments*. The writings of the following Western theologians, especially Odo Casel, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner greatly influenced Vatican II in the designation of the Church as a Sacrament. With this Council, a new light dawned on the understanding of the sacrament. Let us see briefly the contribution each of them made.

4.3 Christ/Church as Sacrament

4.3.1 Odo Casel (1886-1948)

Odo Casel, a Benedictine Monk and Liturgist from the Monastery of Maria Laach, Austria did not consider the sacraments from the point of view of their abstract and essential forms. Rather, he approached them from the point of view of concrete cultic performance. By so doing, he widened the understanding of the sacraments from the material and formal dimensions, to the liturgical celebration. He maintains that it is only in the experience of the rite that the faithful could grasp the existential meaning of the sacraments and consciously open themselves to their healing effect. Casel focuses more attention on the Eucharistic celebration which is the highest actualization of the Church's sacramental economy. He leaned on the Greek Church Fathers of the early Fifth century A.D. who described the Sacrament of the Altar and Baptism as "mysterical celebration".⁸⁴¹ Consequently, he proposed a tri-partite systematic formulation of mysterical acts in the following order, namely:

First Stage: Easter Mystery: This stage deals on Christ himself, Death and Resurrection – which Odo Casel described as the mystery of the once and for all saving action of Christ, communicated in cultic mystery.

Second Stage: Cultic Mystery: This stage refers to the dramatic event of the Cross and the empty tomb, which is picturally symbolic, real, commemorated, renewed, and actualized in the present. The making-present of the Easter mystery in cultic action takes place in the mystery of the participant.

Third Stage: Mystery of the Participant: Here, he sees the mystery of the celebration as the centre of union of the participant with Christ Himself. The mystery is a sacred, cultic action, which saving act is made present in the rite. The community celebrates it, participating in the saving act and receives the saving will.⁸⁴² In his study of the Church Fathers, like St. Cyril of Jerusalem, he writes: "In the knowledge of faith we look at the sacramental image, the original image itself, that is, the saving work of Christ. We look at it in faith and knowledge. That means,

⁸³⁹ Cf. DH. 1601 1-9.

⁸⁴⁰ Cf. W. Pannenberg, (ed.), "Lehrverurteilungen- kirchentrennend? III Materialien zur Lehre von den Sakramenten und vom kirchlichen Amt", in: *DK ialog der Kirchen*, 6 (Freiburg-Göttingen: 1990), 159, 186.

⁸⁴¹ Cf. O. Casel, "Die Stellung des Kultmysteriums im Christentum", in: *LiZs* 3 (1930), 134.

⁸⁴² In the original text, he defines "ritus" as "eine heilige, kultische Handlung, in der eine Heilstatsache unter dem Ritus Gegenwart wird; indem die Kultgemeinde diesen Ritus vollzieht, nimmt sie an der Heilstat teil und erwirbt dadurch das Heil". (O. Casel, *Das Christliche Kultmysterium*, Regensburg: 1935, 102).

we touch it, and in the same way, through our participation in it, we are formed in the image of the crucified and the risen one.”⁸⁴³

The Place of Myth, Symbol and Drama: Odo Casel presents myth, symbol and drama as the central categories of sacramental celebration. For him, myth is lived in cult and cult is a living myth.⁸⁴⁴ He sees myth as a principally cultic symbol which in the Christian religion expresses a living reality of the original saving action in a dramatic celebration of the cultic mystery, and in which the readings are also presented as sacrament. The cultic mystery is made visible and celebrated in the mystery of Christ. It is a form of continuation and transmission of the economy of Christ.⁸⁴⁵

Odo Casel’s theology of liturgical celebration has practical consequence for the church in Nigeria. The place of *experience* of the participant in the liturgical celebration needs not be overemphasized. Experience deals with “seeing”, “touching”, “feeling”, “sensing”, and “hearing” of the subject who participates in the mystery of celebration. The liturgy, therefore, should take account of the cultural condition of the celebrating community. The sacraments, especially, of initiation, should make use of local signs, symbols and ways of celebration of the people. As liturgy involves drama, that is, the dramatizing of the salvific acts of God in Jesus Christ in human history, it should dramatize the same saving acts of God in an African way, making use of African rites, symbols, words, gestures, and other ways of expression. There is need, while celebrating the Christian sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), to dramatize them in an African way. It is only in this way they could become more meaningful and relevant to Africans who celebrate their religious experience in dramatic form.⁸⁴⁶ This would facilitate deeper awareness of what is being celebrated. The African rites of initiation, songs, music and dances, which make much meaning to the people and bring out the symbolism of what is being celebrated, need much study and integration into the Christian rites of initiation.⁸⁴⁷

In addition, celebration involves active participation. According to Vatican II Council’s document on Sacred Liturgy, “Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of his Body the church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. Therefore, Catechesis must promote an active, conscious, genuine participation in the Liturgy of the church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit.”⁸⁴⁸ The only way the faithful could be motivated to active participation is to celebrate the liturgy with truly African “community spirit”, that is, to allow the “community spirit” of the Africans, with their immense religious spirit, symbolisms and rites to truly find a place and expression in the liturgy. The Church in Africa has much duty to see that the liturgy truly takes an African form. The need to have a serious look at this area of drama in African liturgy would not only be a way to realize the intention of Odo Casel⁸⁴⁹, but also be in keeping with the Vatican II Council’s recommendation on the incorporation of local rites into the liturgy⁸⁵⁰ and active participation in the liturgy.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴³ My translation. In the original text, it reads: “In der Erkenntnis des Glaubens schauen wir in dem sakramentalen Bild das Urbild selbst, d. h. das Heilswerk Christi. Wir schauen es im Glauben und in der Gnosis, das heißt, wir berühren es, eignen es uns an, werden ihm gleichgestaltet durch die Teilhabe und dadurch umgestaltet nach dem Bilde des Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen”. [O. Casel, “Glaube, Gnosis und Mysterium”, in: *JLW* 15 (1941), 268-269.]

⁸⁴⁴ Cf. O. Casel, (1935), 157; cf. A. Schilson, *Theologie als Sakramententheologie, Die Mysterientheologie Odo Casel*, Mainz: 1982, 127.

⁸⁴⁵ Cf. Casel, (1935), 158; cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 128.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. Chapter Three, sub-sections 3.2-3.5.

⁸⁴⁷ Cf. SC 112, 119; cf. Chapter Six.

⁸⁴⁸ Cf. SC 26.

⁸⁴⁹ Cf. Chapter Six on inculturation of initiation in African traditional religion.

⁸⁵⁰ Cf. SC 37.

⁸⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid* 14.

4.3.2 Edward Schillebeeckx (1914)

Edward Schillebeeckx, another Western theologian, maintains that *Sacrament* is not a biblical word, but has a biblical root. The *Trinity*, *Hypostatic Union*, *Transubstantiation*, *Mother of God* are for him, examples of concepts that do not originate from the Bible but which find their presence in the biblical writing. The pagan religion influenced the use of these words in the New Testament writings.⁸⁵² The pagan religion influenced the use of these words in the New Testament writings.

E. Schillebeeckx presents Christ as the principal sacrament (Ursakrament).⁸⁵³ He presents Christ as the Son of God, the second person of the most Holy Trinity, who is personally man. Christ is God in the human form, and man in God's form. Every action of Christ is a divine action in human form – an interpretation and transposition of divine activity into the human form. Jesus' love is the human embodiment of the redeeming love of God, God's love in visible form. Because of the saving actions of the man Jesus, performed by a consecrated person, therefore, these actions have a divine power to save. Because of the visible manifestation of this divine power to save, Jesus' saving act becomes sacramental. In addition, he holds the view that sacrament is a divine bestowal of salvation in an outward, perceptible form, which makes salvation visible in human history.⁸⁵⁴

According to E. Schillebeeckx, the Church is a manifestation of the reality of salvation in a historical form. She is a visible community of grace. The community, based on a hierarchical structure and leadership, is the earthly sign of the triumphant saving grace of Christ. She is the sacrament of the risen Christ. The glorified Christ is both Head and members. The essence of the Church, therefore, is the final goal of grace achieved by Christ which is visibly present in the Church as a visible society. Because of this unique nature of the Church, she is the original sacrament (Wurzelsakrament).⁸⁵⁵ This provides the basis for the addition of the seven sacraments through Christ. He sees the sacrament as an act, a visible action, which derives from the Church. It is an official act of the Church, celebrated in different ways in: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, et cetera.⁸⁵⁶ The sacrament is more than what we designate as the "seven sacraments." It is more limited than what we call general signs. He highlights that to understand the nature and place of the seven sacraments we must see them within the wider context of the sacramental nature of the Church. The sacrament, therefore, is primarily an act, a personal act of Christ Himself that reaches and involves all the members in the Church in the form of an institutional act, celebrated by one, who, by virtue of sacramental character, is empowered by Christ Himself to do so in the Church. This is the *ex officio* character of the sacrament.⁸⁵⁷

The seven sacraments, although primarily official actions of the Church, administered through the minister, also include the official actions of the recipient who, in virtue of his baptism (expressed in the actual reception of the sacrament), truly and co-essentially, contributes to the validity and full realization of the sacrament in the Church.⁸⁵⁸ To receive the sacraments of the Church in faith is to encounter the person of Christ himself. The sacramental character of the seven sacraments belongs to the whole Church.⁸⁵⁹ What takes place in the sacraments, through visible form, is the immediate encounter, in mutual form, between the living *Kyrios* and the Christian. Christ Himself, in an unmediated form, effects this. The sacraments express this

⁸⁵² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Sakrament der Gottesbegegnung*, Mainz: 1960, 33; cf. *New African*, 396 (2001), 35ff; For more readings on the influence of Ancient Pagan religions on Judeo-Christian Religion, cf. M. Stone, *When God Was A Woman*, New York: 1976, 103-240.

⁸⁵³ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, (1960), 23.

⁸⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 24-25.

⁸⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid* 57-58 and 120.

⁸⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid* 121-122.

⁸⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid* 52-53.

⁸⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid* 53-54.

⁸⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid* 54.

encounter. That means Christ, in these seven directions, must have fixed mediated grace through a visible action of the Church.⁸⁶⁰ Marriage and Anointing of the Sick are, in addition, ordered through the implicit will of Christ and the insertion of the Church.⁸⁶¹

The above exposition constitutes, in a summary form, Schillebeeckx's theology of the sacrament. His theology, rich as it is, could have significant implications for the Church in Africa. The aspect of the encounter of the recipient with the person of Christ is an encouraging one. It challenges the Church, through her celebration of the sacraments, to dispose the individual to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. One of the ways she could do this is through the incarnation of the celebration of the Christian sacraments of initiation in African forms and symbols. As the individual encounters Christ in a personal way, nevertheless, it does not remove the role of the ordained minister of the church, who is empowered to celebrate the mysteries of God's saving grace in the church. If the individual is conscious of this, it would remove the danger of resorting to extreme personalism in one's encounter with Christ. Moreover, the aspect of Jesus' love, the love that reaches its culmination on His death on the Cross, challenges not only the individual but also the celebrating community to be the brother's and sister's keepers.⁸⁶²

4.3.3 Karl Rahner (1904-1984)

In a totally different fashion, Karl Rahner gave a new meaning to the reality of the sacraments. His point of departure is the Thomistic mediation of Augustine and the biblical economy of salvation.⁸⁶³ He gave more attention to the concepts of "Word" and "Grace" than to "Cult" and "Mystery." In this sense, the pragmatic relevance of the sacramental structure, as a way of celebration of worship, does seem more important to him. The theory of the Word of God has such importance that he understood "promise" as an eschatological valid law for human salvation.⁸⁶⁴ Rahner presents Jesus Christ as both sacrament and *res sacramenti*.⁸⁶⁵ He is the primordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*), the point of origin of the sacraments.⁸⁶⁶ In addition, Christ is a historical real presence of God's mercy in its definite victory. Before Christ, there was uncertainty about the outcome of the dialogue between God and man in the history of salvation. Christ is the last Word that had been pronounced as a Word of grace, reconciliation, and eternal life to humanity.⁸⁶⁷

K. Rahner maintains that God's people exist before the institutional, hierarchical, juridical and organised Church. That means the people of God extends beyond the institutionalised Church. Its unity is the human race. The unity is not a logical unity of nature, but the real, actual unity of a race which arises from one man, Adam, called to a supernatural end with one history of salvation and ruin. The Incarnation confirmed, strengthened, and fulfilled this unity of the human race.⁸⁶⁸ He presents the Church as the basic Sacrament of human salvation. She manifests the on-going presence of Jesus Christ in the world. She is the fruit and means of salvation by which God offers his salvation to an individual in a concrete form. The individual realizes this in the historical and social dimensions of human life.⁸⁶⁹ The Church derives her sacramental structure from the person of Christ, a historical perceptibility in space and time. For Rahner, because of

⁸⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid 120.

⁸⁶¹ Cf. Ibid 123-124.

⁸⁶² Cf. The Eucharist in African Context in Chapter Six.

⁸⁶³ Cf. K. Rahner, "Kirche und Sakramente", in: *QD* 10 (Freiburg: 1960), 11-12; cf. S. Pemsel-Maier, "Rechtfertigung durch Kirche? Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Rechtfertigung in Entwürfen der neueren katholischen und evangelischen Theologie", in: *SST* 5 (1991), 118.

⁸⁶⁴ Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 17-18.

⁸⁶⁵ Cf. Ibid 78.

⁸⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid 17-22.

⁸⁶⁷ Cf. K. Rahner, Art. "Selbstmitteilung Gottes", in: *HTTL* 7, (1973), 37.

⁸⁶⁸ Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 11.

⁸⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid 19.

the union of the Church with Christ, she can never be an empty sign.⁸⁷⁰ She extends God's offer to humanity, the self-offer in Jesus Christ in whom he has the final, victorious and salvific word in the dialogue between God and the world. In this sense, the Church remains an efficacious sign to the world, a sign of a question that the human history looks at.⁸⁷¹ She strives to effect and bring a positive answer, without prejudice, to human freedom.⁸⁷² God commands and wills the sacraments to be received. Because of this, the salvation of the individual is oriented towards the Church – a visible and basic sacrament of salvation. The Church is an efficacious sign; an extension of God's self-offer in Jesus Christ in whom he has the final, victorious and salvific efficacy in the dialogue between God and the human world. The Church receives the mandate to execute this function and exercise it throughout her entire life.⁸⁷³

Although, K. Rahner was very dogmatic in most of his positions, his views on “anonymous Christianity”⁸⁷⁴ did not fail to meet serious objections on theological quarter.⁸⁷⁵ V. Boublik maintains that Rahner's view on “anonymous Christianity” denies non-Christian religions the role of mediation of God's salvation to their members.⁸⁷⁶ If so, their myths and initiation rites are inefficacious. This could constitute serious problem to inculturation of African rites since it does not recognize their roles and efficacy. How could we then realize an authentic incarnation of the gospel when Rahner's view is applied to missionary activity? We now turn attention to the Vatican II Council.

4.3.4 The Vatican Council II (11th Oct. 1962- 8th Dec. 1965)

This Council marked a turning point⁸⁷⁷ in the understanding of the sacraments. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council speaks of the Church as a sacrament: “Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”⁸⁷⁸ But it still remains open on how the sacramental nature of the Church should be understood. The Council bases the origin of the sacramental nature of the Church on the Triune God. The same document presents Christ as the Founder of the sacraments. It emphasizes the saving initiative of God in Christ as the mediator of salvation (cf. LG 1). In addition, it expresses the sacramental nature of Christ, the Spirit and the spiritual dimension of the Church.⁸⁷⁹

Very typical to this Council is the emergence of the various images of the Church.⁸⁸⁰ Using biblical images, the Council designates the Church as the People of God. It is a new image of the Church, which the Council discovers. In the earlier Council, the Church was designated as a perfect society (*Societas perfecta*), and in the Patristic period, as a Spiritual reality. In Vatican

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid

⁸⁷¹ Cf. K. Rahner, “Theologie des Symbols”, in: *ST IV* (1965), 5, 275-311.

⁸⁷² Cf. Ibid

⁸⁷³ Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 37-66.

⁸⁷⁴ Cf. K. Rahner, in: *TI*. 23 (1966a), 5, 115-34; ibidem, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. London: 1978, 306.

⁸⁷⁵ Some of the theologians that seriously object his views on “anonymous Christianity” cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: 1997, 146-147; cf. Congar Yves, “Non-Christian Religions and Christianity”, in: *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development*, (ed.) D. Dhavamony, Rome: Universitat Gregoriana Editrice, 113-45; cf. H. Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Eglise*. Paris: 1967c, 152-56; cf. H. U. Balthasar, *Cordula ou L'épreuve décisive*. 2d ed. Paris: 1968a 79-90, 96-124.

⁸⁷⁶ Cf. V. Boublik, *Teologia delle religioni*. Rome: 1973, 269-282.

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. M. Bernards, “Zur Lehre von der Kirche als Sakrament. Beobachtungen aus der Theologie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts”, *MThZ*, 20 (1969), 29, 54; cf. H. Döring, “Gundriß der Ekklesiologie. Zentrale Aspekte des katholischen Selbstverständnisses und ihre ökumenische Relevanz”, in: *Grundrisse*, 6 (Darmstadt: 1986), 105-113; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 158.

⁸⁷⁸ “Cum autem Ecclesiae sit in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis” (LG 1).

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. LG 48; cf. W. Kasper, *Die Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils*, in: *TuKA*, (Mainz: 1987), 238-245.

⁸⁸⁰ Cf. LG 2.

II, the People of God is also seen as the Church of Christ, the body of Christ.⁸⁸¹ LG 5 presents the Church as the sacrament of human salvation, realized in the earthly community of believers, which will attain its fulfilment in the eschatology of God's kingdom. The Church is a mediating principle of human salvation, which in union with Christ, carries out this saving function to the world.⁸⁸² It lives in the self-mediation of the Trinitarian God. In the immanent economy of salvation, communication becomes communication of saving economy. And Word and Sacrament participate in God's gifts to humanity. Thanksgiving would mediate God and human beings. And the Church, in her sacramental actions, would be a point of contact between God and human beings.⁸⁸³

As the Church communicates the saving-will of God to humanity, she has the duty to represent God and Christ to the world. In addition, she has the obligation, through signs and symbols, to communicate the gospel in an intelligible manner.⁸⁸⁴ The use of African language, rites and symbols pose great challenges to the Church, especially, in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in Africa.⁸⁸⁵

Because of the saving role of the Church, she is a sign of salvation to humanity. But as the Church is not salvation itself, she indicates and mediates God's salvation to the world. She is a visible sacrament which ensures the unity of the human race.⁸⁸⁶ The sacramental structure of the Church is established and perfected in the sacraments. Like the civil society, the Church is challenged to perfect herself and come to her full actualization by acting. "This is fully, in the highest degree of her real essential perfection, while she teaches, witnesses to Christ's truth, bears his cross, loves God in her members, makes present cultically in the Sacrifice of the Mass the salvation which is hers, and so forth."⁸⁸⁷ Therefore, every entry into the Church as means of salvation, and all reception of salvation from the Church, must be somehow sacramental, with at least a quasi-sacramental structure.⁸⁸⁸ The sacramental nature of the Church and her basic activity is implied by the very essence of the Church as the presence of God's saving sacrifice in Christ. The Church interpreted "sacramentality" in the seven sacraments, just as the church developed its own essence in its constitution. Therefore, an individual Christian can accept without hesitation and live out this seven-fold sacramental Order, as it exists.⁸⁸⁹

Vatican Council II was a reform Council. Renewal or *Aggiornamento* is a key concept, even in ecclesiology.⁸⁹⁰ The Church shows herself as pilgrim People of God. As a people of God, who sometimes can be unfaithful to her Lord, is always there as a community of saints and sinners who is in need of forgiveness. This concept has consequences for the Church in her historical realities: morals, teaching, proclamation of the gospel and liturgical celebrations.⁸⁹¹

The Council also indicated the hierarchical structure of the Church, and the place and function of the Lay Faithful.⁸⁹²

Christ: On the person of Christ, the Council affirms the sacramental nature of Christ; indicating various ways in which he is sign and cause, and what he signifies and effects. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council sees Christ's humanity, in the unity of the person of the Word, as the

⁸⁸¹ Cf. LG 7.

⁸⁸² Cf. H. U. Balthasar, *Theodramatik. Bd. II Die Personen des Spiels, Teil 2 Die Personen in Christus*, (Einsiedeln: 1978), 394.

⁸⁸³ Cf. O. Semmelroth, *Die Kirche als Sakrament des Heils*: MySal 4,1 309/ 355.

⁸⁸⁴ Cf. H. Döring, (1986), 106.

⁸⁸⁵ Cf. Chapter Six.

⁸⁸⁶ Cf. LG 9.

⁸⁸⁷ W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 87; cf. LG 9.

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid 20/21-22

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 413.

⁸⁹⁰ Cf. LG 8.

⁸⁹¹ Cf. UR 6.; W. Beinert, (1995), 519.

⁸⁹² Cf. LG 18-38.

instrument of our salvation.⁸⁹³ The Church's role is illumined by the analogy of the human nature of the Incarnate Word.⁸⁹⁴ Christ's role is implicit in the introductory words of the document on the Church, since Christ is the light of the nations, and in the account of revealing the presence of the Kingdom.⁸⁹⁵ In his words, works and presence of Christ, the kingdom of God shines forth to men.⁸⁹⁶ His word is compared to a seed. His miracles attest to the presence of the kingdom on earth. And the kingdom is manifest in the person of Christ, Son of God and Son of man.⁸⁹⁷ Most efficacious in Christ's works, was the paschal mystery.⁸⁹⁸ The sacraments derive their power from this mystery.

Christ continues to be present and active in and through his Church; in the Sacrifice of her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered Himself on the cross' (Council of Trent), but especially in the Eucharistic species. He is also present in the sacraments, so that when anybody baptizes, it is Jesus Christ Himself who performs this function. He is present in His word since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Finally, he is present when the Church prays and sings (Mt 18:20). Christ always associates the Church with himself in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is his beloved bride who calls to her Lord, and through him offers worship to the eternal Father.⁸⁹⁹ Vatican II further highlights, in any community gathered around the altar under the ministry of the bishop is a symbol of the love and unity of the mystical body. In these communities, Christ is present, by whose power the one and holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is united.⁹⁰⁰

The above exposition shows the contributions of the various Church Fathers, the Council of Trent and Vatican II Council in the understanding of the sacrament, one which reached its climax in the latter with the designation of the Church as Sacrament. Therefore, when we talk today of the possibility of incorporation of so-called pagan natural sacraments into the Church, it is not out of place; for ancient pagan religions had, for centuries, furnished Christianity with a great deal of religious symbolisms and rites, including the word "sacrament" itself. How then could this be relevant to African context, especially, taking account of initiation in African Traditional Religion?⁹⁰¹ Before we address this question, we consider now the significance of the "Seven Sacraments" of the Church.

4.3.5 The 'Seven Sacraments' of the Church

With reference to the number of the Sacraments of the church, the Council of Trent maintained that they are more or less seven in number, namely: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony, but one of these is not actually a sacrament.⁹⁰² With regard to the history of fixing of the sacraments, there is a long process in the development of the dogmatic statement on the formation of the Sacraments, especially, what has today become known as the "Seven Sacraments".⁹⁰³ *Augustine*, a great theorist of the Sacramental essence, thought of Baptism and Eucharist as the only Sacraments, when he spoke of the cultic Sacraments. Definition makes a clear distinction of the Church's rites between 'sacrament' and 'non-sacrament.'⁹⁰⁴ In the 10th century, the Western church

⁸⁹³ Cf. SC 5

⁸⁹⁴ Cf. LG 8.

⁸⁹⁵ Cf. LG 1.

⁸⁹⁶ Cf. SC 5 §1.

⁸⁹⁷ LG 5 §1.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid* 5 §1.

⁸⁹⁹ SC 7 §§ 1-2.

⁹⁰⁰ Cf. LG 26 § 1; 21 § 1.

⁹⁰¹ Cf. Chapter Six.

⁹⁰² Cf. DH 1601.

⁹⁰³ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 39.

⁹⁰⁴ Cf. B. Geyer, (1918), 325-338.

recognized, in addition to Baptism and Eucharist, the sacraments of Penance and Matrimony. In addition to Baptism and Confirmation, different anointings accompany the rites of consecration of Kings, Priests and Monks. There was not any given fixed number of the sacraments. The number varied from five to twelve. In addition, one teaching holds it to be thirty.⁹⁰⁵ Before the 12th century, an official Church's teaching or theological system was lacking on this.

Peter Lombard (+1160 AD). He contributed much to the fixing of the number of seven sacraments. He presents, in summary form, the important moments of the Teachings on the sacraments, and discusses each sacrament in the order of the seven numbers.⁹⁰⁶ He gave a three-fold definition of the Sacraments as

1. "Sacramentum est sacrae rei signum" (sacrament is a sign of sacred thing, which he borrowed from Augustine).
2. "Sacramentum est invisibilis gratiae visibilis forma" (sacrament is a visible form of invisible grace; borrowed from Berengar of Tours).
3. "Sacramentum enim proprie dicitur quod ita signum est gratiae et invisibilis gratiae forma, ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat".⁹⁰⁷ (Sacrament is that which signifies grace and invisible form of grace, which causes what is imagined to exist).

What is significant in the above definitions is the designation of sacrament as 'causa gratiae', which occurs here for the first time.⁹⁰⁸ When we study the history of the sacraments, we see that the composition of the sacraments takes place in the 12th century with the connection of *form* (verbum) and *materia*, (res, elementum). One only finds this evidence with the presentation of individual sacraments where primary matter (*materia prima*) meant the physical substance and not the ritual action, while *forma* designates the *forma verborum* (formula).⁹⁰⁹ Moreover, we discover that the "Seven Sacraments" of the Church were formed in a School in Paris between 1148 and 1152. Peter Lombard⁹¹⁰ counts them in the same manner as "Magister Simon" and the "Sententiae divinitatis".⁹¹¹ They vary in the order they occur. Similarly, Peter Lombard played much role in writing the Commentary on the Decree of Grace. The Decree itself did not mention anything on the seven sacraments just like the oldest Commentary.

Today, when we think of the process of fixing the number of sacraments, we think of Thomas Aquinas. He worked a lot on the theology of the seven sacraments. Thomas Aquinas maintains that the sacraments effect the perfection and healing of the human soul. Just as human beings are persons and members of the Church and society, the sacraments heal and perfect them. He holds the view that three things are necessary for human development, namely: generation (giving birth), growth of body-soul, and feeding. These three existential moments arise in religious context, designating Baptism as a spiritual rebirth, Confirmation as strengthening in the Holy Spirit, and Eucharist as the bread of life. The Eucharist stands at the peak of the hierarchy not only because it is the power of Christ, but because it is Christ himself. All the other sacraments derive their sources and nourishment from it. It fulfils the great comprehensive life of communication between Christ and the community. The human person requires the Sacrament of the Sick because his bodily and spiritual integrity always experiences sickness and is threatened

⁹⁰⁵ A. Ganoczy, (1991), 39.

⁹⁰⁶ Sent IV d 2 c1 *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum*, Bd. V Grottaferrata 1981, 239-240. There one reads: "I am ad sacramenta novae Legis accedamus: quae sunt baptismus, confirmatio, panis, benedictionis, id est eucharistia, poenitentia, unctio extrema, ordo, coniugium, Quorum alia remedium contra peccatum praebent et gratiam adiutricem conferut, ut baptismus, alia in remedium tantum sunt, ut coniugium; alia gratia et virtute nos fulciunt, ut eucharistia et ordo". cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 143; cf. W. Koch, "Die Einsetzung der Sakramente durch Christus. Eine Untersuchung zur Sakramententheologie der Frühscholastik von Anselm von Laon bis zu Wilhelm von Auxerre", in: W. L. Hödl, (ed.), *BGPhMA*, 24 (Münster: 1983)227-228.

⁹⁰⁷ My rough translation. P. Lombard, *Sententiae*, IV, d1, n 2; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 143; cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 39.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid

⁹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid. 83-84; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 144.

⁹¹⁰ Cf. *Sent IV d 2, c 1* (Spic Bon V, 239-240).

⁹¹¹ B. Geyer, "Die Siebenzahl der Sakramente in ihrer historischen Entwicklung", in: *TG.10* (1918), 341.

by it. Moreover, as human beings long for the social essence and live in the community, they have to be led and make progress. The sacrament of the Holy Orders plays this function conferring the character of leadership. On the other hand, Matrimony is instituted for the generation and increase of the human species.⁹¹² He surmises that human beings do not need more because the seven sacraments naturally encompass the whole of human existence. Apart from the speculative symbolism of the number “seven” of the sacraments, it has also mystical and symbolic meanings which could designate its anthropological meaning. The number 7 stands for totality, the universal and incomprehensible, just as the number 3 symbolizes divinity, and 4 cosmic perfection. With reference to the “seven sacraments”, it confers them with great mystic and symbolic meanings.⁹¹³

Despite the speculative effort to fix the number of the sacraments in the Church’s tradition at seven, in the Eastern (Orthodox Catholic rite), “Anointing” does not acquire the status of sacrament of Last Anointing. In this region there is a yearly practice of the rite of forgiveness of sins, but it does not acquire the status of the sacrament of Penance as in the West. In the West, for the sake of unity, there is the need for baptism to be independent of Confession. Moreover, it was possible to pass through many sacramental stages before one could receive the sacrament of Ordination.⁹¹⁴

Despite the historical and theological considerations of the sacraments, one could today also talk of new sacraments. Thus, as there were sacraments that were never counted as such, could one not imagine that in the future that there may be sacraments that are not yet recognized as such in the present?⁹¹⁵ With reference to initiation in African Traditional Religion, could one not imagine the possibility of their being recognized as sacraments in the future? They already serve as natural sacraments.⁹¹⁶ It is true that the number and theology of sacrament are so interwoven with one another that a new concept of sacrament will produce a new theology of sacrament. In addition, a simple insertion of new sacrament to the already existing ones (the seven sacraments) will not be achieved without causing a breach or disorganizing the already established one. In so far as this is true, the issue is not on the question of insertion or non-insertion of new sacraments to the already existing ones, but on the relevance of the existing sacraments of the Church⁹¹⁷, especially, the Christian initiation in Africa. How do the present sacraments mediate God’s healing power and salvation to the Christian in his/her cultural context? Could they not mediate the same God’s healing power and salvation to a Christian when the Church celebrates them with local forms, elements and symbolisms of the people? Must the Church continue to celebrate them with foreign forms, disregarding the rich cultural elements of the people? Could the inculturation of initiation in African Traditional Religion not be of practical and theological relevance in the mediation of God’s healing grace and salvation to human beings in their cultures? These questions need to be addressed in any serious discussion of the sacraments in the Church in Africa.

We should not forget that for cultic actions (sacraments) to be existent, it must be alive; to be alive, it must take account of the cultural condition of the celebrating community. In other words, to communicate God’s grace, it must dispose the individual participant. And to do this, it

⁹¹² T. Aquinas, S. Th. III, 65, 1.

⁹¹³ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 40.

⁹¹⁴ Cf. K. Rahner sees the “Diakonat, Priesterweihe und Episkopat als von der Kirche selbst vorgenommene Aufgliederung ihrer einen, ihr von Christus überkommenen Amtsgewalt aufzufassen. Das um so weniger, als alle großen Theologen des Mittelalters die niederen Weihen als sakramentale Weihestufen aufgefasst haben, es auch jetzt noch erlaubt ist, diese für damals als wirkliche Sakramente aufzufassen, selbst wenn man der Meinung sein will (...) dass sie dies heute nicht mehr sind”. K. Rahner, *Kirche und Sakramente*, QD 10 (Freiburg: 1950), 65.

⁹¹⁵ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 41.

⁹¹⁶ Cf. Sub-section 4.5.1.

⁹¹⁷ Words of the Council of Trent come to mind. In its Decree on the sacraments, the Council states: “Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novae Legis non esse ad salutem necessaria, sed superflua, et sine eis aut eorum voto per solam fidem homines a Deo gratiam iustificationis adipisci..., licet omnia singulis necessaria non sint: anathema sit”. (DH 1601 § 4).

must take account of the local history and culture of the individual and community, making use of local symbols that the individual and the community understand. This challenges the incarnation of the liturgy in African culture. It is not our intention to treat all the sacraments of the Church but to give particular attention to the ones that constitute the Christian sacraments of initiation, namely: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist⁹¹⁸ Let us now examine the sacraments of Christian initiation

4.4 The Christian Sacraments of Initiation

Christian initiation, which includes Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist, is not just a mere practice of rituals. More than that, it involves an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality. In addition, it involves *a process and period of formation* in the Christian life, an apprenticeship of sufficient duration within which the disciple will be joined to Christ.⁹¹⁹ Let us examine in some detail the various stages of Christian initiation that mark one's membership to the church and a share of mystery of the triune God.

4.4.1 The Catechumenate

The Catechumenate⁹²⁰ is not the Christian initiation *per se* rather it is the first liturgical threshold to be crossed in one's journey of Christian initiation. It is the first official encounter between the Church and the candidate who has undergone an initial conversion. It is that period of time, process, and spiritual journey which an adult enters into if he/she wants to be admitted into the Church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.⁹²¹ It forms the second period of initiation. Through it, the neophyte, or the Catechumen is initiated, through successive rites, into the mystery of Christ (salvation) and the practice of the evangelical virtues. It includes a willingness not only to pursue the discovery of Jesus, but also to conform one's life to the Gospel's challenges.⁹²² The candidate requests for baptism, confronts the mystery of interpersonal relationship between God and his/her fellow human beings, present and expressed in the community, and united in Jesus Christ, namely in the Church. It involves not only learning the truths and prayers as a discovery of persons, the persons of God. It also involves the intellectual activity, and vital process, which is a discovery in the Church, expressed in interpersonal relationship with one another in faith, love, worship, and service. In other words, this stage introduces the candidate in the three principal Church's lives: of faith, liturgy, and charity.⁹²³ It as a journey of faith, oriented to living out of the paschal mystery of Christ, which takes place in the Church rooted in a specific culture and time.⁹²⁴ This threshold of becoming a Christian calls the need for recognition of the traditional rite in the celebration of the rite of the Catechumenate. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) stipulates that if the local customs and practices would seem to warrant it, an exorcism and a renunciation of false gods would follow the first promise of the candidates and sponsors. The Rite gives Episcopal Conferences the right to adapt the formulas for this exorcism and renunciation according to local needs and circumstances.⁹²⁵

⁹¹⁸ For detailed readings on the other sacraments of the Church, confer the following works: DH 1614-1816; F. -J. Nocke, "Spezielle Sakramentenlehre", in: T. Schneider, (1992b), 227-376; G. Koch., "Allgemeine Sakramentenlehre", in: W. Beinert, (ed.) *GLKD*, (1995), 321-518; A. Ganoczy, (1991), 55-105; H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 320-331; E. M. Faber, *Einführung in die Katholische Sakramentenlehre*, Darmstadt: 2002, 122-176.

⁹¹⁹ A similar process of formation and exposition of norms of morality also takes place in initiation in African traditional religion, cf. 3.3.2.2.

⁹²⁰ In Edda religion, the Catechumenate stage could, in a certain sense, be compared to "Ipu Ogo Umirima Ena" as first stages of initiation proper, although remarkable differences exist in terms of motif and practices (cf. subsection: 3.8.2 above).

⁹²¹ Cf. M. Ann, "Opening Remarks", in: *AWACC SEMINAR*, (1985), 8-19; cf. Mvuanda, Jean de Dieu, *Inculturer pour evangeliser en profondeur*. Frankfurt: 1998, 255.

⁹²² Cf. Ibid 8-9.

⁹²³ AG 14.

⁹²⁴ Cf. M. Ann, (1985), 8.

⁹²⁵ Cf. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Rome: 1973, 78-79.

Nevertheless, the adaptation of those formulas should give room for their incarnation in African rites of initiation.

In this regard, the Vatican II Council emphasized the need for the restoration of the Catechumenate stage in the Church. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* the Church Fathers states: “The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and brought into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time.”⁹²⁶ This forms the basis for the restoration of the catechumenate in the Church. A look at the historical development of the catechumenate reveals its existence already in the early Church. In the early days of the Church, people were received in the Church as Peter received them on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1ff). Later we begin to meet Catechist and catechumen, instructor and the one instructed (cf. Acts 18:25). Consequently, some type of preparation for baptism began to emerge. In the second century, we see elements of a formal catechumenate in the writings of St. Justin: “Those who are persuaded and believe in the truth of our teaching and sayings undertake to live accordingly; they are taught to ask, with fasting, the remission of their sins; we also pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to a place where there is water, and they are re-generated in the same way as we have been regenerated.”⁹²⁷ *Traditio Apostolica*, in the third century, supplied us with the earliest historical evidence of the rite of entrance into the catechumenate. It provides a picture of a systematic Catechumenate, which seems to have grown out of the needs of the time. It was a period of persecution and an abundance of false doctrines. A sophisticated programme was needed to prepare the catechumens as well as to admit only those who sincerely wanted to join the Church. The candidates entered a 3-year instruction and formation, which was followed by an intensive examination. Their knowledge of faith, but more importantly their living of the faith was examined, which consisted of (1) a dialogue between the “doctors” (teachers), the candidates and their sponsors; and (2) catechesis on the fundamentals of Christian life.⁹²⁸ The candidates were accepted for an intensive preparation during Lent, which climaxed in the sacraments of initiation proper, that is, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist - during the Easter Vigil.⁹²⁹ *Origen* mentions the same conditions of examination and admission of candidates, and adds “candidates’ renunciation of their former idols in order to follow Christ faithfully.”⁹³⁰

In the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, these essential aspects of the rite of entrance into the Catechumenate continued to be endorsed, and accompanied by a number of additional rituals. *St. Augustine* demands the converts to express their faith before they could be admitted into the Church.⁹³¹ This form of catechumenate was practised for centuries until there was no need for adult baptism as the children of Catholics were being baptised as children.

In the 19th century, Cardinal Lavigerie, Founder of the White Fathers of Africa recommended the use of ancient catechumenate missionary work, which comprises a four year programme: two years of postulancy; experiencing one’s desire to know about the Church, and two years of catechumenate. Seeing the urgency for the implementation of the rite, Vatican II Council called for a reform of the baptismal rites. The process took ten years that resulted in the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in 1972. As the candidate passes through this stage of preparation, he receives baptism

4.4.2 Baptism

The Christian initiation culminates in the sacrament of Baptism, a symbol of death of the old person and the rebirth of the new person in Christ. The sacrament of baptism is a rite of

⁹²⁶ SC 64.

⁹²⁷ Justin, *Apology*, I, 61, 2; *FaCh* (Fathers of the Church), 1 (Washington: 1948), 100.

⁹²⁸ Cf. *Trad Ap 32* (*Fontes Christiani* 2, 365-370 (Geerlings)).

⁹²⁹ Cf. *Ibid* 370.

⁹³⁰ Cf. Origen, *Against Celsius*, III, 51, 2.

⁹³¹ Cf. Augustine, *First Catechetical Instruction*, XXVI, 50.

purification, using water and the words of institution by Christ. It is a rite of “Birth” that marks the birth of a new person in Christ, and incorporation into the community of Christ’s Faithful. Essentially, it is a rite of purification.

In etymological terms, “Baptism,” derives from the Greek word, “βάπτειν” meaning to ‘plunge’ or ‘immerse’. The ‘plunge’ into the water symbolises the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as a “new creature.”⁹³² It affects a washing or regeneration, and renewal by the Holy Spirit. It signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one ‘can enter the kingdom of God.’⁹³³ W. A. Van Roo interprets the symbolism in the act of immersion (an element of salvation), as deliverance from evil, that is, sin. Deliverance is understood in the sense of symbolism of dying in union with the death by which Christ destroyed sin, and by the symbolism of bathing, washing, cleansing, to signify the forgiveness of sin. The symbolism of “Immersion into water” - a universal, non-Christian symbolism, acquires a Christian meaning in baptism, namely, dying with Christ.⁹³⁴ Justin the Martyr designates the “baptismal bath” as enlightening those who receive it to understand the mystery of God and the Church. The baptised person becomes a ‘son of light,’ and light to himself.”⁹³⁵ In addition to purifying and washing away of the original sin, baptism also incorporates the baptised into the community of the triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁹³⁶

In defining the content of the Christian initiation, the Second Vatican Council took up the theology of baptism of the early Church, especially, the Council of Trent,⁹³⁷ and designated baptism, the laying of hand, and Eucharist as parts of Christian initiation rites.⁹³⁷ It accepted the early form of the sacrament whereby the baptised is confronted with the Credo and handed over the faith of the Church, which challenges his personal decision of faith.⁹³⁸ As a sign of repentance and the purification from sin, Baptism is conferred in the name of Jesus, in view of the coming reign of God. It is the initiation rite of the new fellowship.⁹³⁹ In its ecclesial dimension baptism incorporates the individual into the Church. The community becomes the bearer of the personal existence of faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights the ecclesiological content of this sacrament, according to which Baptism makes Christians members of the Body of Christ. By so-doing we, as Christians are members of one another. It incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal fonts, the one People of God of the New Covenant is born; a covenant, which surpasses all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races and sex: For by one Spirit we are all baptised into one body.⁹⁴⁰ This definition directly expresses the universal character of the Church. Most of the sacraments effect transition into the eschatological saving community. But Baptism achieves it in a special way by initiating one into membership of the community of believers that demands the individual to allow his life to conform to the ethical implications of faith.⁹⁴¹

⁹³² *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 1214.

⁹³³ CCC.1234; Titus, 3:5.

⁹³⁴ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 15.

⁹³⁵ Justin, *Apologia*, 1, 61/12.; cf. B. T. Falls, *FaCh.* 1(Washington: 1948), 100.

⁹³⁶ H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 310.

⁹³⁷ Cf. DH 1515, 1609, 1624; cf. SC, 69 §1; LG 11 §1, 31 §1; cf. AG 15 §14; cf. CCC 1285; cf. T. Schneider, *Zeichen der Nähe Gottes*, Freiburg: 1992, 77.

⁹³⁸ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1991), 55.

⁹³⁹ Cf. Acts 2:38; 41; 8:12; 16, 36, 38; 9:18; 10:48.

⁹⁴⁰ 1Pet. 2:5; cf. CCC 1267.

⁹⁴¹ Cf. W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 15.

To St. Paul, the baptismal water⁹⁴² acquires a central position in the Christian baptism. He brings Christ's saving death to a speculative sense⁹⁴³ maintaining that in this sacrament, water serves the function of washing and purification. He regards Baptism as circumcision with Christ (Col. 2:11). As a point of departure, he applies it to faith to show that Jesus Christ, through the crucifixion on the Cross and the resurrection, had won life for humanity. Secondly, he regards Baptism as the "sacrament of initiation"; the reality of the Christian baptismal water in which the individual receives salvation that Christ's saving act finally mediates.⁹⁴⁴ The baptised suffers in the immersion in death with Christ. In this sense, the "dying with Christ," is united with "rising with him in glory." For St. Paul, to be baptised means to die with Christ, and rise with him.⁹⁴⁵ This understanding expresses the Christological and eschatological dimensions of baptism. W. A.

⁹⁴² The symbolism of baptismal water is linked with the symbolism of water. Three significant biblical meanings could be noted, namely, "als lebensgefährdende Chaostmacht erfahren werden. Überschwemmungskatastrophen leben weiter in Sintflutgeschichten, die Erfahrung Schiffbrüchiger macht den Ozean zum verschlingenden Ungeheuer. Erst dadurch, daß göttliche Mächte den chaotischen Urgewässern Grenzen weisen, entsteht für die Menschheit eine Lebenschance. So bedeutet auch für Israel das Leben ermöglichenden Schöpfungshandeln Gottes Scheidung der Wasser, Ausgrenzung von Land aus der chaotischen Flut (cf. Gen 1, 6-10), Kampf gegen das Meer und die Seeungeheuer (cf. Ijob 7:12; 26, 12; Ps 65:8; 74, 13f; 77:17; 89:10f; 93:3f; 104:6f; 107:29). Die Erinnerung an Israels fundamentale Rettungserfahrung verdichtet sich in den Liedern vom Durchzug durch das Schilfmeer. In Gebeten wird Wasser zum Bild tödlicher Ängste (2 Sam 22:5; Ps 42:8; 66:12; 69:2f. 15f; Jona 2:4, 4-6). Daß einmal Gott den Drachen im Meer vollends töten (Jes 27:1) und das Meer nicht mehr sein wird (Offb 21, 1), gehört zur endzeitlichen Hoffnung. (2) Mindestens ebenso ursprünglich aber ist die gegenteilige Erfahrung: Wasser ist *Quelle des Lebens*. Das ist besonders den Völkern am Rand der Wüste bewußt. Alt-Ägypten weiß sich als Geschenk des Nils. Für den Nomaden bedeuten Wasserquelle und Oase das Überleben. Wasser aus dem Felsen rettet das Volk in der Wüste. Der Strom, der in Eden entspringt, gehört zu den Wohltaten der Schöpfung, das Wasser des Lebens, an dessen Ufern die überaus fruchtbaren Bäume des Lebens wachsen, zur messianischen Zukunft. Das Lechzen der Tiere nach frischem Wasser wird zum Bild für die Sehnsucht des Beters, für sein Dursten nach Gott. (3) Wasser *reinigt und belebt*. Nicht nur getunkene Wasser, auch Waschung und Bad haben eine elementare Bedeutung. Sie ergibt sich aus dem Zusammenhang zwischen Schmutz und Krankheit: Unreinheit muß zu Ausscheidung aus der Gemeinschaft führen, die Reinigung im Wasser eröffnet den Weg zurück. Darüber hinaus wird in manchen Kultuen dem Bad im Wasser eine lebenssteigernde, ja unsterblich machende Wirkung zugeschrieben. Für Alt-Ägypten ist die Vorstellung bezeugt, daß vergöttlicht wird, wer im Nil ertrinkt. In Israel steht der Gedanke der Reinigung im Vordergrund. Dabei gehen physische (Krankheit), moralische (Sünde) und kultische Unreinheit (durch Berührung mit den geheimnisvollen und Schrecken erregenden Kräften des Lebens und des Todes) einander über. Der aussätzige Naaman wird durch das Bad im Jordan wieder rein. Wer kultisch unrein geworden ist, muß rituell gereinigt werden, bevor er in die Gemeinschaft zurückkehren darf (cf. Lev. 11-15; cf. Num 19:11-22). Auch Gottes Handel, das den Menschen von der Schuld befreit, wird mit dem Bild des Wassers verbunden: >Entsündige mich ... wasche mich, dann werde ich weißer als Schnee< (Ps. 51:9). Aber das Bild von der Ausgießung >reinen Wassers< über das Volk Israel geht noch über Heilung. Reinigung und Entsündigung hinaus: Es spricht von der Gabe eines neuen Herzens, von der Mitteilung des göttlichen Geistes, von neuer Lebendigkeit und Freude am verheißenen Land". (cf. Ez 36:25-27; Jes 32:15-20; 44:3; Joel 3:1f"; F.- J. Nocke, *Sakramententheologie: Ein Handbuch der Dogmatik Theologie*, Düsseldorf: 1997, 90-91)

⁹⁴³ O. Kuss, "Zur Frage einer vorpaulinischen Todestaufe", in: *MThZ*, 4, (1953), 1-17. Although, St. Paul first brought out the symbolism of water in the Christian sense, its symbolism and use were already present in the pagan initiation.

⁹⁴⁴ U. Wilckens, "Der Brief an die Römer", in: Schnackenburg (ed.), *EKK VI/2* (Zürich: 1987), 17.

⁹⁴⁵ The principal meaning of Baptism "Baptizein (immerse), which Jesus Christ allows himself to receive the baptism of John the Baptist, expresses the writing of the early Christian Ritual as 'Washing' (cf. 1 Cor 6:11; cf. Acts. 22:16; cf. Heb 10:22), and more clearly as 'Bath' or 'washing' (cf. Eph. 5:26). Finally, the symbol of 'burial' (cf. Rom. 6: 4) leads to a conclusion that the ideal and normal figure of Baptism was immersion. "Des näheren wird in der Tauchung' (Kol 2:12) (die plastische Vorstellung schwingt bei Paulus immer mit, auch Röm 6:4 vom vorausgehenden Vers her) der Mensch, mitbegraben mit Christus', 'mitgekrenzt' mit ihm (Röm 6:5); er 'stirbt mit Christus' (Röm, 6:8; Kol, 20) und wird damit in Christi Tod einbezogen. So ist der äußere Ritus (des Untertauchens) *homoïoma* (Röm 6:5); konkretes sakramentales Abbild, rituelle Erscheinungsweise, symbolhafte Gestaltwerdung des Todes Christi". (J. Betz, *Taufe*, in: *HthG II*, München: 1963, 615).

Van Roo expresses it thus: To be baptized into Christ “(...) is to be baptized into, plunged into, his death: into Christ in the very mystery of his dying. Baptism, then, as a symbolic imitation of the death of Christ, terminates in a symbolic spiritual death. By his death, Christ destroyed sin, died to sin. United with him in the mystery of his death, buried with him (Rom 6:4), we die to sin, break irrevocably with sin (Rom 6:3-4). The symbolism of death is reinforced by that of burial, of the crucifixion of our old self to destroy the sinful body (Rom 6:6) and of a spiritual circumcision which consists in cutting off of the body of the flesh (Col 2:11).”⁹⁴⁶ This means in an efficacious and symbolic manner that the baptised dies into the death of Christ in a sacramental, social, and tangible way in time and space.⁹⁴⁷

In addition, St Paul stresses the pneumatic dimension of Baptism. In the same Letter to the Romans, he writes, “Through baptism, we receive the spirit of Sonship, which enables us to call God, “*Abba*, Father!” (Rom 8:15). In that body, the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to him in his passion and glorification. Through baptism the Christian is formed in the likeness of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (Cor 12:13).”⁹⁴⁸ Baptism realizes this in the individual, and the Holy Spirit enables him to grow strong in the faith.⁹⁴⁹ No sin can delete the indelible, spiritual mark (*character*) which baptism seals the Christian with.⁹⁵⁰ As St. Paul made effort to explain baptism in the Christian sense, John’s gospel refers to it (baptism) as a gift of God, which makes possible a new birth from water and the Spirit.⁹⁵¹

The new birth is the life that God bestows on the baptized at Baptism. The individual is born anew in the Holy Spirit, shares in the death and resurrection of Christ and incorporated in the community of believers where Christ is the Head. In the community of Christ’s Faithful,⁹⁵² as living Organism, the individual becomes a part of Christ’s body.⁹⁵³ The communicative structure of baptism is manifest in the incorporation into the Church. Just as for our sake, the saving mystery is fulfilled on the Cross in the death of Christ, the Church becomes an existing community of the baptised. T. Schneider maintains that this principal dimension gives baptism a communicative structure. God the Father mediates himself to the individual through the person and life of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (as person and medium). He does this in such a way that the individual is called, through Christ and the Spirit, to be admitted into the saving medium and to enter into union with God. This results the transcendental dimension of baptism. The response of the individual is faith. Paul uses faith and baptism interchangeably.⁹⁵⁴ They form communication where God’s communication of agape encourages the communication of the faith of the individual.⁹⁵⁵ For the fact that God’s love, that is, the “aesthetic dimension”, is revealed in Jesus Christ, it establishes the relationship of communications in the human existence. The saving mystery flows from existence to existence. This understanding removes the Aristotelian-Scholastic themes of cause and effect, and leads to the relationship of personal-dialogue that is fruitful and efficacious.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁴⁶ W. A. Van Roo, (1992), 15-16.

⁹⁴⁷ Cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 80-81; Compare this Christian understanding with the symbolism of “death-Resurrection” in the ancient Egyptian religion, and see similarity of thought. For the Christian, it is now a “dying and rising” with Christ. We may ask, which of these two religious symbolisms influenced the other- the ancient African initiatory rite or the Christian? (cf. Chapter three above; C. I. Onyewuenyi, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism*, Enugu: 1993, 53-54; cf. *New Africa*, May, 2001, no. 396, 2-35).

⁹⁴⁸ LG 7 §2.

⁹⁴⁹ Cf. UR 22 §2; T. Schneider, (1992), 87.

⁹⁵⁰ Cf. CCC 1272.

⁹⁵¹ Cf. Joh 1:33.

⁹⁵² Cf. CCC 1213.

⁹⁵³ Cf. 1 Cor 12:12, 17

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. Gal 3:26, 27; cf. Eph. 3:17; cf. Gal 3:2; 3:14; cf. Rom 6:4.

⁹⁵⁵ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 310.

⁹⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid cf. U. Kühn, *Art. Abendmahl IV. Das Abendmahlsgespräch in der ökumenischen Theologie der Gegenwart: TRE*, 239.

What is significant is that in the faithful proclamation function of the Church, Jesus alone knows the readiness of the baptised to respond to the dialogue that God initiates. The same individual realizes his life in concrete relationship with the God and Church. The baptismal act becomes an expression of the future *communio* and *communicatio* between the baptised and the community. Similarly, it serves the function of mediating communication between God and man. The living, historical condition of the individual has the consequence of understanding the social reality of the Church, both in her word and symbols (sacraments).⁹⁵⁷ This is the solidarity dimension of the baptised with the Church.

In union of the believers and the baptised with Christ, a unity is formed - the unity of the Christian community; enlivened by the Spirit. The salvation of the individual now has meaning in the community of the Believers (Christ's Body). Insofar as the individual is incorporated into the Church, through baptism, it does not guarantee automatic salvation, unless complemented by faith and love. K. Rahner highlights: the individual's sanctification can be acquired by means of faith and love only, without the sacrament. This is also possible in non-baptised persons. For this to happen, baptism must have a positive sense for the individual. Thus, the incorporation of the individual in the Church, which baptism effects, is not merely for the attainment of the individual salvation, but is realized in the context of the meaning and function of the Church.⁹⁵⁸ The Church, therefore, has the function of making salvation possible for the individual, but the individuals cannot achieve this without the tangible intervention of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* highlights that through baptism and the expression "Lay," all Christ's believers are loved, made the People of God, and share in the common priesthood of the people of God, in the prophetic and kingly offices of Christ.⁹⁵⁹ This compels them to an active participation in the Mission of the Church; to profess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church.⁹⁶⁰

The New Testament provides no direct witness on infant baptism. However, there are indirect ones that speak of the baptism of a whole family and household (cf. Acts 16:15; 33; 18:8; cf. I Cor 1:6). The gospel of Matthew, for instance, makes reference to Jesus "blessing of little children" (Mt 10:13-16). The Official Teaching centres its practice of infant baptism on tradition and parental love, which began in the second century when the "households" received baptism, and infants might also have been baptised.⁹⁶¹ She bases the justification of its practice on since man is born with a fallen human nature, and tainted with original sin, children have need of new birth in baptism to free them from the power of darkness, and bring them into the realm of the freedom of the children of God. G. Koch states that in the Judeo-Christian context, when baptism actually took the place of the rite of circumcision, it is understandable that infant baptism should be included, as well.⁹⁶² Infant baptism is an old practice of the Church.⁹⁶³ Origen traces its historical development to the Apostolic tradition⁹⁶⁴, where he maintains that the Church received from the Apostles, the tradition to baptise infants.⁹⁶⁵ Until the 5th Century it was a loosed tradition to confer baptism of removal of Original sin on grown ups, especially adults. From the 5th Century onwards, the Official Church's Teaching expresses more the justification and meaning of Infant baptism.⁹⁶⁶ Here, the Church did not define its essential necessity, rather,

⁹⁵⁷ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 310-311.

⁹⁵⁸ Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 415-416.

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. DH 1515, 1609, 1624.

⁹⁶⁰ Cf. LG 33 §2; 31 §2.

⁹⁶¹ Cf. CCC. 1250-1252; cf. Winterswyl: *Die Zwölfapostellehre. Eine urchristliche Gemeindeordnung*, Freiburg: 1954, 24; cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 91; cf. W. Breuning, "Die Kindertaufe im Licht der Dogmengeschichte", in: W. Kasper (ed.), *Christsein ohne Entscheidung?*, Mainz: 1970, 80.

⁹⁶² Cf. G. Koch, (ed.), *Sakramentenlehre I. "Allgemeine Sakramentenlehre bis Firmung"*, in: W. Beinert, (ed.) *Text zur Theologie, Dogmatik 9,1* (Graz-Wien-Köln: 1991), 400.

⁹⁶³ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instr. Pastoralis action", in: *AAS 72* (1980), 1137-1156.

⁹⁶⁴ Cf. Acts. 16:15, 33; 18:8; cf. I Cor. 1:16.

⁹⁶⁵ Cf. Origen, Rom 5: 9, 1047 A/C; tzt D9/1, Nr. 265; *FC*, Freiburg: 1990, 1, 34.

⁹⁶⁶ Cf. The Council of Carthage 418 (DH 223); Lateran Council 1215 (DH 802); Council of Trent (DH 1514 and 1625-1627).

explains its justification.⁹⁶⁷ O. Cullmann suggests that as regards infant baptism, all discussions on Baptism should begin with the theological definition of the essence and meaning of the sacrament. In addition, it is necessary to determine whether the early Church attested to infant Baptismal sources, or not. O. Cullmann uses passages that speak of the Baptism of “whole houses”⁹⁶⁸ to prove the existence of doctrine of infant baptism. But T. Schneider holds that the passages Cullman cited, do not offer effective proof of the practice of infant baptism in apostolic times.⁹⁶⁹ On Infant baptism, the Christian initiation lies on the action and agreement between faith and baptism. Baptism is not an individual action which only plays a role between Christ and the Christian. The salvation of the baptised does not stand before God as an individual entity, rather in the context of a living family, the saving community, and solidarity of all believers. Baptism, as living the Christian witness, has a consequence in the community of Christ’s believers. The child is brought to the Church by the parents who are already members of the Christian community. The Church baptises the infant in the faith of the parents who now have the duty of bringing up the child in the Christian faith. This act of baptism involves a public proclamation of the Christian faith. The subject of faith and the baptism is not the baptizer or the individual baptised. The step towards the individual salvation is a progress which, like in the early Church tradition, is foreign to the newly baptised. The individual needs daily constant personal effort, assisted by the grace of God, to live out the Christian principles.

The Church teaches that the necessity of Infant baptism is based on God’s call which awaits an answer in the child, who carries this grace. The answer is given and represented by that of the parents, sponsor and the Church in whose faith the child is baptised. This is possible because God makes Himself available to human beings also through their fellow human beings. Moreover, just as it is true that parents should not deny their child parental love, in the same way the Church should not deny the child her love.⁹⁷⁰ The child is baptised in the faith of the parents, the sponsor, and the Church (*ecclesia fidei*). This leads to an entrance, a process that the adult has to make a personal decision, to be or not to be for the Church. This leads to an entrance, a process by which the adult has to make a personal decision as to whether to belong or not to belong to the Church. F. J. Nocke maintains that this does not only take place once, but also in the celebration of Confirmation, and all through one’s life until death, just as it also affects a baptised adult.⁹⁷¹

In the view of T. Schneider, the Protestants reject child baptism.⁹⁷² But Protestants do not actually reject infant baptism; it is only that K. Barth, a Protestant theologian, had problems with it. According to Barth, it would constitute a *Gewaltakt* (Imposition) upon a child to baptize him – similar to the forced baptisms of Charlemagne – unless some provision were made for his

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. G. Koch, (1991), 400.

⁹⁶⁸ On the practice of infant baptism in the New Testament, O. Cullmann states that in the New Testament Church, that is, at the time of its emergence, the opportunity for such a practice would seldom occur even if it were in thorough agreement with primitive Church doctrine. Such opportunities only occur in two different cases: firstly, when a whole house in which there were infants came over into the Christian Church; and when, after the conversion and Baptism of the parents, children were born, a case not ordinarily occurring at the very earliest beginnings, but certainly in New Testament times. Therefore, when heathen came over into Judaism, their children also were subjected along with them to proselyte baptism. However, such children as were born only after the conversion of their parents did not have to be baptised. They ranked as sanctified through their parents, an important consideration in view of the analogy in 1 Cor 7:14. (cf. O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament: Studies in Biblical Theology*, J. K. S. Reidl, transl., London: 1969, 24-26). Even though such passages need special consideration as regards infant Baptism in the New Testament, he expresses with all possible caution on the historical question of its practice in the New Testament. This is because “there are in the New Testament decidedly fewer traces, indeed none at all, of the Baptism of adults born of parents already Christian and brought up by them. Chronologically such a case would have been possible about the year 50, if not earlier ... within New Testament times.” (Ibid).

⁹⁶⁹ Cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 99-102.

⁹⁷⁰ Cf. G. Koch, (1991), 402.

⁹⁷¹ Cf. F. J. Nocke, in: T. Schneider, (1992) 257.

⁹⁷² Cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 102.

subsequent, voluntary, and personal confession of faith, which follows upon a finished period of instruction, as belonging to such baptism as its final act.⁹⁷³ The question is whether baptism requires at all a free choice of faith, as this fails in child baptism.⁹⁷⁴ The present discussions in modern theology centre on the foundation that (1) Infant baptism is not essential and should, therefore, be rejected; (2) Infant baptism is given under known conditions; (3) The Christian parents should have a free choice for Infant baptism.

Celebrating baptism in the African context has some consequences. It involves the need to study initiation in the African Traditional Religion and how best to incorporate the initiatory process and forms. In Africa, for instance, baptism involves a process of learning and growth which touches not only the newly baptised but also the entire Church. It does not only affect the candidate to be received in the stages of the Church's life, but also the entire community of believers.⁹⁷⁵ The life of the individual in the Christian community involves interaction and socialization in the cultural context of the individual. According to F. J. Nocke, lively socialization always affects the society and culture in which the individual is integrated. Human beings find their identity in the socialization process which contributes to promoting the growth and liveliness of the group and the culture.⁹⁷⁶

E. Hillman brings out the implication of this in the human culture. In *Inculturation Applied*, he writes: "(...) in the present post-colonial climate it should be possible to rethink critically the history of expansion of Christianity among the peoples of the south [Africa]. It should even be more possible now to present the good news of Jesus of Nazareth 'creatively' to a people: to express it and celebrate it among them, without at the same time asking them to 'renounce their culture, with its immemorial 'religious values.'"⁹⁷⁷ Equally, K. Rahner expresses the need for both the gospel and theology to apply to the experiential condition of the subject that embraces culture and religion. He maintains that transcendental questions of faith and theology would not have any meaning unless they touch the concrete existence of the human subject.⁹⁷⁸ In addition, B. Lonergan opines that the only way out is to apply creativity in the communication of the gospel: To simply use the resources of one's culture is not to communicate with the other. Nor is it adequate simply to employ the resources of the other culture. One must do so creatively. God's love for mankind, as manifested in the incarnation, allows people to be themselves in their particular historical and cultural situations. And people need to be themselves, if they are to retain their psychological balance in the face of life's varied sounds and furies. So the only thing Christianity has to renounce is sinful behaviour, or any cultural element found to be clearly and demonstrably contrary to the gospel.⁹⁷⁹ Therefore, it is not enough to present Christianity to a people in their own language. A more comprehensive language in the anthropological sense must also be appreciated, assumed and used, namely: the language of the people's indigenous cultural symbols, signs, myths, rites, images, customs and gestures. It includes the aspirations, riches, limitations, ways of praying, loving, looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering. These are appropriate religious communication to a people.⁹⁸⁰

With regard to celebration of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) in Africa, it behoves the Church to study the African cultural world, her religious rites and symbols, and see how best to incorporate them into Christian initiation. As it touches

⁹⁷³ Cf. K. Barth, "Die kirchlichen Lehre von der Taufe", in: *Theol. Existenz* (1947), 29; cf. J. Jeremias, *Kindertaufe in den ersten 4 Jahrhunderten*, (Göttingen: 1958), 29ff; cf. P. K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, Michigan: 1980, 2.

⁹⁷⁴ Cf. K. Barth, *Der Christliche Glaube*, 138, *Dogmatik* 14, 4, Zürich: 1967, 34.

⁹⁷⁵ Cf. B. Kleinheyer, *Sakramentliche Feiern I* (DdK 7/1), 263; F. J. Nocke, (1992), 119.

⁹⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid 120.

⁹⁷⁷ E. Hillman, *Inculturation Applied*, (New York: 1993), 68, Bracket mine.

⁹⁷⁸ Cf. K. "Rahner, *Theologie und Anthropologie*", in: *ST VIII*, (Einsiedeln: 1967), 44-46.

⁹⁷⁹ Cf. B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, New York: 1972, 300, 362-363; cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican City, Ibadan: 1991, no. 24.

⁹⁸⁰ Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican City: 1975, 63.

baptism, for instance, U. E. Umorem makes this observation: “(...) it does not recognize the African community. It strips the African of his bearing with his community, ancestors, and history. Notice too that such Baptism rite snobs the ancestors. They are not invited, not mentioned. Notice that it is the individual uprooted and isolated that is baptized, evangelized. The chief elders of his patrilineage are not here.”⁹⁸¹ It presents a challenge on how best to incorporate this African value into the Christian initiation. A neglect of African traditional community because it is not specifically Christian, is not adequate. The fact that there is no where in the world that baptism does not create this dichotomy does not justify its perpetuation in Africa.⁹⁸²

Therefore, could initiation in the African Traditional Religion not offer any room for the individual to be an active participant in the mystery of salvation which also takes place in his cultural world?⁹⁸³ This touches on the practical relevance of the Christian sacraments of initiation in the African setting. There is need for change and for the incorporation of African rites into Christianity. On this necessity, E. Hillmann states to affirm the priority of each people’s local symbol systems is not to deny the importance of elements borrowed from other cultures, and the innovations thereby introduced. ‘Priority’ should not be interpreted as exclusive-changing, probably more often than not, contribute to the vitality of any society. Instead of trying always to avoid them, innovations may be seen generally as things to be integrated in the life of society *and the church in Africa*. The message of Jesus, however understood or misunderstood, has been a great force for change historically. This has been so even when Christianity was presented by means and methods subversive of its own mission and damaging to the people it intended ‘to save.’⁹⁸⁴ This is a matter of concern to incarnation of the liturgy in African culture.⁹⁸⁵

4.4.3 Confirmation

The sacrament of confirmation impresses an indelible character on the recipient. By it, the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and are bound more perfectly to the Church; it strengthens them and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith.⁹⁸⁶

The sacrament produces the following effects:

1. It confers on the receiver, the Holy Spirit whom the Lord sent upon the apostles on Pentecost.
2. It leaves an indelible mark on the soul of the baptized. Therefore, it designates one a Christian. Its effect lies on the gift of the Holy Spirit, an intensive incorporation into the Church and a special power of a witness of faith.⁹⁸⁷ This sacrament enjoys some biblical support.

4.4.3.1 Biblical Foundation

The Acts of the Apostles reports on the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day (cf. Acts 2: 1ff). The gifts of the Holy Spirit filled the young Church with divine life. It shows that what happened at this special event of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit and transmission of the gifts of the Holy Spirit⁹⁸⁸ continued with the laying on of the hand of the Apostles on the newly baptized Christians at Samaria and Ephesus.⁹⁸⁹ This historical, original and saving event

⁹⁸¹ U. E. Umorem, “Anthropological and Religious Viewpoint”, in: *AWAAC Seminar*, (Port-Harcourt: 1985), 61.

⁹⁸² Cf. Subsection 6.1.3.

⁹⁸³ Cf. Chapter five.

⁹⁸⁴ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 73. My italics.

⁹⁸⁵ Cf. Chapter six.

⁹⁸⁶ Cf. C. 879.

⁹⁸⁷ Cf. M. Hauke, *Die Firmung: Geschichtliche Entfaltung und theologischer Sinn*, Paderborn: 1999, 9.

⁹⁸⁸ Cf. Acts 2:38; 8:15, 17-19; 19:2.

⁹⁸⁹ Cf. Acts 8: 14-17; 19: 5.

is received from the sacrament of confirmation. The Old Testament already prepares for the Pentecost event. The Speech of St. Peter at Pentecost centres on the out-pouring of the spirit in the Old Testament and quotes the book of Joel 3:1-5 (cf. Acts 2:17-21). Nevertheless, exegesis affirms that the text of Joel has nothing to do with the sacrament of confirmation rather it deals with the extension and fulfilment of the horizon in which one could see the sacrament.⁹⁹⁰

In its etymological context, the word “Spirit” derives from the Hebrew word, *Ruach*, (*pneuma* in Greek), which means “wind”, “breath”. Wind is a power, which sets other thing in motion. It gives the human breath the power of life. In the book of Genesis, the *ruach* (spirit) of God moves like a storm over the flood (cf. Gen 1:2). In Gen 6:17 the life of God is designated as *ruach*, *Spirit*. The word “Spirit” embraces the power of the wind, which with reference to breath, is the life principle of human beings, and the power of God’s life.⁹⁹¹ The Old Testament designates the Spirit of God as the author of extra-ordinary physical and psychical effects. It manifests its power in different ways. In the times of Judges, it shows its power in the figure of a leader who leads his people from the oppression of war to freedom (cf. Judges 6:33). The Spirit of God works in different ways in man. It gives the power of saving action (cf. Ex 31:3; 35:31), to the Judges the power of judgment (cf. Num 11:7) and Joseph wisdom (cf. Gen 41:38). The Holy Spirit is connected with the forgiveness of sin and inner-change of man (cf. Ps 51:13). The spirit is united in a special way with the prophets. The spirit of God empowers a prophet/ess to speak in the name of God. The person is filled with the spirit of God. Like Micah, he/she is called to the service of the prophet (cf. Micah, 3:8). The Spirit of God is given to King David as a power for the office of a ruler (cf. Is 11:3-9).⁹⁹² The Songs of the servant of God, which derives from the exilic period, praises the coming of a son of God who will gather his people and be a light to the pagans. He will expiate the sins of the people through his death. Similarly, through it God will be praised.⁹⁹³ For this mission, God puts his spirit on him (cf. Is 42:1). In these passages, there is the personification of the spirit, and gradual taking up of a masculine character. In the Drito-Isaiah, there is the report of the full out-pouring of the spirit by which the one anointed by God proclaims the Good News (Is 61:1).

“Anointing”, originally, is a rite for the appointment of priests and kings. It designates the image of the end-time (eschatological) prophet. In Isaiah, the “Messiah” (Christus) is called the anointed (cf. Is 39:29). The Prophet Isaiah shows a complete renewal that arises from the Spirit of God which follows the action of human beings that has inner effect. The Spirit is a gift to the inner man (cf. Jer 31:33). It also applies to the great promise of the prophet Jeremiah who speaks of the new Covenant that God would write in the hearts of men (cf. Jer 31:33). The book of Joel, written in 400 BC, speaks of the “Day of the Lord” that would usher in terrible judgement and cosmic signs. On that day, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Similarly, the prophet proclaims the good news of salvation to all. God would pour his spirit on humanity. Both old and young, slaves and free men and women would share the gifts of the spirit of God.⁹⁹⁴ The presence of the spirit of God manifests itself, especially in the gift of prophecy, which includes dreams and visions (cf. Num 12:6). It fulfils itself in old yearnings which lead back to the time of Moses. The spirit of God calls Moses (cf. Num 11:29). The already quoted prophetic dreams and visions of Joel should not be merely understood as external signs, but instead as signs of the incomprehensible presence of the spirit of God that leads one to inner change. In addition, Ezekiel already wrote of the eschatological renewal of the human hearts. The prophet Joel took this prophecy of Ezekiel and its verbal formulation.⁹⁹⁵ The prophetic promise of the out-pouring of the gifts of the Spirit at the end of time surpasses the effects of the divine spirit on the charismatic figures (like Simon) which the time of the Judges reports (cf. Judges 13:25; 14:6). The out-pouring of the Spirit of God brings about inner dynamic movement that would result to a

⁹⁹⁰ Cf. J. Gamberoni, “Die Geistbegabung im Alten Testament, besonders nach Joel 3: 1-5”: Nordhues/Petri: 1974, 10.

⁹⁹¹ Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 11.

⁹⁹² Cf. Ibid 12.

⁹⁹³ Cf. Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53, 12.

⁹⁹⁴ Cf. Joel 3:1-5; Acts 2:17-21.

⁹⁹⁵ Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 15.

new creation of the human hearts. The gift of the Spirit is not a gift subordinate to the other. Rather, it is a gift of God. It is from this tradition that the prophecy of the out-pouring of the Spirit of Joel derives. It is also the condition for understanding the significance of the Acts of the Apostles and the universality of the out-pouring of the spirit on all flesh – the whole of Israel would experience the gift of God at the end of time. This forms the background for understanding Acts 2:1ff.⁹⁹⁶

4.4.3.2 Confirmation in the West

Tertullian (220 AD): The oldest detailed witness of the process of Christian initiation comes from the African theologian, Tertullian. His writing on baptism (*De baptismo*) gives us a picture of how the incorporation into the Church in Carthage began in 200 AD.⁹⁹⁷ Tertullian already knows the actual motives of the present day rite of Confirmation. Very peculiar to Tertullian is that the baptismal bath is united with the proclamation of faith in the Trinity, the blessing of water for baptism and the rejection of Satan. He emphasizes that the Holy Spirit gives the water the power of healing.⁹⁹⁸ Then comes the anointing with Oil, making the sign of the Cross on the forehead and laying of the hand, as post baptismal rite. Anointing the whole body of the baptised with oil confers on him/her the name “Christ”, which means “anointed.” The actual descent of the Holy Spirit is at the laying of the hand (*imposition manus*) through the word of blessing that invite the Holy Spirit. The laying of the hand occurs after the word of blessing (benediction) is said.⁹⁹⁹

Cyprian of Carthage (+258). After Tertullian, we meet the witness of Cyprian of Carthage of North Africa who, in his quarrel with Pope Stephen I maintains that the baptism of heretics was not valid and should be repeated during incorporation into the church. He holds the view that during the laying on of the hand the Holy Spirit is invoked and poured on the baptized.¹⁰⁰⁰ In addition, it is not enough for former heretics to receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hand when they did not receive baptism of the Church. Using the gospel of John (Joh 3: 5), he maintains that one who is not born of water and Spirit cannot enter into the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁰¹ Therefore, it seems to him, that baptism and the laying on of the hand were double sacraments that lead to rebirth.¹⁰⁰² The newly baptized, realizes this in the double sacrament of Water and Laying of the hand. In another letter, he differentiates between “birth” from the water of baptism and “birth” from the mediation of the Holy Spirit. For him, the newly born in baptism is the “temple of God” on whom the Holy Spirit could be poured through the laying on of the hand. That is why it is not possible to separate Christ from the Holy Spirit. He maintains that it is not enough for water to cleanse sins and to sanctify human beings without the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰³

Using the biblical myth of Adam, Cyprian explains that no one is born by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hand, but through baptism as in Adam.¹⁰⁰⁴ In addition, the baptized must be anointed so that by receiving the Chrism (anointing), he can become God’s anointed and possess the grace of Christ in him.¹⁰⁰⁵ The oil of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), according to Cyprian, is blessed by the Bishop on the Altar. Then the sign of the cross on the forehead, which goes back to Tertullian, marks the end of the rite of initiation. To Cyprian we have a similar post-baptismal rite of initiation as it was fifty years before with Tertullian. What is only new is that he shifts the signing of the forehead with cross that used to precede the laying on of the hand

⁹⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid

⁹⁹⁷ Cf. *De baptismo*, *CChr.SL* 1; 227,295; deutsch: BKV² 7, 274-299; cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 53.

⁹⁹⁸ Cf. *De baptismo*, (*CChr. SL* 1,2,279f); cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 54.

⁹⁹⁹ Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 55.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Cf. Ep 73, 9 (*CSEL* 3/2, 775; dt.: BKV² 60;332); Ep 73,21 (*CSEL* 3/2, 195; dt. BKV², 60,353).

¹⁰⁰¹ Cf. Ep 70, 1 (*CSEL* 3/2, 775; 784f, BKV² 60; 342f); cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 59.

¹⁰⁰² Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 59.

¹⁰⁰³ Cf. Ep. 74 (*CSEL* 3/2, 803; dt. BKV² 60, 361f). cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 59.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Cf. Ep. 74,7 (*CSEL* 3/2, 804; dt.: BKV² 60, 363).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Cf. Ep. 70,2, (*CSEL* 3/2, 768; dt. BKV² 60,343; cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 59.

to end of the rite. Thus, he has this order: Water ritual – Anointing – Prayer with the Laying of the Hand and Making the Sign of the Cross on the forehead.¹⁰⁰⁶

St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397). In the fourth century we see the witness of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. In his two works, *De sacramentis and De mysteriis*, he gives a detailed report of the process of ritual celebration of Easter initiation and the meaning of each rite. There is the practice of the washing of the foot after baptism. In comparison with the theology of Tertullian and Cyprian, Ambrose bears witness to Trinitarian theology and tries to explain the Spirit, which Arianism challenges. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God and work together. What concerns us most here is the understanding and practice of Confirmation according to Ambrose. After baptism with water, what follows is the anointing of the body with oil by the Bishop. The oil of anointment (in Gk. *Myron*) makes one a King (1 Peter 2: 9) and Priest.¹⁰⁰⁷ At the anointing with oil the Bishop says the following prayer: “God the almighty Father, through whom you are born in water and spirit, and forgives your sins, anoints you to eternal life.”¹⁰⁰⁸ After the rite of anointing the body with oil, the Bishop inserts a special rite of washing of the feet, followed by the spiritual sign (*spiritale signaculum*). After the baptism at the baptismal bond, there follows fulfilment (*perfectio*) at which the bishop invokes the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of enlightenment and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of holy fruit, and the seven powers of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰⁹ It is not our intention here to trace the whole history of the development of Confirmation in the West¹⁰¹⁰, but to determine its nature in this early period of the Church. Therefore, from the above, what is obvious is that in the early history of the Church, Baptism and Confirmation belong to the single Christian rite of initiation. With the passage of time, the two came to be separated and exist now as independent sacraments. Despite the separation, the two are still ultimately one.¹⁰¹¹ They could be regarded as one sacrament with two points.¹⁰¹² The unity of Baptism and Confirmation as one sacrament comes into play with the anointing with the oil of Chrism at baptism which confers on the baptized the responsibility of a Christian witness in the world. It is the same spirit that is conferred at baptism that is renewed at Confirmation.¹⁰¹³

The separation of these two Sacraments which took effect in the Latin Church in the sixteenth century with the sanction of the Council of Trent (13th Dec.1545- 4th Dec. 1563)¹⁰¹⁴ was necessitated more by practical than dogmatic reasons.¹⁰¹⁵ In reaction to the Reformers’ denial of

¹⁰⁰⁶ Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 61.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Cf. *De Sacr.* 4,1,3; *De Mst.* 6,30, (*FC* 3,134) 228).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 2/7,24 (*FC* 3,114); cf. J. Schmitz, *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand*, (Theopaneia 25), Köln/Bonn: 1975, 160-167.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Cf. *De Sacr.* 3,2,8 (*FC*. Freiburg, 1990/3,124).

¹⁰¹⁰ For more readings on Confirmation in the West, cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 53-115.

¹⁰¹¹ Cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 112.

¹⁰¹² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Sakrament der Gottesbegegnung*, Mainz: 1960, 164.

¹⁰¹³ “Ist der eine Geist, der in der Tauf und (Firm-) Salbung verliehen wird, kann die Differenz nur darin bestehen, daß die eine Wirksamkeit des Parakleten durchaus unterschiedliche Akzente annehmen kann, weshalb die in der Taufe geschenkte Geistmitteilung (Heils-Indikativ) den Getauften zum aktiven Leben in der Kraft dieses Geistes veranlaßt (Heils-Imperativ), was in einem eigenen Sakrament durchaus seinen sichtbaren Ausdruck finden mag”. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 312; cf. T. Schneider, (1992), 110-114.

¹⁰¹⁴ Cf. DH 1601, 1628.

¹⁰¹⁵ A. M. Rodriguez Rodriguez reports: In the early Christian centuries it was usual for Bishops to celebrate the Rites of Christian initiation, performing Baptism, and Confirmation together. In the Dioceses, the priests were not allowed to exercise any priestly function without the Bishop’s consent. With the peace, which the Church entered with Emperor Constantine in 313 AD, the number of converts to Christianity greatly increased. Then, it became necessary for priests and deacons to be entrusted with the duty of evangelisation of the entire Roman Nation and other small neighbouring States, where Bishops could not be placed. Therefore, the authority of Bishops at this time was more or less no longer sought for the conferment of Baptism and Confirmation. Therefore, where it was not possible for the Bishop to confer these Sacraments, priests and deacons had to baptize the Catechumen, and what followed immediately was Confirmation. The issue that came up later was whether the priests should administer Confirmation or separate both Rites, and reserve Confirmation to a Bishop. It was in the Church of

the sacramental character of the Sacrament stated, the Council teaches that it is “a true and actual sacrament.”¹⁰¹⁶ The Anglican and Lutheran churches, in the 16th century Reformation, considered Confirmation as a puberty rite.¹⁰¹⁷ The Council of Florence (26th February 1439-August, 1445) had already spoken of the bishop as the *minister ordinarius* of Confirmation.¹⁰¹⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, article 26, on the other hand, designates the bishop as *minister originarius* (original minister). But the Code of Canon Law, 1983 Code did not make use of this new term. Rather, it designates the bishop as *minister ordinarius* (ordinary minister).¹⁰¹⁹ It explains the bishop, in the case of necessity, could grant the faculty to confirm to one or more specific priests of his diocese to administer the sacrament.¹⁰²⁰ Furthermore, it states that for a grave cause, the bishop and even the priest endowed with the faculty of confirming in virtue of the law or the special grant of competent authority can in single cases, administer the sacrament. The same applies to associate priests.¹⁰²¹ The priest is the *minister extraordinarius* (extraordinary minister) of the sacrament.¹⁰²²

Both in the periods of Pre- and Post- Tridentine Councils, evidence on the correspondence of the words of Jesus (even when one reads about the promise of the Holy Spirit) and an apostolic tradition are lacking to legitimize the institution of Confirmation as a separate Sacrament. But, the Church tried to interpret the laying on of hand by the Apostles Peter and John in Samaria as indirect evidence of Christ’s institution of this sacrament (Acts 8:14-17). But, as A. Ganoczy contends, the legitimization does not enjoy any exegetical support. Moreover, the Church’s practice of the first second and half centuries does not give any evidence on the separation of Confirmation from Baptism. For Cyprian there were varied Patristic accounts on the reason for the bishop’s intervention in the initiation process. The Church’s Synod held in Elvira, Spain (300-303 AD) ruled that the believer who in serious sickness received baptism in danger of death from a lay Christian or is baptized by a deacon could receive a fulfilment of the sacrament through the laying on of the hand with a bishop’s blessing.¹⁰²³ However, the whole rite did not take the name “Confirmatio” (confirmation). It was just a measure in emergency. The same Synod, following St. Paul’s missionary report on Samaria, further gave the highest Church authority on the diocesan level, the mandate to see the rightful function of the initiation processes. What was emphasized at that time was that baptism should be well prepared for: it should be ministered in the Church and be under the supervision of the Bishop.

Almost all the Greek Church Fathers, right from Chrysostom, agree that the rite of the completion of baptism and the fulfilment of the baptismal grace were derived from the power of the Apostles. But the Medieval Scholastics of the West ruled on the right of the Bishops. The bishop has the duty to bless the Holy Oil, and the valid “ordinary minister” of the sacrament. It was from the 12th century A.D that this rite became generally designated as *confirmation* (Confirmatio), a single sacrament, and second of the seven sacraments.

The Teaching on the Armenians (1439) brings out the efficacy of the sacrament. It increases grace and strengthens faith.¹⁰²⁴ The Catechism of the Council of Trent maintains that it produces the specific effect of fulfilling the baptismal grace (Cat. Rom 11:3, 19). The Thomists of the new age give a two-fold character of the sacrament. It leaves an indelible mark on the soul to fight against the enemies of the faith. It configures one to Christ as Teacher, King of Justice

Orient that the Roman Catholic Church decided on this second solution, to reserve the administration of Confirmation to a Bishop. (cf. A. M. Rodriguez, *Der Spender der Firmung*: Conc 4, 1968, 517; cf. E. Ruffini, *Die Frage des Firmalters*: Conc 4 1968, 579).

¹⁰¹⁶ Cf. DH. 1628.

¹⁰¹⁷ Cf. M. Hauke, (1999), 419.

¹⁰¹⁸ Cf. DH 1318.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. C. 882.

¹⁰²⁰ Cf. C. 884 § 1.

¹⁰²¹ Cf. C. 884 § 2.

¹⁰²² Cf. RConf. 7, DOL. 2516.

¹⁰²³ Cf. DH 120.

¹⁰²⁴ Cf. DH 1311, 1319.

and High Priest, and confers on one the duty to a public profession of the faith. Following the Scholastics, contemporary Catholic Theology sees Confirmation as necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.¹⁰²⁵ *Lumen Gentium* bases its institution on Jesus Christ, that is, through it the baptised are more perfectly united to the Church and enriched with special strength of the Holy Spirit. In addition, through it, they are constituted true witnesses of Christ and strictly obliged to spread and defend the Christian faith by word and deed.¹⁰²⁶ Similarly, it gives another accent in the interpretation of this sacrament. Its primary goal lies on the mission of the Church in the world that baptism lays its foundation. It emphasizes the social and functional aspects of baptism, maintaining that through it, the person is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is the sacrament of giving witness to the faith, of charismatic fullness, of the mission of one sealed with the Spirit to give witness to the world so that it will become subject to the lordship of God. That is why “the grace of confirmation, is the grace of the Church for its mission to the world and for proclaiming the world’s transfiguration.”¹⁰²⁷ It participates in the sacramentality of Baptism and it is only in this sense that it is understood as Sacrament.¹⁰²⁸

With the original meaning of Confirmation separated from Baptism as second stage of Baptism, the question arises as to whether to administer it to children or not. It also produces the biblical character of infant Baptism.¹⁰²⁹ On the question of at what age should a baptised person be confirmed, the 1983 Code of Canon Law recommends the age of discretion as the appropriate age for confirmation, unless the Conference of Bishops determines another age, or in the judgement of the minister a grave cause warrants otherwise.¹⁰³⁰ Several ages are proposed, namely: (6-8), or puberty age (12-16), or age of adolescence (17-20) to the age of a matured person (20-30).¹⁰³¹ In Nigeria, the Catholic Bishops Conference leaves the determination of age to the discretion of the local ordinary.¹⁰³² In Germany, on the other hand, Confirmation is administered as part of a transition of school life, generally between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Generally, this sacrament is received at the age of discretion. The Code of Canon Law recommends that it should be regularly renewed and deepened at each Sunday Eucharistic celebration as well as yearly at the Easter Vigil. Moreover, as a more mature acceptance and manifestation of the Christian faith and witness, it should be in continuity with the same baptismal commitment which all the baptized, including unconfirmed young people, are expected to renew always in the Christian community during the Eucharist.¹⁰³³ The essence of this is for completion and continuing renewal of initiation.

1025 Cf. *The Roman Ritual*, Rite of Confirmation (OC), Introduction 1.

1026 Cf. LG 11.

1027 Cf. K. Rahner, (1960), 417.

1028 Cf. J. Amougou-Atangana, *Ein Sakrament des Geistempfangs? Zum Verhältnis von Taufe und Firmung*, (Freiburg: 1974), 312.

1029 Cf. K. Barth, in: *Theol. Existenz* (München: 1947), 29; J. Jeremias, *Kindertaufe in den ersten 4 Jahrhunderten* (Göttingen: 1958), 29ff.

1030 Cf. C. 891. The 1917 Code stipulates that confirmation in the Latin Church be administered at about the seventh year of age, but allowed earlier confirmation in two cases, namely: in the case of danger of death, and secondly, case the minister judges an earlier age to be necessary for just and grave cause.

However, an authentic interpretation of *CIC* 788 of the former Code instructs that postponing the age of confirmation to the tenth year could not be sustained.

The 1983 Code gave a broad concession to diverse pastoral practice, stating that as regards children, in the Latin Church, the administration of Confirmation is generally delayed until about the seventh year. However, for pastoral reasons, especially to implant deeply in the lives of the faithful complete obedience to Christ the Lord and a firm witnessing to him, it grants power to the conferences of bishops to determine more appropriate age. Thus, the sacrament is given after adequate formation, when the recipients are more matured (cf. C. 891).

1031 Cf. Ruffini, (1968), 579.

1032 Cf. C.B.C.N., *Particular Complementary Norms to the Revised Code*, Onitsha: 1985, 31.

1033 Cf. C. 881.

4.4.4 The Eucharist as Third Stage of Christian Initiation

The Eucharist is the third point of the Christian initiation. F.-J. Nocke maintains that there is no sacrament, in the course of history, that received deep comprehensive analysis and work of explanation as the mystery cult of the Lord's Supper just as none has received so much theological and confessional controversy as the "sacramentum unitatis".¹⁰³⁴ This is with particular reference to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We have to note that what Jesus Christ meant with the symbolic action of his Last Supper and which form his spoken words, prayers, and actions, can only be understood in the context of the early Christian practice of preaching.¹⁰³⁵

The Lord's Supper (Community Meal): Meal is a universal phenomenon that characterizes not only the ancient religions but also the historical ones.¹⁰³⁶ For H.-J. Klauck, the Lord's Supper is genetically derived from the ancient mystery cult.¹⁰³⁷ In its original sense, the Eucharist is first understood as a meal. The Lukan Theology presents the periscope of the Last Supper in the form of worship from which the Christian community derives life (cf. Lk 22:7-38). In the Acts of the Apostles, the ideal type of community life is closely connected with the breaking of bread, the body of Christ (cf. Acts 2:42-47). In the Eucharist the element of the meal prevails. The liturgical celebration of the Mass makes available this element of the meal which commemorates the paschal banquet and perpetuates the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, where he gave his life as a ransom for many (cf. Heb 9:12). In the meal, the Lord offers his body and blood for the nourishment of his people.¹⁰³⁸ He sustains His people through this wonderful sacrament.

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians expresses the identity of the Eucharistic food of the Church and the body and blood of Jesus Christ (cf. I Cor 11:23-27).¹⁰³⁹ It is the body which was offered at Jesus' Last Supper. It is the crucified body of Jesus. The (Pauline) statements and critique on the Corinthian activities on the Lord's Supper emphasize community gatherings (cf. I Cor 11:17; 18:20; 33:34).¹⁰⁴⁰ This gathering facilitates communion with Christ. Here, just like in Luke, the meal indicates the existence of a community which derives its nourishment from the table of the Lord. It establishes a faithful communication with Christ (cf. Joh 6:51).¹⁰⁴¹ Meuffels maintains that faith and community life constituted basic elements in participating in the sacramental celebration of the meal¹⁰⁴² which concretely manifests itself in the love of the neighbour (cf. Joh 13: 34 f).¹⁰⁴³

By partaking of the Lord's meal means in effect to proclaim the death of Jesus as efficacious and salvific.¹⁰⁴⁴ The individual is incorporated into the community of the one spiritual body of Jesus Christ (cf. Joh 6:56). The permanence of this food in the Church *and as* food of the church arises from the Lord's command to remember him, which is immediately connected with the words of the institution: "Do this in memory of me" – a statement that does not arise from the historical Jesus, rather from the witness of the early Christian community. The Eucharistic bread and the blessing of the cup become sources of communion of the Christian with the crucified and risen Lord (cf. I Cor 10:16).¹⁰⁴⁵ H.-J. Klauck interprets the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup as establishing union with the risen Christ realized through participation in his Body and Blood. This expresses the efficacy of the element of *Koinonia* or communion in the Eucharist.

¹⁰³⁴ F.-J. Nocke, *Sakramenten Theologie*, Düsseldorf: 1997, 66.

¹⁰³⁵ Cf. Ibid

¹⁰³⁶ Cf. Ibid 313.

¹⁰³⁷ H.-J. Klauck, *Gemeinde. Amt. Sakrament: Neutestamentliche Perspektiven*, Würzburg: 1989, 313.

¹⁰³⁸ Cf. Joh. 6: 52-55; F. G. Nocke, "Spezielle Sakramentenlehre", in: T. Schneider, (ed.) *HD*, 2 (1992), 275-277; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 314.

¹⁰³⁹ H.-J. Klauck, (1989), 315.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Cf. A. Ganoczy, (1989), 80.

¹⁰⁴¹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 315; F.-J. Nocke, (1992), 280.

¹⁰⁴² Cf. Joh 6:51 b; 6; 40:47 and 6:53.

¹⁰⁴³ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 315-317.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid

¹⁰⁴⁵ Cf. H.-J. Klauck, "1Korintherbrief", in: R. Schnackenburg, (ed.), *NEB*, 7 (Würzburg: 1987), 73.

The primary transmitters of the banquet meal are the four accounts of the New Testament books.¹⁰⁴⁶ They report on how Jesus before and after his death called his disciples to a brotherly community in the context of “table meal.” It gives them the hope of the arrival of God’s kingdom and the final coming of God’s Spirit. The four accounts have to do with the witness of the early Christian community in the context of preaching. However, many interpretations emerge on this action of Jesus. Three theological motives surround the action, namely: (A) The *preaching* which commemorates the death of Jesus where the memorial character of the liturgical symbols takes place. (B) The *consciousness* which all the disciples of Jesus have that this memorial Supper takes place here and now at the table. The power of reconciliation of the self-sacrifice of Jesus is designated as a “New Covenant.” (C) The *expectation* which the disciples of Jesus have for the successful coming of the Kingdom of the Father. These interpretations help one to understand the motive behind the commemoration of this paschal mystery by the early Church. Another dimension of the Eucharist is the covenant aspect.

4.4.4.1 The Aspect of Covenant

Covenant (*berith*, Hb.), in the ancient world, were solemn agreements by which societies attempted to standardize the behaviour of individuals and social organizations, especially, in contexts in which social control was either inadequate or nonexistent. Covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath, which may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action.¹⁰⁴⁷ It explains a bond of relationship between two parties who enter into agreements and contracts that implies rights and duties that were usually reciprocal.

The seal or symbol of the agreement distinguishes a covenant from a contract. That is why legal procedure may be entirely secular, for law characteristically does not require that each member of the legal community voluntarily swear an oath to obey the law. In an ordinary legal procedure the sanctions of the law are carried out by appropriate agencies of the society itself, not by transcendent powers beyond the control of man and society. Covenants originated in the prehistoric times. They served as well-developed political instruments by the third millennium BC, and might have developed at least in part out of marriage contracts.¹⁰⁴⁸

4.4.4.2 Biblical Tradition

In the biblical tradition, the concept of covenant has been of great importance; from it emerges the long tradition of the Bible into the Old and New Testaments (Covenants). Two aspects characterize the biblical understanding of the term covenant. First, it deals with union of life and law. Union of life establishes a deep relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel. The second requirement, law, indicates the commitment assumed by the people in an explicit manner. Thus it constitutes the covenant rite. The existence of a formula is the heart of the covenant. Such is the interpretation of the priestly writing concerning the inner significance of the covenant which Yahweh offered to Israel at Sinai with the form: “I shall be your God and you shall be my people” (cf. Ex 24:1-11). The covenant at Sinai, a typical early biblical covenant form, is like a marriage covenant containing the two elements of marriage act: “indicating marriage is a legal contract to which both parties assent before witnesses. Secondly, it is a moment when both parties, having plighted their troth, promise to be faithful and loyal to each other till their life’s end.”¹⁰⁴⁹

The original Hebrew term *chesed* is used to denote this attitude of loyalty and faithfulness which both parties to a covenant should observe towards each other. It may have come to be used because of the zeal which the two parties are supposed to shown in thus coming together to bind themselves in keenness and eagerness; but in Hebrew the major factor is that it is used

¹⁰⁴⁶ Cf. Mk. 14:22-25, Mt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:15-20 and, 1 Cor. 11:22-25.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Cf. W. Dryness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, South Africa, Cape Town: 1979, 113.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Cf. J. Giblet / G. Pierre, “Covenant,” in: *DBT*, (London: 1992), 93-98.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Cf. G. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, London: 1964, 194.

definitely in connection with the idea of covenant-relationship. To manifest this relationship, the gathering of the people of Israel is theologically described with the word *qahal*.

The New Testament Understanding: The understanding of covenant in the New Testament is expressly evident in the Letter to the Hebrews. The Letter casts doubt on the efficacy of the Old covenant, calling it weak. Its sacrifices are incapable of removing sins (cf. Heb 10:1, 11) and appropriate only to external matters (cf. Heb. 9:9f). The criticism of the Letter to the Hebrews on Old Testament sacrifices does not amount to a dismissal, for the ancient rites are also said to suffice and sanctify, at least at that external level (cf. Heb 9:13).¹⁰⁵⁰ The Letter distinguishes Christ from Moses and Aaron, and the salvation wrought by him from theirs, in kind rather than in degree. In many instances, the Letter to the Hebrews compares between the conditions of earthly life and the hope of the new. In effect, these comparisons are the same: In its perspective the old covenant yielded only earthly satisfactions and, though it could point to the better hope, it could not realize it. Chapters 10 and 11 compares the new covenant with human life regarded as unfulfilled and painful for all¹⁰⁵¹, especially for those who have surrendered such earthly goods which they possessed in the hope of receiving heavenly security. Elsewhere it compares earthly goods as such (including salvation available under the old covenant) with the grace of Christ.¹⁰⁵² The blood became the seal of the new covenant.¹⁰⁵³

J. Dunnill surmises that the constant repetition of the relative praise, always favouring the new over the old, accumulates into an impression of a total and qualitative superiority. What is important is that any understanding or appreciation of the new covenant must begin from the recognition of the goodness of the world as created by God and the graciousness and power of the old covenant made with Israel.¹⁰⁵⁴

It is not so much our concern to treat the historical development of the Eucharist in dogma and theology, like the “transubstantiation”¹⁰⁵⁵ as to expose its sacramental character, as a symbol of communication of divine mystery, which it shares with other sacraments.

4.4.4.3 Sacramental Character

The Eucharist is a sacrament and shares this character with other sacraments: “It is a symbol of sacred thing and the visible form of invisible grace.”¹⁰⁵⁶ In it, Christ seals a new covenant between God and humanity which replaces the old one.¹⁰⁵⁷ In short terms, its sacramental nature explicitly makes present the life of Jesus and his love of total self-giving in four different ways: (1) Personal Presence (cf. 1 Cor 11:20); (2) Communicative actual presence (the crucified Christ carries the wound in his Body such that a commemoration of this act makes it actually present 1 Cor 11:26). The Church by really accepting Jesus Christ as real food; doing this in a courageous reality of faith, she realizes and actualizes her thankful response to God’s gift of grace – His self-communication. This communication is the most intense self-communication executed in flesh and blood, in the life of Jesus, which has always been loved and accepted¹⁰⁵⁸; (3) Final presence: The sacrament renews the past, commemorates in the present the eschatological meal at the end of time (cf. 1 Cor 11:26). (4) Somatic Real Presence: The Eucharist celebrates the different forms of Christ’s presence, from his crucifixion and resurrection, manifest in his saying, “This is my Body that will be given unto you” (1 Cor 11:25; “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you” (Lk 22:20).¹⁰⁵⁹

¹⁰⁵⁰ Cf. J. Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in The Letter to the Hebrews*, Australia: 1992, 229.

¹⁰⁵¹ Cf. Heb 10:34; 11:16, 26:35, 40.

¹⁰⁵² Cf. J. Dunnill, (1992), 229.

¹⁰⁵³ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1989), 325.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cf. J. Dunnill, (1992), 230.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Cf. W. Beinert, *Glaubenszugänge, Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, Paderborn: 1995, 428.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Cf. DH 1639.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Cf. Gen 17:14; 12:1; 29:14; cf. Ex 24:1- 8.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Cf. W. Beinert, (1995), 426.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 314.

Jesus Christ wishes this sacrament to be the pledge of our future glory and everlasting happiness. Therefore, it remains a symbol of the one Body, with himself, the head, and he wishes the members to be bound together by the closest union of faith, hope, and love.¹⁰⁶⁰ This is the eschatological character of the Eucharist that foreshadows the future meal at the Table of the Lord.

4.4.4.4 Sacrificial Character

Sacrifice is another important dimension of the Eucharist. It is an act of offering to a deity something precious, especially the killing of a victim on an altar; giving up something for the sake of something else.¹⁰⁶¹ In the Old Testament, sacrifice usually takes place with gift. A gift (in Heb *Korban*) is a transference of something from one person to another and involves deprivation on the one side, gain on the other.¹⁰⁶² Some of these gifts would not be included in a modern classification of sacrifices; others possibly would. The sacrifice of Cain and Abel were typical examples of gifts (cf. Gen.4). The presentation of gifts to God was important element in Hebrew practice. Two key words suggest the idea of gifts to God. The first is “gift” itself, and the second is “offering”. The third term is “oblation”. Some presentations of gifts to Yahweh were made within the context of an altar ritual; certain gifts were not. The latter includes both money payments in the form of half-shekel Temple tax and the contributions in kind which were delivered direct to the priests or sacred classes without presentation at the altar. In certain cases, sacrifice takes the form of commutation or money valuation. This one points to the absence or waning of any idea of communion and to the presence or strengthening of the idea of gift.¹⁰⁶³

4.4.4.4.1 Sacrifice in the Scripture

In the Old Testament, certain sacrifices are chiefly propitiatory and expiatory in nature. Propitiatory sacrifices trace their origin beyond the Jewish religion. It already existed among the Philistines.¹⁰⁶⁴ In Babylonian language, propitiation is called *Kuppuru*, meaning to purge, purify. The aim of this form of sacrifice is to remove sin. A typical example of propitiatory sacrifice is the story of Saul’s pursuit of David (cf. 1Sam 26:1f).¹⁰⁶⁵ This form of sacrifice, which takes the form of the ritual of the red cow, rests on or is the survival of some primitive rite that is not the ritual sacrifice. The red cow was not sacrificed on Yahweh’s altar. It was not in any other way ever presented or offered to Yahweh. It is not a sin-offering, but a means for the removal of sin, that is, expiatory offering (cf. Num 8:5f). When this form of sacrifice took place, it did not so much refer to the fact that they were offerings to Yahweh as that they were victims by means of which the sins of the men who offered them were removed, whether in virtue either of the gift of the animal to God or of some element in the ritual disposition of it (cf. Lev 4: 8).¹⁰⁶⁶ Propitiatory and expiatory sacrifices arose in priestly circles. They already existed in these circles before the exile. It had been familiar to Ezekiel before he left Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Important elements of the ritual of these sacrifices including the ritual eating of sacrificial meal by the *priests* were already established before the exile. Some other sacrifices in Jewish religion were pre-eminently happy occasions, but in theory at least and at times in practice also, occasions for dwelling on the goodness of Yahweh and professing gratitude to him (cf. Dt 26). What is obvious is: “When we combine the wide prevalence of Eucharistic first-fruit presentations, the liturgy of Dt 26, and the large place in Hebrew sacrificial rites of feasting and mirth, we may somewhat safely conclude

¹⁰⁶⁰ Cf. DH. 1638.

¹⁰⁶¹ Cf. G. Kam, “Opfer” in: W. Kasper, (ed.) *LThK*, 7 (Freiburg: 1998), 1061.

¹⁰⁶² B. G. Gray, “Sacrifice in The Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice”, in: M. H. Orlinsky, *LBS*, (New York: 1971, 3-8, 3.

¹⁰⁶³ Cf. *Ibid* 19.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 66.

¹⁰⁶⁵ In this biblical text, “David distinctly implies that no sin is on his conscience, and there is no suggestion that he thinks of the possibility of sins of ignorance being the cause of Yahweh’s anger. Second, the term ‘sacrifice’ is used, which meant primarily a present or a gift, which could be used in early times so as to cover every form of sacrifice.” B. G. Gray, (1971), 84.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Cf. B. G. Gray, (1971), 60.

that the Eucharistic character was ancient in Israel, although the exact grounds of gratitude may vary in different ages.”¹⁰⁶⁷ The above illustrates the place of sacrifice in the ancient Jewish religion.

New Testament: The New Testament is seen as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament sacrifice is fulfilled and perfected in the sacrifice of Jesus. The theological understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus emasculates and invalidates any and all apparently competitive sacrifices, as well as any and all preparatory in the Old Testament and Christian sacrifice which is consequent. The understanding of Jesus as the sacrifice demands that the very meaning of sacrifice be radically redefined.¹⁰⁶⁸

4.4.4.2 *Sacrifice in Dogma*

“Sacrifice” occupies a special place in the Church’s dogmatic teaching. In the Teaching Office of the Church, effort has been made to present the Mass as a representation of the bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Council of Trent teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus is always realised at Mass, in the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving from which the word “Eucharist” derives its name.¹⁰⁶⁹ On the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, the bloody sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross becomes present in the repetition of the Lord’s Supper which Jesus himself wanted. It is the flesh and blood of the *suffering* and *dying* servant of God as sacrificed and poured out for many. It becomes present according to the institution of Jesus himself. Moreover, this presence of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is found in a liturgical, sacrificial action of the Church.¹⁰⁷⁰ With it, the Church sings the glory of God in the name of all creation. The sacrifice of praise is essentially realised in and through Christ who unites the faithful to his person, to his praise, and to his intercession. Therefore, this sacrifice is offered through Christ and with him, to be accepted in him.¹⁰⁷¹ The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification.¹⁰⁷² It expresses God’s total act of self-giving in his Son, Jesus Christ for humankind, whom he sent into the world to redeem it.¹⁰⁷³ For H. B. Meyer, the sacrificial character of the Eucharist proves a trinitarian immanence and God’s saving economy¹⁰⁷⁴ which facilitates *communication* and *dialogue* between God and humanity.

The theological position on the issue of the sacrifice of the Mass has been one of the major issues in theological discussions which centre on establishing the relationship between grace on the one hand, and good works on the other. The Reformers strongly opposed the sacrificial nature of the Mass. Martin Luther sees the Mass as a denigration of the sacrifice of the cross.¹⁰⁷⁵ For John Calvin, the Mass is

- A blasphemy against Christ
- The Mass as suppression of Christ’s Passion
- The Mass brings forgetfulness of Christ’s death
- The Mass robs us of the benefit of Christ’s death

¹⁰⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid 94.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Cf. K. B. Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation*, New York: 1987, 220, 221.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Cf. DH. 1642, 1652, 1636.

¹⁰⁷⁰ DH 1751.

¹⁰⁷¹ C. 1361.

¹⁰⁷² C. 1360.

¹⁰⁷³ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 318; cf. Council of Trent, “canons of the Sacrifice of the Mass”, in: DH 1751; cf. Rom 1:11; 12:1; cf. Phil 2:17; 4:18; cf. Heb 13:15f; cf. A. Ganoczy, *Glaubwürdiges Feiern der Eucharistie: GuL* 45 (1972), 106.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Cf. H. B. Meyer, “Eucharistie: Geschichte, Theologie, Pastoral”, in: H. Auf der Maur (ed.), *HLTW*, 4 (Regensburg: 1989), 44-45.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Cf. M. Luther, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen: 1959, 419.

The Mass as nullification of the Lord's Supper

Private Masses are a repudiation of communion

The Mass is not scriptural and not primitive.¹⁰⁷⁶

The opposing views of the Reformers and Roman Catholics on the Mass in relation to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross caused serious problems in the Church, especially in ecumenical bilaterals.¹⁰⁷⁷

The sacrifice (at the last supper) was to re-present the bloody sacrifice which he accomplished on the cross once and for all (cf. Ch. 1)

In the divine sacrifice that is offered in the Mass, the same Christ, who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross, is present and is offered in an unbloody manner (cf. Ch. 2)

Therefore, the holy Council teaches that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory. In addition, the Council affirms: "For by this oblation (the Mass) the Lord is appeased, he grants grace and gift of repentance, and he pardons wrongdoings and sins, even grave ones. For it is one and the same victim: he who now makes the offering through the ministry of priests and he who then offered himself on the cross; the only difference is the manner of the offering. The benefits of this oblation (the bloody one, that) are received in abundance through this unbloody oblation" (Ch. 2). The Council reaffirms the once-and-for-all and therefore the completely propitiatory nature of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. A "modal" difference exists in the Mass. K. Osborne writes: "... the cross is bloody, the Mass is unbloody, but the propitiatory sacrifice is only that of Jesus. The Church, the priest, the Mass itself add absolutely nothing to this once-and-for-all propitiatory act of Jesus. If one were to say that the mass added anything, it would simply be a modality, that is, the same sacrifice is not reoffered, but only re-represented, in an unbloody manner."¹⁰⁷⁸

The above interpretation ought to have refuted Luther's protest. But the Tridentine clarification came several years too late, and could not effect a reversal of the split.¹⁰⁷⁹ There remained a lingering doubt among the Protestant Churches that the Mass was some sort of "sacrifice" in its own right. Private Masses, that is, Masses celebrated by the priest with only a server or with no server at all, continued to be celebrated to the benefit of some specific intention. Theologians, after the reformation, continued to argue about the "essence" of a sacrifice and among the Roman Catholics there were many different views between "bloody" and "unbloody". But there was a clear unanimity that Jesus alone offered a total and perfect propitiatory sacrifice.¹⁰⁸⁰

4.4.4.3 Modern Theological Teachings

Since the writings of the Reformers and the Council of Trent, many theologians have written much on the theme "sacrifice of the Mass." The Lima document of the World Council of Churches, using some traditional expressions, carefully notes: "The eucharist is the great sacrifice of praise by which the Church speaks on behalf of the whole creation. For the world which God has reconciled is present at every eucharist: in the bread and wine, in the persons of the faithful, and in the prayers they offer for themselves and for all people. Christ unites the faithful with himself and includes their prayers within his own intercession so that the faithful are transfigured and their prayers accepted. This sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ, with him and in him."¹⁰⁸¹ The WCC document uses the term "sacrifice of praise" which was not a cause of difficulty at the time of the reformation. Most Christian churches, in most part, agree with this definition. When it comes to the "propitiatory" sacrifice, the WCC document carefully states:

¹⁰⁷⁶ Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis IV*, 14, 9. Zur Struktur der Sakramente; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, Philadelphia: 1960, 1429-1437.

¹⁰⁷⁷ For detailed readings, cf. K. B. Osborne, (1987), 212-223.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Cf. K. B. Osborne, (1987), 218.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Cf. J. Betz, "Eucharist als zentrales Mysterium", in: *Mysterium Salutis*, v. 4/2, 476.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Cf. K. B. Osborne, (1987), 218.

¹⁰⁸¹ Cf. WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 4.

“The eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us.”¹⁰⁸² This definition of the WCC which brings together the two aspects of the eucharist: “sacrifice” and “sacrament”, which for several centuries had been kept apart by Roman Catholic theologians, is the real key to the Protestant-Catholic reconciliation on this matter.

Various theologians, in the modern time, have offered diverse opinions on how to solve the Roman Catholic-Protestant controversy on the Eucharist.¹⁰⁸³ K. B. Osborne remarks on the need to reach beyond the Old Testament to the entire milieu of the Semitic world, considering sacrifice in non-Semitic religions as well and focusing on those essentials which constitute the very reality of sacrifice. Again this reality is seen as “perfected in the sacrifice of Jesus. This expiatory sacrifice of Jesus has been seen throughout Christianity as the sole source of expiation for all men and women, no matter when they lived, to which religion they belong, and if any, they participated in. “Outside of Jesus there is no salvation’ is at the heart of the Christian faith. The expiatory value of all other sacrifices is nil.”¹⁰⁸⁴ When one researches on the Jewish, Old Testament understanding of sacrifice, on sacrifice generally within human history, which the theological understanding of the one and only sacrifice of Jesus, it becomes clear that it is not a question of some sacrifice being fulfilled in and perfected by the sacrifice of Jesus. This theological understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus emasculates and invalidates any and all apparently competitive sacrifices, as well as any and all preparatory and consequent sacrifices, that is, sacrifice which is preparatory in the Old Testament and Christian sacrifice which is consequent. An understanding of Jesus as the sacrifice demands that the very meaning of sacrifice be radically redefined.¹⁰⁸⁵ Real Presence is another controversial aspect of the Eucharist. *Real Presence: The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines real presence as followings: “Christ Jesus, who died... who was raised from the dead, who sits at the right hand of God, (...) is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer, (...) in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass and in the person of the minister. But he is present most especially in the Eucharistic species.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Faith helps the individual to understand real presence. Insofar as human beings meet Jesus Christ in a personal way, it expresses faith; faith, which they receive from God, through Christ, in the form of *Communio*. This communion is gift. As children of the Father, they return the same gift to God in the manner of thanksgiving. This ontological real presence establishes an indelible unity with the personal communion. Therefore, persons and their essence come from Christ, which build interpersonal *communication* and *communio*.¹⁰⁸⁷ On the Eucharistic sacrifice in African context, refer to chapter Six¹⁰⁸⁸ Let us look at its *communio* aspect.

4.4.4.5 The Eucharistic *Communio*

The Lord’s Supper effects a change in the participating community. St. Paul designates the Eucharistic community as the Body of Christ. Although the Vatican II Council¹⁰⁸⁹ holds that under the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, the whole people of God, as bearers of the Eucharist, are also subject of the Eucharistic celebration, she concentrates the actual celebration of the same

¹⁰⁸² Cf. Ibid 8.

¹⁰⁸³ Notable among them are R. De Vaux, R. Daly, E. J. Kilmartin and R. Rendtorff who call for the study of sacrifice with the Old Testament’s perspective; contextualizing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ within a Jewish framework. J. Betz took a different approach, calling for a restudy of the patristic period and its manifold discussion on Sacrifice and Eucharist. (cf. J. Betz, in: *Mysterium Salutis*, 185-313; cf. R. Daly later joined him, who took his excursus up to the Alexandrian period of Clement and Origen. cf. J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, Washington, D. C.: 1978, 508).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Cf. K. B. Osborne, (1987), 220.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid 221.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Cf. C. 1373; cf. SC 7.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 319; cf. A. Ganonczy, (1972), 98, 110.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Cf. Sub-section 6.2.2.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Cf. SC 7: 3,4; 14: 26-28.

sacrament in the hands of priests.¹⁰⁹⁰ Four elements are evident in the above position of the Vatican II Council, namely:

- 1) The Eucharist is described as work of Jesus Christ offered to the Father, in the working of the Holy Spirit. God gives his power to the human receiver, through self-mediation.
- 2) The text expressly encourages an active participation of the members so that the celebration would be recognized as action of the Church.
3. The structure of the Word-Sign of the Eucharist has a double dimensional communicative function to fulfil: to be a justified adult tradition and to correspond to the challenges of our time.
- 4) Inner communication must be an external one where the Prayers of the Faithful and the “Go in Peace” must render the service of a good communication.¹⁰⁹¹ Through different interactions, communication and the theology of People of God, the Vat. II gives it a spiritual foundation. The worship of the community, as subject of faith, is linked with the communication between God and man. It is here that worship is understood as truly communication in the form of the Agape.¹⁰⁹²

4.4.4.6 The Agape Meal: Implication

The Church teaches the Eucharist is a symbol of love, and Christian unity (1Cor. 11. 20f).¹⁰⁹³ These aspects of the agape and unity elements of the Eucharist present interesting topics. Let us see the scriptural foundation of the Agape meal.

4.4.4.6.1 Scriptural Basis

4.4.4.6.2 Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Jews, earlier in their history of religious experiences, realised God’s love (Gk. Πηλαντηρπια) and blessing as the presence that saved them from extinction in Egypt. Thus, it elaborated national cultic schemes of ‘thanksgiving’. The presence, the ‘being-with’, ‘Immanuel’, God-with-us, (Wis 11:25) - the greatest and constant blessing elicited in them an attitude of thanksgiving (Heb. Berakoth; Gk. Ευκριστια).¹⁰⁹⁴ The Lord *Yahweh* revealed himself to the people of Israel within the context of the Exodus experience. From then on, He became a Saviour God. The Israelites marked his presence among them in the form of the Passover meal which later on and with the law of the Sabbath, the jubilee year and the regular thanksgiving (berakoth) prayers evolved into an anamnestic service of protection and liberation from Egypt. The later institutional elaboration of this faith experience within the context of the feast of unleavened Bread also emphasises the significance of the liberation from the evil of injustice in its various dimensions. It is because the Passover articulated the liberation of vital forces, marked God’s liberation act and achieved socio-cultural and religious importance, that it became the pillar upon which the Jewish calendar revolved. It became a key point through which the Hebrew viewed reality as a whole. The ritual celebration and its various elements became anamnesis that transported worshippers to the original events as a source of fresh hope in God’s faithfulness and justice, thereby imbuing Israel with the idea of liberation and forging their collective consciousness and a deep desire for freedom and profound aversion for any kind of enslavement and injustice.¹⁰⁹⁵

4.4.4.6.3 New Testament

¹⁰⁹⁰ Cf. PO 2:2

¹⁰⁹¹ Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 320; cf. F. Kohlschein, *Die Liturgische Feier als Kommunikationsgeschehen, Theologie der Gegenwart*, 26, 1983, 5.

¹⁰⁹² Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 320.

¹⁰⁹³ Cf. “Decree on the most holy Eucharist” DH. 1635, 1640, DH 1649.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Cf. W. D. Davis, & D. M. Allison, *Matthew: The Internationally Critical Commentary*, vol III, XIX-XXVII, Edinburg: 2000, 426.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid

The incarnation becomes the fulfilment of the Old Testament allusions – God taking flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 1:23; Joh 1:14). The incarnation becomes a continuation of God’s presence in human history and thus forms the centre of the Christian message. During his earthly ministry, Jesus identified with the poor, sick and needy (cf. Mt 25:40).¹⁰⁹⁶ His death on the cross becomes a fulfilment of God’s love for humanity.

In his commentary on the Acts of Apostles, G. A. Buttrick states that because of the situation in Jerusalem, we find the selling of possessions superseded by the sending of alms by the richer Churches. Antioch sent relief through Barnabas and Paul (cf. Acts 11:30). Paul was asked to remember the poor, presumably at Jerusalem (cf. Gal 2:16) and latter he brought a present of money to the Saints in Jerusalem since Macedonia and Achaia had decided to send a generous contribution to the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. A generous contribution as it should be since those who share the spiritual possessions of these poor people have a duty to help them with temporal possessions.¹⁰⁹⁷

Furthermore, St. Paul, in his critic to the Corinthians, on the practice of the Lord’s Supper, often speaks of “coming together”.¹⁰⁹⁸ This was in view of the Lord’s community coming together (cf. 1Cor 11:21ff). The Eucharist, where the body of Christ is offered (cf. 1 Cor 11:29) is to ensure togetherness.¹⁰⁹⁹ As one eats and drinks of the blood, it ensures personal union with the crucified and risen Christ.¹¹⁰⁰ “This act produces vertical and horizontal symbolic implications on the Christian. It gives the social basis of the Eucharist in the quest for justice.”¹¹⁰¹

R. Avila sees the divisions in the Corinthian Church (cf. 1 Cor 10:31), which Paul responds and condemns, as not of dogmatic, spiritual or mystical division, but as a social one. Similarly, the *Koinonia* of the early Christian community, which Paul promotes is not merely a dogmatic, spiritual and mystical unity of hearts (as many claim) but one of bread and possessions- an infra and supra-structural *koinonia* concretely manifested in the way the early Church administered material support (not just only moral) for the needy Churches.¹¹⁰² Therefore, “it is imperative we insist less on and indeed reject the sort of ‘feudal’ naive spirituality that presently surrounds us and insist on platitudes and ‘sterile communiqués’ on prayer without action - at times of social crisis.”¹¹⁰³

By consecrating the bread and wine at the Eucharist we consecrate the social relationship and process of production that make bread and wine (and other fruits of human labour which they symbolise) possible and available to human beings, and thus offer to God the Father through Christ (the True Bread from heaven) the bread from the earth, that he may bless it, and bless all who make it available and those who partake of it, so that after eating, we would commit ourselves to do what Christ himself did in sharing his life with the poor and needy. The celebration of the Eucharist, therefore, establishes relational structure just as the bread and wine as body and blood of Jesus Christ and the event of the crucifixion are united with the historical offering of the Mass. The Eucharist, the symbolic eating and drinking of the bread and wine (fruits of human labour), becomes a clear declaration of our honest intention to share other fruits of just human labour and collaboration instead of monopolising them.¹¹⁰⁴

Christ’s choice of the elements of bread (and wine) for the Eucharist is laden with deep anthropological content and theological symbolism. Bread – symbol of all human food,

¹⁰⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid 428.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Cf. Rom. 15: 25ff; 1Cor 16:1-4; 8:2; cf. G. A. Buttrick, et al (ed.) *The Interpreters Bible*, 9 (New York: 1954), 73; cf. D. E. Igboanus, “The Eucharist As A Symbol for Social Justice”, in: *EJALR* 3 (Rome; 1994), 70-74, 71.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 1Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Cf. F. -J. Nocke, (1992), 275/277.

¹¹⁰⁰ Cf. H-J. Klauck, (1987), 84.

¹¹⁰¹ D. E. Igboanus, (1994), 67.

¹¹⁰² Cf. Ibid 70.

¹¹⁰³ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris: The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission towards the Year 2000: “You Shall Be My Witness”*: Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa, Vatican City: 1993, no. 22.

¹¹⁰⁴ Cf. D. E. Igboanus, (1994), 69-70.

summarises “the fruit of human labour”¹¹⁰⁵ and man’s total dependence on God’s providence. Human beings may not live by bread alone, at the same time, cannot do without it. Human life cannot do without material infrastructure because “the Father did not make us pure spirits.”¹¹⁰⁶ Despite the profundity of our mystical experiences and metaphysical speculations, human beings are dependent on ‘lumps’ of matter – a cup of water, a piece of bread. There is the aphorism that human being is what he eats. Food is therefore power¹¹⁰⁷, the power of life, the strength to survive and live.¹¹⁰⁸ Human food is symbolised by bread; life depends on it, upon its opaque materiality, upon its material substance. Life is more than bread but it can’t get along without bread.”¹¹⁰⁹ One would then understand why Jesus Christ fed the people before and after preaching to them, for the stomach assumes an importance in line with that of the heart and head. There is no prayer, *dogmatism* or spiritual activity that takes the place of bread, or of the frequently heavy labour required to earn it and to place it on the table of the hungry, nor can pious speech quell the hunger of starving person. God wants us to earn bread with our work, which involves time, sweat, tears to be concerned with his affairs, His kingdom, with human affairs, human needs, human hunger, the desperate need for protection and salvation.¹¹¹⁰

The salvation implied in bread, as constitutive element of meal, is closely connected with how we produce it, and what we do with it - how we share it, whether we take care of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned and unjustly treated and whether we show meaningful solidarity with people in these situations (cf. Mt 25:31-46; Is 58:7).¹¹¹¹ Thus, the symbolisms of bread and meal have the implication of solidarity that is, sharing with one another.¹¹¹²

The understanding of the Eucharist from its *Agapeic* context, which symbolizes love and Christian unity, is very controversial today in the Christian circle. However, it is not our intention to delve into the controversy.¹¹¹³ Our intention is to see how Agape is practised in the early Church.

4.4.4.6.4 Theological Basis

Early Christian Fathers: From the evidence provided by Church history, the early Church made the Eucharist a celebration of the imperative and practice of unity and justice. Justin bears eloquent witness in his *Apology* that the Eucharist was an occasion when Christians brought what they could to help orphans, widows and those who were in want on account of sickness or in bonds, and the strangers who were sojourners and, in short, all those in need¹¹¹⁴ The Eucharist was not merely an act of devotion but also a characteristically social act in which Christians shared their possessions with those in need. Gradually, with time, this ‘koinonia’ began to be considered as an integral part of the celebration.¹¹¹⁵ In his own part, St. Cyprian

¹¹⁰⁵ Cf. Blessings over the bread and wine in the Eucharistic prayer: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which the earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.” “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.” *The Sunday Missal*, Harold Winston (ed.), Britain: 1987, 30.

¹¹⁰⁶ H. Camara, *Church And Colonialism*, London: 1969, 21.

¹¹⁰⁷ Cf. W. J. Burghardt, *The Seven Hungers Of The Human Family*, Washington, United States Catholic Bishops Conference: 1976, 14.

¹¹⁰⁸ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 75.

¹¹⁰⁹ L. Boff, *The Lord’s Prayer*, Quezon City: 1984, 75.

¹¹¹⁰ Cf. D- E. Igboanusi, (1999), 75.

¹¹¹¹ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 75-76.

¹¹¹² Cf. Chapter six on its implication in African context.

¹¹¹³ Cf. DH 1651; CC. 2, 3; DH 1653; cf. M. O’Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*, Collegeville, Minnesota: 1998, 63-148; *Response of the Catholic Church To The Joint Declaration of The Catholic Church And The Lutheran World Federation On the Doctrine of Justification*, Vatican City: 2000, 1ff; cf. W. Beinert, (1995), 443; A. Ganoczy, (1991), 74-75.

¹¹¹⁴ Cf. Justin, *Apologia*, 1, 67, 6; B. Thomas, Falls, *FaCh*, 1 Washington: 1948, 83.

¹¹¹⁵ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 76.

rebuked the rich for their insensitivity to the lot of the poor and the needy in their midst and warned that if they attended mass without offerings for the poor, their participation could be considered necessarily vitiated since it was simply unjust for them to “come to the Lord’s feast without a sacrifice and take part in the sacrifice the poor man has offered.”¹¹¹⁶

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* furnishes eloquent information on what was obtainable during the time of the Apostles. It states that in cases where the churches were so destitute that only the resources of the wicked, “those who oppress the widow, overbear the orphan, fill prisons with the innocent and starve their servants – may help the upkeep of the poor, the Bishops whose duty it was to collect and preserve aids were to avoid such odious oblations as it was better to be famished than to flourish from an evil source.”¹¹¹⁷ The reason is again that the Eucharist could not be celebrated while injustice and oppression were being perpetrated and tolerated. St. Ambrose also played a great role in promoting the Agape meal. He reminded the rich of the need for a proper attitude towards the Eucharist. He states, “You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common, for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all and not only to the rich.”¹¹¹⁸ Other Church Fathers and Doctors had similar preoccupations arising from their realistic and predominantly pastoral concern for their flocks in an era that had not totally understood the Christian message.

But later, with the “unholy” marriage of the Church with the State (Caesaropapism) effected in good will by Constantine, the entire Church became (at the decline of the Roman Empire) the establishment’, that is, allowing for occasional harassment of the Church by some princes. The appalling result was a clergy that saw itself on the vantage side of the feudal set-up, acquiring for itself with vicious tenacity all the symbols, mannerisms and souvenirs of the feudal lords – the Bishops began to be “their lordship”, coming at the end of processions, their rings being kissed (and later to be done to get “indulgences”) and competing with the kings for women, property and estates.¹¹¹⁹

Bishop Camara observes that it was this clerical superiority-complex that eventually sequestered them from the rest of the ‘faithful’ – thus creating out of the one Eucharistic community ‘the clergy’ and ‘the faithful’. Similarly, the division of the members into socio-religious classes was also related to socio-political classes with very interesting economic implications. The overall consequence was a hypocritically peaceful and cynical co-existence facilitated by the Church’s refusal to take a strong stand against the land-owners and feudal overlords, the rich and powerful who camouflaged their terrible injustices by giving palliative alms in order to build Churches (very often scandalously exotic in shocking contrast to the surrounding poverty and ghettos) and contributing to ‘ecclesiastical projects.’¹¹²⁰ The fact remains that today, Christians are still greatly divided. Christianity has a history (of almost 2000 years) of bitter tinkering with bread and wine – over who has access to the authentic Eucharistic tradition and what happens when Christians eat bread and drink wine and remember the Lord – with anamnetic force! Down the historical lane the Eucharist has become an obstacle to unity and source of injustice – a meal that divides.¹¹²¹ It is a discreditable fact of history that ‘on frontiers of the Western world – in Latin America and Africa – the Christian religion (Catholicism especially) was seen as going hand in hand with Western imperialist structures, offering little or no challenge to its destructive effects and condoning slavery and butchery of Africans and Indians.’¹¹²² Because missionaries reflected their ‘national’ positions on the Eucharistic debate – against or for the Pope.¹¹²³ H. Küng adds: “There is much that can be

¹¹¹⁶ St. Cyprian, *Treatise on “Works And Almsgiving”*, VIII/15.

¹¹¹⁷ *Didascalia Apostolorum (Teachings Of The Apostles)*, 13.

¹¹¹⁸ Cf. J. R. Palanque, *Saint Ambroise et L’Empire Romains*, Paris: 1933, 366; cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 72-74.

¹¹¹⁹ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 74.

¹¹²⁰ Cf. H. Camara, *Church And Colonialism*, London: 1969, 21.

¹¹²¹ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 73.

¹¹²² S. Hays, “To Good Christian Katie”, in: *New African*, 450 (2006), 6-7, 6.

¹¹²³ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 73; cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 122.

brought against the church by so many (...) Against the manifold complicity with the powerful and the neglect of the despised, downtrodden, oppressed, exploited; against religion used as opium of the people; against a Christianity wholly occupied with itself, at odds with itself, a divided *oikoumene*.¹¹²⁴ With the existence of division in the Church, it is not startling then that in continental Europe, a Church existing through cultural osmosis with the bourgeoisie was swept off scornfully with the elite, and ‘blue bloods’ in the French Revolution. The Bolshevik Revolution (much later in 1917, and the October of 1924 that installed Leninist communism) also had the same ‘unforeseen’ effects on the Church. But these were unavoidable because the Church then only offered to pariahs/serfs an alienated and passive Christianity proclaiming to people in subhuman conditions an illusion of divine life with contradictions, human life and its realities magnified in an appalling and self-evident manner.¹¹²⁵

The similar feudal structures that were transported whole and entire into Latin-America that gave birth to “liberation theology” as a people’s faith-response to a system that was identical with fatalism, social immobility, enduring destitution, regarding inequality and social injustice as inevitable divine will – since some are born rich, some are born poor, and it is useless to do anything about it since things will never change anyway.¹¹²⁶ It is the same shrewd complicity of the Church with the oppressive racist system of South Africa that gave birth to “Black Theology” – a theology “which takes into consideration the experiences of oppression and the struggle for liberation, which gets its inspiration from the biblical faith as expressed in African language and categories as well as from the experience and reflections of black North Americans.”¹¹²⁷ Camara submits that such pervasive theological determinism was the reason why K. Marx got such a wide hearing from the poor instead of the Church: Marx would never have presented religion as the opium of the people, and the Church as alienated and alienator if he had seen around him a Church made flesh, continuing incarnation of Christ; if he had seen Christians who really and practically loved men.¹¹²⁸ This means either that the Church had probably compromised its prophetic impetus because of her position of comfort and was at best speaking with feeble voice or that the Church had failed to understand fully the implication of the ‘Agape’ nature of the Eucharist, the tradition of which she proclaims to the world that she upholds. No wonder then D. Dorr, while commenting on Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* noted: “Leo XX encouraged what might be termed ‘spirituality of stability’; he laid emphasis on obedience to lawful authorities to a point where in the last analysis, people were asked to endure gross injustices rather than overthrow the regime that perpetrated them, and the promise of future reward was held out to those who were patient this way.”¹¹²⁹

The above discussion exposes the implication of the Agape Meal to a Christian.¹¹³⁰ Within the Christian initiation, the Eucharist plays the function of renewing the union of the baptised with Jesus Christ and the community of the faithful. At this point, let us see the relationship that exists between the Christian initiation and natural sacraments. This disposes us to consider the possibility of incarnation of the liturgy in African culture / rites.

4.5 Christian Initiation and Natural Sacraments

4.5.1 Theological Foundation of Natural Sacraments

The Catholic theology treats the sacramental nature of traditional initiation under natural sacraments. She exposes the effect of the supernatural saving will of God in the rites of non-

¹¹²⁴ Cf. H. Küng, (1974), 508-509.

¹¹²⁵ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 73.

¹¹²⁶ Cf. H. Camara, (1969), 21.

¹¹²⁷ J. O. Odey, *Africa, The Agony of A Continent: Can Liberation Theology Offer Any Solution?* Enugu: 1996, 22; *Communiqué, Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians*, Accra, Ghana, December, 17-23, 1977, 3f; cf. S. Gayraud Wilmore and J. H. Cone, (ed.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, 506.

¹¹²⁸ Cf. H. Camara, (1969), 112; cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1999), 73.

¹¹²⁹ D. Dorr, *Option For The Poor- A Hundred Years Of Vatican Social Teaching*; New York: 1983, 59.

¹¹³⁰ Cf. Chapter Six, sub-section 6.2.1.

Christian religions.¹¹³¹ With it, one could understand better the theological foundation of natural sacraments. Generally, sacraments come under rites. L. Bouyer defines “rite” as a form of contact with the sacred which demands personal the response of an individual experience of the sacred.¹¹³² They are things of God(s) and not of human beings.¹¹³³ Rite is a determined mode of action. Its object is the belief system of the society that forms the classification of everything into the two levels of the sacred and profane. In the community, rite serves the function of providing proper rules of conduct in relation to the sacred, serving as point of contact between the sacred and the profane. Rites belong to religion and form part of cultic act.¹¹³⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century, H. Mauss¹¹³⁵ and J. Frazer¹¹³⁶ saw in original rites magical actions. For these two authors, rites, in their original nature, are important acts of powerful secret magic. Human beings use them for various reasons: to follow certain natural order, to stimulate divine action and acquire sacred favours. And through ritual orgies, human beings acquire the power to increase the fertility of the earth. Today, modern historians of religion dismiss the above position, maintaining that it does not offer any reasonable explanation for the goal of rites.¹¹³⁷ Rites usually refer to the transcendence, numinous (spiritual) reality and the ultimate values of a community. Rites possess various forms¹¹³⁸ and characters, distinguished by (a) the feeling or emotion of respect, awe, fascination, or dread in the face of the sacred; (b) dependence on a belief system expressed in the language of myth, and (c) symbolic action. There are various types of rite: rites of essential laws and phases of life that punctuate moments of human existence: There are rites of birth, sexual maturity, marriage, and death.¹¹³⁹ They are always marked by initiation. The various types of rites, marked by the essential laws and phases of life which punctuate moments of human existence are: the rites of Birth, sexual maturity, marriage, and death.¹¹⁴⁰ They are marked by initiation.

Myth is an integral character of religious rites. M. Baigent holds that when symbols are organised into a coherent narrative, or story-like, they can become what we call ‘myth.’ He maintains that the world ‘myth’ should not be used in the once fashionable sense of ‘fiction’ or ‘fantasy’. Rather, it designates something altogether more complex and more profound. Myths were not devised simply to entertain and amuse, but to explain things – to account for reality. In the ancient world, among the Egyptians and Babylonians, Celts and Teutons, Greeks and Romans – myth was synonymous with religion, and like the Church of the Middle Ages, embrace what today we classify as science, psychology, philosophy, history, the entire spectrum of human knowledge. ‘Myth’ means “any systematic attempt to explain or account for reality, past or

¹¹³¹ Cf. J. Heisbetz, *Theologische Gründe der nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Freiburg: 1967, 113; cf. Scheffczyk, L., “Natuersakramenten”, in: *LThK*, 7 (1999), 697-698, 697.

¹¹³² Ritus ist “eine festgesetzte Form des Umgangs mit dem Göttlichen, dem das Bestreben zugrunde liegt, auf das personal erlebte Heilige zu antworten.” [A. Paus, “Ritus, Ritual (Ri). 1. Begriff”, in: *LThK*, 8 (1999), 1210-1211; cf. W. E. Mühlmann, “Ritus”, in: *RGG* 5 (1986), 1127-1128; cf. L. Bouyer, *Mensch und Ritus*, Mainz: 1964, 88; cf. Lotter, F., “Ritus”, in: *TRE*, 29 (Berlin 1998), 260-264].

¹¹³³ L. Bouyer writes: “Es scheint also, daß der Mythos in dem Augenblick entstanden ist, da der Mensch sich selbst entdeckt und sich für den Haupthandelnden, wenn nicht für den Urheber der Riten hält. Dagegen stellt der Mythos fest, daß die Riten Sache der Götter und nicht des Menschen sind”. L. Bouyer, (1964), 949; cf. Gen 17:9-14; cf. Ex 4:24; cf. Lev 19:23.

¹¹³⁴ Cf. H. Bürkle, “Kult”, in: *LThK*, VI (1997), 503-505, 503.

¹¹³⁵ Cf. H. Mauss, *Mélanges d'histoire des religions*, Paris: 1909.

¹¹³⁶ J. Frazer, *Der Goldene Zweig*, Leipzig: 1928, 10f.

¹¹³⁷ L. Bouyer, (1964), 92.

¹¹³⁸ G. Van der Leeuw, in the *Phenomenology of Religion*, distinguishes two types of rites in religions, namely: the action of gods themselves at the beginning of the mythical time, in which the visible image of Eternity is performed. The sacred acts rise above in that ‘here and now’ of our time through celebration. Here it deals with divine life, which life, human beings will be. Secondly, there are rites, which raise the lowliness of human existence to a sacred level. Example is blessing, which consecrate the lives of human persons and infuse them with divine powers (cf. G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen: 1955, 338).

¹¹³⁹ B. J. M. Götz, *Die Religionen der vorgeschichtlichen und primitiven Völker*, Aschaffenburg: 1960, 98.

¹¹⁴⁰ Ibid

present.”¹¹⁴¹ It is a religious projection of the original experience of human beings who consciously possess existential feelings and try to express them in the face of a strange and great power of nature and its essences.¹¹⁴² Thus, any system of beliefs – African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, Darwinism, Marxism, psychology, atomic theory – can be classed as a myth. All systems of belief evolve and develop for the same purpose – to elucidate ‘the order of things’, to make sense of the world.¹¹⁴³ They (myths) occur in natural forms: power in animals and storm; in elements: light, fire and darkness, and in natural catastrophes: panic and anxiety; and in respect, witness, birth and death, and ancestors.¹¹⁴⁴ Myth play very significant role in religion. Every religion has its own myth. It is usually based on faith and deals with *epiphany* or the manifestation of an ever-abiding presence of the numinous, deep foundation of reality.¹¹⁴⁵ Myth and rite serve common purpose in religion. The former recounts the divine origin of sacred rites. It shows rites as something not of human origin but as something that has sacred beginning.¹¹⁴⁶ Rites, on the other hand, celebrate the sacred mysteries. God reveals himself in myths.¹¹⁴⁷ The presence of the divine in myth gives it theological significance.

Since the time of St. Augustine many theologians have recognized the theological foundation of so-called pagan rites. St. Augustine, in *Contra Julianum*, affirms the presence of revelation in non-Christian religions and the general saving will of God in the non-Christian world, where parents could, through cultic profession of faith, free their children from the Original Sin.¹¹⁴⁸ The sacred medium (*remedium naturae*) is analogous to Circumcision in the Old Testament.¹¹⁴⁹ Some theologians like J. Heisbetz see circumcision, in the Old Testament, as a way boys were freed from the bond of Original Sin.¹¹⁵⁰ Bede sees circumcision as having the same effect of removing the Original sin of under-aged children like the Christian baptism. In the *Homilies*, he writes: “The Law of circumcision provided the same health-giving balm against the wound of original sin as baptism in the time of revealed grace. But baptism now confers grace. Therefore, circumcision conferred grace like the other sacraments of the Law. This is possible because as baptism is the way to the sacraments of the New Law, so was circumcision to the sacraments of the Old Law.”¹¹⁵¹

These ritual forms of purification or profession of faith are termed “natural sacrament.” Their existence has always remained a valid theological teaching. The paltry remains of saving economy of the laws of circumcision remained valid for both pagans and the Jewish people. Eliade affirms that natural sacraments (sacraments of the time of the natural laws) belong to the supernatural order. Since the time of the *Proto-evangelium*, the saving grace of Jesus Christ has always been effective to sinful humanity. If natural sacraments proceeded from God’s saving will, it threw a new light on the understanding of the Sacraments and the qualities of rites. Rites originate from sacred Beings and were freely given to human beings at the beginning of the

¹¹⁴¹ M. Baigent, (et al), *The Messianic Legacy*, New York: 1986, 179.

¹¹⁴² H. U. Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator, Skizzen Zur Theologie III*, Einsiedeln: 1967, 20.

¹¹⁴³ Baigent, (1986), 179.

¹¹⁴⁴ Cf. H. U. Balthasar, (1967), 21.

¹¹⁴⁵ Cf. W. Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte*, Mainz: 1970, 245.

¹¹⁴⁶ Cf. L. Bouyer, (1964), 92.

¹¹⁴⁷ Cf. J. Schmid, *Im Ausstrahl der Schönheit Gottes*, Münsterschwarzach: 1982, 69.

¹¹⁴⁸ Cf. Augustine’s teaching on natural sacraments, *Contra Julianum V III*, 45; cf. S. Th. III Q. 70, a 4; cf. J. B. Franzelin, *De Sacramentis in genere, Romae* 4 (1901), 16f; C. Pesch, *Praelectiones dogmaticae*, Freiburg: 1914, 19; cf. A. Michel, *Sacraments prechretiens*, in: *DThC, XIV* 644-655; cf. M. Premm, *Katholische Glaubenskunde III/1*, Wien: 1960, 84; cf. M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik, IV/1*, München: 1964, 114-118.

¹¹⁴⁹ M. Ntetem, *Die negro- afrikanische Stammesinitiation*, Münsterschwarzach: 1983, 171.

¹¹⁵⁰ He writes, “Daß es während der Epoche Adam bis Abraham ein ‘Natursakrament ‘ zur Befreiung der Kinder von Erbsünde gegeben hat, ist die sichere Lehre aller Theologen”. (J. Heisbetz, *Theologische Gründe der nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Freiburg: 1967, 116).

¹¹⁵¹ Cf. Bede, *Homilies*, Bk. II X, On the Feast of Circumcision (PL 94, 54); cf. T. Aquinas, S. Th. q. 62. a 6. obj. 3; cf. J. Heisbetz, (1967), 116.

mythical Time.¹¹⁵² The Christian writings, especially the Acts of the Apostles, present Jesus Christ as the centre of human salvation: “For all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:11-12). This becomes the basis of the justification of the theology of faith and Jesus Christ as the centre of human salvation and supernatural saving medium. The New Testament, therefore, would recognize the Christian baptism as more efficacious in the removal of Original Sin than natural sacraments.

But some theologians question the Church’s use of external symbols by wondering whether the saving medium actually demands the use of external symbols.¹¹⁵³ The majority of theologians maintain that faith demands the use of external symbols, for Jesus Christ is not only the symbol of the Father, but also made use of symbolism in his public ministry.¹¹⁵⁴ Using the analogy of the removal of Original Sin in the Old Testament, they maintain that just as it is achieved in the Old Testament, so is it effected now in the New Testament through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross that the church now celebrates in the sacraments. Therefore, baptism replaces circumcision as means of the removal of Original Sin in the Christian religion.

T. Aquinas presents a clear teaching on circumcision. Both Suarez and T. Aquinas maintain a common view on Christian initiation. For two of them the act of incorporation is achieved in the rites of the Church.¹¹⁵⁵ This view, however, creates some theological problem on whether man could through rite also achieve the removal of Original sin. Many theologians differ on this. For T. Aquinas, external signs (sacraments) is probably not directly instituted and revealed by God.¹¹⁵⁶ God left it more or less to the choice of human beings to make use of external forms of rites. But God takes care of the inward illumination of grace or the inner “instinctive grace” (interior instinctus)¹¹⁵⁷ so that human beings could, through their choice, not err. He maintains the position that God did not institute the sacraments, but that human beings did. For him, form of prayers, ordination and sacrifices are external forms of natural sacraments.¹¹⁵⁸ Don Scotus and his school, on the other hand, taught that the constitutive elements of the natural sacraments expressly derive from God and are revealed to human beings.¹¹⁵⁹ M. Schmaus recognizes the

¹¹⁵² Cf. M. Eliade, *Le Mythe de L'éternel Retour. Archétypes et répétition*, Paris, 1948.

¹¹⁵³ Cf. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, London, 1984, 89-100.

¹¹⁵⁴ Cf. 2.2.1 to 2.2.4.

¹¹⁵⁵ Suarez, *De Sacramentis*, disp. 4 sect. 1 and 5. T. Aquinas, S. Th. III Q. 60. a 5, obj. 2; Q. 69. a. 4 obj. 2; cf. M. Ntetem, (1983), 234.

¹¹⁵⁶ T. Aquinas writes, “For those things which God instituted are delivered to us in the Holy Scripture. But in the sacraments certain things are done which are nowhere mentioned in Holy Scripture; for instance, the chrism with which men are confirmed, the oil with which priests are anointed, and many others, both words and actions, which we employ in the sacraments. Therefore, the sacraments are not instituted by God alone.” (S. Th. Q. 64. a.2 obj. 1). Conversely, to be noted is that “Part of almost every definition of a sacrament is the requirement that it has been, in some sense, ‘instituted by Christ.’ Of the seven sacraments accepted by Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, such institution can be incontrovertibly documented from the New Testament for only two, baptism and the Eucharist. During the debates of the 16th and 17th centuries, the language of the New Testament was strained by both sides in an effort to prove that the historical Jesus really did, or really could not have, instituted marriage, ordination, etc., as sacraments. Protestant biblical scholarship eventually came to recognize that even the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist by Christ are, in their present form at least, products of the recollection of the early Christian community rather than verbatim transcripts of the sayings of the historical Jesus. Roman Catholic theology likewise surrendered the effort to find explicit historical support for each of the seven sacraments in such sayings and concentrated instead on the implicit significance of the very establishment of the church: Christ instituted the sacraments in a theological sense, even though there is no way of proving that the historical Jesus instituted them in a historical sense”. (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 10, Chicago: 1998, 287).

¹¹⁵⁷ T. Aquinas further writes: “(...) it is not fitting that the salvation of men be restricted by the Divine Law, still less by the Law of Christ, Who came to save all. But in the state of the Law of nature determinate things were not required in the Sacraments, but were put to that use through a vow, as appears from Gen. 28: 20, where Jacob vowed that he should offer to God tithes and peace-offerings. Therefore, it seems that man should not have been restricted, to the use of any determinate thing in the sacraments.” (S. Th. III, Q. 60. a. 5 obj. 3).

¹¹⁵⁸ Cf. S. Th. Q. 64, a. 1.

¹¹⁵⁹ Cf. D. Scotus, *In Ivum Sent.* dist. 1, q. VI, VII.

possibility of original revelation which manifests external rites and serve as basic principle for the acceptance of concrete life.¹¹⁶⁰ For J. Heilsbetz, the formations of various religious rites and natural sacraments belong to God's grace. Since God's general saving will is present in the mediation of grace, the same applies to the actual celebration of religious rites.¹¹⁶¹ The Vatican II Council recognizes this position in its teaching on Non-Christian Religions.¹¹⁶² Faith belongs to religion. It is the answer of human being to concrete life situations. J. Heilsbetz sees the possibility of faith meeting with God in the entire human history which should not be limited to a particular cultic act.¹¹⁶³ Therefore, theological tradition generally sees the effectiveness of God's saving will as neither necessarily limited to a particular religion nor natural sacrament.¹¹⁶⁴ The Scholastics present the sacrament of Faith, Penance and Matrimony as the three sacraments of nature, but failed to give their particular external signs.¹¹⁶⁵

In the native religions, rites express the signs of essential internal salvation (act of faith) that man celebrates to actualize God's saving will. In the non-Christian cultic rites, God's grace is also available to human beings. Man actually celebrates them in religious form. This forms the *ex opus operatum* efficacy of natural sacraments. This means that human beings are blessed with God's Grace that is not dependent on the power of celebration of the rites, but the power of God that is inherent in what man believes and celebrates. God offered himself in an unambiguous way to the world in history in the person of Jesus Christ. With his life, death and resurrection, Christ promised to the individual God's offer of grace. The Catholic Church celebrates Christ's saving mystery in the sacraments the grace of which is conferred on the individual independent of the power of the celebrant. The *opus operatum* of the sacraments causes itself in the unambiguous and efficacious word of God.¹¹⁶⁶ In *ex opus operantis*, on the other hand, the individual is expected to respond with "yes" or a "no."¹¹⁶⁷ This depends on the disposition of the individual. In the Christian context, the individual sacrament encounters the individual person with an eschatological finality, assisting the individual on his earthly journey to the final union with Christ in glory. The *matter* and *form* of the sacraments conform to Christ and the Church – the root and founder of all sacraments.¹¹⁶⁸ In the Christian sacraments, the already natural sacraments remain an eschatological validity (*ex opus operatum*). They unite with supernatural grace. Bouyer therefore says: "The Christian sacraments do not provide any new reality of sign, but express natural signs in different ways."¹¹⁶⁹ The difference lies in the person of Jesus Christ, the primordial sacrament and the triune God to whom the sacraments unite the individual.¹¹⁷⁰

Here lies the theological foundation of natural Sacraments. Knowing that cultic rites are culturally and historically conditioned and motivated, and that grace is not definitively bound to the concrete formation of rites, but always remains detachable from the saving history¹¹⁷¹, the question is: How do we make incorporation of African rites of initiation a reality?¹¹⁷² What is

¹¹⁶⁰ Cf. M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik IV/1*, München: 1952, 89, but he did not maintain this view again in his work (cf. vol 6 of the same work), which appeared twelve years later.

¹¹⁶¹ Cf. J. Heilsbetz, *Theologische Gründe der nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Freiburg: 1967, 118.

¹¹⁶² Cf. NA 1.

¹¹⁶³ "Der Glaube als Antwort auf das totale Angesporensein des Menschen durch Gott wird in den entscheidenden Situationen des Lebens gelebt. Diese können als konkrete Möglichkeit einer Glaubensbegegnung mit Gott beim geschichtlichen und der Gemeinschaftsaspect plural verfassten Menschen gar nicht unter eine einzige kultische Handlung subsumiert werden" [J. Heilsbetz, (1967), 119].

¹¹⁶⁴ Cf. H. Küng, (1984), 1-92.

¹¹⁶⁵ Cf. K. Schanz, *Sakramentenlehre*, Freiburg: 1893, 60.

¹¹⁶⁶ Cf. K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 414.

¹¹⁶⁷ Cf. K. Rahner, "Personale und sakramentale Frömmigkeit", in: *STh*, II (1962), 15-141.

¹¹⁶⁸ Cf. K. Rahner, "Kirche und Sakramente", in: *QD*, 10 (Freiburg 1961), 10-15, 10; cf. M. Ntetem, (1983), 237.

¹¹⁶⁹ L. Bouyer, (1964), 83-89.

¹¹⁷⁰ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, 2001, 242.

¹¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹¹⁷² SC 37, 65.

their place in the Christian liturgy?¹¹⁷³ Let us see first the relationship that exists between the Christian sacraments and African traditional Myths/Rites.

4.5.2 Christian Sacraments and African Myths/Rites

In the first place, it should be noted that culture and faith are complementary to one another. They are not opposed to each other.¹¹⁷⁴ The symbolic relationship that exists between the two is obvious. By surveying this relationship, we do not intend to commit the error of relativism as the two forms of initiation belong to two different religions, rather to examine points of agreement that would facilitate the inculturation of liturgy in African rites. A. J. Chupungco articulates it thus: “Before entering into the area of inculturation it is necessary to make a preliminary comparative study between the Christian liturgical forms and the corresponding cultural elements. The object of such a study is to discover the points of convergence on which interaction between the liturgy and culture can operate.”¹¹⁷⁵ Consequently, the relationship that exists between faith and culture calls for re-structuring of both rites of the Christian initiation and initiation in African traditional religion, especially among the Igbo people, in order to explore the possibilities of an integrated co-existence among them, rather than the hitherto parallelism that characterised their relationship or lack of it.

Myth characterizes initiations in the Christian and African traditional religion. Robin Lane Fox maintains that the so-called non-Christian religion had always influenced Christianity. The attachment of a myth to the ceremonies of the two religions is suggestive. For instance, the cult of *Mithras*, the recurrent imagery of its shrines and monuments, accompanied a suggestive set of titles for the cult’s officiants, and this influenced Christianity in title-taking.¹¹⁷⁶ For Odo Casel, Christianity, right from its beginning and essence, is a Christ-founded religion – a mystery cult (*Christianimos*). The religion centres on the commemoration of salvation.¹¹⁷⁷ Although true as it is, his view does not give room for a genetic derivation of the Christian sacraments from the non-Christian mysteries. In addition, it renders invalid the agreement of the absolute Christo-centric nature of the sacraments with native rites.¹¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the elements of “speech form” and “thought pattern” open the way for drawing a relationship between the Christian and non-Christian mysteries. A leaning on the Church Fathers on the use of analogy, would buttress our position.¹¹⁷⁹

4.5.3 The place of Analogy

With the Church Fathers, one comes to a better understanding of analogy that exists between the Christian and non-Christian (African traditional) mystery cults. Justin Martyr compares the Christian Eucharist with the pagan¹¹⁸⁰ rite of *Mithras*¹¹⁸¹ as did Tertullian and Cyprian.¹¹⁸² The Church Fathers drew with caution the analogies of the Christian sacraments with the non-Christian rites. The only reason they had for this caution was their disdain of the pagan mystery cults. Consequently, they condemned and attacked the rites with severity.

The Christian initiation, especially baptism, effects the removal of sin, and incorporates the individual into the community of Christ’s Faithful and the triune God.¹¹⁸³ But in the first

¹¹⁷³ Chapter Six.

¹¹⁷⁴ C. O. Onuh *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage: The Prospects of inculturation*, Frankfurt: 1992, 202.

¹¹⁷⁵ A. J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future, The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, New York: 1989, 27.

¹¹⁷⁶ Cf. F. R., Fox, *Pagans And Christians*, England: 1986, 93.

¹¹⁷⁷ Cf. O. Casel, “Mysteriengedächtnis der Meßliturgie im Licht der Tradition”, in: *JLW*, 6 (1926), 141.

¹¹⁷⁸ Cf. A. Schilson, *Theologie als Sakramententheologie, Die Mysterientheologie Odo Casel*, Mainz: 1982, 254.

¹¹⁷⁹ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos*, *ibid*.

¹¹⁸⁰ We have to note that the word “pagan” has a perjorative connotation.

¹¹⁸¹ Cf. Casel, *Eucharist des Heiligen Justinus Martyr*, in: *Der Katholik* 4 (1914), 154. The Eucharist, which was celebrated in the context of the Passover (cf. Mt 26:17; cf. Lk 22:15-16) was a pre-Israelite origin, an annual festival of nomadic shepherds celebrated for the well-being of their flocks (cf. Ex 12:1-14).

¹¹⁸² Cf. O. Casel, (1926), 134-139.

¹¹⁸³ Cf. O. Casel, (1926), 134-139.

place, the Christian initiation incorporates one into the community of the Church. For the fact that the Church has a sacramental character, this incorporation into the church produces the effect of *communion* with the living God. The African traditional initiation, on the other hand, incorporates one into the traditional community. This could distinguish the Christian initiation from the pagan initiation. Despite the notable difference that exists between the two, the Christian writers did not fail to recognize the presence of “religious type” and “form appearance” that both of them share in common, which the writers applied in symbolic language. They communicate these in words in order to make the gospel intelligible to the people of their time.¹¹⁸⁴

The relationship, which exists between Christianity and pagan myths and the unique characters of the Christian sacraments, disposed Odo Casel to make a comparison of religious teaching and the pagan mysteries. In the *Liturgie als Mysterienfeier*, he lays emphasis on the essential analogy of the “type of action” which belongs to the natural dimension of the human history. This *type*, what he calls “Cult-Eidos Mysterium”¹¹⁸⁵, gives the Christian sacraments their tangible types. When one accepts the language and introduction to the understanding of the cultic actions of the Church Fathers, it shows basic similarities with the pagan mysteries. The analogy remains that in each side (the Christian sacraments and the pagan rites), there is always the place of cult, which celebration leads human beings to commune with God.¹¹⁸⁶ The element of divine-human action always remains central to cultic act, both in the Christian sacraments and non-Christian, native myths and rites. The analogy always contains two elements of “commemoration” (different from the Old Testament!) and “drama”.

4.5.4 Form Dimension (Anthropological Base of Sacramental Theology)

The history of religion always has an anthropological content in the understanding of the phenomenon of “sacrament”. Odo Casel maintains that the Christian Liturgy is not pre-occupied with the ancient, but it involves itself, with the help of analogy, with the Christian cults.¹¹⁸⁷ The “form dimension” plays much role in Christianity. The early Christian writers appropriated the non-Christian mystery language to make the gospel intelligible. Despite the appropriation of the non-Christian language form and thought pattern, the ancestors find their fulfilment in the Christian sacraments.¹¹⁸⁸ It confronts Christianity, through her liturgical celebration, to introduce and refine the non-Christian spirits that lead to Christ.¹¹⁸⁹ Odo Casel called for the application of original forms, especially the ancient Hellenistic cult mystery (*Eidos Mysterium*), in instruction that would contribute to an understanding of the Christian sacraments. For him, cultic mystery which is rich in the native religions is lacking today in the Christian religion. He expresses this concern thus: “Since our culture, apart from Christianity, does no longer contain cultic mystery, in order to enliven what we have today in the Church, we need to research on its source. Every essence is best understood in its origin, where its nature, that is, the birth place of its given art has no mixture. We ought to quietly ask the ancient people, what do you understand by mystery? The Church names her actions mystery. Help me to know this deeper.”¹¹⁹⁰ Odo Casel contributed much to establishing the relationship between the Christian and the pagan

¹¹⁸⁴ Cf. O. Casel, *Liturgie als Mysterienfeier*, Freiburg: 1922, 12.

¹¹⁸⁵ O. Casel, (1922), 12.

¹¹⁸⁶ Cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 256.

¹¹⁸⁷ Cf. O Casel, “Katholische Kultprobleme”, in: *JLW*, 7 (1927), 122.

¹¹⁸⁸ Cf. O. Casel, *Mysterienfeier*, 1-44; 104; cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 258.

¹¹⁸⁹ Cf. O. Casel, “Religionsgeschichte und Liturgiewissenschaft”, in: *JLW*, 14 (1938), 221.

¹¹⁹⁰ “Da wir nun in unserer Kultur außerhalb des Christentum keine Kultmysterien mehr haben, ist es durchaus legitim, nun jene von der Kirche erhaltenen Termini dadurch wieder lebendig zu machen, daß wir sie in ihrem Ursprung erforschen. Jedes Wesen wird am klarsten in seinem Ursprung erkannt, wo es seine *natura*, d.h. die ihm durch seine Geburt gegebene Art, noch ganz ohne Beimischung besitzt. Wir dürfen also ruhig die Antike fragen: ,Was hast du unter Mysterium verstanden? Die Kirche nennt ihr Tun ein Mysterium. Hilf mir, dies tiefer zu erkennen”. (O. Casel, *Mysterienfrömmigkeit*, in: *BZThS*, 4 (1927), 101; cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 259

rites/myths, suggested the need to lean on the African traditional religionists in order to have a good understanding of the meaning of mystery cults.

To the Church in Africa, his position could be practically relevant in the celebration of the Christian mysteries. Perhaps, the Church needs to present a similar question to African traditional religionists in order to learn what mystery means to them. This would help her to understand the “pure” African world view on mystery, in order to make the Christian cultic (initiation) celebrations relevant to Africans. It is not enough to condemn African traditional religion as ‘paganism’ and do away with its myths and rites, knowing that Christianity derives much of her archetypal forms from the ancient pagan religions. The same applies to most of Church’s religious symbolisms. The African myths, rites and symbols should form a basis for an authentic celebration of the mystery cults (and rites of initiation) in Africa.¹¹⁹¹ They should form a basis for the propagation of the gospel. The Church needs, in the face of the erosion of her religious symbolisms, turn to Africans and ask them: Please, tell us what you understand by religious myths and symbolisms? What does the rites of initiation mean to you, and how do you celebrate them? Perhaps, the Church would learn from the wealth of African religious symbols and rites, myths and sacred celebrations, to enrich her liturgy of the sacraments of initiation. A mere exhibition of superiority complex in this regard is not enough and does not offer any solution. We should know that the essence of a thing is best comprehended within its cultural and historical roots. The world of African culture and religious experience should help the African to live and express the Christian faith – a faith that is built from outside and brought to the African in his/her cultural world. A denial of this fact would not only be doing great injustice to the African, but also have a long-time negative effect on Christianity – a situation we are presently witnessing in the Church in Africa.¹¹⁹² An emergence of an initiation rite that takes on African flesh and spirit would contribute much to enabling the African to live and express his Christian faith in his/her world. The task of arriving at this goal does not only present a challenge to Systematic Theology (the task of finding theological and hermeneutical justifications for it), but also Practical Theology, especially, Liturgy on its concrete application. In general, it challenges the Christian theology to get involved in the concrete-life situation of the people, which is the place of the hearers of the gospel.¹¹⁹³

4.5.5 Mystery Cult (Εἶδος)

Mystery cult is another element that characterizes both the pagan and Christian sacraments of initiation. Odo Casel holds prayer and sacrifice as constitutive parts of mystery cult. He maintains that the pagans believe in the manifestation of gods in human form that suffered the pains of death on earth, but returned to life. These gods, according to him, began their destiny in dramatic rites. Their manifestation and acts express new reality. He holds that modern cultic rites originate from the gods. They participate in their destiny (of gods). In addition, they entered sacred circle and achieved sacred reality.¹¹⁹⁴

The commemoration of sacred circles characterizes both the Christian sacraments and non-Christian rites and myths. Each cult (Εἶδος) is an element of mystery type of one of the gods that appeared on earth. Other real historical myths remain on the side of cosmic type. In prayer and sacrifice, gods and elements unite. They affect the celebration of commemoration of a particular art. The actions of gods that appeared on earth, their manifestation, suffering and

¹¹⁹¹ Cf. The origin of symbolism in chapter two, sub-section 2.1.3 and symbolisms of initiation rites in chapter Three.

¹¹⁹² It is obvious that some baptized Christians, in the face of life-struggle, turn to the African Traditional Religion for security, whereas others, while professing, *de jura*, the Christian faith, *de facto*, practise the African Traditional Religion. Moreover, some see Christianity a denial of the true African religious experience and an imposition of a foreign religion on the Africans - a form of religious imperialism. (cf. C. William, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of A Race From 4500 B.C. To 2000 AD*, Chicago: 1987), 56-58.

¹¹⁹³ Cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 260; cf. K. Rahner, (1966a), 48-55.

¹¹⁹⁴ Cf. O. Casel, (1926), 139; cf. O. Casel, *Das Christliche Kultmysterium*, Regensburg: ²1935, 52; cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 261.

victory are celebrated at particular times. Through symbolic rites, human beings commemorate a past event.¹¹⁹⁵ This is a peculiar character of commemoration. The subjective remembrance of an individual is a symbolic “re-presenting” of a past event. The cultic commemoration of a past, saving event creates a presence in time and brings the event to a presence. The peculiar characteristic of cultic mysteries is the celebration of the death-resurrection of the gods, which symbolic action represent. In the Christian context, the cultic, dramatic representation of the mystery of Christ (the mystery of His transition - passing [from death into eternal life] is a peculiar commemoration of this event.¹¹⁹⁶ The cult mystery is a medium through which the Christian lives his / her life in the mystery of Christ. It is a condition of the possibility of human beings to co-operate with God.¹¹⁹⁷ The notion, “God”, is an Archetype in every religion. It establishes the anthropological base of mystery cult that involves prayer and sacrifice to God.

Mystery involves the saving action of God (*opus operatum*) and the co-operation of human beings (*opus operantis*). The co-operation of the individual in the mystery cult is not a passive act. Rather, it is the free exercise of freedom of the individual in the mystery cult. Just as the Christian sacraments dispose the individual to participate, in a symbolic manner, in the cultic mystery of Christ and attain salvation, so do the non-Christian rites dispose the individual to participate in the religious and sacred mysteries of his / her own religion and attain salvation.¹¹⁹⁸ The action of God in human form equally establishes a relationship between the Christian sacraments and non-Christian myths and rites. The action of God, which remains valid in the Christian sacraments also manifests in the non-Christian mysteries. Prayers (the thought and expression of the human hearts), and sacrifice (essential offering of the people to gods) combine to celebrate the action of God in human history.¹¹⁹⁹ Both occur in any sacred relationship with God, whether with the God of the immanence or the God of transcendence. L. N. Mbefo affirms this when he said, this God, whether God of nature or God of salvation, is one and the same, that the God of nature is the Lord of history.¹²⁰⁰ This is the *Anknüpfungspunkt*, the point of relationship between the two religions and their rites. The experience of God in cult, which makes it possible for human beings to share in the suffering and life of god, draws analogy between the mystery cult and the Christian sacraments. The Christian sacraments re-present God’s saving action in Christ. They execute God’s saving action in Christ in order to enable human beings to share in the spiritual life of Christ. They also help human beings to participate in the divine essence.¹²⁰¹ These dimensional forms of ritual actions that feature in mysteries have real symbolic, representative and commemorative characters. They enable human action to participate in the life of the sacred, and relate the Christian sacraments with the non-Christian mysteries and rites. Thus as the Church discovers and highlights areas of disagreement with the non-Christian cultic mysteries, she is also challenged to discover more areas of agreement, and endeavour to integrate the latter into the Christian Sacraments of initiation, especially, in Africa.

4.5.6 Summary

In this Chapter, we have devoted much time to discuss initiation in the Christian context, giving particular attention to the word “sacrament”, its nature, origin and development in the Church right from the early Church Fathers to the Vatican II Council. Although, founded and

¹¹⁹⁵ Cf. O. Casel, “Die Stellung des Kultmysterium im Christentum”, in: *LiZs*; 3 (1930/31), 142-143, 142; cf. O. Casel, (1935), 2.

¹¹⁹⁶ Cf. J. Plooiij, *Die Mysterienlehre Odo Casel’s. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch der Kirchen. Deutsche Ausgabe besorgt von Oda Hagemeyer, mit einem Vorwort von Burkhard Neunheuser*, Neustadt an der Aisch: 1968 (Niederland: 1964), 18; cf. O. Casel, “Mysterienfrömmigkeit”, in: *BZThS*, 4 (1927), 101-104.

¹¹⁹⁷ Cf. O. Casel, (1935), 160.

¹¹⁹⁸ Cf. LG 6.

¹¹⁹⁹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: 2002, 215.

¹²⁰⁰ Cf. L. N. Mbefo, *Theology and Aspects of Igbo Culture*, Enugu: 1997, 15. H. U. von Balthasar corroborates the above statement saying: “Der Namen des Gottes, der in Liebesgunst hilft, (...) können in den Völkern und Zeiten unzähligen sein, immer ist der Gott dieser Eine, Besondere, der mir zugewandt ist, in dessen Schutzbereich ich geborgen, erhört und heil bin”. (H. U. Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, 21).

¹²⁰¹ Cf. A. Schilson, (1982), 264.

instituted by Christ, this claim leaves room for theological debate. There is little or no doubt that the ancient Egyptian rite of purification leaves clues on its influence on Judaism and subsequently, Christianity in her rite of initiation, especially, baptism. The chapter equally establishes not only areas of disagreement, but also areas of agreement between the Christian sacraments and African traditional religious myths and rites, soliciting the Church to make effort to incarnate the liturgy, especially, the sacraments in the African culture. This is a duty that confronts the inculturation and incarnation of the liturgy in Africa. Who will bell the cat? It requires the conscientious effort of all. Before we discuss a possible realization of this goal, we shall devote attention in the next chapter to the position of the Church on non-Christian religions.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 THE CHURCH ON NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

5.1 Scriptural Evidence of God's Revelation in non-Christian Religions

The Scripture provides enormous evidence on the presence of revelation in non-Christian religions. The Old and New Testament writings bear much testimony on this. To substantiate our point, let us see the concepts of God the Creator, the Word of God and Wisdom (Sophia) of God.

5.1.1 God the Creator as Father of All Nations in the Old Testament

The Genesis account presents God as Creator of the world.¹²⁰² As the creator, he has always the power and might to redeem and to help, especially what he created.¹²⁰³ The Prophet Isaiah presents God as the Lord of the nations and history.¹²⁰⁴ He is Lord (Adonai). In this exilic prophet, the God of Israel acquires an absolutizing and universalizing tone. He is the only God, apart from him, no other God exists. This absolute Lord is King¹²⁰⁵ of the world and his people. His deeds are right and just, especially to all he created. His will is the foundation of the world.¹²⁰⁶ In addition, God becomes the foundation of Israeli legal system. All the Israeli legal Code (both in Exodus and Deuteronomy) derive from Him. Also, God is wisdom and life.¹²⁰⁷ This divine origin of Israeli Laws is also present in non-Jewish religions. He is the personification of Wisdom. To understand better how the God of Israel acquired a universal status as the father and creator of all, the concepts of "Word of God" (Dabar) and "Wisdom of God" (Sophia) are very significant.

5.1.2 The Word of God

The Old Testament presents the Word of God (Heb. *Dabar*, Gk. *logos*) as expressive of the divine Law¹²⁰⁸, and interprets the meaning of Yahweh's historical interventions.¹²⁰⁹ As a dynamic reality, it (the Word of God) is infallibly efficacious of God's designs. Whether these refer to historical interventions or to God's cosmic action, once God utters his Word, it necessarily accomplishes what it contains (cf. Is 55:11). First and foremost, the Old Testament applies the efficacy of the Word of God to God's intervention in the history of Israel: the saving events are the "confirmation of his Word" (cf. Dt 9:59). In retrospect, its efficacy applies to God's creation.¹²¹⁰ It later takes on a universal significance that will re-echo in the New Testament (cf. Joh 1:1-3). The Word becomes a distinct reality stimulated with power. It is not distinct from Yahweh, only as the dynamic expression of God and God's self-manifestation in salvation history, both in words and deeds. It is God's turning to human beings to reveal himself, as well as calling human beings to a communication of life.¹²¹¹

¹²⁰² Cf. Gen 14:19.

¹²⁰³ Cf. Ps 121: 2; 146: 6.

¹²⁰⁴ Cf. Is 40:9-20; 46:1-7.

¹²⁰⁵ Cf. Is 6.

¹²⁰⁶ Cf. J. Schreiner, "Gott: III Biblisch: 1. Alttestament", in: *LThK*, 4 (1995), 856-859, 857.

¹²⁰⁷ Cf. Dt. 30:15-20; cf. Ex 22:20 -26; 23:10f; cf. Lev 19:11-18; cf. Dt 15.

¹²⁰⁸ Cf. Ex 20:1-17; cf. Dt 5: 6-22.

¹²⁰⁹ Cf. Ex 20:2.

¹²¹⁰ Cf. Gen. 1. 3ff; cf. Ps 33:6-9, 107. 120.

¹²¹¹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: 2002, 42.

5.1.3 The Wisdom / Sophia of God

God, who alone is wise, communicates his wisdom to human beings. The Old Testament literature presents the divine Wisdom (*Hokmah*) as the origin of all wisdom (cf. Prov 8, Sir 24, and Wis 6-13). Wisdom is the product of Yahweh's creation that exists 'before all things'. It is at the beginning of God's work, the first of God's acts of old, before the beginning of the earth (cf. Prov 8:22-26); "I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men" (Prov 8:30-31), "teaching them and instructing them to be wise" (Prov 8:32-36). The Book of Wisdom describes her as the breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the God (cf. Wis 7:25).¹²¹² Like the Word, Wisdom is fundamentally dynamic reality, closely associated with all the works of God in the world. In her, God has shaped the plan of his work, and through her, brings it to completion. She shared with God in the act of creation (cf. Pro 8:27-31). Throughout the unfolding of salvation history, God sends her on mission. Retaining her identity, she renews all things, and in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets (cf. Wis 7:27). She is the dispenser of all goodness and of God's friendship (cf. Wis 7:14, 89), the source of right and perfect conduct who teaches those who welcome her (cf. Wis 6.19-20; 24). She is life for the person who discovers her (cf. Prov 8:35). She makes herself familiar with people to teach them (cf. Prov 8:32-36).¹²¹³ She presided over the destiny of humankind from the start (cf. Wis 10:1-24). Having come from the mouth of the Most High (cf. Sir 24:3), she takes control of every people and nation (cf. Sir 24:6), seeking among them a resting place (cf. Sir 24:7). The book of Proverbs speaks of Wisdom as a person in the same manner as the Word of God. She is as a popular preacher standing at the crossroads, calling passers by, inviting them to enter her house, to sit at her table and gain by her lessons (cf. Prov 9:1-12). She takes care of her children like a mother, providing them with God's blessings (cf. Sir 4:11-15). The Books of Proverbs (1-9), Ben Sirach (cf. 1-6; 24) and Wisdom (cf. 1-9) show eloquent personification of Wisdom. She is all-powerful like God himself. She is God's associate who participates in all his works, his counsellor, who sits on a throne by the side of Yahweh (cf. Wis 9:4) and above all, Yahweh's spouse (cf. Wis 8:3).¹²¹⁴ Despite these marvellous designations of Wisdom in the Jewish Holy Writ, the personification of Wisdom, just like the Word, is a literary device. Wisdom originates from Yahweh as his radiance and image (cf. Wis 7:25-26). She represents God's self-manifestation, standing for the beauty, order, and wisdom of the divine plan that unfolds in the history of salvation as a reflection of the harmony that exists in God's self. Finally, the Wisdom of Yahweh expresses Yahweh in his relationship to human beings, in works and self-manifestation, and directs the destinies of the chosen people. She is universally present in humankind and history. The Word of the Old Testament recurs in the New Testament by way of a Word-Christology. No wonder, the Wisdom too develops, mostly in John and Paul, into a Wisdom-Christology.¹²¹⁵ In all these, how does its universal presence manifest in the universe?

5.1.4 The Universal Presence of *Ruah* Yahweh in the Universe

The Hebrew word *Ruah* (Spirit) basically means "wind" and "breath."¹²¹⁶ In the song of Moses, this easterly wind is praised as the "blast of (Yahweh's) nostrils" which piled the waters up and made the waves stand upright like a wall.¹²¹⁷ This passage is indicative of the process of generating symbols that lies at the very origin of religions. In specific historic circumstance, the objective given, the sensual perception of the east wind, the sirocco, which comes in from the desert and whose heat is so intense that it immediately withers all vegetation, is experienced and celebrated in song as a transcendent dimension, in this case as the breath of Yahweh. Wherever

¹²¹² Cf. Ibid. 43.

¹²¹³ Cf. P. Otto, "Sprüche Salamos", in: S. Herrman, (ed.), *BK*, 17 (1984), 96-98, 96.

¹²¹⁴ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 44; cf. R. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, New York: 1994, 205.

¹²¹⁵ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 44.

¹²¹⁶ Cf. Ex 14: 21.

¹²¹⁷ Cf. Ex 15: 8.

the natural event of wind agrees with an historical event important to the people of Israel, the natural phenomenon becomes a divine symbol. It can punish and destroy, or fertilize and vitalize.¹²¹⁸ This was the case with wind (*ruach*).

Ruach represents divine energy and power already active in God's creative act. The book of Genesis presents the *Ruach Yahweh* (Spirit of God) as hovering over the flood of chaos in the primeval ocean and filling it with seeds of life and order.¹²¹⁹ Here the breath of God is never a storm, a raging cyclone, but a vitalizing breeze. Elijah encountered Yahweh on the sacred Mount Horeb not in the form of the raging storm which "tore mountains and shattered rocks" (1 Kg 19:11), but in the gentle breeze that came once the storm had ebbed. This comforting and shooting wind was the breath of Yahweh. It was the "cool of the day" in which Yahweh walked in the garden (Gen 3:8).

The visible reality of the wind and of the protecting breath of God becomes visible in the bird that spreads its wings and seems to move weightlessly through the skies. It is a symbol of this divine reality. Yahweh protects and guides his people "like an eagle guarding its nest, hovering over its young, he spreads out its wings to hold them; he supports them on his pinions" (Dt 32:11).

Unlike the Hebrew word "neschama," the term "ruach" does not describe the involuntary process of breathing, but the special breathing in which the dynamic vitality of human beings is expressed. It is the breath as expression of life and emotion. The Queen of Sheba is left breathless – without *ruach* when she sees the unbelievable riches of Solomon (cf. 1 Kg 10:5; 2 Chron 9: 4). G. Baudler notes that this windy, dynamic *ruach* itself had features of Yahweh. It was only in later times that this character of *ruach* turned into the common meaning of "breath of life" (Gen 2: 7). Only in the latest period of the Old Testament does *ruach* turn into a "fully-fledged theological concept which does not mean any specific (wind-like) action of God. Sometimes, the word stands for "God". At this point does the combination of "ruach Kadosh" (holy breath) spring up (cf. Is. 63: 9).¹²²⁰ In this latest period the scripture presents *ruach* as spirit of God. Consequently, the Psalmist presents life as entirely dependent upon God's Spirit: "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30). The *Ruach* of God is also at work within human beings as a quickening energy. It is present in creation and re-creation. Joel already prophesizes in the Day of Yahweh, the Spirit will be poured out "upon all flesh" (Joel 2:28) – a prophecy which Peter's speech re-echoes and sees fulfilled in the Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:16-21). The Spirit endows people with divine power, to turn them into instruments through which God intervenes in history. It is the "Holy Spirit" (Wis 1:5; 7:22; Is 63:10-11) because it belongs to the divine realm. The action of the Spirit of God remains unique in the history of Israel in many ways. On the one hand, the Spirit of God lays hold of human beings to transform them into the instruments of God's actions among his people. For example, the king of Israel is "seized upon" by the Spirit of God (1 Sam 16:13). Similarly, the Spirit will "rest upon" the Messiah foretold by Isaiah (cf. Is 11:2; 61:1); it will be "put" by God upon his Servant (Is 42:1). Conversely, the Spirit of God also falls on the prophets to empower them to speak the Word of God. In late Judaism, the Spirit will be above all else she "who has spoken by the prophets." Here, it will acquire a universal dimension in the understanding of the people of Israel. It fills the whole world (cf. Wis 1:7). God's omnipresence (cf. Jer 23:24) is understood in terms of his Spirit (cf. Ps 139/138:7), and the Spirit's universal, life-giving activity.¹²²¹ "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth" (Ps 104/103:30). The book of Wisdom indicates a clear witness to the Spirit's universal, life-giving activity (Wis 11:24-12.1).¹²²²

¹²¹⁸ Cf. G. Baudler, *God and Violence*, Springfield, Illinois: 1992, 157.

¹²¹⁹ Cf. Gen 1:2; cf. C. Westermann, "Genesis", in: S. Hermann, (ed.) *BK 1* (1974), 148-150, 148.

¹²²⁰ Cf. G. Baudler, (1992), 158.

¹²²¹ Cf. Jdt 16:14, Job 34:14-15.

¹²²² Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 45.

Generally, the Old Testament witnesses the Word-Wisdom-Spirit to God's dealing with humankind throughout salvation history. From the Judeo-Christian perspective, therefore, history from beginning to end, is history of salvation - dialogue initiated by God with humankind (in Christ's Agape love) from the dawn of time the separate phases of which are leading humankind to God's appointed fate. In the Old Testament, Word-Wisdom-Spirit already testify to such promise on the part of God, awaiting its completion in the Word-Wisdom made flesh and in the Spirit poured out.¹²²³

5.1.5 New Testament Evidence

The New Testament sources present two paradoxically contrasting views on the possibility of revelation and salvation in non-Christian religions. Some texts emphasize the uniqueness of Christ and faith commitment to him as indispensable for knowledge of the will of God and for salvation, while other texts emphasize the fact that God has left no nation or culture without knowledge of God.¹²²⁴ Clearly, the paradox and tension is evident in the New Testament to the extent that even in the same writers, one "finds expressions of both of the absolute necessity of Christian commitment and of the recognition that God does not withhold the knowledge of himself from the great mass of mankind."¹²²⁵ The synoptic gospels, for instance, explicitly or implicitly express the unique authority and role of Jesus as a means of reaching God the Father, and at the same time, offer salvation to anyone who does good to a neighbour. With this affirmation, the synoptic gospels seem not to limit salvation to members of Christ's folk. The paradox is more evident and implicit in the gospel of Matthew, where one reads: "Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).¹²²⁶ Another passage attributes blessings on *those* who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, and clothed the naked (Mt 25:42). Although they might not be *aware* of what they were doing, as far as they did this to one of the least of his brothers, and sisters, they did it to Christ. The gospel of John speaks of the Word that has been in the world from the beginning (cf. Joh 1:1), and in some sense enlightening all people, yet the gospel of Matthew, on the other hand, speaks of the "only begotten son" (Mt 3:17) and claims that no one can go to the Father except through him. Therefore, such statement of Acts 4: 12 "of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved" should be balanced with Acts 14:16-17: "God who made heaven and earth. In the past, he allowed each nation to go its own way, but even then, He did not leave them without evidence of himself in the good things he does for them" (cf. Acts 14:15-17). From the above evidence, it is conclusively logical to say that the New Testament writings directly or indirectly affirm Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father and at the same time allow the possibility of salvation even without precise confession of faith in Christ. The view of the New Testament on the matter is not either or, but both and.¹²²⁷

5.2 Theological Foundation

5.2.1 The Doctrine of the 'Logos' in the Patristic Period

The doctrine of the *Logos* features prominently in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church. At the beginning of the Christian era, the concept of *Logos* or *Dabar* occupied a most excellent place in the minds of the intelligentsia in both Hellenistic philosophy and in Semitic thought. Hellenistic philosophers see *Logos* as a principle of intelligibility immanent in the

¹²²³ Cf. Ibid. 45.

¹²²⁴ Cf. I. E. I. Metuh, "Theological Status of African Traditional Religion," in: J. Ukpong, (ed.) *JIT*, 1 (1994), 113 – 115, 114.

¹²²⁵ J. Macquarrie, "Christianity and Other Faiths", in: *UTSQ*, 20 (1964), 3f.

¹²²⁶ Cf. D. W. Davis, & D. Allison, *Matthew: The Internationally Critical Commentary*, 2000, Vol. III, XIX-XXVII, Edingburg: 2000, 30.

¹²²⁷ Cf. E. I. Metuh, in: *JIT*, 1 (1994), 115-116., 115.

world. To the Jews it expresses a literary personification, and personal revelation of Yahweh.¹²²⁸ As the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the Word of God incarnate, it appears to be a revolutionary innovation.¹²²⁹ To the Christian, the *Logos* appeared as a “person” different from Yahweh. It is a divine person. Despite the originality of his personal character in the mind of the early Fathers, the *Logos* also exercise the functions attributed by Hellenism to the impersonal *Logos*.¹²³⁰ Paul speaks of the cosmic significance of Christ (cf. Col 1:16-16).¹²³¹ Questions that boil in the mind are: In what ways do the *Logos* exercise these universal cosmic functions? Did the eternal *Logos* manifest himself to all human beings, or the knowledge of him only limited to the Jewish-Christian tradition? Did those who lived before or outside this tradition have part in him, or was it restricted solely to those who received him when he came into the world?¹²³²

In an attempt to answer these boiling theological questions, the Fathers of the Church spread the theology of *Logos*, maintaining that the Word of God was active in the world from the very beginning, even if the mystery of his self-manifestation had to pass through various stages before reaching its end in the incarnation.¹²³³ Saint Justin, for instance, recognized the presence of revelation in non-Christian Religions. He holds that the *Logos*, the word of God had long been active in every nation and culture down through the ages before it became incarnate in Jesus Christ. As an agent of creation, the *logos*, was and is always present as a seed (*spermatikos*) in the individual persons and groups. In the *Apologia*, he writes: “We have been taught that Christ is the first-begotten of God, and have previously testified that he is the Logos (*Logos*) of which every race of humans partakes (*metechein*)... Those who have lived in accordance with the Logos (*meta logou*) are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them; among the Barbarians, Abraham, Ananias, Azarius, Misael, and Elijah, and many others, whose deeds and names I forbear to list, knowing that this would be lengthy. So also those who lived contrary to the *Logos* were ungracious and enemies to Christ, and murderers of those who live so now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed.”¹²³⁴ With the above words, St. Justin firmly affirms the existence of revelation in non-Christian religions as well as the clear acknowledgment of pagans as Christians.

Similarly, St. Irenaeus of Lyon brings out the historical meaning of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, but incorporates the pre-Mosaic dispensation in the history of salvation, thereby makes room for salvific value of pre-biblical religions. He organizes his theology of history on the idea of the revealing *Logos*. To the Heretics, he writes: “Since it is God who works all things in all, he is, by virtue of his nature and his greatness, invisible and ineffable to all his creatures, but not therefore unknown; for, through his Word, all learn that there is one sole God and Father who contains all things, who gives being to all things (...). Moreover, the Word was made the dispenser of his Father’s grace for the benefit of people, for whose sake he carried out such great divine plans (*dispensations = oikonomias*), showing God to people, presenting them to God and preserving the invisibility of his Father so that the human being should never come to despise God, and that he should always have a goal toward which to advance; on the other hand, showing God to people in many ways, lest they, wholly lacking God, should cease to exist.”¹²³⁵ The whole theology of Irenaeus centres on the intense text on the divine philanthropy which creates human beings that they may live, the economy of the divine revelations through the *Logos* who, present to creation from the beginning, gradually reveals the Father.¹²³⁶

¹²²⁸ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 147. B. Witherington, III, *Companions to the New Testament: The Many Faces of the Christ*. New York: 1998, 17.

¹²²⁹ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, “Das Johannesevangelium”, in: *HThK*, VI/1 (Freiburg: 1979), 209-211.

¹²³⁰ Cf. B. Witherington, III, (1998), 170-178.

¹²³¹ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1994), 104-122.

¹²³² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religion: from Confrontation to Dialogue*, New York: 2001, 147.

¹²³³ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹²³⁴ Justin Martyr, 1 *Apologia*, XLVI, 1-4; *FaCh.* 1, 46/87; cf. J. Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* Philadelphia: 1973, 40-41; cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 148; cf. E. I. Metuh, (1994), 116; cf. A. Shorter, *Towards A Theology of Inculturation*, London: 1988, 88.

¹²³⁵ Cf. Irenaeus, *Ad. Haer.* IV, 6, 6.

¹²³⁶ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 150.

Clement of Alexandria stands prominent in his highly developed philosophy on the nobility of the cultural values of the Greco-Roman, pagan civilization that recognizes the presence and activity of the *Logos* in them. In the *Stromateis* he urges the people as follows: “Your way will not stumble”, says the Scripture, “If you attribute to Providence all good things, whether belonging to Greeks or to us.”¹²³⁷ In the *Protreptikos* (Exhortation to the heathens), Clement develops a Logos-centric theology, asserting that the *Logos* at work in Judaism, and in the best of what the Greek philosophers and poets had to offer, is that very *Logos* who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the identity between the not-yet-incarnate *Logos* and the *Logos*-made-flesh, at the same time asserting the entire newness which the incarnation of the Word brings about as compared to his earlier revelations to humankind.¹²³⁸ Despite his contribution, many Church Fathers recognize the limited and imperfect nature of philosophical knowledge as a means to attaining full knowledge of God.

Tertullian, on the other hand, maintains that even though every human being and culture had “a naturally Christian Soul”¹²³⁹, revelation was important to correct and complete the imperfect and limited human knowledge acquired through philosophy and other human sciences. His famous oratorical outbursts, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concern is there between Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?”¹²⁴⁰ explain better the relationship between Christianity and the native Roman religion at the time of his writing.

St. Augustine of Carthage, a famous North African theologian, recognizes the possibility of salvation in non-Christian religions as he writes: “John the Baptist ... who ... pointing with his finger said: see the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the World: see the one, whom many righteous longed to see, whose arrival, since the beginning of time, humanity believed; which promises were given to Abraham, and Moses wrote, to whom the Laws and Prophets gave witness. See that Lamb of God, he takes away the sins of the World, about whom John, at the beginning of the past or present events of Christ, dramatize, who above all, all the righteous of the early time believed, hoped, and desired as the future event. Similarly, is the faith of those who do not go by this name before Christ, but also those who are given this name.”¹²⁴¹ In addition, he stated in categorical terms that what we call Christian Religion today already existed with the ancient people before the birth of Christ.¹²⁴²

It is important then to stress that with few exceptions the early Church Fathers generally acknowledge some early revelation in non-Christian religions and cultures, recognizing its theological status. Furthermore, they hold that Jesus Christ, as the source, has the fullness of all truth and divine revelation. Therefore, any true knowledge of God, Christ-like truths, and values in non-Christian religions are signs of the presence of Christ.¹²⁴³

5.2.2 The Centrality of the Christ Event

J. Dupuis notes that the constitutive uniqueness and salvific universality of the event of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, must be based on his personal identity as the Son of God.

¹²³⁷ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.V. XXVII/1; cf. A. Shorter, (1988), 130.

¹²³⁸ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrept.* 1.8.

¹²³⁹ *Apologia*, 17:6

¹²⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione haereticorum*, 7, 10; cf. *FC*, Bd. 42 Freiburg: 2002, 63-86; cf. A. Ekechukwu, “Theology of Religions and The Theological Problematic of Inculturation”, in: E. Uzukwu, (ed.), *RC* (Enugu: 1988), 127-128, 127; cf. E. I. Metuh, (1994), 116.

¹²⁴¹ The end of this quotation goes this way: “eadem igitur fides est et in illis, qui nondum nomine, sed re ipsa fuerunt antea Christiani, et in istis, qui non solum sunt, eorum etiam uocantur, et in utrisque eadem gratia per spiritum sactum.” (Augustine, *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 3, 4, 1; CSEL 60,497f).

¹²⁴² “Die Sache selbst, die heute christliche Religion genant wird, existiert schon bei den Alten und hat seit dem Anfang der Menschheit nie gefehlt. Als dann Christus selbst im Fleische erschien, wurde die wahre Religion, die schon existierte, als ‘die christliche bezeichnet’ = “Nam res ipsa, quae nunc Christiana religio nuncupatur, erat apud antiquos, nec defuit ab initio generis humani, quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne, unde vera religio quae iam erat, coepit appellari christiana.” (cf. Retr- 1, 13, 3; cf. *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 12, 342).

¹²⁴³ Cf. E.I. Metuh, (1994), 117.

Therefore, in the modern time, Christology has rightly indicated that the basis for the Christological discourse must be the human reality, even the human history, of Jesus of Nazareth.¹²⁴⁴ In this case, no other thought outside the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of God provides an adequate theological basis of his salvific uniqueness and universality. The gospel values which Jesus upholds, the kingdom of God, the human project or program, option for the poor and the marginalized, denouncing of injustice, message of universal love: all these contribute to the difference and specificity of Jesus' personality. However, none of them would be decisive for making him or recognizing his "constitutively uniqueness" for human salvation.¹²⁴⁵ The theological basis of the sole meaning of the Jesus Christ event centres on the fact that through the mystery of the incarnation the Word of God became, once for always (*ephapax*), personally inserted in human reality and in the story of the world. Through him God establishes an unbroken bond of union with the whole of humanity.¹²⁴⁶

The humanity of Jesus began to exist in time with the mystery of the incarnation, being submitted to the conditions of time and space; but it perdures beyond death, in the glorified and risen state, having become henceforth "metahistorical" or "transhistorical," that is, having reached beyond the conditioning of time and space. Because of the mystery of his death and resurrection, Jesus remains present through all times and in all places.¹²⁴⁷ The Christ event, while it is inclusively present and actual in different times and places, does not weaken the power of the Word of God which became flesh in Jesus Christ. The operation of the Word goes beyond the confines which mark the working presence of the humanity of Jesus even in his glorified state, just as the person of the Word goes beyond the human being of Jesus Christ, irrespective of the 'hypostatic union,' that is, the union in the person of Jesus Christ. From this, one could get a glimpse of how seeds of 'truth and grace'¹²⁴⁸ could be present in other religious traditions of the world, which serve, for their followers, as authentic 'ways' or 'path' of salvation. It is the Word of God who sowed his seeds in the religious traditions. And these are not to be understood as merely human 'stepping stones' (*Pierre d'attente*), gifts of nature, awaiting a divine self-manifestation and self-giving in their own right, however initial and germinal.¹²⁴⁹

Despite the fact that the Church Fathers recognized the presence of revelation in non-Christian religions and the centrality of the Christ's event which is also open to the entire humanity, the Official Church's position on revelation in non-Christian religions, more or less, remained silent; not until the dawn of Vatican II Council. This was the first in the conciliar history of the Church to speak positively, albeit guardedly, about the other religions. The reason was for the Church to look beyond the narrow confines of the Western world and to reflect "on the Church in relations with non-Christian religions."¹²⁵⁰ The Council (Vatican II) laid the theological basis for the elements which serve as starting point in initiating dialogue between Christianity and non-Christian religions.

On its emergence, E. Ikenga Metuh maintains that the theology of non-Christian religion was traditionally worked out in the context of mission theology and had been conditioned by it. Above all, the growing pluralism of modern societies and the consequent awareness of the need for inter-religious dialogue had resulted in a more positive view of non-Christian religions.¹²⁵¹ The issue of the status of non-Christian religions has often been posed and answered in a framework that assumes rather than tries to prove the absoluteness of Christianity both as containing the fullness of God's revelation and the means of salvation. Therefore, the famous statement *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church no salvation) credited to St. Cyprian is

¹²⁴⁴ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 157.

¹²⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid 158.

¹²⁴⁶ Cf. GS 22.

¹²⁴⁷ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 158.

¹²⁴⁸ AG 9.

¹²⁴⁹ Cf. Cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 160.

¹²⁵⁰ Cf. LG 16; cf. NA 2-4.

¹²⁵¹ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1994), 109.

disputed in theological circles today and seem no longer to hold¹²⁵² But how does the Vatican II Council view other traditional Religions?

5.2.3 Vatican II on non-Christian Religions

It is not the aim of this work to delve into exposition of the dogmatic teachings of Vatican II Council¹²⁵³, but to limit itself to important statements of the Council that deal on non-Christian Religions. The Vatican II Council formulated a new image of the Church, expressed in its Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. It brought out in an authentic manner, the essential image of the biblical passages on the Church, and widens the Church's traditional reflections, especially the Patristic. By taking this new course, the Council became popularly known as a "Reform Council", being conscious of the apologetical, as well as the defence and creating of boundary of the post-tridentine Council's narrow image of the Church and reigning ecclesiology that lasted till the Middle of our last century.¹²⁵⁴ Contrarily, it took strongly the reigning spiritual and theological new outbreak of the century, especially in the liturgy and biblical movements, leaning on the universal salvation of the African and Greek Church Fathers and the incarnation of the Church in every Continent. By so-doing, it tried to remove the narrow traditional image of the Church. In addition, it tried to initiate dialogue with other Christian Churches, world Religions and the secular world. Thus, it makes the Church available to the challenges of the present.¹²⁵⁵ Its great contribution was a change of position and a new attitude towards non-Christians. By reaffirming the incarnation principle, it puts the Church back on its novel course of real participation with the whole inhabited earth. Christianity since then, despite the remarkable resistance noted in both high and low places, has sometimes appeared to be on the brink of a third epochal enfleshment as a world Church honestly alive in the varied cultural symbol systems of humankind's vast majority existing in the non-western world.¹²⁵⁶

The spirit of the Vatican II Council is the will to renew the Church and faith: on the one side, the true acceptance of the whole (namely: the forgotten biblical and patristic tradition, and on the other hand, the necessity to justify faith in the midst of the present historical challenges). The Council did not intent to repeat the tradition, but in view of the changed situation, to actualize and enliven it. In his commentary on Vatican II Council, J. Dupuis notes that if Vatican II Council actually innovates in any way on this account, the newness must be concretely visible in the positive way in which it looks at the world at large, as is best outlined by *Gaudium et Spes*.¹²⁵⁷ In relation to non-Christian Religions and universal salvation, the document, *Nostra Aetate*¹²⁵⁸ states that there are already a presence of God and manifestation of the Spirit (before the emergence of the Church) who works and dwells in every human being of good will. The Church as a new reality reveals to the world the hidden face of salvation, the love of God already present in creation. In addition, *Lumen Gentium* states that those religions possess some sacred religious truths in them, which are approachable roads to salvation.¹²⁵⁹ *Nostra Aetate* outlines the new attitude and the principles guiding the Church in her relationship to non-Christians: their religions and sacred values. In search of a real companionship outside the visible Catholic Church, the Vatican II Council proposes several notions that have positively influenced the Catholic understanding of the members of other religions. The Council now teaches that the Catholic Church does not deny anything, true and holy in those Religions, and recognizes also the possibility of *salvation* outside the Church.¹²⁶⁰ Similarly, it recognizes the theological status of non-Christian Religions.¹²⁶¹ It was the first Council ever to recognize the presence of revelation

¹²⁵² Cf. Ibid

¹²⁵³ For more readings, Cf. M. Kehl, (2001), 63ff.

¹²⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid 48.

¹²⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid

¹²⁵⁶ Cf. E. Hillman, *Toward An African Christianity*, New York: 1993, 38.

¹²⁵⁷ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 161.

¹²⁵⁸ Cf. NA 1.

¹²⁵⁹ Cf. LG 14-16.

¹²⁶⁰ Cf. NA 2.

¹²⁶¹ Cf. Ibid 3.

in the non-Christian Religions and the possibility of salvation for their members. *Lumen Gentium* aptly states: “Those too may attain eternal salvation, who, through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or the Church but seek God with a sincere heart and, moved by the grace of God try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience.”¹²⁶² Moreover, the Council honestly acknowledges the spiritual and moral values of other religions.¹²⁶³

The Vatican II Council’s teaching on Non-Christian Religions which affirms the bestowal of God’s saving actions and love to all people has come to remain an official teaching of the Church.¹²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the Church is confronted today with the task to fully realize the Council’s teachings both in the human society and in her relationship with non-Christian Religions. Despite some hurdles that ahead, something positive has so far emerged: the epoch of confrontation and rejection, of objection and subjection, of scorn and contempt is all over. Consequently, it is necessary to be acquainted with these religions, to be fair and objective in judging them, and to go deeply into their roots in order to find there a knot and string for the trans-mission and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church must therefore search every current of truth in those religions and joyfully retain what is good in them.¹²⁶⁵

It is worthy to note that the statement of Paul VI in August 1964 provided great inspiration to the new Church’s approach to non-Christian religions. Referring to other faith traditions, the Pontiff speaks of “those who above all adore the one Supreme God whom we adore”; mentioning particularly, the people of Old Covenant (Jews), Moslems, and also “the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions.”¹²⁶⁶ This position of Paul VI prefigures the declaration of Vatican II: that God, in his infinite goodness, saves all people of good will; both Christians and non-Christian alike. It states: “Nor does divine providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who without blame on their part have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks for His grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the church as a preparation for the gospel.”¹²⁶⁷ The first part of this statement refers to the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, and the second part touches indirectly, revelation outside the Church. The traditional religious experiences possess some elements of salvation since they contain the notion of a True God; they can therefore offer some *manifestations of God’s truth* to the Christian message of salvation. In a positive manner, the Council encourages the Christian to “borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts, sciences of people everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, *manifest the grace of the saviour*, or contribute to the right ordering of their Christian life.”¹²⁶⁸ This means that God is the source of the natural as well as the supernatural order. He is the author of both orders – the order of this world and the order of salvation, for the people within the Church and for those outside the visible Church.

The Christian is invited to seek for his/her salvation in an ecclesial community, in the same measure in which a non-Christian is obliged to strive for his/her salvation in his/her traditional community. In this regard, Christianity and African Traditional Religion have points of contact. Each makes use of sacred rites and rituals to celebrate God’s presence, which are means of salvation to their members. But since according to human nature, both of them are the same in their personal and community character, they (Christian and non-Christian) belong to the fellowship/*koinonia* of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is beyond the institutional Church.¹²⁶⁹ God addresses his universal call of salvation to all human beings (both Christians and non-Christians alike) who are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ in their own various ways

¹²⁶² LG 16.

¹²⁶³ Cf. NA 2; AG 11.

¹²⁶⁴ Cf. NA 1; AG 2; LG 8; GS 22.

¹²⁶⁵ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, *Church As A Communion: An African Christian Perspective. Theology of the Local Church in the Light of the Second Vatican Council*, Frankfurt am Main: 1995, 184.

¹²⁶⁶ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Vatican City: 1964, 3.

¹²⁶⁷ LG 6.

¹²⁶⁸ AG 22.

¹²⁶⁹ Cf. LG 9, 16.

and possess the same right of sharing/*koinonia* in his divine life. The grace of salvation is the same for all human beings - the grace which Jesus Christ allots freely and universally through His life-giving Spirit. Therefore, the differentiating factor between the Christian and African traditional initiations centres on the fact that while the former incorporates the individual into the Mystical Body of Christ, and the visible and institutional Church through the Christian sacrament of initiation (baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), the latter incorporates the individual into Jesus Christ and the Church through its rites of initiation (*votum sacramenti*)¹²⁷⁰ The universal presence of Christ in creation effects this in the latter case.

5.2.4 African Traditional Religion

With reference to African Traditional Religion, F. Nwaigbo shares the view that the Vatican II's search centred on understanding the Christian concept of communion and the African view of "community" – which chiefly manifest itself in the socio-political and religious contexts.¹²⁷¹ In the past, African socio-spiritual heritage was grossly neglected and at times even relegated to the background by the evangelizing programmes of the Church in the early stages of the missionary activities in Africa. The Christian testimony was often compromised by the political and economic interests of the missionaries and their lack of respect for the African cultures. This attitude arose chiefly from their insufficient courage to read beyond the lines of the Scriptures like Philip¹²⁷² and to recognize like Paul, the presence of God in the cultures of other nations.¹²⁷³ Some missionary thrusts for evangelization had tapped creatively these pluralities of other religions and cultures in their missionary adventures.¹²⁷⁴

Interestingly, Pope Paul VI, in 1964, created the Secretariat for non-Christian Religions, now the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, giving it the permission to execute the decisions of the Council and the new thinking of the Catholic Church on non-Christian religions.¹²⁷⁵ This Secretariat addressed twice in detail the questions arising from the Church's worldwide evangelizing mission in relation to the pressing need to initiate dialogue with the followers of other religions. In 1968, three years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Secretariat, under the Presidency of Cardinal Paul Marella, published a book titled, *Meeting African Religions*, which outlines the Secretariat's principles and position regarding the African Traditional Religion – a book E. Hillman describes as a masterpiece of "anthropological understanding of African religions." Moreover, it represents "a significant theological step beyond the more generalized position of Vatican II."¹²⁷⁶ The Secretariat acknowledged the presence of divine revelation in African Traditional Religion. In *Meeting African Religions*, it highlights: if God is at work in the traditional religions, and if humankind responds to this divine activity, the African religions contain an element of revelation and help of divine grace, because God, from the beginning of time seeks to make Himself known to humankind, and this humankind's response to God is religion.¹²⁷⁷ This observation, it argues, has strong biblical and theological bases, for such terms "reduce to the single dimension of a human effort what is in reality an answer to a (divine) call."¹²⁷⁸ There can be no stronger and clearer affirmation that African Traditional Religion contains divine revelation. Such terms as "natural religion" and or "human religion" hence forth ceases to apply to the African Traditional Religion. These terms,

¹²⁷⁰ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 185.

¹²⁷¹ Cf. Ibid 183.

¹²⁷² Cf. Acts 8:26-40.

¹²⁷³ Cf. Acts 17:22-31.

¹²⁷⁴ Cf. J. P. Jodan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, Dublin: 1971, 55.

¹²⁷⁵ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1994), 119.

¹²⁷⁶ E. Hillman, (1993), 39.

¹²⁷⁷ Cf. Secretariat Pro Non-Christianis, *Meeting African Religions*, Vatican City, 1960, 124; cf. Ibidem, "The Attitude of the Church Toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission", in: *Bulletin*, 56 (1984) XIX, 2; cf. Ibidem, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Joint Document by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples", in: *CI* 2,17/1-14 (1991), 805-823.

¹²⁷⁸ E. Hillman, (1993), 39.

just like many others used for the African Traditional Religion like animism, paganism, fetishism, totemism, are derogatory and borne out of ignorance, prejudice, and contempt for the African Traditional Religion. The term “natural religion” is glaringly unscientific for every organised religion is certainly a cultural activity. By rejecting the term “human religion,” the booklet appears to emphasize that divine revelation in the African Traditional Religion is also a “supernatural revelation” rather than a “natural revelation,” which the human mind can attain through experience (cf. Rom. 1:19).¹²⁷⁹

The documents issued by the Catholic Church suggest two conditions for the identification of supernatural elements in African Traditional Religion, namely: (i) Meaningful and sustained high human moral and cultural ideals, which give meaning and purpose to human life; (ii) The comparability of African Traditional beliefs and values to Christian ones, which serve the providential basis for the spread of the gospel.¹²⁸⁰ For instance, *Africae Terrarum* highlights the essential values which constitute signs of divine revelation in the African Traditional Religion. These include: (i) spiritual view of life, (ii) belief in God as the first or ultimate cause of all things, (iii) respect for the dignity of man, (iv) the sense of family, (v) the sense of community, (vi) holistic view of life, (vii) anthropocentric view of the universe, (viii) life enhancement as the goal of life, and (ix) religious activity.¹²⁸¹

F. Arinze, former President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, points out the Church’s proclaims respect for the religions and cultures of various peoples and her keen desire to remain in contact with those people, to conserve all that is noble, true and good in their religions and culture. He further highlights the need to specify concrete aspects of those religions to be studied systematically in each cultural area by scholars chosen for their competence. The identification of the basic felt needs of Africans is a priority for the Church, to enable Christianity to know how she could meet such needs in order that the people would feel more at home in and with the Church.¹²⁸² Cardinal Maurice Otunga, the Kenyan Archbishop of Nairobi, ten years earlier, had already articulated this issue in the 1977 Synod of Bishops in Rome, where he rejected the old missionary approaches to African religions and cultural heritage which either ignored them completely or regarded them simply as a *preparatio evangelii* that could be set aside once the work of evangelization has begun. The Cardinal later called for the recognition of a “new and dynamic image” of the “seeds of the Word” already present in the Africa’s traditional ways of being human and religious. The African culture, according to him, possesses seeds that can produce flowers that have never been seen before.¹²⁸³ Similarly, The Episcopal Conference for Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), in its Synod in Rome in 1974, urged for the need of promotion of the particular incarnation of Christianity in each country, in accordance with the genius and talents of each culture, so that a thousand flowers may bloom in God’s garden.¹²⁸⁴ The seventy bishops that participated in this Synod declared unanimously and in unequivocal term, that Christian life in Africa was insufficiently incarnated in African ways, customs and traditions. They pointed out that the Christian life was very often only lived at the surface without any real link of continuity with the genuine values of traditional religions.¹²⁸⁵

In his own evaluation of the position of Vatican II Council on non-Christian religions, P. Hacker presented a minimalist evaluation of the Council’s doctrine on religions. Differentiating two aspects of religion, one human or anthropological, the other theological and dogmatic, he infers that it as was the case with Paul’s discourse at Athens (Acts 17), so too the texts of the Council, if carefully examined, can be found to refer positively only to the “anthropological

¹²⁷⁹ Cf. Ibid 120

¹²⁸⁰ Cf. Paul VI, “Africae Terrarum” (Message to the Countries of Africa), in: T. Okure, etal (ed.), *ICA* (1990), 19-22.

¹²⁸¹ Cf. Ibid. 120

¹²⁸² Cf. E. Arinze, and M. L. Fitzgerald, “Pastoral Attention to African Traditional Religion: Letter from the Secretariat for Non-Christians”, in: *AER*, 30/ 3 (1988), 121-131, 121.

¹²⁸³ Cf. M. Otunga, “African Culture and Life-Centered Catechesis”, in: *AER*, 20/1 (1978), 65-68, 65.

¹²⁸⁴ Cf. Bishops of Eastern Africa, “Report on the Experiences of the Church in the Work of Evangelization In Africa”, in: *AER*, 17, 1 (1975), 43.

¹²⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid 56-58.

aspect of religion”.¹²⁸⁶ He further observes that they describe religious efforts undertaken by men and women of different religions and support the fact that they thus seek God; but they remain mute on the possibility of reaching the goal through these efforts. In addition, they say nothing about whether the myths hold truth or whether the rites and practices are in conformity with the will of God.¹²⁸⁷ The Council’s insistence on the negative features of non-Christian religions makes it impossible to attribute to it the thesis according to which “pagans are saved through their religions or that their religions as received no sanction or support by the Council.”¹²⁸⁸ Mikka Ruokanen, on the other hand, states that in the Council, continuity seems to exist between non-Christian religions and the Christian truth. A possibility of the presence of God’s saving grace in other religions thus appears not to be totally excluded. However, non-Christian religions “have no independent status as to the truth of Christianity”.¹²⁸⁹ The Council’s interpretation is in line with the perfection or fulfilment theory so common in postconciliar Catholic evaluation of non-Christian religions.¹²⁹⁰ K. Rahner, on the other hand, states that the Council’s achievement consists in looking beyond the question of salvation of individual non-Christians to a positive relationship of the Church to the religions as such. But while supernatural salvation in the actual self-gift of God for all people is looked upon with great optimism by the Council, she does not explicitly profess the same optimism where religion is concerned. Here the essential problem for the theologian has been left open. Equally, the theological quality of non-Christian religions remains undefined.¹²⁹¹ In his evaluatory contribution, H. Maurice pays attention to the strongly “ecclesiocentric” perspective of the doctrine in general and of *Nostra Aetate* in particular. The Church, according to him, appears to acknowledge as positive and good in the other religions only such elements as are found in it super abundantly. He submits that the Church’s way of thinking in relation to non-Christian religions remains ‘egocentric’.¹²⁹² This view easily leads to the “fulfilment theory”, which maintains that inasmuch as they represent the search of the human person for God, the other religions become stereo-typed by the very fact of reaching their fulfilment in Christianity. In this regard, the question remains, whether the dialogue with the other religions which the Council proposes does not presuppose the recognition in them of authentic human values which Christianity does not possess. Only then is dialogue fruitful and meaningful. However, by definition, dialogue is a two-way traffic, marked by give-and-take. But the basis question is: Does the Church of Vatican II show itself eager to receive from other religions?¹²⁹³

In African context, in as much as the Church gives to Africans her good news, she should be ready, in the spirit of dialogue to take from the wealth of African Religion and culture. In this regard, F. Arinze observes that even if African traditional belief seemed detachable from the supernatural faith, it is the duty of theology to relate this belief to the Christian message of salvation and to preserve the same world-view from the erosion of religious pluralism. There is the need to strengthen African communion, which gives rise to the examination and inquiry of how the Good News of salvation can penetrate into the life of Africans, especially, into the religious and cultural conditions of Christians in that continent, using this element as basis prepared by the Divine Providence.¹²⁹⁴ On the impact of Vatican II Council on African Church, F. Nwaigbo wisely admonishes in view of deep experience of God in African religion, and the value of their traditional rites in mediating salvation, the Church in Africa may not propose another means of offering the salvation wrought by Christ, but can apply it in humility from the

¹²⁸⁶ Cf. P. Hacker, *Theological Foundations of Evangelization*. St. Augustine: 1980, 61-76.

¹²⁸⁷ Cf. Ibid 73-75.

¹²⁸⁸ Ibid 72; cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 165.

¹²⁸⁹ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council*, Leiden: 1992, 61.

¹²⁹⁰ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 166.

¹²⁹¹ Cf. K. Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation”, in: *TI*, 18 (1981), 228-295.

¹²⁹² Cf. H. Maurier, “Lecture de la Déclaration par un missionnaire d’Afrique”, in: A. M. Henry (ed.), *RERC*, (1966), 133-134; cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 169.

¹²⁹³ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2001), 169.

¹²⁹⁴ Cf. F. Arinze, *The Church and Nigerian Culture*, Onitsha-Nigeria: 1973, 112.

perspective of African religion and culture.¹²⁹⁵ This is the only way out for the Church in her evangelising mission in Africa. Having seen the position of the Church on non-Christian religions, what is the place of superiority complex in religion? What place does it have in Christianity? An attempt to answer these questions would dispose one to appreciate better the position of the Church on non-Christian Religions.

5.3 'Superiority Complex' in Religion

Origin: When Merlin Stone wrote her work, *When God Was A Woman*, in which she traces the origin of "supremacy complex" to the Indo-Europeans, she was making remarkable contribution to the history of religion; helping one to understand the role of this phenomenon in the human society. Although, the work is polemical, the author uses it to bring her message home. According to her, superiority/supremacy complex originated from the Maglemosian and Kunda people of Mesolithic times, whom she referred to as "the cultural ancestors of Indo-Europeans" who lived about 15,000-8,000 BC.¹²⁹⁶ Their home land was located in the forest and coastal areas of northern Europe, especially in Denmark. Their sites further situates north than those of the earlier Gravettian-Aurignacian groups who left us the tradition of the Venus figures. According to her, the lack of historical evidence for their earlier cultural centres in their northern homelands of Russia and the Caucasus region, before their invasions, suggest that up until their arrival in the Near and Middle East they might still have been nomadic people, with hunting and fishing as their main occupation. Also, they might still be shepherds just beginning to practice agriculture. Different texts refer to them as Indo-Europeans, Indo-Iranians, Indo-Aryans or simply Aryans. They were known as aggressive warriors riding two abreast in horse-drawn war chariots; their earlier more speculative appearances in prehistoric times, as big sailors who navigated the rivers and coastlines of Europe and Near East. They later engaged in migration and invasion of other lands. This factor was marked by series of events that took place in waves over a period of at least one thousand to three thousand years. Basically, hunger, starvation, greed and search for food, light, land and warm climate necessitated their migration and military invasions of other lands.¹²⁹⁷ This supports C. Williams when he states: "From time immemorial, stark greed, the desire for wealth, had overridden all humane considerations. Greed had served as kind of anaesthesia, deadening humane sentiments and breaking the bonds of affection that relates human beings to one another."¹²⁹⁸

As the northern invaders migrated, they took along with them the worship of a young warrior god and/or of a supreme father god, which they imposed on the people they conquered. History and archaeology trace their arrival to 2400 BC.¹²⁹⁹ As they gained more territorial control and became more powerful for the next two thousand years, their religion often juxtaposed the female and male deities not as equals but with the male as the dominant husband or even her murderer. Their appearance in history witnessed the emergence of the worship of a male, superior god, and religion as instrument of superiority complex. The transition from the worship of a god, natural to the people, to a male, dominant father god and the imposition of foreign concepts, symbols and myths on the people they conquered became the order of the day. Often this was not achieved through peaceful means, rather through violent aggression, brutal massacres and territorial conquests throughout the Near and Middle East, *and far beyond*. Equally, these people (Indo-Europeans) are known for conflict-generation. They did only exhibit it to the people whose lands they invaded, but also to themselves. The pattern that surfaces in each area they make an appearance is that of a group of aggressive warriors, accompanied by a priestly caste.¹³⁰⁰ By the time they migrated and invaded India, the worship of sky gods was already notable in the Aryan religion, about the second millennium BC. On their arrival in India

¹²⁹⁵ Cf. F. Nwaigbo, (1995), 186.

¹²⁹⁶ M. Stone, *When God Was A Woman*, New York: 1976, 63, 28.

¹²⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid 170.

¹²⁹⁸ Cf. C. Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of A Race From 4500 B.C. To 2000 A. D.*, Chicago: 1987, 79.

¹²⁹⁹ Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 20.

¹³⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid 63.

they found, contrary to belief before the archaeological excavations in and around the Indus Valley since 1922, not a primitive aboriginal population but a highly developed urban civilization superior to their own relatively simple way of life.¹³⁰¹

In addition, they brought with them the concepts of light as good and dark as evil (very possibly the symbolism of their racial attitudes toward the darker people of the southern areas). The surfacing of the male deity in their subsequent literature, which repeatedly described and explained his supremacy, and the nature of their priestly caste, may perhaps allow one to understand these invasions as religious crusade wars as much as territorial conquests.¹³⁰² They always reflected superiority complex in the way they related with the people of other cultures they came into contact with. Thus, in historic times, they always see themselves as a superior people. This could be because of their ability to conquer the more culturally developed earlier settlers, whom they regarded as the people of the Goddess.¹³⁰³ This superiority complex gradually influenced Judeo-Christian religion with its contact with the European culture.¹³⁰⁴ No wonder then theology is inherently political: “The way human communities deify the transcendent and determine the categories of good and evil have more to do with the power dynamics of the social systems which create the theologies than with the spontaneous revelation of truth from another quarter.”¹³⁰⁵ Theology serves the instrument of the proof of the existence of God¹³⁰⁶, even a God who abides with his people, and accompanies them even in moments of military invasions and territorial conquests.¹³⁰⁷ The influence of Indo-European religion on Judaism and Christianity is eloquent in the absorption of Indo-European (Roman-Greek) concepts, non-Christian mysteries, myths and cultic symbols in the religious writings of the above two-named religions.¹³⁰⁸ Thus, the Scripture contains narratives of the Indo-European Myths which, were influenced by other non-Christian cultures.¹³⁰⁹ Examples are myths that explain the creation of the universe by the male deity or the institution of kingship, when none had existed previously, strongly suggests the possibility that many of these myths were written by priests of the invading tribes to justify the supremacy of the new male deities and the installation of a king as the result of the relationship of that king to the male deity.¹³¹⁰ In the Indo-European

¹³⁰¹ Cf. G. Baudler, *God and Violence: the Christian Experience of God in Dialogue With Myths of Other Religions*, München: 1992, 197; cf. M. Stone, (1976), 84.

¹³⁰² Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 64.

¹³⁰³ Cf. Ibid 64.

¹³⁰⁴ Ibid 66; cf. C. F. Welsing, *The Isis Papers: The Keys To The Colours*, Chicago: 1991, 61-79; 163-173; cf. C. Williams, (1987), 92; cf. subsection below on “More Rationalization”.

¹³⁰⁵ S. Collins, “A Feminist Reading of History”, in: *RRJ*, (1974), 12-17; Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 65-66.

¹³⁰⁶ Cf. S. Th. 1, 23:1 cf. Q. II, a.1, 2 & 3. obj. 1. 3.

¹³⁰⁷ Cf. Dt 1-4; cf. Judges, 6:25-35; cf. 2 Sam 22:1-51; cf. 1 Sam 2:2; cf. Ps 22:22; cf. I. Finkelstein, N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, New York: 2001, 252.

¹³⁰⁸ Cf. *Mysterion* and Sacrament in the ancient pagan religion, chapter four above.

¹³⁰⁹ Cf. The myths of Adam and Eve and the origin of sin (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-24), and the stories of Gilgamesh written in Nineveh, today Irak, about 3000- 2500 B. C. (cf. Victor H. Matthews, *Old Testament Parallels, Laws and Stories from Ancient Near East*, New York: 1991, 19). The above supports I. Finkelstein when he states that the historical saga contained in the Bible from Abraham’s encounter with God and his journey to Canaan, to Moses’ deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, to the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah – was not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination. According to him, it was first conceived during the span of two or three generations, about twenty-six hundred years ago, in the kingdom of Judah - a thinly settled region of shepherds and farmers. Few extraordinary decades of spiritual tumult and political campaigning, toward the end of the seventh century BC, gave rise to its composition. It was the product of Judahite court officials, priests, scribes, peasants, and prophets, who converged to create a new movement, which nucleus was a sacred scripture – an equalled literary and spiritual brilliance. It was an epic saga woven together from an astounding rich collection of historical writings, memories, legends, folk tales, anecdotes, royal propaganda, prophecy, and ancient poetry. Partly, an original composition, and partly adapted from earlier versions and sources, that literary masterpiece would undergo additional editing and elaboration to become a spiritual base not only for the descendants of the people of Judah but for the communities all over the world. cf. I. Finkelstein, N.A. Silberman, (2001), 1.

¹³¹⁰ Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 67.

religion, the male deity, unlike the son/lover of the Goddess religion, was most often portrayed as a storm god, high on a mountain, blazing with the light of fire or lightning.¹³¹¹ This recurring symbolism suggests that these northern invaders may once have worshipped volcanoes as manifestations of their god. In some areas this god was annexed to the Goddess as husband, such as the storm god *Taru* and the Sun Goddess of *Arinna* or *Zeus* and *Hera* of the Greek pantheon. He appeared in some legends as an insubordinate young man, who bravely destroyed the older female deity, at times upon the formerly assured promise of supremacy in the divine hierarchy.¹³¹² One of the major Indo-Aryan gods was known as *Indra*, Lord of the Mountains (He who overthrows cities). Upon securing the pledge of supremacy if he succeeded in killing *Danu* and Her son *Vrtra*, he does execute the act, and achieved kingship among the A-Dityas. The *Rg Veda* mentions an ancestral father god known both as *Prajapati* and *Dyaus Pitar*. He appears as an almost abstract idea in the *Rg Veda*. But *Dyaus Pitar*, in later Brahmanic writings, is known as 'supreme father of all'. Evidence of ancestor worship of the father occurs in several hymns of the *Rg Veda*. The Indo-Aryans daily recited the *Pitriyajna*, the worship of the ancestral fathers. In this ritual the father of the family usually assumed the role of a high priest, later transferring these rites on to his eldest son. In Sanskrit, *pitar* means father, but *pati* has various meanings, and has the alternative translations of lord, ruler, master, owner and husband.¹³¹³ M. Stone boldly infers that the Indo-European concept of 'god who lives on high', the 'male god', 'father of all' influenced Judeo-Christian Religion. These concepts may well account for the origins of many of the ideas of the early Hebrews. The concept of the 'god on the mountain top' 'blazing with light', 'the duality of light' and dark symbolized as good and evil, the myth of the male deity's defeat of the serpent and the leadership of a supreme ruling class, so common in Indo-European religion and society are profound in Hebrew religious and political concepts. The influence or possible connection between Indo-European peoples may account the extreme patriarchal attitudes of the Hebrew. She pointed out that by first becoming aware of the Indo-European political patterns and religious imagery, would help one to better understand Hebrew attitudes and ideas that influenced Christianity.¹³¹⁴ The work of M. Stone, although feministic in undertone, and somehow polemical, provides a systematic study of 'superiority complex' in religion and its influence on Christianity - a fact one may not overlook in the evaluation of the position of the Church on non-Christian religions. Questions that come to mind are: What is its place in Christianity? And how did the European culture influence Christianity and vice versa?

5.3.1 Christianity and Western Culture

In his essay, *The Assumption of African Values As Christian Values*, T. Okere, presented a scientific study of Christianity and Western culture. He maintains that the influence of Christianity on western culture had been the most studied phenomenon. Already at the very infancy of Christianity, at the mid of the second century, one reads from the apology of Justin Martyr, addressed to the emperor *Antoninus Pius*, something of the impact the new spiritual movement made on the contemporary pagan culture.¹³¹⁵ There Justin writes: "Before we became Christians we took pleasure in debauchery now we rejoice in purity of life, we used to practice magic and sorcery, now we are dedicated to the good un-begotten God; we used to value above all else money possessions, now we bring together all that we have and share it with those who are in need.

Formerly we hated and killed one another and because of a difference in nationality and custom, we refused to admit strangers within our gates. Now since the coming of Christ, we all live in

¹³¹¹ See such depiction of mountain as a sacred place, where God reveals himself to the Israelites (cf. Ex 24: 12-18; cf. Dt 1:1; 4: 9-14; 13:36; 5:22; cf. Jos 1:19).

¹³¹² Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 67.

¹³¹³ Cf. Ibid. 70-71.

¹³¹⁴ Cf. Ibid 69; For further readings on the Indo-European influence on Judaism/Christianity, see, Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman*.

¹³¹⁵ Cf. T. Okere, "The Assumption of African Values As Christian Values", in: *Lucerna* 1/1 (1978), 8-9.

peace. We pray for our enemies and seek to win over those who hate us unjustly in order that, by living according to the noble precepts of Christ, they may partake with us in the same joyful hope of obtaining our reward from God the Lord of all.”¹³¹⁶ Very striking in the above quoted statement of Justin is the phrase “formerly ... we refused to admit strangers within our gates”. The question is what happens today? We may not be carried away by the above sugary, one-sided account of the Apologete, directed to impress the reader. A deeper insight into the immediate impact of Christianity on the existing culture needs to be balanced with the knowledge of the influence of the latter on the former. Obviously, the influence of the Christian Religion on subsequent European history has been widely acknowledged. It presided over the gestation, birth and maturation of European civilization, put a new spirit into decadent antiquity, tamed the barbarian North, and patronized learning and Arts, refined manners and moral to a degree hitherto unknown.

Christianity was the first integrative force to unite Europe’s peoples into one community - a religious community centuries before the economic and political community. Religious influences and the growing authority of the popes cemented the union of the Christian republic. It gradually produced similar manners and the common jurisprudence that has been renowned from the rest of mankind the independent and even hostile nations of Modern Europe.¹³¹⁷ J. Kovel shares a similar view, stating that Christianity spread over the West and created a community out of what had been barbarian splinters. It did this through the power of a concrete institution, the Catholic Church. It was the Church’s immediate influence that held aloft the subliminary ideal of Christ and, through that ideal, gave Europeans a scaffold of identification with which to bind them into a unified civilization.¹³¹⁸

Despite the enormous contribution of the Church to European unification and identity, human beings however, remained human beings torn and driven by their obscure passions into striving for greed and domination which culture could scarcely regulate. Intense aggression resisted the Church’s unification, continued to plague European culture and delayed its growth. Within the original world-view, there was no way to rationalize or include the striving for greed and domination that persisted with civilization. Christian revolution was superimposed upon a basically dominative way of life. It could only account for the guilt that arose from the dominative style of society by turning away from the given world.¹³¹⁹ This was the society in which the Church found herself – a society that also influenced the Church in her doctrinal issues, theological formulations, Church’s Law and mode of evangelisation of unbelievers.

Nevertheless, today, when Europe and America are said to fly the banners of secularism not one institution is totally free from some Christian influence or does not carry the indices of an unmistakable Christian origin.¹³²⁰ These are some of the influences of Christianity on European culture. What of the latter on the former?

5.3.2 Western Culture and Christianity

Obviously, if the historian observes the progressive Christianization of European culture, the same historian can also observe equally clearly the progressive Europeanization of Christianity. In this sense, T. Okere observes that when we examine the progressive Europeanization of Christianity, from the missionary journeys of St. Paul to the reign of *Benedict XVI* we shall discover that the interaction of religion and culture in Europe has been long enough to give us, by the time we came to be evangelised a heavily Europeanised Christianity. Catholicism such as we know it today would be unthinkable without the particular contribution of each of the varied geniuses of the peoples of Europe and their culture - Greek philosophy, Roman

¹³¹⁶ Justin Martry, *Apologia*, 1, 14/47; cf. *FaCh*, 10, Washington D.C: 1948, 13, 47; cf. T. Okere, (1979), 8.

¹³¹⁷ Cf. T. Okere, (1978), 9.

¹³¹⁸ Cf. J. Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, New York: 1988, 11.

¹³¹⁹ Cf. T. Okere, (1978), 9.

¹³²⁰ Cf. *Ibid* 9.

law, Teutonic militarism, Italian art, Gallic logic - all have left their indelible mark on Catholicism.¹³²¹

E. Hillman presents a vivid account of the influence of Western culture on Christianity. In *Toward an African Christianity*, he states that the Pauline respect and creative boldness in the face of multiple cultural differences was not totally abandoned when Christianity, together with its Jewish and Greco-Roman accretions came to live among the other peoples of Europe beyond the Mediterranean basin. If not a complete inculturation of Christianity in these regions, there was at least a notable measure of tolerance and patience.

Diverse Teutonic, Iberian, Gallic, Scandinavian, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Slavic forms were allowed to find their way into a more or less homogeneous Christendom. After its original Judaic enfleshment, this Europeanization was the Christian community's second epochal embodiment in the ephemeral cultural forms and historically conditioned structures, systems and institutions of the north.¹³²² Thus, the historical developments and movements among these peoples have determined the dominant emphasis from era to era in the history of Christianity – the monastic movement, the Papacy, the great schism, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and even today the problems of 'the Church' are problems as expressed by the present generation of Christians in the West. Thus, Christian theology, morality, and Church laws, despite the protestations of unconscious ethnocentrists - all bear the marks of 2006 years of European history and influence.¹³²³

Christianity took over most of the pagan myths, symbols, images, and ritual celebrations of its followers in their respective historic-cultural terms and gave them Christian colouring. Professor Young supports this, saying: "It was because it could take on the values of European traditional religion that it was able to replace its rivals. Early Christianity assimilated the old festivals, images and symbols to its own view of appropriate worship, and was able to use paganism's own fundamental perceptions to justify and affect this."¹³²⁴

The incorporation of non-Christian practices into Christianity and the latter's celebration of the same are eloquent in many European Christian Countries. Countries like Austria, Germany and France, to mention but a few, retain some pagan feasts and symbols in the Church.¹³²⁵ In addition, in Ireland, St. Patrick, instead of rejecting all the Irish traditions, tried to save them and build upon them. He took the pagan symbols and models and baptized them with Christian values. P. Schineller affirms that because of this (syncretism), Catholicism grew and remained strong in Ireland and in many European countries, which unfortunately is today witnessing erosive decay.¹³²⁶ But with regard to non-European cultures, what was the attitude of the Church?

5.3.3 The Church on Missionary Activity

B. Longergan articulated the above question in his work, *"The Dehellenization of Dogma"* in which he maintains that the European ethnocentrism played major role in determining what method should be adopted in evangelization of non-European world. Ethnocentric trait was particularly recalcitrant. In missionary activity, Church leaders were blinded by 'classical mentality'.¹³²⁷ E. Hillmann affirms that the Greco-Roman antecedents were uncritically assumed

¹³²¹ Cf. Ibid. 8.

¹³²² Cf. E. Hillman, *Toward An African Christianity*, New York: 1993, 36.

¹³²³ Cf. T. Okere, (1978), 8-9; cf. F. C. Wesling, (1991), 77, 224.

¹³²⁴ F. Young, "Traditional Religious Cultures and the Christian Response - II", in: *ET*, 95 (1984), 268-269; cf. F. C. Wesling, (1991), 70.

¹³²⁵ These countries celebrate, among others, the "Rosenmontag"/"Faschingsdienstag"; a typically pagan feast, to mark the beginning of planting season, now celebrated to mark the beginning of Lent. The pattern, intention and form of this pagan feast still remain the same.

¹³²⁶ Cf. P. Schineller, "Inculturation and the Issue of Syncretism: What is the Real Issue", in: J. S. Ukpong, *EATMCP* (1992), 54-56, 55.

¹³²⁷ Cf. B. Lonergan, "The Dehellenization of Dogma", in: *TS*, 28,1 (1967), 347-248.

to be normative for the entire human family. Christians from other cultural worlds were expected, indeed required, sometimes in the name of ‘divine law,’ to abandon their own traditional ways of being human and religious. They were morally coerced into embracing the ‘superior’ ways of Europe, ‘in the name of Religion’, uncritically imagined to be somehow more compatible with Christianity than the ways invented and developed by most of humanity living outside of Europe.¹³²⁸

Superiority complex, inherited from the Indo-European culture, held sway in missionary evangelism. The effects it had on Indian culture was devastating. Historical accounts note that Catholics in India, evangelized by St. Francis Xavier and his associates in the sixteenth century, were victims of European cultural arrogance and ‘superiority complex’, often paraded as God’s will. The Goans responding to the ‘good news’ brought by these Jesuit missionaries were robbed not only of their immemorial traditions, but also their indigenous names. The Christians were obliged to take not only the names of foreign saints, but also Portuguese or Spanish surnames. This, together with many other foreign cultural impositions, including hair styles, amounted to a massive psycho-social assault against the people’s original cultural identity, self-understanding, ethos, world, aesthetic sense and human dignity.¹³²⁹

The history of expansion of Christianity is replete with such massive exhibition of this superiority complex in religion, was particularly noticeable in missionary activity. In his book, *The Faith of Other Men*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a historian of religion, observes that the fundamental error of Western civilization in its role in world history is arrogance and this has infected also the Christian Church.¹³³⁰ The crudest documented evidence of this arrogance is the 1452 papal bull *Dum diversis* of Pope Nicholas V. In this document, His Holiness generously gave to the King of Portugal “full and entire faculty of invading, conquering, expelling and reigning over all the kingdoms (...) of the Saracens, of pagans, and of infidels, wherever they may be found; of reducing their inhabitants to perpetual slavery; of appropriating to yourself those kingdoms and all their possessions for your own use and that of your successors.”¹³³¹ However, the Papal rhetoric, these days, is quite the opposite. But the destruction sanctioned by Nicholas continues to the present century, albeit with methods progressively less brutal than those employed by the *conquistadores* of previous centuries.¹³³² It is on record that in the early period of evangelization of non-European lands, Pope Benedict XIV frustrated and forbade every effort of the clergy to make Christianity at home with the local people. India and China, in the middle of the eighteenth century, were particular victims of this arrogance. E. Hillman notes that during the time, in contrast to the earlier decision at the so-called Council of Jerusalem favouring St. Paul’s missionary method, the decision was against the cultural catholicization of the Church. Since then, western monoculturalism - basically, the historical experiences, myths, symbols, customs, assumptions, conceptions, arts, practices, laws and institutions of Europeans – become normative for Christians everywhere in the world. Thus, where the Judaizers had failed the Europeanizers triumphed.¹³³³ Equally K. Rahner affirms that the actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe was in fact (if you will pardon the expression) the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of this supposedly superior culture and civilization.¹³³⁴

Africa is not left out in the devastating effect of this obnoxious syndrome. Derogatory terms such as “animism”, “paganism” or “devil worship” were coined and attributed to the African Traditional Religion. This religion, together with the rites of initiation became “natural”,

¹³²⁸ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 36.

¹³²⁹ Cf. Ibid 37.

¹³³⁰ Cf. W. C. Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, New York: 1978, 130.

¹³³¹ Pope Nicholas V, *Dum diversis*, Rome: 1452, 5f; E. Hillmann, (1993), 37.

¹³³² Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 37.

¹³³³ Cf. Ibid 37.

¹³³⁴ Cf. K. Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II”, in: *TS*, 40/4, (1978b), 716-718, 717; K. Rahner, in: *TI*, 20 (1981b), 77-79, 78.

“inferior” and “imperfect”; while Christianity became “supernatural”, “perfect” and the “superior” religion; with its rites as the only means to salvation. Consequently, some theologians, while viewing the non-Christian religions from “superiority-inferiority” spectrum use these terms, “superior” and “supernatural” to justify their position on the difficulties involved on the inculturation of African traditional initiation rites. The crucial question is: why should this religion give way to Christianity?¹³³⁵

Although, one acknowledges some positive contributions the missionaries made in and to African traditional society¹³³⁶, their arrival generated conflict of ideologies and inter-religious crisis. According to O. A. Onwubiko, the Christian Missionary, in many parts of Africa, arrived after the military pacification process therefore, inherited the general attitude of the adult members of the society which was one of avoidance. Open hostility ensued when the Christian Missionary began, in various ways to destroy the traditional places of worship, sacred objects and totems.¹³³⁷ “The crisis represented for the traditional community by the Christian stranger is the result of their appearing to be inassimilable: they no sooner come to a place than they begin activity to destroy the religious, and therefore the ideological, foundation of the society. Despite the people’s general tolerance, it is only a matter of time before serious conflicts develop.”¹³³⁸

In addition, the missionaries indoctrinated the indigenous people to abandon their names and traditional ways of life. African religious symbols, myths and ethos became taboos. Their religious symbols, often referred to as “arusi” (Igbo: idols) would be covertly exported to Europe to enrich European museums. Under this pattern of Europeanism in the name of “evangelizing those living in darkness” (where everything “European” is regarded as “sacred”, “holy”, “good”, “superior” and “adored”, and every thing African as “profane”, “pagan”, “devilish”, “inferior” and desecrated), the African traditional society and its religion were put into disarray. Initiation rites in the traditional religion would no longer be considered worthy of effecting salvation to the adherents of African Traditional Religion – a false position that Vatican II has tried to correct.¹³³⁹ However, things really fell apart, and the centre could no longer hold.¹³⁴⁰ Even though one would argue from the point of view that there is no part of the world where this phenomenon does not exist in the contact with Christianity culture, it does not justify such missionary strategy replete with brainwashing and robbery in the name of evangelization. It only smacks of immaturity and lack of a good missionary approach to other people’s culture.

Could the above illustrations not justify M. Stone’s position, when she traces superiority complex to Indo-European culture and its influence on Christianity?¹³⁴¹ Although the work, somehow feministic and polemical in its method and orientation, it raises some fundamental issues that could be objects of theological discuss. It is an eye opener to the understanding of this phenomenon in the human society. Despite whatever nuts one could pick with the work, we have to rest with the Igbo adage which says: “Onye adila ka onu a kora ya di” – (literal translation: Let no one be as one is negatively described).

Despite the above criticisms of the Church regarding its attitude to non-Christian religions, the dawn of a new light in the Church, in terms of dialogue with non-Christian religions, especially, with Vatican II Council, is laudable. Perhaps, more conscientious efforts need to be made in this direction, both on the personal and universal levels, to realize the intention of the Council. At this point, let us turn to the principles of missionary activity with the aim of ascertaining which one is most acceptable in the African context.

¹³³⁵ Cf. J. Odey, (1986), 1ff.

¹³³⁶ One of such contributions is the abolition of the killing of twins.

¹³³⁷ Cf. O. A. Onwubiko, *Christian Mission and Culture in Africa, (Vol. 1), African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu: 1991, 123.

¹³³⁸ Cf. E. Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society In West African Novels*, London: 1975, 222.

¹³³⁹ Cf. NA 2.

¹³⁴⁰ Cf. C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: 1958, 1ff.

¹³⁴¹ Cf. M. Stone, (1976), 67.

5.4 Principles of Church's Missionary Activity

The Church evolved some principles that govern missionary activities, especially in non-European cultures. Some of these principles aim at bringing the gospel of Christ to other cultures. With reference to our work, we shall limit our examination to inculturation and incarnation as principles of missionary strategy.

5.4.1 Inculturation

T. H. Huxley presents inculturation as one of the missionary principles. It is an on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures; a dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures, which implies the necessity of culture for practical realisation of Christian objectives.¹³⁴² Inculturation suggests a double movement: the inculturation of Christianity on the one hand, and the Christianization of culture, on the other. The gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon, while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context.¹³⁴³ It is a product of culture change. Through it Christianity meets culture and at the same time, culture meets Christianity. In certain respects, the meeting of Christ and his Church with a local culture brings about mutual changes.¹³⁴⁴ The local culture introduces fresh meanings to the concept and person of God and Christ, his Son.

In relation to Christian liturgy, inculturation also has double movement: (1) liturgical inculturation from the standpoint of the liturgy and (2) liturgical inculturation from the standpoint of culture. From the standpoint of the liturgy, it involves the process of inserting the texts and rites of the liturgy into the framework of a local culture. The texts and rites assimilate the people's thought, language, and value, and ritual, symbolic and artistic pattern. Therefore, from the point of view of the liturgy, its goal is the grafting of the Church's worship tradition onto "the cultural pattern of the local Church."¹³⁴⁵ This grafting of rite to culture occurs along a continuum, ranging from mere adaptation to the creation of completely new liturgical forms.¹³⁴⁶

And from the standpoint of culture, liturgical inculturation can be identified as "the cultural components which interact, dialogue, and combine with the Christian *ordo*. Cultural components consist of values, patterns, and institutions that form part of the system of the rites of passage of a society."¹³⁴⁷ Cultural components are indicative of the very social fabric of a society. They include those essential cultural characteristics that the Christian tradition cannot supplant without destroying the very identity of the local society. Examples of this might be the loyalty to clan or society and respect for its tradition, fundamental expressions or codes concerning ritual purity, and the essential role that persons play within the fabric of a society.¹³⁴⁸ Essential to the perspective of culture, is the understanding that development of liturgical texts and rites, from their beginning, integrated cultural practices and traditions. The shape of baptism, Eucharist, reconciliation, marriage, healing and funerals, was dependent on uncompromising cultural factors. From the onset, the core liturgical patterns of the Church's liturgy were enhanced and extended by the norms of cultural value, pattern and institution. Thus, the

¹³⁴² Cf. T. H. Huxley, *Science and Education: Essays Vol. III*, London: 1905, 143.

¹³⁴³ Cf. D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll: 1991, 378.

¹³⁴⁴ U. E. Umorem, (1992), 68.

¹³⁴⁵ J. A. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, Collegeville: 1992, 30.

¹³⁴⁶ Here J. A. Chupungco delineates four methods by which the liturgy is grafted to cultural patterns: dynamic equivalence, creative assimilation, organic progression, and liturgical creativity (cf. *Ibid* 37-54).

¹³⁴⁷ J. A. Chupungco, "Baptism, Marriage, and Funeral Rites: Principle and Criteria for Inculturation", in: A. S. Stauffer (ed.), *BRC*, (1998), 50-52, 51.

¹³⁴⁸ Cf. J. A. Chupungco, "Baptism, Marriage, and Funeral Rites", 51-52; *idem*, "Liturgy and Components of Culture", in: A. S. Stauffer (ed.), *WCD*, (1994), 153-166.

continued integration of cultural components is important to the evangelical principle of Christian worship.¹³⁴⁹

For inculturation of the liturgy, especially, the Roman rite, the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments lays down following principles: (1) the goal of inculturation, (2) the substantial unity of the Roman rite and (3) the competent authority.¹³⁵⁰

(1) The goal which should guide the inculturation of the Roman rite is the one laid down by the Vatican II Council, as the basis of the general restoration of the liturgy: The Council fathers demand that Both texts and rites should be so drawn up that they express more clearly the holy things they signify, so that the Christian people, as far as possible, may be able to understand them with ease and to take part in the rites fully, actively and as befits a community.¹³⁵¹ In inculturation. In addition, (2) The process of inculturation should always maintain the substantial unity of the Roman rite.¹³⁵² This unity is currently expressed in the typical editions of liturgical books, published by authority of the Supreme Pontiff and in the liturgical books approved by the Episcopal Conferences for their areas and confirmed by the Apostolic See.¹³⁵³ The work of inculturation does not fore-see the creation of new family of rites. Rather, it responds to the needs of a particular culture and leads to adaptations that will remain part of the Roman rite.¹³⁵⁴

(3) Adaptations of the Roman rite, even in the field of inculturation, depend completely on the authority of the Church. The authority belongs to the Apostolic See, which exercises it through the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. It also belongs, with the limits fixed by law, to Episcopal conferences and to the Diocesan Bishop. The Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments stipulates: “No other person, not even if he is a priest, may on his own initiative add, remove or change anything in the liturgy. Inculturation is not left to the personal initiative of celebrants or to the collective initiative of an assembly.”¹³⁵⁵ These conditions, strict though they may appear, contain an element of flexibility where the competent authority is recognized.

In African context, especially, from the stand point of culture, inculturation involves dialogue with African Traditional Religion in order to achieve fruitful results. Here, John Paul II highlights the challenges it poses to Christians. With reference to African Traditional Religion, he notes that it requires a serene and prudent dialogue that will help to protect Catholics from negative influences that condition the way of life of many of them and, on the other hand, it would help to foster the assimilation of positive values as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values that are readily harmonized with content of the faith. He admonishes Christians to treat adherents of African Traditional Religion with deep respect and esteem, and avoid the use of inaccurate and disrespectful language to them. Finally, he encouraged the inclusion of suitable courses in African Traditional Religion in houses of formation.¹³⁵⁶ These gestures of the Pontiff are positive ones, which would encourage the process of inculturation of the liturgy in Africa, and establishing cordial relationship with African Traditional Religion.

On the dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, A. N. Odoemene raises some crucial questions: “If we accept culture as ‘the possession of an ideal, and the habit of critically estimating the value of things by comparison with a theoretical standard, and being the ‘complex-whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society’, have we (Africans) accepted

¹³⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid

¹³⁵⁰ Cf. CDWDS, *Varietates Legitimae*, Rome: 1994, Nos. 37-40, 34-37.

¹³⁵¹ Cf. SC 40.

¹³⁵² Cf. Ibid 37-40.

¹³⁵³ Ibid 16

¹³⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul II, “Discourse to the plenary assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments”, in: *AAS*, 3, 83 (1991), 940.

¹³⁵⁵ CDWDS, (1994), 37.

¹³⁵⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 42, in: John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Yaoundé, Cameroon: 1995, 70.

our culture as the ideal and as a theoretical standard for comparison? ‘If the complex whole includes our mental, intellectual and physical capabilities, how then can we conceive of a particular culture which could dialogue with Christianity or faith?’¹³⁵⁷ A. N. Odoemene surmises that since our culture was yet to assume a leadership role as a theoretical standard it could not at the moment engage in a useful dialogue with the Christian faith, except on the level of individual experiences.¹³⁵⁸ But our culture needs to move beyond this level. Africa needs unity, not only in politics, but also economics, religion and culture, in order to assume a leadership role in the world. Failure to do this would push Africa to remain on the brims of exploitation and marginalization. On inculturation, we need to adopt a certain attitudes.

5.4.2 Attitudes to Effective Inculturation

For effective inculturation, the following attitudes are necessary:

1. *Risk Taking*: Effective inculturation involves risk, and risk involves courage which manifests in the saying, “No risk no gain,” courage based on the conviction of the active presence of and guidance of the Spirit of God in human history, the Christian community, its leaders and theologians, as well as the Traditional Religion of the people.
2. *Freedom*: We need creativity based on freedom as well as knowledge of the limits of freedom. There should be toleration of diversity and growth, and positive encouragement on the part of Church leaders. The dictum, “What is rigid is often dead, what is flexible is ready to move and to grow” should be a guide to the Church. There should be an appreciation of the people’s lives in the present, in new circumstances, rather than nostalgia for the past.
3. *A sense of the reign of God*: Theology of inculturation should be ecclesial theology which sees the importance of the Church. However, it must see beyond the Church to the larger realm of God’s kingdom or reign, and the Church should be in witness to, in service to, that kingdom. Otherwise, it becomes narrowly focussed and unable to expand with the freedom of the children of God, and to be led by the Spirit which blows where it wills.
4. *Patience*: Patience is needed as change comes slowly, and at times, with pain.
5. *Sense of God at work in the world, in human lives today*: While in inculturation the bible is important, it functions not as an end in itself, but helps us to see God at work in human lives today. Therefore, it should serve the means not only of spreading the gospel of Christ, but also help to portray the reality and love of God in the world today.
6. *Listening*. This involves a critical openness, an attitude of learning and listening both to the Christian message in all its richness and to the various human cultures in all their richness and diversity. The life of Jesus is the criterion of an offering to God and human beings – an *agape* par excellence. Therefore, this listening attitude touches the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth present in all cultures and human lives, including their traditional rites, present today in new and exciting ways that we are still to discover.¹³⁵⁹

5.4.3 Incarnation

Although the documents of Vatican II used the classical theological term ‘incarnation’ which is certainly more radical in its connotations and implications; the term is also less easily reduced to pure conceptualism.¹³⁶⁰ J. Müller notes that for one to understand the problem of adaptation, one has to look back to the Theology of Incarnation.¹³⁶¹ “Inculturation”, as a missionary principle, derives from the primordial missionary of God’s good news for humankind

¹³⁵⁷ A. N. Odoemene, “Ecumenism: A Key to African Theology”, in: J. S Ukpong, et al (ed.), *EATMCP*, (1992), 187-188, 187.

¹³⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid*

¹³⁵⁹ Cf. P. Schineller, (1982), 57-58.

¹³⁶⁰ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 30.

¹³⁶¹ Müller noted: “Der inkarnatorische Ansatz ist sehr alt. Er reicht in griechisches Denken zurück und ist selbst ein Ergebnis theologischer Akkomodation. Die Inkarnationstheologie redet vom Sein und kreist um die Tatsache, dass da ein Mensch Gott ist und dass damit zugleich Gott Mensch ist”. J. Müller, *Missionarische Anpassung als theologisches Prinzip*, Münster: 1972, 270.

– the birth, life, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.¹³⁶² K. Rahner notes that the centre of understanding the Christian world mission is Jesus of Nazareth, how his humanity and the events of his life are interpreted. But whether we approach this heroic figure from below, through the relevant historical and cultural data demonstrating his authentic humanity and time-conditioned Jewishness; or from above, through the Easter faith-claims of his associates, we are apt to arrive at the same place, the mystery of the incarnation. This mystery is the centre of the Christian life.¹³⁶³ But Christian revelation, like the Old Testament is an integral part of human history. It forms one of God’s given teachings, revealed to humanity. In Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the mystery of God took a concrete form, revealing Himself to humanity.¹³⁶⁴ In him, humanity is not removed, but through God, brought to light. The humanity of Jesus gave incarnation a concrete meaning, challenging human beings for a concrete mode of action. Thus, all the actions of the Church have to follow, in analogical sense, the action of the God-man in Jesus Christ.¹³⁶⁵ John Paul II notes that revelation, God’s self-communication, takes place in and through cultures. That is why to understand the God who reveals the self-communication offered, we must pay turn to historical context or culture. Cultures, according to him, both traditional and modern, remain the locus for God’s past, present and future revelation.¹³⁶⁶

Later theology has worked out the consequences of the definition of this word ‘Incarnation’, although there have been various tendencies emphasizing either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus. It has commonly been accepted that the union of the human nature of Christ with his divine nature had notable consequences for His sanctity. Thus, theologians viewed the union of the two natures as a gift to human beings, both in terms of salvation from their sins and appreciation of the potential goodness in human culture, and the activity, which arises from the doctrine of the Incarnation.¹³⁶⁷ The Vatican Council II took place within the spirit of this incarnation. And among its objectivities was to incarnate the Gospel in the human cultures, and make it more relevant to man in his contemporary situation. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council Fathers stresses that the Church does not wish to impose unyielding uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she does respect and promote the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people’s way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.¹³⁶⁸ Attentiveness to the “signs of the times” was the principal concern of the Vatican II Council, facing the third-world in a post-colonial era, to show a maximum respect for humanity’s invincible historical diversity and cultural pluriformity, hence the council’s emphasis on the primordial and unique principle of incarnation, only recently designated by the neologism “inculturation.”¹³⁶⁹ However, one may ask is “this concern of the church, which is coming late, in the post-colonial era” an indirect way of correcting the injustices she committed, in complicity with Colonialism, against Africans?¹³⁷⁰

¹³⁶² Cf. S. I. Udoidem, *Pope John Paul II on Inculturation: Theory and Practice*, New York: 1996, 48.

¹³⁶³ Cf. K. Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation”, in: *TI*, (1974), 105-106.

¹³⁶⁴ Cf. Joh 1:1.

¹³⁶⁵ Cf. K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, Die Lehre der Versöhnung*, Bd. 21, Zürich: 1986, 21, 71-83.

¹³⁶⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio Hominis* (Redeemer of Man), Vatican City: 1979, 25.

¹³⁶⁷ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago: 1985, 277-278.

¹³⁶⁸ Cf. SC 13; cf. S.C.R., *Inter Oecumenici, and Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 26, Sept. 1964, art. 41; GS 1-91.

¹³⁶⁹ E. Hillman, “Inculturation”, in: J. A. Komonchak, et al, (eds.), *NDT* (1991), 510-513.

¹³⁷⁰ History records the activities of the early missionaries in aiding and abetting slavery. On this Celestine Obi reports: “...Father Lutz and his team at Onitsha embarked on the buying back or redeeming of slaves and harbouring them in the mission houses. This method was prevalent among the missionaries of various congregations working in Africa. Through this device 880 children were bought on slave markets in the Congo in 1896, while 830 were rescued at Ubangui between 1884 and 1899. The C.S. Sp. Journal at Onitsha recorded the following entries: June 12, 1886: Father Superior buys a young slave, six years old, for 9 pieces of plain white Sattun (shirting?) worth 180 francs. June, 15 1886: Father Superior buys an old slave woman by exchanging foods worth about 90 francs....(C.S.E., *Journal* (June, 1886); *Annales Apostoliques* (1888), no. 12, 132-133; cf. A. C.

E. Hillman shares the same view. While examining the Church's missionary activities in Africa, he raises the question: "Even more problematical is the alien image projected by these European and North American organizations. Are they not reinforcing the impression that Christianity itself is something left over from colonialism? In any event, it is hard to see how these religious orders, congregations and societies, with their vast accumulations of European cultural baggage – baroque styles, bourgeois mores, medieval symbols, rites, myths, gestures, rules, arts, concepts, customs and costumes – can help the Church in Africa to overcome its congenital and chronic foreignness."¹³⁷¹ Whatever may be the case, the fact remains that the tree of a Hellenized Christendom cannot simply be uprooted from Europe and replanted in *Africa*¹³⁷², which has a completely different culture. In the view of E. Ikenga-Metuh, the attitude of Christianity to African Religions was instrumental in inspiring the theology of "incarnation" of the gospel to the African culture."¹³⁷³ This Church's call for the incarnation of the gospel in the culture of people is laudable. It is most welcome in African context, especially today, when Africans are yearning for a restoration of the eroding traditional values.

The incarnation speaks of the actual history of the people of Israel, realised in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The historical witness is the place of God's revelation to human kind. Therefore, one cannot speak of God of the gospel in a different way as one would speak of humanity and its history. In the incarnation, the communication of the divine Word to humankind involves human response. The communication assumes historical habituation and taking cultural flesh. God's self-communication has always an incarnational tendency. The incarnation creates an crucial need for fleshy visibility, audibility and tangibility in particular historical and cultural forms capable of arbitrating the meaning of God's Word in the respective times and contexts of each distinctive people. This is why the Church is now striving for a new openness to all peoples, and why the Church aspires to become "the house in which all may feel at home."¹³⁷⁴ The theology of incarnation stresses the assumption of human nature by Christ – God, who took on human nature in Christ. Following this principle, the Church was sooner to be interpreted as the living Christ and its mission as a continuation of incarnation. It gives the Christological foundation of the Church's mission to incarnate herself in human culture. The Church incarnates in the human culture just as Christ, through the incarnation, took up the concrete social and cultural world he lived. Just like Jesus Christ fully and completely took up historical features: the Jewish language, clothing, religion, and moreover, a Jew renews and fulfils Judaism from within, so the Church should do in the human / African culture.¹³⁷⁵ The incarnational and pneumatic structure of salvation is the basis of the gospel which obliges the Church to bring the message of Christ in the concrete human conditions. In this sense, the Church in all its human existence, actions, human experiences, and historical way, could be understood as the revelation of God. Therefore, the concrete human history is the constitutive element of Revelation itself.¹³⁷⁶ John Paul II expressed the relationship existing between incarnation and inculturation in the address he presented to the Catholic community of the University of Coimbra, Portugal. He stated: "It is through the providence of God that the divine message is made incarnate and is communicated through the culture of each people. It is for ever true that the path of culture is the path of man, and it is on this path that man encounters the one

Obi, "The French Pioneers, 1885-1905", in A. C. Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*, Onitsha: 1985, 35. During this period, the missionaries not only co-operated in the promotion of slavery, but also contributed in the degradation and destruction of African values and religious symbols. Most of these symbols that were condemned as "idols" and "evil worship" were stolen by the same Europeans who brought Christianity to Africa, only to use them to enrich their European Museums, and Africans have to pay now with their hard-earned money, either to see or to recover them (cf. *New African Magazine*, December 2002, no. 413, 33).

¹³⁷¹ E. Hillman, (1993), 44.

¹³⁷² H. Küng, (1974), 82.

¹³⁷³ E. I. Metuh, "Incarnating Christianity in African World-views," in: J. Ukpong, *CASAS*, (1993), 110-111.

¹³⁷⁴ E. Hillman, (1993), cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican City, 1991, no. 24.

¹³⁷⁵ Cf. H. B. Meyer, "Zur Frage der Inkulturatio der Liturgie", in: *ZTK*, 105 (1983), nr. 1. 10.

¹³⁷⁶ Cf. W. Kasper, *Glaube und Geschichte*, Mainz: 1970, 213; cf. DV 2.

who embodies the values of all cultures and fully reveals the man of each culture to himself. The gospel of Christ, the incarnate word finds its home along the path of culture and from this path it continues to offer its message of salvation and eternal life.”¹³⁷⁷ With the above words, the John Paul II defends the position that incarnation is only possible within the context of culture, that is, the culture of each people and nation. Jesus Christ reveals himself to the man of each culture and religious tradition. The incarnate word finds its home in every culture and continues to offer its message of salvation.

Incarnation, through inculturation is not a static event rather, it is dynamic and continuous. The *Catechesi Tradendae* emphasizes that the term inculturation may be a neologism, it conveys very well one factor of the great mystery of incarnation.¹³⁷⁸ The Nigerian Bishops bring out the relationship between incarnation and inculturation. In their Joint Pastoral Letter, they expressed in unequivocal terms: “There is no culture no matter how perverse, which does not possess some positive structures, symbols and value system as imprints of God’s passage through her (...): The event of the incarnation does not belong entirely to the past. Rather its historical essence is of a re-occurring nature, making it possible for the *Logos* to continually assume the body of any subsequent human history and culture. This is why incarnation is used synonymous with inculturation.”¹³⁷⁹

On its implication to the Church, the Vatican II states explicitly, the Church is not tied exclusively or indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, ancient or modern but is instead engaged in “a wonderful exchange in keeping with the economy of the incarnation.”¹³⁸⁰ It is by entering “into communion with different forms of cultures; enriching both itself and the cultures themselves,”¹³⁸¹ that the Church is enabled to grow in catholicity while serving obediently its mission to every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Far from being historically static and culturally monolithic, the Church, aspiring to become an authentically catholic sign of humankind’s unity and salvation, must implant itself among these groups – the large distinct groups united by enduring ties, ancient religious traditions, and strong social relationships – *in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived.*¹³⁸² Here E. Hillman critically observes that we used to think of the Church as ‘catholic’ while it was in real sense ‘provincial’ in its cultural-specific garb, archaic language and idiosyncratic posturing. Although always intentionally catholic in an abstract sense, the Church is now trying to come alive, indeed to be born into, the much larger cultural worlds outside of Europe and North America. Today, the real challenge of the Christian faith comes from the inner dynamic toward universality, from its own claim of ‘catholicity.’¹³⁸³ He further submits that the principle of incarnation, oriented toward catholicity, is derived directly from the scandalous belief that God in Jesus became one of us in *everything* except sin (cf. Phil 2:6-8). This belief governs the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and humankind. God so loves the world that he assumed human nature from the inside, embracing a mode of existence not his previously. Through this incomprehensible and self-emptying humility (cf. Phil 2:6-8), the divine Word became fully one of us in human finitude, flesh, history: like ourselves in our daily experience, circumscribed by the particularity of time, place, ethnicity and culture, while thinking, learning, acting and loving with a human mind, will and heart. Jesus of Nazareth is not a disguise used by God, not a human outer garment covering the divinity, not something foreign or extrinsic to what we are. This theme of incarnation dominates the religious experience and self-understanding of Christians uncontaminated by the quasi-monophysite pietisms inherited from late medieval

¹³⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Address to the University Community*, Coimbra, Portugal, May, 15, 1982, 2; Cf. S. I. Udoidem, (1996), 50.

¹³⁷⁸ Cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53.

¹³⁷⁹ Nigerian Bishops, *Evangelization through Inculturation*, Nigeria: 1991, 21.

¹³⁸⁰ *GS*: 58; cf. *AG*: 22.

¹³⁸¹ *GS*: 58.

¹³⁸² Cf. *AG* 10; cf. John Paul, *Redemptoris Missio*, nos, 8, 9, 18; cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 31-32.

¹³⁸³ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 32; cf. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, New York: 1979, 352.

Europe, and vigorously asserted in some modern forms of both Catholic and Protestant fundamentalism.¹³⁸⁴

What we may not forget is that the Church is challenged to preach the gospel, to relate it to the concrete lives of the people of Africa in their social, economic and political lives as well as in their cultural and religious world of symbols. John Paul II articulated the need for this. While addressing the Kenyan Bishops, he urged them to make effort to incarnate the gospel message in the lives and cultures of each people and enable them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.¹³⁸⁵ In September, 1982, the Pope admonished the Bishops of Mozambique in the following words: “It is our duty, according to the mind of Vatican II, to seek and translate the Gospel into forms suited to our culture, so as to make it well understood and (even more) well lived by your people, without (...) prejudice to that necessary ecclesial unity and evangelical substratum, which must be present and firm in the diversity of peoples and of cultures. Not alone must you absorb these suitable cultural expressions, but you must evangelise African culture itself, (but this evangelisation does not mean devastation of African culture) so that little by little one may come to recognise a true African Christian culture, just as this was done in early Christian centuries by Saint Cyprian and Saint Augustine (...). It is the necessary condition for the survival of Christianity in your country (...). As long as the people of Africa do not feel Christianity as part of their own flesh and blood, their own soul, they will not be disposed to defend it (...).”¹³⁸⁶

In relation to preaching the gospel, W. Kasper observes that the gospel is not just an intellectual process of witness. It has to do with more than a mere meditation, which occurs in the living Christian, and Church praxis. The existential comprehension and the realization of the kerygma, or dogmatic statements, in the face of the concrete realities, is the essential criterion of the appropriateness of the proclamation of the gospel. Where this living and committed reception do no longer occur in the consciousness and life of the Church, it could result to faith dying, or the statement of the Belief is no longer alive.¹³⁸⁷ The Gospel of Christ is a meeting of the Divine Word and the human answer. It involves proclamation. The proclamation of revelation must combine ‘address,’ and ‘reception.’ Proclamation is not just a bare pedagogical explanation of the already concluded systems of Christian teaching, but “a making present”¹³⁸⁸ of the gospel, so that the event of Christ takes place anew in the constant new situations of history. This has double meanings. First, the word of God would reach all humanity, and every human situation would assimilate it. Secondly, the word of God must relate to every situation, in which it is proclaimed. The new era of evangelization should be centred on a transforming encounter with *the living person of Christ*. The first proclamation ought to bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith. This task is made all the easier because the African believes in God the Creator from his traditional life and religion and thus is also open to the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God with us, Word made flesh.¹³⁸⁹ The Episcopal Conference of East Africa, and Madagascar (SECAM), in its 1974 Synod in Rome, already examined the principles of evangelization in Africa, and opted for ‘incarnation’ of the gospel in African soil.¹³⁹⁰ The choice is based more on its theological connotation. However, the *lineamenta*¹³⁹¹ seem to have adopted both ‘incarnation’ and ‘adaptation’. In the African context, the principle of incarnation involves “immersing Christianity in African culture (...) sowing the seeds of Christianity on the African soil and helping them to germinate and be nourished to maturity by the African cultural context. As a

¹³⁸⁴ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 32.

¹³⁸⁵ John Paul II, “Episcopal Ministry at the service of Life”, in: *AAP*, (1980), 243-244.

¹³⁸⁶ John Paul II, “Address to the Bishops of Mozambique on ad Limina visit”, Rome: 1982, 10, in: D. C. Isizoh, (1998), 46.

¹³⁸⁷ Cf. W. Kasper, (1992), 222.

¹³⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid* 259.

¹³⁸⁹ Cf. John Paul II, (1982), 58.

¹³⁹⁰ E. I. Metuh, (1993), 111.

¹³⁹¹ *Ibid* 111

theological method, it demands a return to the original sources of Christianity - the Bible, tradition, and a total opening out to the whole of African Traditional Religion and culture as opposed to the mere selection of themes from them. It involves an encounter between the Christian faith and African culture. In the process, there is an interpretation of both. The Christian faith enlightens African culture, and the basic data of revelation as contained in scripture and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them an African cultural expression.”¹³⁹² This approach demands faith meeting with African Traditional Religion.

The encounter between the gospel message and African cultures would result in the mutual enrichment of the two. African Religion is illuminated and perfected by the gospel message, and the Christian faith finds adequate rich cultural expression in African religious traditions and experience. Consequently, the theological value of the African Traditional Religion would not be limited to serving as an appendage of Christianity already incarnated in other cultures. Moreover, from this incarnation would be born Christianity which would be truly Christian and truly African.¹³⁹³ That means from all the above missionary principles, the ‘incarnation’ of the gospel is most appropriate to African culture. Let us examine the pneumatic consequence of the incarnation.

5.4.4 Pneumatic Element

The word “Pneuma” is a derivative of the Hebrew word “Ruach”, meaning wind and breath.¹³⁹⁴ In demotic Greek it can mean any kind of wind, a powerful storm, a fresh wind, propitious or unpropitious to sailors, a breeze, a mild gust, as well as the steam that rises from the earth at certain places.¹³⁹⁵ Moreover, “Pneuma” signifies the air that is breathed in and out by humans and animals. Insofar as words and sounds are formed by exhaled breath, “pneuma” can also take on meaning of living, audible voice. Derived from the meaning of “breath of life,” “pneuma” can also signify “life.”¹³⁹⁶

In Greek language, “pneuma” refers to animals, humans, and gods. Influenced by the Platonic thought that tried to keep anything material or corporeal separate from God, the Irish Monks mistranslated the word “pneuma” to be “Spirit” – a misnomer of wind and breath. Thus the word “Spirit” has come to remain in the Church as the traditional meaning of the word “pneuma”.¹³⁹⁷ The “pneuma hagion” will always remain a sacred “wind” and “breath,” with all the concrete, material associations that make up the content of the words “wind” and “breath.” The qualification “holy” acts as a “factor”, making us aware that in our thoughts and ideas we have to focus on the transcendent dimension of the physical phenomenon of wind and breath, that is, to take the wind and breath as symbols. G. Baudler maintains that the translation of “pneuma hagion” as “Spiritus Sanctus” (Latin), “Heiliger Geist” (German) or “Holy Spirit” (English) has hastened the process of dissolution and evaporation of the Christian tradition of divine wind and breath with serious consequences.¹³⁹⁸

In the Church’s theological language, the pneumatic element involves the role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church. The Spirit is an essential factor in the life of the Church. The Church manifests the Holy Spirit and is the sign of the Holy Spirit in the World. The Holy Spirit, in whose power the Lord rose from the dead, always abides in the Church. In the Pauline theology, the Lord is presented as the Spirit.¹³⁹⁹ It is the same Spirit which after the

¹³⁹² Cf. AG 22.

¹³⁹³ E. I. Metuh, (1993), 124.

¹³⁹⁴ Cf. Sub-section 5.1.4.

¹³⁹⁵ Cf. H. Kleinknecht, “Art. Pneuma”, in: G. Kittel/G. Friedrich, *TWNT*, 6 (1959), 333; cf. G. Baudler, *God and Violence*, Springfield, Illinois: 1992, 159.

¹³⁹⁶ G. Baudler, “Geist als Wind, Atem, Luft und Vogel. Ein Übersetzungsfehler als Ursache für die Schwierigkeiten bei der Wiedergabe des Glaubens an den Heiligen Geist”, in: *Schule und Mission*, 2 (1987/88); 86-89, 87.

¹³⁹⁷ Cf. G. Baudler, (1992), 162.

¹³⁹⁸ Cf. Ibid 163-166.

¹³⁹⁹ Cf. 2 Cor 3:17.

Easter event empowered the Apostles to carry anew the message of the risen Lord to all the ends of the earth.¹⁴⁰⁰ As the Lord is the Spirit and the Spirit abides in the Church, the Church, therefore, is committed to preach the good news in every age and time. On this, lies the pneumatic foundation of the Church and her evangelizing mission in the world. From these pneumatic and missionary dimensions of the Church, the present and the future are not less than the past.¹⁴⁰¹ Consequently, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church, which renews all things and brings all things to Christ, has the power and duty to transmit the message of revelation in new ways that are comprehensible to the people.

The belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church does not remove her institutional nature, rather, it gives it a peculiar character, for the Church as institution, an organized structure, confirms faith in the power of the Holy Spirit in the church. The Church is not just the presence of Christ, the abiding flesh of the Lord, but a principal structure of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatic element in the Church is not separated from the incarnation and Christology. Both complement each other to bring out the true nature of the Church.

The ecclesial *soma tou Christou* could not only be understood from the point of view of the incarnation, but also from the contexts of the Last Supper and Resurrection. The body of Christ is not then understood as perishable body (*soma tes sarkos*), but the spiritual body, (*soma pneumatikon*)¹⁴⁰², Jesus Christ is the one who gives the body a new meaning. In his death and resurrection, the body is raised to life. The theology of Incarnation and the theology of the cross, which appear to contradict one another for Irenaeus of Lyons and Tertullian, only complement one another. In this sense, the temporal and spiritual dimensions of the Church should not be overlooked, for the Lord is the Spirit.¹⁴⁰³ The Church, which is founded on Pentecost, is the same sign of the Holy Spirit, which human beings understand in their different languages.¹⁴⁰⁴ This human language, which became a point of confusion at the event of the Tower of Babel, acquired a new meaning and unity at Pentecost – in the Church. Therefore, the event of the Pentecost compels the Church to carry out the Good News in an understandable language to every culture. This refers to the language of the people: their symbols, rites of initiation and so on. This theme, which centres on inculturation, would not only be a new tactic, but a living responsibility to openness to the Spirit which forms the basis of incarnation.

5.4.5 Trinitarian and Christic Dimensions

Exposing these dimensions, J. Dupuis observes that in the Old Testament, God revealed himself in Yahweh's dealings with his people, the Son in Jesus Christ, and the Spirit in Pentecost, which begins the "time of the Church" – better called the time of the growth of the reign of God unto its eschatological fullness.¹⁴⁰⁵ Wherever there is a communication of God, it is always necessarily the God of Jesus Christ who engages in self-revelation and self-bestowal: that is, the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. A trinitarian structure is, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the *a priori* condition of the possibility of every personal divine communication.¹⁴⁰⁶ Already in the Fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus had this to say: "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father quite clearly, and the Son only dimly. The New Testament revealed the Son and allowed us to glimpse the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and shows himself more clearly. When the divinity of the Father was not yet recognized it would not have been prudently openly to proclaim the Son; and when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted it would not have been fair to impose – I dare to put it like that – a new burden on people by talking about the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, like people (...) who have stared the sun's

¹⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Joh 20:19-23.

¹⁴⁰¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, "Kommentar zu Nr. 11 der Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt", in: *LThK*, III (1968), 314-316, 314.

¹⁴⁰² Cf. Col 1: 22; Phil.3:21,1 Cor 15:44f.

¹⁴⁰³ Cf. 2 Cor 3:17.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Acts 2:1-3.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 42.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid* 42.

light with eyes still weak from illness, they would have run the risk of losing the strength they had already gained. It was necessary therefore to work toward perfection by stages, by an ‘upward journey,’ to use David’s phrase; it was necessary to go forward by way of successive clarification, by increasingly enlightening improvements and advances, in order to see the light of the Trinity shine out at last.”¹⁴⁰⁷ The Old Testament did not know about the “Word of God” (*Dabar* in Hebrew, who would become incarnate in Jesus Christ) or the “Spirit” (who in the New Testament became a “person” distinct from the Father and the Son). Neither the Word nor the Spirit – no less than the Wisdom of God – represented divine spheres of God’s action. For God’s speech and his deeds are closely one; the biblical categories unite them closely. Yahweh does not only speak through his Word, but through acts; the Word of God is very efficacious and creative. In the same manner, the Spirit is the agent not merely of prophetic inspiration but of divine action.¹⁴⁰⁸ The divine-Word and the divine Spirit are “medium” for God’s personal interventions in history, both in Israel and outside.

The literary ‘personification’ of those divine ‘attributes’ enhances the personal commitment in human history by progressively delving into the personal character of the Son (Logos-Wisdom) and of the Spirit. From then on, the Logos-Wisdom and the Spirit, who had already been operative in pre-Christian history, will be understood, by retrojection, as two distinct persons within the mystery of the Triune God: the Son who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the Spirit of Christ, on the other hand. The two divine persons had been present and operative in the pre-Christian dispensation without being formally recognized as persons.¹⁴⁰⁹ The will of Jesus Christ is always to glorify the Father who sent him (cf. Joh 17:4), to reveal his name to the people confirms his works (cf. Joh 17:6; 26). On the other hand, the Father who sends, confirms the Son (cf. Joh 5:20, 37; 17:5; Mk 1:7, 9, 11). Despite the humiliation of the Son in human form (cf. Phil. 2:7-8), Jesus is united with his Father in the Spirit (cf. Mk 1:2; Mt 3:16-4, 4). What obtains in his prayer life (cf. Mk 14:32) finds actual expression on the cross. The saving economy traces its source to life in God that the life of communion is the exchange of love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This creates an intensive dialogue of love which took a concrete form in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴¹⁰ E. Kilmartin expresses the role of the Father in the communication between God and man, maintaining that the Father is the primary communicator and initiator of dialogue between Himself and humanity. He is pure communicator in the immanent Trinity. The Son and the Spirit are communicated in a sequence from person(s) to person. Therefore, if God chooses to communicate himself to humanity, it can only be the two modalities of the self-communication of the Father that is received. The Son and the Spirit are received in such communications. They actuate the relation and potential union that exist between humanity and God, the Father.¹⁴¹¹ The essence of God is a personal communication of love in the form of mediation and exchange of love.¹⁴¹² The Church, leaning on God, who also looks on the people, is oriented to communicate to the world God’s love to humanity in sacramental forms, which Jesus manifests in his farewell prayers to his disciples.¹⁴¹³ The Holy Spirit is the bond and love of the Trinity that is oriented to the saving economy that touches human persons. The same Spirit is the personal medium of communication of love between the Christ and the Christian to the glory of the Father.¹⁴¹⁴

The relevance of this trinitarian-christic dimension to our work is the dimension of John’s recognition of the universal presence of the divine Logos before the Christ-event. For John, the

¹⁴⁰⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Discourse* 26; *FC*, Freiburg: Br. 22, 26/323.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 42.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Cf. *Ibid* 43.

¹⁴¹⁰ Cf. P. Hofmann, “Glaubensbegründung. Die Transzendentalphilosophie der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft in fundamentaltheologischer Sicht”, in: H. B. Bacht, et al (ed.), *FTS*, 36 (1988), 268-268, 268; cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 35.

¹⁴¹¹ E. J. Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice. 1 Systematic Theology Liturgy*, Kansas City: 1988, 139.

¹⁴¹² Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 35.

¹⁴¹³ Cf. Joh 16:7-15.

¹⁴¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid* 36.

Logos was “the true light that enlightens every human being by coming into the world” (Joh 1:9). Irenaeus already highlights the universal revelatory function of the *Logos* which makes him present to humanity from the beginning. The Old Testament Logophanies are real anticipations of the Christophany.¹⁴¹⁵ The human manifestation of Christ – the earth-dwelling God-Jesus took place once for all in space and time – is in his mind ample guarantee of the newness of historical Christianity. For if in the old dispensation the *Logos*, in a certain sense, was already made noticeable – visible to the mind, inasmuch as he is the revelation, the manifestation, of the Father (*visibile Patris*) – then to the eyes of the flesh he became visible only by his advent in the flesh. “The Word’s visibility according to the flesh corresponds to his essential visibility or cognoscibility according to the mind. Both generations, the one *ex Patre Deo* and the other *ex Maria Virgine*, correspond to each other in this.”¹⁴¹⁶ In this sense, the universal revelatory role of the *Logos* made him present to humankind throughout history from the beginning, even though that operative presence was to end in his coming in the flesh in Jesus Christ. Where the Spirit is concerned, his universal presence and action throughout human history in religious traditions¹⁴¹⁷ as well as in individual persons have been stressed by the recent Church magisterium, especially, in the teaching of John Paul II. In the Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, the Pope acknowledges: The Spirit’s presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time. The Spirit is at the very basis of the human person’s existential and religious inquiring which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very composition of its being. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.¹⁴¹⁸ In this sense, J. Dupuis suggests that we have to recognize the universal action of the Word and the Spirit in the extra biblical history of salvation, which combines theologically in one economy of salvation with the punctual historical event of Jesus Christ, being reciprocally exclusive, that is, Christocentricism, on the one hand, and Logocentricism and pneumatology, on the other. These call for each other.¹⁴¹⁹ K. Rahner acknowledges the Christ-event as the aim or end of the predicted action of the *Logos*-to-become-man and of the Spirit’s universal working in the world. The *Logos* pre-incarnational action is directed toward the Christ-event, even as the Spirit can rightly be called “Spirit of Christ” from the beginning of salvation history. He noted: “Since the universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the very beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ-event (...) it can be truly said that the Spirit is everywhere and from the very beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine *Logos*.”¹⁴²⁰

This has trinitarian and Christological consequences: Between the different dimensions of the Trinitarian Christological salvation economy there is a relationship of reciprocal conditioning by virtue of which no singular aspect can either be stressed to the harm of the others or, on the contrary, played down in favour of them. The Christ-event never stands in isolation from the working of the *Logos* and the Spirit, any more than these ever function without relation to it.¹⁴²¹ The action of the *Logos*, the work of the Spirit, and the Christ-event are inseparable aspects of a unique economy of salvation. That human beings are created in Jesus Christ¹⁴²², to whom pre-eminence belongs in the order of both creation and re-creation¹⁴²³, does not detract from, but

¹⁴¹⁵ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV, 34, 1; J. Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Cultures*, Philadelphia: 1973, 172.

¹⁴¹⁶ Cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teologia de la procesion del Verbo*, Rome: 1958, 407; cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 65.

¹⁴¹⁷ Cf. Chapter Five on the “Church and non-Christian religions.”

¹⁴¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican City: 1991, no. 28: *AAS*, 83 (1981), 249-340; cf. Vatican II, AG. 3,11,15.

¹⁴¹⁹ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 195.

¹⁴²⁰ K. Rahner, “Jesus Christ in the non-Christian Religions”, in: *TI*, 17 (London: 1981), 139-155, 146.

¹⁴²¹ Cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 221.

¹⁴²² Cf. Eph 2:10.

¹⁴²³ Cf. Col 1:15-20.

proposes, the anticipated action of the Word-to-become-flesh¹⁴²⁴ and the universal working of the Spirit, “Without doubt, the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified.”¹⁴²⁵ This has consequence for the Church. The abiding presence of the Spirit in the Church challenges her to be a leaven in the world and in human cultures. It challenges her to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit even in non-Christian religions. At this point, let us see the factors that may hinder the incarnation of Christianity in Africa.

5.5 Problems of Incarnation of Christianity in African Culture

Many factors militate against the incarnation of Christianity in the African culture. Some of these problems are discussed below.

5.5.1 Ethnocentrism and Pusillanimity

Ethnocentrism is not merely a religious concept but also has anthropological and sociological dimensions. For matter of specificity and relevance to our work, we shall give attention solely to its religious connotation. In matter of religion, ethnocentrism “is a widespread practice of imposing upon people who have their own culture certain foreign cultural patterns as the unique possibility for expressing faith and the way to live it”¹⁴²⁶ Pusillanimity, on the other hand, has to do with the lack of courage and resolution. It has to do with the fear of innovation or the risk of it all.¹⁴²⁷ Consequently, people whose minds are so tainted with this trait always see the cultural elements in the African Traditional Religion as being contrary to Christian faith, such that the possibility of incorporating them is seen as “making mockery of Christianity.” These two factors posit enormous problems for the incarnation of Christianity in African culture.

With reference to the effect of the former on the African Church, T. Okere notes that it is obvious fact Africans have not participated in the creation of anything significant in Christianity, in the religion with which they have been so intimately identified. There has been no dialogue between African religion and culture and Africans cannot be said to have yet reacted to the gospel. He raises critical questions: “Is it possible for a whole people to be forever just passive recipients in such a sensitive and existential area of religion, the area of ultimate questions and ultimate answers? Are the history, the ideas and ideals, the aspirations and achievements, the collective experience of our people simply worth nothing to a religion that now claims our allegiance exclusively?”¹⁴²⁸ This is too hard to believe. He surmises that African Christians have been brought up to despise and renounce the old traditional religion. But what is being offered in its place is foreign, developed in every detail by outsiders. The choice put to them is unfair – to accept this foreign made product or to return to the traditional religion which, however, discredited, has authentic stamp of a self and home made article. For however poorly made, if it is self-made then it is truly one’s own. Africans in opting for autonomy today have also opted for all its risks and it is becoming evident that modern Africa would rather be content with a less perfect religion in which, however, they can recognise their cultural contribution, than with an impeccably orthodox Christianity where every item has been regulated and prescribed from overseas. This question remains unanswered: Is there any rational justification for this attitude or is it just another case of racial chauvinism, the reverse side of the coin of ethnocentrism with which we have often reproached Europe? It is true that with all due respect to the purity of the original message, the influence between it and the receiving culture must be reciprocal.¹⁴²⁹

To resolve the problem this factor posits in African culture, there must be two-sided form of communication between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion. A Communication

¹⁴²⁴ Cf. Joh 1: 9.

¹⁴²⁵ AG 4; cf. J. Dupuis, (2002), 223.

¹⁴²⁶ P. Arrupe, “Catechesis and Inculturation,” in: *Teaching All Nations*, 15, 1 (1978), 21.

¹⁴²⁷ E. Hillman, (1993), 41.

¹⁴²⁸ T. Okere, “The Assumption of African Values as Christian Values”, in: *Lucerna*, (1978), 9-15, 10.

¹⁴²⁹ Cf. Ibid 10.

has to be two-sided, if it is to be communication at all. For any given people the gospel will influence the culture as certainly as the culture will influence the gospel. The gospel is a challenge, an interpolation of a people. The people must give a response that is of course generally human but in fact also specifically theirs. In other words, the reception of the gospel cannot but be hermeneutic. There will be no understanding of the gospel except from the context of the people's previous understanding of themselves. A culture can receive the Christian message only on its own terms. This law of the hermeneutical circle has been totally ignored in the evangelization of Africa. The idea of a cultural *tabula rasa* where the gospel can be announced to completely virgin ears and minds completely innocent of a predisposition is just a little less nonsensical than the idea of importing Christianity with a complete baggage of foreign culture to an alien people. The end product of an encounter between the gospel and a people will always be a certain type of Christianity, always a modified Christianity – and there does not exist any other Christianity! That Africa must have its own type of Christianity is not only, therefore, a matter of Africans wishing to participate in the establishment of their own Christianity but the nature of things demands it to be so. This nature of things is so glaring that we should not pretend that it does not exist, therefore, calls for proper redress.¹⁴³⁰

Thus, the above observations raise one of the issues that confront the Church in Africa today and she cannot remain aloof to the challenges they pose to evangelization. There is only one way out. To put it more concretely, the African local Churches must move from a receiving, to a giving, missionary Church. The Church must now move from an inward looking Church to an outward looking one; from a Church of a David dressed in borrowed cumbersome armoury of doctrinal formulations, liturgical practice, and architectural structures, to one dressed in one's proper and therefore comfortable military outfit; from a Church that is weighed down by a false sense of strength and self sufficiency in its powers and structures, to a Church truly strong because recognizing its weakness and poverty, it becomes open to the Spirit. The processual nature of inculturation means the Church moves from always talking (like the disputes that ruined early African Church) to a Church that is sharing, as well as listening and learning.¹⁴³¹ For effective incarnation of Christianity in Africa, the Church is obliged to reflect on this issue. She is to realize that our friend and saviour saves only what he assumes. Thus it is necessary that all cultures be assumed by Christ; or that all people be assumed by Christ through their own cultures, because faith never exists unless it is incarnated, for it is a way to life.¹⁴³² This follows that Christ should assume into his body, the Church, all cultures, their rites, purify them without destroying them. To those who feel threatened by these new or different expressions of faith; expressions that might possibly contradict what Europeans have formulated and put into practice up to now,¹⁴³³ P. Arrupe has these good remarks; "real pluralism is the most profound unity," and the present "crisis of unity in many cases is due to insufficient pluralism which fails to provide the satisfaction of expressing and living one's faith in conformity with one's culture."¹⁴³⁴ This is because all human beings are creatures of culture, always in need of some concrete cultural contexts as their own humanizing way of life within its own limited time-frame. Without some such matrix, one is acutely in danger of being reduced by the forces of anomie to "howling animality."¹⁴³⁵ This danger is demonstrated in contemporary history by the breakdown of cultures and the disintegration of the social order in times of war or violent revolution.¹⁴³⁶ As far as these factors of ethnocentricism and pussilaminity exist, they pose no small obstacles to the authentic incarnation of Christian initiation in African initiatory rites.

¹⁴³⁰ Cf. Ibid

¹⁴³¹ Cf. E. U. Umorem, "Inculturation and the Future of the Church in Africa," in: *EATMCP*, (1992), 66- 68, 67.

¹⁴³² Cf. P. Aruppe, (1978), 20.

¹⁴³³ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 41.

¹⁴³⁴ P. Aruppe, (1978), 21; cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 42

¹⁴³⁵ L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, Harmondsworth: 1973, 29-33.36.

¹⁴³⁶ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 42.

5.5.2 Western-Oriented Nature of Church Doctrines and Rites

Church's doctrines and rites are formulated in Western style and mentality, and are meant to be transmitted in the same form to non-Western worlds. Consequently, the Church looks with distrust and contempt at any theologian who calls for innovation or de-westernization of Church's doctrinal formulations and rites in such a way as they accommodate non-Western (African) world-views, myths and religious rites. The person falls into the danger of being sharply condemned and anathematized. The fact remains that many of the Church's doctrinal formulas, laws, social structures, styles and religious ceremonies - borrowed initially from Mediterranean cultures - no longer speak to the minds and hearts of the people, even in Europe and America, no less, the people of Africa.¹⁴³⁷ E. Hillman articulated it when he observes that these cultural vessels of clay', originally intended to preserve, describe and transmit the gospel itself, have become obsolete.¹⁴³⁸ As they apply to the Church in Africa, new doctrines, institutions, and the ceremonies need to be formulated, not in order to replace the gospel, but to keep enliven it and bring it to bear in the problems of the present age, and the cultural context of the people.¹⁴³⁹ There is an urgent need to celebrate the Christian belief that God's re-creating love has been operative always and everywhere through the cultures of all peoples. The symbolisms of initiation express profoundly the African world-view. The Church in Africa should inculturate them. This requires creativity, and ensuring the relevance of the gospel to African people. According to T. Okere, It is not the making of some acceptable contribution to world Christianity that is our first concern. It is rather the possibility, through the Christianisation of our values, of getting creatively involved in Christianity in order to make it our own. Our enterprise cannot be predominantly export-oriented. For it is when we first make it really our own, when we have an authentic Christianity that we can then have something to offer to the greater world Church. But first and foremost we have to allow the Gospel to encounter our culture and become relevant to us. For it can only be either relevant or useless - there is no third alternative.¹⁴⁴⁰

5.5.3 The Seminary System

The Seminary system is another major obstacle. On its effect on Priests, E. Hillman writes: "The local clergy, far from being prepared by their clerical training for the inculturation challenge ahead of them, are still being intensively re-socialized into imitation of Euro-Americans. This is done through the universally standardized seminary system starting at secondary school level."¹⁴⁴¹ In the Seminaries, candidates to the Catholic Priesthood are practically taught to be keepers of the orthodoxy of faith, Church's Laws and morals, often coloured with European world-views; to celebrate Masses exactly the same way as it is done in Rome, without any room for modification. In a situation like this, the question of inculturation of local symbols and rites of initiation into the liturgy becomes a Herculean task. Such a system does not easily encourage the possible incarnation of the liturgy in African culture.

Moreover, some seminarians, while on Apostolic work do not dispose themselves to learn the local rites of the people, instead, approach them with disgust. Having been formed in such a system, one does not expect a miracle from some of these seminarians when they are ordained to the Catholic Priesthood, as regards their attitude to African traditional religious values. Instead, some of them go to extreme to attack the local rites with severity, supporting them with wrong theological jargons, instead of creating a balance. This attitude of disgust of African cultural values makes them vulnerable to conflict with the people, thus, virtually impossible to immerse themselves deeply in their indigenous cultural worlds. Some are ordinarily unable to reach an appreciation of their own cultural way of celebrations, not to talk of making effort to survey the possibility of inculturating them in the liturgy. E. Hillman notes that some of them are unable to

¹⁴³⁷ Cf. Ibid 42.

¹⁴³⁸ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁴³⁹ A. Dulles, *The Survival Of Dogma: Faith, Authority, and Dogma in a Changing World*, New York: 1973, 154; my italics.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Cf. T. Okere, (1978), 15.

¹⁴⁴¹ E. Hillman, (1993), 43.

appreciate their own cultures as equal in depth to that of their traditionally educated, but relatively less schooled, siblings. Thus, with every effort being made for many years of formation to transform these seminarians into carbon copies of conventional western clergymen, it is neither fair nor honest to expect them to be the agents of incarnation of the gospel in Africa, at some time in the near future. Thus, he adds: “among the tragic consequences of the current seminary system in African countries is the extent to which the indigenous clergy are apt to be alienated from their own cultural heritage. Some are conspicuously uninterested in the religious and artistic tradition of *the* people. Their re-socialization experience into the invading culture and their encasement in a clerical subculture shaped by neo-scholasticism and legalism, has led to a situation in which the principle of inculturation and incarnation can hardly be discussed, much less implemented.”¹⁴⁴² Thus, it is obvious that the European has absolutised his historical and cultural perspective. European Christianity, which it must be avowed is altogether a legitimate Christianity, is made into Christianity as such. A veto has been placed on every worth-while contribution from other sources. It is a holy blackmail forbidding every innovation in essentials under pain of deviation from orthodoxy.¹⁴⁴³ Therefore, much as the current seminary system is overly Eurocentric in orientation, therefore, does not encourage creative and reciprocal dialogue with the traditional religious values of the Africa, it hinders many Priests to positively contribute to the emergence of a truly African liturgical rite. Thus, some of them bury their ideas rather than be misunderstood.

5.5.4 More Rationalizations

Rationalization hinders the promotion of the cultural catholicity of the Church, and incarnation of the gospel in African culture. The term deals with the facile assertion that African cultures are archaic and vanishing under the impact of westernizing modernity.¹⁴⁴⁴ These cultures, now regarded as ‘obsolescent’ by some western and westernized scholars, used to be called ‘savage’ or ‘primitive.’ All these pejorative judgements, which arise from western perception shaped by a deep and misleading paradigm defending western feelings of superiority against any possibility of eclipse by other cultures, greatly, oppose any effort to incarnation of Christianity in Africa. E. M. Zuesse expressed his fear on the challenge the African Traditional Religion posits to Christianity very bluntly: “To suppose that these cultures have in their traditional forms both the avenues and the power to deal with problems of nationalization, industrialism, and the scientific method is to pose a real challenge to our own lives - our western ways of dealing with these features of modernity. Likewise to suppose that Christianity’s self-expression might be enriched and clarified through traditional African symbol systems is to raise disturbing questions about the adequacy of the religious experiences and expressions of western peoples.”¹⁴⁴⁵ But under the lid of colonialism such questions were hardly thinkable. These questions and fear find expressions, in more subtle ways that even today these issues are apt to be considered too threatening to be formulated in unambiguous terms. The same fear continues to grip the West’s relation to the South that find expression not only in religion, but also politics, economics, et cetera.

Equally, the profound re-socialization of many Africans, through the Churches, schools and universities of the colonial period, who now have been ‘westernized’ or ‘modernized’ constitute another major problem to effective incarnation of Christianity in Africa. E. Hillman notes that the westernization was done for the benefit of the colonizing powers and at a great personal and social cost to Africans. Consequently by internalizing the pejorative judgements of their western teachers and preachers, these Africans promoted the west’s social, cultural, religious and economic hegemony, while at the same time denigrating their own heritage. The misdirected loyalty had the effect of inhibiting, if not totally precluding, any likelihood of

¹⁴⁴² Ibid 43; my italic.

¹⁴⁴³ Cf. T. Okere, (1978), 15.

¹⁴⁴⁴ E. Hillman, (1993), 43.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Cf. E. M. Zuesse, “The Degeneration Paradigm in the Western Study of World Religions,” in: *JES*, 3,1 (1976), 14, 1; cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 46.

authentically African cultural systems of humanism and social order (ethics, law, religion, art, et cetera) meeting the new needs of African peoples. This disintegrative process, which produces, among others, the consequences of depriving people of their traditional ethical and religious systems, is a growing amorality and religious indifference among African elites, even an emerging atheism in practice. It is no secret that some African populations have been led, more often than not under the banner of ‘progressive’ or ‘modernity’, to the brink of anomie, while others have already fallen into a state of total chaos.¹⁴⁴⁶ All the above factors militate against the authentic incarnation of Christianity in African culture, and call for a closer participation of all for a better inculturation of the African world-view, cultural symbols and rites in Christianity. It is only then that the gospel message would become relevant to Africans.

5.5.5 Summary

This chapter exposes the position of the Church on African non-Christian religions; inculturation and incarnation as principles of missionary activity, as well as the factors militating against them. Interestingly, with Vatican II Council, a new approach emerges in the Church in relation to non-Christian religions. Thus, “these ‘other religions that were regarded formerly as lies, works of the devil and - at best - vestigial truth, now count as kind of (‘relative’) revelation through which innumerable individuals of ancient times and of the present have experienced and now experience the mystery of God. These other religions that formerly count as ways of damnation, now are recognized as ways of salvation - whether “extraordinary” or “ordinary” is a matter of dispute among scholars - for innumerable persons, perhaps indeed for the majority of mankind. They are now recognized as “legitimate” religions and represent in fact all the religion that is possible in a particular social situation, with forms of belief and worship, concepts and values, symbols and ordinances, religious and ethical experiences that have a ‘relative validity,¹⁴⁴⁷ ‘a relative, providential right to exist.”¹⁴⁴⁸ The validity of African Traditional Religion, with its innumerable values calls on the Church to give more serious attention to the incarnation of the liturgy on African rites. Despite the factors that militate against it, more concerted effort is needed.

The fact remains it is only when the liturgist starts to understand the basic insight of the universe by the African people, their understanding of the life of man lived in dynamic relation to ancestors, to good and evil spirits, to good and evil people, to the physical universe and God, embodied in myth and ritual (initiations); only when this perception of the universe is taken seriously and its role as a problem-solving mechanism in the real African universe, revealed by African Traditional Religion and the continually evolving African societies, is seen *dia*-logging, not duo-logging, with a critiqued living, thereby evolving, Jewish-Christian tradition; only then do we have an African liturgy in the making.¹⁴⁴⁹ It is an issue of great importance to the Church in Africa today and tomorrow. The incarnation (inculturation, contextualization) theology should lead Africans to reflect on and express their faith-experience in cult.

From our exposition so far it dawns on us, especially, on the Church on non-Christian religions, that from a Christian point of view, it does not seem that there is a satisfactory solution to the problem of religious pluralism, because without a radical revision of its self-understanding Christianity cannot accept other religions and religious traditions as such, that is, as alternative paths to salvation. As long as Christianity sees Jesus Christ as the consummation and culmination of God’s self-revelation and therefore the universal Saviour, other religions, religious traditions and saviour-figures will, from its perspective, remain at most subordinate and intermediary means of salvation¹⁴⁵⁰ – a factor that presents a major obstacle to inter-religious

¹⁴⁴⁶ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 46.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Cf. J. Neuner, “Missionstheologische Probleme”, in: K. Rahner, (ed), *Gott in Welt*, II (1964), 401-402.

¹⁴⁴⁸ H. R. Schlette, *Die Religion als Thema der Theologie. Überlegungen zu einer Theologie der Religionen*, Freiburg-Bassel-Wien: 1963, 39; cf. H. Küng, (1974), 90.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, *Liturgy: Truly Christian Truly African*, Kenya: 1982, *Spearhead*, no. 74, 31.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Cf. A. Ekechukwu, “Theology of Religions and the Theological Problematic of Inculturation”, in: E. E. Uzukwu, (ed.), *Religion and African Culture*, (1988), 127; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 31.

dialogue on equal level and waters down the process of incarnation of Christianity in Africa. On the possible inculturation of, especially, African initiation rites in the liturgy, we turn to the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

6 INCULTURATION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL INITIATION

6.1 Consequence to the Liturgy

In 1976, Pope Paul VI addressed the Bishops from Africa and Madagascar. In the address, he presented these pertinent questions to them: “Does the Church in Africa retain certain Christian religious form that was brought in from outside and which makes her, as it were, a stranger and pilgrim among her peoples? Should new and more suitable means be sought in theology and in pastoral practice?”¹⁴⁵¹ This papal address touches specially on the celebration of the liturgy, and the inadequacy of retaining foreign elements in the celebration of the sacraments in the Church in Africa. Therefore, the Pope calls for an orientation of the sacraments in African culture. It demands the inculturation of African traditional rites of initiation in the liturgy, in other words, the incarnation of the liturgy in African rites. He calls for an emergence of a liturgical rite that takes account of African world-view, its symbolisms and rites and myths. The inculturation of African rites of initiation would not only make the liturgy lively, but enrich it and reflect true African pattern of celebration. It would help facilitate an emergence of a liturgical rite that is at home with the people. In this direction, the Pope urges the Bishops to “consider the elements of initiation in a particular region that agree with the Christian Baptismal rite, and decide on their incorporation.”¹⁴⁵² O. Onwubiko considers this papal call as the first official approval of the incarnation of the Church in Africa.¹⁴⁵³

Just like Paul VI, John Paul II, during his first visit to Africa (May 2 to 12 1980), expressed his promise to promote the process of the incarnation of the Church in African culture. Kissing the African soil, he showed ritually the sacredness of this continent and the great respect he has for Africans, living and living-dead. In his addresses, the Pope did not only express admiration for the ancestral heritage in all its dynamic dimensions, but also an awareness of the indispensable position of this heritage for the shaping of Africa’s and global future. Addressing the diplomatic corps in Nairobi, Kenya, he declared: “Africa constitutes a real treasure house of so many authentic human values. It is called upon to share these values with other peoples and nations; and so to enrich the whole human family and all other cultures. To be capable of sharing this wealth with others, ‘Africa must remain deeply faithful to itself’. This fidelity is burgeoning from its faith in its own personality: Africa believes in the truth about itself.”¹⁴⁵⁴ The question of *enrichment* involves all aspects of human life, the life of the Church and celebration of the sacraments. Moreover, the true African personality expresses itself in the central values that form the motive force of African perception of the universe.¹⁴⁵⁵ John Paul II acknowledges the wealth of African Traditional Religion, which he affirms the Church regards with deep respect. And being a body which is at home in all cultures without identifying itself with any given of them,¹⁴⁵⁶ the Church encourages her children to engage themselves in the task of realizing a true encounter between the Gospel and African culture; precisely, in dialogue that promotes

¹⁴⁵¹ Paul VI, *Evangelization in Africa Today*, Rome: 1975; cf. *Ibidem*, *Christ To the World*, XXI, 5, (Rome: 1976), 294; cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 October; cf. Paul VI, “Address to SECAM”, in: *Gaba Pastoral Papers*, 7 (1969), 48-51.

¹⁴⁵² *Rituale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. Vi promulgatum, Ordo Baptisimi Parvulorum* (Citta del Vaticano: 1969), Nr. 31.

¹⁴⁵³ Cf. O. A. Onwubiko, *Christian Mission & Culture in Africa, (Vol II), Theory And Practice of Inculturation: An African Perspective*, Enugu: 1992, 92.

¹⁴⁵⁴ *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER), Kenya: 1980, 216.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Cf. E. E. Uzuoku, *Liturgy Truly Christian Truly African*, Spearhead, 74, Nairobi, Kenya: 1982, 2.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Cf. *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER), Kenya: 1980, 217.

acculturation or inculturation, which reflects the incarnation of the Word, since African culture transformed and regenerated by the Gospel produces from its own living tradition, original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.¹⁴⁵⁷ Referring to the inculturation of African rites and values, he noted that “not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but that ‘Christ, in the members of his body, is himself African’.”¹⁴⁵⁸ The Church realizes this declaration when the members of Christ’s body in Africa strive to be authentic Christians, and authentically African.¹⁴⁵⁹ The above positions of Paul VI and John Paul II show how both of them committed themselves to implement the spirit of Vatican II Council.

Vatican II Council¹⁴⁶⁰ had earlier in 1965 welcomed in mission lands, elements of initiation rites adaptable to the Christian ritual. The position of the Vatican II touches on the family and social life, traditional rites that mark important occasions¹⁴⁶¹, local rites of marriage, birth rite, transition into adulthood, New Year, sowing and harvesting, death and burial rites. The same Council obliges the Local Bishops to purify these rites of some stains of superstition (where they exist), and incorporate them into the sacred ritual of the Church.¹⁴⁶²

Article 65 of *The Constitution on the Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, explicitly prescribes that in mission countries, outside the elements of initiation furnished by the Christian tradition, it will be permitted to admit those other elements of initiation which are established practice among every people, in so far as they can be adapted to the Christian rite.¹⁴⁶³ Here, the principle applicable to the African context is not adaptation, but the incarnation of the liturgy in African rites.

Article 40 gives consideration on the areas and places, where appropriate application in the liturgy are demanded, and offered conditions for this procedure. These areas possess “quality of ‘Co-naturalness’ for signifying certain aspects of the sacramental reality, and should be able to frame Christian initiation in the context ‘of a people’s distinctive traditions and culture.’”¹⁴⁶⁴ It stipulates submission of final recommendations to the Holy See, which has the right to approve which elements are to be admitted into the Liturgy.¹⁴⁶⁵

Later in 1971, the *Secretariat for non Christians* now (Secretariat for Inter-religious Dialogue) recognized dominant ideas in initiation in African Traditional Religion that are analogous with the Christian sacrament of initiation. Such dominant ideas are symbolic death, rebirth or resurrection, accession to a new form of existence marked by the giving of a new name, and entry or incorporation into the community of adult or member of religious society.¹⁴⁶⁶ The 1972 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults leaves the door open for creativity. The General Introduction to this new adult ritual (no. 30) reminds Bishop’s Conferences of the provinces, of Vatican II’s directives on local rituals.¹⁴⁶⁷

The above Papal, magisterial and Vatican II declarations and recommendations form the basis for the incarnation of the liturgy in African traditional rites, with a view to arriving at authentic African rites. Their positions suggest that the establishment of African liturgical rites is not only desirable but also mandatory. They agree with the declaration of Pope Gregory the Great¹⁴⁶⁸ who once said: *in una fide nil officit consuetude diversa* - which means as long as the

¹⁴⁵⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to Zairean Bishops*, (AFER), 1980, no. 4, 223.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to Kenyan Bishops*, (AFER), no. 6.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* 6; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 3.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Cf. chapter five, sub-section 5.1.2.

¹⁴⁶¹ Cf. SC. 65; cf. C. D. Isizoh, (ed.), *The Attitude of The Catholic Church: Towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*, Lagos, Rome: 1998, 63; cf. sub-section 5.1.2.

¹⁴⁶² Cf. *Acta et Documenta*, Series II, Vatican City: 5, 487; Cf. SC. 37, 40.

¹⁴⁶³ Cf. SC. 65.

¹⁴⁶⁴ A. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future*, New York: 1989, 129.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Cf. SC. 40.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Secretariat Pro non Christianis, *Bulletin*, 18 (Vaticana: 1971), 187.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Cf. *Die Feier der Eingliederung Erwachsener in die Kirche*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien: 1994, 29.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Gregory the Great (540-604 AD), *Epistle*, 1,4,3.

Church preserves one faith there is nothing inconsistent about a divergence of customs. The same Pontiff, in reply to Augustine of Canterbury's inquiry on which liturgical traditions one should introduce among Anglo-Saxon Christians, advised Augustine to choose from the various traditions that he had known what would be suitable for English Christians.¹⁴⁶⁹ He writes: "If you have found something more pleasing to almighty God, either in the Roman or in the Frankish or in any other Church, make a careful choice and institute in the Church of the English – which as yet new to the Faith – best usages which you have gathered together from many Churches (...). Therefore, choose from each particular Church what is godly, religious and sound, and gathering all together as it were into a dish, place it on the table of the English for their customary diet."¹⁴⁷⁰ The same advice is also applicable to the African context.

The task confronting us, therefore, in the discussion of the consequence of African traditional initiation to the liturgy is not just how to insert some African rituals into the Roman liturgical structure (for this would lead to distortion of African rites), but rather what should be done to discover the Christian inspiration and to create true African liturgical rites – rites that take account of African initiatory practice, structure, processes, forms and symbolic contents. Let us see the effort of the West African Episcopal Commission in this regard.

6.1.1 The West African Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Liturgy

This Episcopal Commission was established in 1963.¹⁴⁷¹ It is one of the commissions that have made notable contributions to the development of an African rite. In 1973 it became a sub-commission in the Commission for Catechesis and Liturgy. Its successful achievement was the establishment in 1968 of the *Institute Supérieur de Culture Religieuse* which was raised to a Faculty of Theology in 1975 and became the *Institute Catholique de l'Afrique de L'Ouest*.¹⁴⁷² In 1975, a commission instituted by this Institute, had a meeting whose objective was to set out a pilot study of the Christian initiation which led to the important 1976 meeting, held at Koumi, Upper Volta¹⁴⁷³ to study the theme *On Becoming a Christian*. On 250 pages, the commission came out with a book, titled, *On Becoming a Christian in Africa: A Research on the Catechetical and Liturgical Steps of Initiation in the Christian Community*.¹⁴⁷⁴ This book examines the Christian initiation from New Testament times to Vatican II and after. In addition, it takes special look at crucial periods of initiation in African traditional life and the consequent initiations for men and women. Moreover, it contains testimonies of experiences in Catechumenate by stages and in pastoral experiences in the various communities of the region, and concludes with a synthesis of the results of the conference, conclusions and practical projects.¹⁴⁷⁵

With the conviction that the African reaches fullness through the Christian vision of the world, the conference also underlines that the Christian message agrees intimately with the culture and heart of the African. The insistence is on the Catechumenate and on step-by-step formation of children, adolescents and adults. To realise this, it is not just necessary that Pastors, Religious and Catechists are informed and formed, but the collaboration of the Christian community, higher institutions of learning, and major seminaries is requested. This is a region which takes its pastoral theology and liturgy seriously. The effort to produce a baptismal ritual like the Mossi, Upper Volta, achieved in their language (the More) is an example of this commitment.¹⁴⁷⁶

¹⁴⁶⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 2.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Gregory the Great, *ibid*; cf. J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, Westminster: 1978, 7.

¹⁴⁷¹ The inter-territorial Episcopal Conference constitutes the following Countries: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Togo and Upper Volta.

¹⁴⁷² Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 48.

¹⁴⁷³ Today, Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Cf. *Imprimerie de la Savane, Bobo-Dioulasso*, Upper Volta: 1977.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid*. 48-50.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid* 50.

6.1.2 Circumcision

Chapter three treated, in detail, circumcision as a *rite de passage* in Africa.¹⁴⁷⁷ It exposed its cultural diversities, structures, procedures and symbolisms. Here, the rite needs critical evaluation, to determine the possibility of its inculturation in the liturgy.

When one looks at the nature of African traditional community, one observes that “the significance attached to the community sometimes leads to the institutionalization of practices that make no real contribution to the individual or group development.”¹⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that in recent years, one of the pressing problems that have engendered heated discussions in various quarters is the female circumcision. Although the practice should be interpreted, among others, in the context of the religion of the community, and has its traditional place in the initiation rite, which aims to integrate both boys and girls into the clan fellowship, female circumcision, especially, the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is still carried out, not only in African communities, but also in many parts of the world¹⁴⁷⁹, is extremely brutal. It enjoys no justification. Unlike the circumcision for boys, the former is a mutilation that carries to the point of absurdity another aspect of initiation, that is, the preparation for sexual life and for sexual pleasure. More and more voices, especially, those of women, rise today against this established tradition¹⁴⁸⁰, and one cannot continue such a practice without being guilty of oppression. This is a structure that despite its somewhat well-meaning intentions must in the final analysis be described as torture and consequently unjust.¹⁴⁸¹

In the traditional African context, the circumcision of boys and girls was seen as one of several physically demanding and intellectual-spiritual exercises intending to teach young people that life consists not only of joy but also of suffering. The human person always lives in the tension between life and death. As circumcision marks the conclusion and high point of the initiation rite, where boys were to learn to bear pain, so that they would be able to endure life's dark hours; only on this background can one understand Mzee Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya when he defended it among the Gikuyu of Kenya as the missionaries condemned it. He argued that the missionaries rejected female circumcision as barbaric only because they were not acquainted with the precise anthropological justification for this practice and reduced its entire significance to the biological and medical levels, ignoring the factors that made it socially and psychologically meaningful.¹⁴⁸² A similar argument could apply to the ritual circumcision in Ezza, Abakaliki¹⁴⁸³ and any other community in Igbo land, Africa, and the world at large where it still prevails. But these arguments do not justify it. Consequently, the lifelong suffering, especially, of circumcised women, prompts the question whether the significance such communities in African traditional society attach to circumcision, leading them to experience it as vitally important and as a source of meaning, could not be attached equally to other symbols and practices without destroying the very core of their culture. In those communities where it is practised, it is right to say that it is forbidden for men to marry women who do not practice female circumcision¹⁴⁸⁴, simply because the person is not yet circumcised. This practice not only entails oppression and physical injury, but also an unacceptable discrimination that is ethnocentric¹⁴⁸⁵ and perversion of justice. On this basis, the thesis does not advocate female circumcision, especially, the Female Genital Mutilation

¹⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Chapter Three, sub-section 3.4.

¹⁴⁷⁸ B. Bujo, *Foundations of An African Ethic*, New York: 2001, 132.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Cf. W. Dirie, *Desert Children*, United Kingdom: 2005, 222-225.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid. 80; cf. W. Dirie, (2002), 77, 347-369; cf. A. Thiem, *Die Stimme der scharzen Fau: Vom Leid der Afrikanerinnen*, Hamburg: 1986, 3f.

¹⁴⁸¹ Cf. B. Bujo, (2001), 132.

¹⁴⁸² Cf. Ibid cf. J. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu*, Nairobi: 1991, 135.

¹⁴⁸³ Cf. subsection 3.3 to 3.4.5; cf. J. Odey, *Ritual Circumcision in Ezza and the Christian Faith*, Ibadan, 1986, 6ff.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Cf. J. Kenyatta, (1991), 130-154.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Cf. B. Bujo, (2001), 133.

(FGM).¹⁴⁸⁶ Nevertheless, it recommends an inculturation of other initiation rites in African Traditional Religion.

Thus, with the knowledge that with regard to the Christian faith, the community of the faithful does not limit or exclude membership to a specific race or tribe as St. Paul maintains that through baptism, there is no more distinction between Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, but all of are one in Christ Jesus¹⁴⁸⁷, nevertheless, the Christian faith finds expression in the human culture. P. C. Chibuko highlights this as follows: “The Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form. The Christian faith requires a receptive ground, fertilised and nourished by the cultural values and the genius of the people. Between the Christian faith and culture there should be a mutual interaction and reciprocal assimilation. No part should be subjected to remain only on the receiving end or left in a state of inactivity or anonymity. This involves the openness of culture to Christianity and vice versa. It avoids any impression of superiority complex syndrome that maintains a kind of *senso unico* – a one way traffic or *sempre diritto* – straight on, or what the Germans would refer to as – *gerade aus* – straight on – or *Einbahnstrasse* – one way traffic. Rather it is two way traffic of mutual enrichment of one another.”¹⁴⁸⁸ The African culture would be a proper avenue and vehicle of expression of the Christian faith.

In this regard, there is need for union between the Christian initiation and the African traditional initiation rites. Such a union, according to St. Augustine, should make the Christian membership to shine out and act as perfection.¹⁴⁸⁹ There is need for a reconstruction of an integrated liturgical ritual that would accommodate both rites such that the pre-baptismal reception becomes the recognition of the origins of the individual in his/her traditional community. The transition of the individual to membership of the wider horizon of the Body of Christ would become clearly manifested.¹⁴⁹⁰ The Ezza and Edda rites of passage and Edda rite of manhood could offer useful materials for careful study and adequate inculturation. This would require the effort to remove areas that contradict faith and reason. The inculturation of these rites would not only promote evangelisation, but also create harmonious existence between faith and culture.¹⁴⁹¹ The transitional symbolism could greatly influence the traditional community of the individual. In the case of a child for baptism, the influence would be registered in the parents and relations of the child who are the immediate community of this child and are expected to play an active role in the upbringing and Christian nurturing of the child. In the case of a Christian, the infant baptism draws the community and the parents of the child into the rite in a way that expresses their acceptance of responsibility for the Christian upbringing of the child, without which the baptism cannot normally be celebrated.¹⁴⁹² A reconstruction of an integrated ritual for the African circumcision rite and the pre-baptismal rite of reception into the Christian community would be an opportunity of making a progress in the cultural centre of the African child. This would be a strategy of imprinting the demands of the Christian life in the minds of the community of the child.

Since both the naming ceremony and the circumcision rite, more or less are celebrated at the same time among the Igbo people¹⁴⁹³ both could form the basis for the construction of the an initiatory celebration of the pre-baptismal aspects of infant baptism. The latter should be spread out a bit and gradually celebrated in stages.¹⁴⁹⁴ With this, a traditionally symbolic expression of the rite of infant Baptism would manifest in the significant moments of the socially sensitive

¹⁴⁸⁶ Cf. W. Dirie, op. cit. 77-369.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13. A call that places demand on the Christian to work against racism that divides the human world!

¹⁴⁸⁸ P. C. Chibiko, *Paschal Mystery of Christ*, Frankfurt/AM: 1999, 117-118.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Cf. St. Augustine, *Sermons*, 8.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Walsh, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, London: 1988, 71.

¹⁴⁹¹ It would be about mutual co-existence between the Church and culture as witnessed in the Faching Feast in Europe.

¹⁴⁹² Cf. Walsh, (1988), 70.

¹⁴⁹³ Cf. Chapter Three, sub-section 3.5.

¹⁴⁹⁴ C. C. Anyanwu, *Rites of Initiation in Christian Liturgy and the Igbo Traditional Society*, Frankfurt: 2004, 341.

traditional gestures of the African. By so-doing, it would be relevant to those communities where the parents have right over the new child. Moreover, it would bring an end to the single celebration of the rite, and elicit closer contact between Christianity and the child's African traditional background, which starts, especially in the home and local condition. It would remove the possibility of a dual-celebration, and bring about an articulation of African traditional rite into the liturgy. Here, the Church should recognize the child's traditional ceremonies, which opens the way for dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The possibility of making the traditional rites parts of baptismal rite would be guaranteed, so that they are situated within the traditional ceremonies in a way that it becomes the recognition of and building on this traditional framework. The admonition of Bishop André Wouking in this regard should be heeded. He calls for the formation of the neo-catechumenate within the context of the African traditional culture and urges for an in-depth Christian initiation that is based on the Word of God and touches upon the points of life and traditional initiation that provokes a true mental transformation.¹⁴⁹⁵ The bishop praises the neo-catechumenate method which has been well adapted in this regard as excellent. He advises that those rites that express the uncultured faith should be constituted by the region or cultural area with the participation of Christians who are fully engaged in Christian faith and the African tradition.¹⁴⁹⁶ Such an effort would help to create uniformity between Christian initiatory rites and traditional African initiation as well as serve as adequate recognition of not only the roles of the child, but also of his local history, family, traditional community and culture. In addition, it would remove the danger of alienating the child from his culture and traditional values. Such alienation usually makes the child asocial and subjects him to experience psychological imbalance. The shock becomes grave because inwardly Africans feel a natural attraction to mix up with their kit and kin¹⁴⁹⁷

A re-orientation of the child for baptism in his traditional and cultural values is necessary.¹⁴⁹⁸ This child for baptism from the Christian-oriented traditional background has to be presented to Jesus Christ who recognises the traditional legitimacy of the child. Ultimately, in the outing ceremony the child is fully baptised, it becomes a Christian with a recognised cultural background. This would make the transitional aspect of Christian Baptism to flourish, being a movement from birth to fullness of life in Christ, who is the centre of Christian life, without alienating one from one's roots and culture. Such attitude of respect and value of non-Christian elements (initiation) would be fruitful means of incarnating the liturgy in Africa. Baptism would then rightly be an entrance into a culturally-oriented Christian faith – faith that recognises the cultural content and traditional background of the African.¹⁴⁹⁹

6.1.3 The African Community

The African community, from which the child is presented for baptism should be given adequate recognition.¹⁵⁰⁰ It plays major roles in the growth of the child and its integration in the community. For instance, the entire community participates in the birth rite, especially, in the naming ceremony, the liminal phase, the process of becoming, of being created, the process of changing, growing by the acquisition of a socio-moral personality by this new arrival. The African community is one in which the individual is integrated and remains in relationship with. The individual passes away, but the community remains forever. At birth rite, the child is initiated into the community and the ancestors. Libations and sacrifices, which create a sense of unity and solidarity, are offered to the ancestors. They (ancestors) contribute to give a child its name, a socio-moral identity and personality in the historical context of his ancestors who

¹⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Bishop A. Wouking (Bafoussam, Cameroon), *Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin*, n. 7, Rome: 1994, 3; cf. C. D. Isizoh, (1998), 259.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Cf. C. D. Isizoh, (1998), 259.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Cf. C. O. Onuh, *Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage: The Prospects of inculturation*, Frankfurt: 1992, 101.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Cf. J. Mvuanda, *Inculturer pour evangeliser en profondeur. Des initiations traditionnelles africains a une initiation chretienne engageante*, Frankfurt: 1998, 385.

¹⁴⁹⁹ C. O. Onuh, (1992), 101.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Cf. 3.6.2.

founded and developed his community as well as in the cultural context of the new arrival at this point in the history of the community. Together with other members of the community, the child marches towards the future. The sacrifice that is offered to the ancestors effects the historical event of the community's procreation. Without the procreation, the community has no future. This is the reason for the convergence of spiritual and physical members of the community at the initiation ground or village square and their participation in the naming ceremony. The traditional community does not only play a social role but also religious one. It helps the child, as a grown up, to take up a functional role.¹⁵⁰¹ With its inculturation, could the sacrifices offered during initiation not be channelled through Christ?

The point remains that the aspect of the African community needs to be appreciated as well as incorporated into the celebration of the Christian baptism.¹⁵⁰² The meanings of the symbols at the naming ceremony suggest ways to evangelise, not just to baptise or initiate the individual African, but also the community of the African. This community dimension in its symbolic richness, the socio-moral identity, and personality, the sense of solidarity, sense of historical continuity of a community created by God, need to be preserved and incorporated into the liturgy in accordance with the directives and the teachings of the Vatican II council on the Liturgy.¹⁵⁰³ John Paul II pointed out the need for this when he said: "African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life (...). Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to the individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions."¹⁵⁰⁴

On the need to restructure the present baptismal rite that does not take account of the African community, Umorem has this to say: "Notice that such Baptism rite strips the African of his bearing with his community, ancestors, and history. Notice too that such Baptism rite snobs the ancestors. They are not invited, not mentioned. Notice that it is the individual uprooted and isolated that is baptized, evangelised. The Chief and the elders of his partrilnage are not here."¹⁵⁰⁵

It is, therefore, pertinent to restructure the present rite of baptism to incorporate the African traditional community. The *Eze* (the traditional ruler) and elders¹⁵⁰⁶ of the community could be invited to attend and participate in the ritual of Baptism. As well, the ancestors should be invited and their presence recognized by a brief genealogical account of the child to be baptized. In the translation of the Christian Liturgy, the spirit must put on a new body.¹⁵⁰⁷ The ancestors as masters of initiation compel a careful study of the African traditional religious belief system. The

¹⁵⁰¹ Cf. sub-section 3.2.2. on Birth Rite.

¹⁵⁰² The point here is not on whether the whole African community is already Christians or not. The question is on appreciating the values of the African traditional community that play a role in the life of the individual and incorporate same in the Christian initiation. Something must not be Christian before it is appreciated and incorporated into the church. It cannot be Christian without effort made to incorporate it in the Church (cf. NA 2).

¹⁵⁰³ SC 37.

¹⁵⁰⁴ John Paul II, (1995), 45.

¹⁵⁰⁵ E. U. Umorem, (1992), 61.

¹⁵⁰⁶ The need to invite the *Eze* and elders arises from the significant roles they play in the community. The *Eze* and elders discern the right order of things, guide the society along the path of right order and truth: in relation to how things are now, and how they should be. They are protectors of traditional culture, which enable the people not only to survive but to become what they have been in the best of times, to establish what they should be now, and to promote what they should become in the future. Moreover, they maintain the community's sense of right order, balance, and integrity in the face of external threats and natural disasters auguring anomie and chaos. cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 54. Extending invitation to them does not imply that they are Christians. Invitation should not be exclusivist in character; limiting it only to Christians. Instead, it should be broad in nature to include the non-Christian members or relations of the candidate for baptism. To exclude the former from such important occasion would not only be unfriendly, but also tantamounts to denying them the African community spirit, where every member of the community or family participates in major events that take place in the community. In addition, it could be a means to foster evangelisation.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Cf. L. Reiners, *Stilkunst. Ein Lehrbuch deutscher Prosa*, München: 1961, 10.

offerings, rituals and sacrifices offered during initiation could be channelled to God through Jesus Christ who takes the role of an ancestor. This could only be achieved where a positive attitude is extended to the African Traditional Religion. African ancestors should be treated with honour and accorded a place in the liturgy. In keeping with the attitude of love and respect for the dead ancestors and as a form of religious experience, the African initiation could also serve as a religious symbol that commemorates the dead ancestors.¹⁵⁰⁸ The aspect of remembering the dead in the Christian liturgy should also recognize African ancestors. In such parts of Igbo land, for instance, where the eldest has the privileged status of an elder or “Ichie”, could this person, in the absence of a priest not have the function of baptising infants in such extra-ordinary circumstances so far the person has the intention of baptising according to the mind of the Church?¹⁵⁰⁹ The liminal phase of the rite of naming features the communication of the *sacra*. The exhibition of symbols of these in the presence of the chief and elders may continue a process of catechising (without imposing doctrines) on others.¹⁵¹⁰ The incorporation of this aspect identifies the child first as a member of a traditional community, and second, as a member of the Church who is called to give witness to God in the midst of his fellow human persons. The incorporation of these elements and the creating community awareness on the baptized Christian could contribute to promoting evangelization in Igboland.¹⁵¹¹

There is also the need to celebrate the pre-baptismal rites within the context of the traditional community, that is, in the home or in the village square of the traditional community. The village square could be useful as avenue for catechesis and pedagogy in Igbo context. Perhaps, they could offer good grounds for the administration of pre-baptismal rites. As the abodes of the community shrines, normal visits in honour and memory of the past generations could be encouraged after such places must have been purified and blessed. This should not provide scorn whatsoever on Christianity as they would serve a true test on how far Christianity has come to live with the people. We should note that even in the countries of Europe such similar places are equally highly regarded and guarded. In Europe, wreaths are laid in such public places as an expression of some spiritual sentiments. The Eucharist could also be celebrated in these traditional symbolic places. We should not forget that the christianization and incorporation of similar cultic places of worship and pagan practices ensured the success of missions and the survival of Christianity in Europe. Could the same missionary strategy not apply to the African context? It is interesting to observe that the church in Igboland is awakening to the discovery of the values and uniqueness of village squares and public grounds in the Igbo traditional societies. Some Christian communities have begun to build churches and meeting halls around these traditional meeting points.¹⁵¹² If even Churches are not situated in these places, except that they are rendered non-inimical for the use of everybody, question arises as to whether the pre-baptismal celebrations and the actual baptism could take place in these places. The celebration of

¹⁵⁰⁸ This same attitude features among the European, where cemeteries, symbols and relics in memory of the dead are gracefully honourably preserved, and adorned with lighted candles and flowers.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Cf. SC 68; cf. C. 861 §§ 1, 2; 517 § 2.

¹⁵¹⁰ Cf. C. O. Onuh, (1992), 101.

¹⁵¹¹ It is notable that Gregory was solicitous to adapt the heathen practices to Christian usage. Writing on the pagan practices, he states: “We have come to the conclusion that the temples of idols (...) should on no account be destroyed. He is to destroy the idols, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up, and relics enclosed in them (...). In this way, we hope that the people may abandon idolatry (...) and resort to these places as before (...). And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to devils, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place (...). They are no longer to sacrifice beasts to the Devil, but they may kill them for food to the praise of God (...). If the people are allowed some wordly pleasures (...) they will come more readily to desire the joys of the spirit. For it is impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at a stroke; and whoever wishes to climb to a mountaintop climbs set by step” (Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, London: 1955, 76; cf. N. Davies, *Europe A History*, Australia, Pimlico: 1997, 280-281). Typical examples of such pagan practices are the ‘Fasching’ and the ‘Christbaum’, to mention but a few.

¹⁵¹² For examples, the Church of St. Anthony’s Parish Ishiagu, Ivo Local Government Area, and the one at Okwor Ngbo, Ishielu L. G. A, Abakaliki Diocese, Ebony State of Nigeria, are located in the nearness of the traditional market square.

baptism in these traditional places will not remove its efficacy of the incorporation of the individual in the church as some may tend to object. The aim is to capture the attitude, attachment, and psychology of the Igbo people for such places, and apply them as evangelisation strategy.¹⁵¹³

Considering the application of the principle for the Anglo-Saxons and allowing exceptions for the normal regulations about sacred places, there is need for attention to be given to the communitarian solidarity of the Africans, especially the Igbo people, their traditional festive psychology, and the traditional value of the sacred places and apply them in evangelisation. S. Anih expressed the urgency of this in his *Hundred Years of War Between Christianity and Igbo Culture*, when he writes: “I am inclined to say that Christianity in our century has converted many human faces but must in the second century face the difficult task of converting the social face – the symbolic values and communal conscience of our people.”¹⁵¹⁴ In the face of this, question arises: What hinders a priest from assembling the Christian community and performing the actual rite of baptism, since the pre-baptismal rites may have been celebrated in the homes, in such traditional sacred places and in the presence of traditional community, whom the celebration is meant to touch? In the case of the scarcity of priests, is it not possible for a deacon or lay person to perform rites of infant baptism in the absence of a priest in this context? The Christian community present should pray for the child at baptism. Prayers should include prayers for the body and soul, farm, work, success, peace, good health, fertility, friends, deceased members by name, children, and so on. Libations could form part of such Christian prayer forms. The rich, imagery, symbolic forms of African prayers should be applied rather than the imported abstract forms of scholastic theologians or the sterile European prayer forms. Let us see more practically, how the baptismal ritual could take African forms.

6.1.4 The Baptismal Ritual

A look at the Roman ritual for the Rite of Becoming Catechumens will expose the following structure or stages:

- 1) First Instruction and Dialogue
- 2) Exorcism and Renunciation of Non-Christian Worship.
- 3) Entry into the Church
- 4) Celebration of the Word of God
- 5) Dismissal of Catechumens
- 6) Celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁵¹⁵

There was already an attempt to inculturate this Roman rite that today we have, for example, the Mossi ritual process.¹⁵¹⁶ The Mossi customs used the following materials below as basis for incorporation of the first stage of the Christian initiation ritual:

- a) The family rituals, which include elementary politeness, ritual adoption of the stranger into the community, birth and funeral rites.
- b) Social rituals (or initiation rites), in which, in the isolation of the initiation camp, one is taught to face the challenges of life; moral education (honesty, loyalty, obedience, self mastery, etc.), social education (solidarity), civic education (learning a job, rites and duties), sexual education (circumcision, sexual deportment), mystical education (spirits, ancestors, forces), all leading the candidate to a new status.
- c) Royal ritual, which includes the investiture of chiefs and the proclamation of their honorific names and programmes, on the part of the community, with special considerations of the customary way of behaviour in a chief's compound.¹⁵¹⁷

¹⁵¹³ Cf. C. O. Onuh, (1992), 207.

¹⁵¹⁴ S. Anih, *A Hundred Years of War Between Christianity and Igbo Culture*, Enugu: 1985, 19.

¹⁵¹⁵ Cf. *OICA (Die Feier der Eingliederung Erwachsener in die Kirche, nach dem Neuen Rituale Romanum)*, Freiburg: 1975, (Nr. 68-97), 55-69.

¹⁵¹⁶ Cf. *Le Calao*, 50 (1980), no. 3, 34-47; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 52.

¹⁵¹⁷ Cf. *Le Calao*, 50 (1980), 41-45.

Step I.

- a) *Dialogue preparatory to welcoming the strangers* (that is, postulants): delegates present the postulant's request to the family chief (that is, minister).
- a) *Welcoming the strangers*, that is, greeting by the spokesman delegated by the minister.
- b) *Preliminary interrogation*, as to why the postulants desire to enter the Christian community, followed by the official designation of members of the community (that is, god-parents) to act as guides to the strangers.
- c) *Exorcism and signation*: each official (that is, god-parent) makes a sign of the cross on the forehead of his/her ward, tying a crucifix around his/her neck
- d) *Welcome drink*: consisting of salt, water and flour, prepared by god-parents.
- e) *Naming*: an indigenous name with a religious meaning is given, in addition to the name of a saint.
- f) *Entrance process into the family court*: following the consent of the family, the strangers leave the court precincts to enter the family court, as they are new children of the family.
- g) *Celebration of the Word of God*: in the homily, the catechumens are instructed to observe, to see and learn, since they are still ignorant of the family customs.
- h) *Eucharist celebration* before the catechumens.¹⁵¹⁸

In this first stage of Christian initiation, the structure of African hospitality occupies a prominent place. The same applies to the role of the community, the leader, who represents Christ, and its delegated ministers.

Step 2

Like the revelation of where the essential Mossi family fresh-water-pot is situated, so is the presentation of the Gospel, the Creed, and the Our Father, to the new members of the family.

Step 3

Under step three, the assembled Christian family is assured that the new members have reached a point of no return, with the recitation of the Creed and the Our Father, the rejection of the devil, and the swearing of loyalty to the elder-ancestor (Christ), and symbolically putting one's name, written on paper, into the baptistery tomb that is similar to the ancestral tomb. They appropriate the secret family force through the anointing with the oil of warriors of African traditional society.¹⁵¹⁹

At this stage, the catechumens have practically ended their social, family, moral and civic initiations into the Christian community. Therefore, they could participate in the solemn funeral of the Elder-Ancestor on Good Friday. Like the elder sons in African traditional society, they stride over the corpse of their father (the cross) placed on the floor as a sign of commitment to good family behaviour. Lastly on Easter night, during the ceremony of investiture of the risen Christ, copied from the royal ritual, the candidates imprinted with all the title names and programmes of Christ, go through the new birth in water and the Spirit (the Spirit of the elder ancestor, Christ). Anointed with the oil of kings, they become Christians. They receive first communion in the Eucharistic celebration. They then emerge from the initiation scene, clad in traditional attire. All marks of the old order used during the initiation are burnt.

The above ritual takes account of the African forms, elements, symbolisms and stages of initiation¹⁵²⁰ – a typical inculturated Christian initiation ritual. The effort to develop it is encouraging and could serve as an impetus to developing a truly African liturgy.

6.2 The Eucharist in African Context

We already examined the Eucharist in Chapter Four.¹⁵²¹ Here, we shall examine its implication in the African perspective especially with regard to the possibility of creating an authentic African rite. Let us see some of its symbolisms.¹⁵²²

¹⁵¹⁸ Cf. Ibid 41. The reason for this is to enable catechumens to learn to participate in the Eucharistic celebration before they are fully incorporated into the Church.

¹⁵¹⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzuoku, (1982), 54.

¹⁵²⁰ Cf. Chapter Three sub-sections 3.3.1 and 3.4.

6.2.1 The Symbolism of ‘Meal-Sharing’

In the African context, the symbolism of “meal-sharing”¹⁵²³ goes beyond the level of mere giving of assistance or food to the needy, to helping the individual/persons to be independent. That is why in traditional African set up, especially realized in the rite of traditional initiation, the father gives his child (the initiate) material things (yams, machete and hoe – symbols of self-sustenance) to enable him start a home, produce his own crops and be self-independent. Equally, groups assist the individuals in such works as bush clearing, planting, and harvesting of crops help the individual to attain self-reliance. Thus, the symbolism of “meal-sharing” encompasses not only solidarity, but also the need to confront tribalism and ethnicism that tear many African Nations apart.

The Eucharistic Agape challenges Christians everywhere to be their brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. It challenges in a special way the moral conscience of the Western nations to come out with a workable package that would alleviate the poverty of the so-called “Third World” Countries. W. J. Burghardt articulated it thus: “(...) the sacramental symbolism of bread which the scriptures amplify as the specific constituent of the historical symbol of the kingdom realised in Christ means that ‘the Eucharist – the bread of life – should make us empathise and be in solidarity with all who need bread to live.’”¹⁵²⁴ Mere crumb-throwing assistance to the “Third World” nations is discouraged as it does not solve the real problems but merely acts as salve for the rotten consciences of the wealthy.¹⁵²⁵ The widening gap between the rich and poor Christian nations challenges the Christian Eucharistic Agape meal. Thus, we need a change of attitude, one that reduces the whole problem of hunger and misery in the world to one of assistance to the poor. According to H. Camara, “The problem will not be solved by general fund-raising alone, but rather by bringing about a sympathy and brotherly love between the rich and poor. The rest will follow from that.”¹⁵²⁶

The saving communion means that the Eucharist, inasmuch as it is rooted in the totality of Christ’s ‘passover experience’ is a liberating foundation, a solidarity flowing from God’s actions into our relationship with others. It must, therefore, make us realize that “the downtrodden, the exploited, the marginalized people and the ‘hapless cases’ have a strong claim on our individual and communal actions for solidarity and justice on their behalf.”¹⁵²⁷ The justice which the Eucharist implies, must be permanent feature of our lives, so that our life both at the reception of the Eucharist and afterwards may mirror signs of being ‘broken’ and ‘poured out’ (like the bread and wine) for the sake of many brothers and sisters.¹⁵²⁸ Perhaps, the symbolism of “meal” in the African traditional set up, especially; in the initiation ceremony¹⁵²⁹ would have much to reflect in the Eucharistic Agape by making the love we share at the Table of the Lord become concretely manifest in the human society.

6.2.2 The Eucharist: Sacrifice, Assembly or Meal?

In his evaluation of the Eucharist in African context, J. Okoye maintains that every concrete celebration of it is necessarily, consciously or unconsciously, organized around one or two of the root metaphors of sacrifice, assembly and meal.¹⁵³⁰ These metaphors, according to him, characterize the celebration of the Eucharist in different parts of Africa. Generally, there is

¹⁵²¹ Cf. sub-section 4.4.2.

¹⁵²² Cf. sub-sections, 3.3.1 and 3.5.

¹⁵²³ Cf. sub-section 4.4.

¹⁵²⁴ W. J. Burghardt, *The Seven Hungers Of The Human Family*, Washington: 1976, 15.

¹⁵²⁵ Cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1994), 76.

¹⁵²⁶ H. Camara, (1969), 15.

¹⁵²⁷ R. C. Chika, *Morality Of Development Aid To The Third World*, Rome: 1985, 181; cf. D. E. Igboanusi, (1994), 78.

¹⁵²⁸ Cf. P. Schilliner, etal (ed.) *Eucharist, Source And Summit Of Christian Life*, Port-Harcourt: 1982, 76.

¹⁵²⁹ Cf. “Ibu Ugvu Ogirinya” in Ezza, Abakaliki and “Ipu Ogo” in Edda, Afikpo, Chapter Three.

¹⁵³⁰ Cf. C. J. Okoye, “The Eucharist and African Culture”, in: *EJALR*, 1,1 (1992), 7-8; cf. G. Jr. Worgul, *From Magic to Metaphor: A Validation of the Christian Sacraments*, New York: 1980: 184; cf. Chapter four, sub-sections 4.4.4.5 to 4.4.4.5.3 on the biblical and theological expositions of the eucharist.

always the presumption that the other parts of the Mass are organically related to these when they are used, that is, Masses organised according to the “root metaphor”, especially of reconciliation. Most of the Masses during Lent, for instance, are centred on the themes of *conversion* and *renewal*, which are “root metaphors” for these Masses. There is the possibility to have, for examples, the anointing of the sick and holy Viaticum within a Eucharistic celebration. The particular circumstance of grave illness determines the particular Eucharistic celebration. In all these, it is the same Eucharistic (paschal mystery) but the situations and organisation differ.¹⁵³¹

In some parts of Africa, sacrifice takes a communal or assembly tone.¹⁵³² The communal or community dimension remains central. But approaches to sacrifice differ. In West Africa, the gift factor seems to predominate. The idea of a “vital force” to be gained from the victim seems to be lacking. A meal does not follow every sacrifice. Prayers are usually petitionary and propitiatory. In Central Africa, sacrifices seem to be limited to vital force/power. Man (*Muntu*) shares in the “force” of spirits through objects brought into nearness with them. The victim somehow participates in the force and can communicate this power to participants.¹⁵³³ The existence of these variations show the possibility of having different “root metaphors” of the Eucharist in different parts of Africa, just as we notice right from the second century the existence of four types of the celebration of the Eucharist: the Egyptian, Roman, Syrian and Greek. In these four Eucharistic types, not only language separates them but also the spirit and the model. While the Egyptian Eucharistic rite was an anticipation of the future fulfilment, the Roman is a sacrificial cult, the Syrian a memorial of and waiting for the Lord as future judge, the Greek an icon/image of the Word made flesh.¹⁵³⁴ In the existence of the above divergent Eucharistic forms, Africans need a truly African Rite that expresses authentic African attitude within the unity of the one Eucharist. The fact that we have the Zairian or Ndzon-Melen (Cameron’s) Masses in Africa today is not enough. The symbolism of the community, as manifest in African initiations where offerings and thanksgiving are offered to the ancestors, needs to reflect in the liturgy. Moreover, just as Jesus took up the title of *Christos*, that is the *anointed*, in the Greco-European culture and offers our prayers and sacrifices to God, He should take the title of *Ichie* (ancestor) in Igbo culture.¹⁵³⁵ Not only that our prayers would be directed through him to the Father, but He would represent the ancestors in offering our sacrifices to God (Heb 1:1). In addition, Africans who approach the Eucharist under the “root metaphor” of sacrifice transfer to it their experiences in the traditional religion. For example, it is common that in most Parishes in Europe Mass intentions are mostly for the dead. In African, on the hand, there is a variety of intentions – “success in business, to pass examinations, protection from evil powers, thanksgiving for recovery, prayer that the doctor chooses the right remedies and that they will work effectively, also for the dead... The majority of intentions concern the living – just as in traditional sacrifice.”¹⁵³⁶ In the face of this situation, the question is what riches and inadequacies would the African/Igbo approach to the Eucharist from the cultural background of Igbo sacrifice bring with it? The formulation of the question implies that the average African does not experience the current rite of the Eucharist adequately as a sacrifice. The reason for this could be that the Eucharist does not express fully the content of sacrifice in the African traditional society. How do we relate dogma with experience?

6.2.3 Dogma and Experience

Many local Churches in Africa report a resurgence of traditional sacrifices, initiations and divinations, and the return of a great number of Christians to these. African countries affirm the

¹⁵³¹ Cf. C. J. Okoye, “The Eucharist and African Culture”, in: L. Ijezie, (1992), 7-8.

¹⁵³² Examples are Yaounde, Cameroon, Zambia, the Kaonde and East Africa do not seem to have deep traditions. (cf. C. J. Okoye, (1992), 8.

¹⁵³³ Cf. M. Dhavamony, *Phenomenology of Religion*, Gregorian University Rome: 1973, 160.

¹⁵³⁴ Cf. J. Timmermann, *Nachapostolisches Parusiedenken*, München: 1968, 92-101, 92.

¹⁵³⁵ This title is not only the highest accorded to the dead, but also designates the concept of anointing (*echichi*) in Igbo traditional religion.

¹⁵³⁶ C. J. Okoye, (1992), 7-8. 10.

dogma of the Eucharist as sacrifice. The fact remains that when some meet situations which in traditional religion would require a sacrifice they tend to look elsewhere. Something from oneself or one's family is brought into the precincts of the sacred and harmony is symbolized. The one offering a sacrifice is given room to externalize and symbolize his intentions, to be a conscious participant in the process. The acceptance of blood and of the life of a victim (usually a fowl) seals the achieved re-integration with the sacred.¹⁵³⁷ It may be true that the traditional concept of sacrifice needs to be transformed by the Christian one, the locus of Christian sacrifice being not a fowl or another object but Christ himself, and the Christian whose life now becomes, under the sign of Christ's cross, "a sacrifice of praise" to God.¹⁵³⁸ Does one not need to symbolize this Christian aspect? Does faith not allow incorporation of symbols that give expressions of the desire to reach out to the sacred, to stay in harmony?

When we consider the inadequacies of the Eucharist in African context, we emphasize that the Eucharist is not primarily a rite to appease an angry God, ward off evil and gain welfare, although, these ends are not excluded. It is not offered to spirits and minor gods. It is primarily a rite of praise and thanksgiving – thanksgiving to God for his goodness on creation and on the individual Christian who manifest the beauty and excellence of the Creator.¹⁵³⁹ It is a sacrifice of praise which the Church offers to God through Christ.¹⁵⁴⁰ Primarily, it is in this attitude of thanksgiving that the individual Christian should approach the Eucharist. Moreover, substitution is a danger: it would be wrong to regard Christ at Mass as substituting for us. He is there to unfold His love to us with this sacrificial life so that we in turn become sacrifices in and through him, living no longer for ourselves but for Him, loving and serving our brothers and sisters even in the pattern of Christ who gave himself for us. The paschal and liberative dimensions of the Eucharist seem often ignored. People tend to see the Eucharist too often as a work to be done, a work necessary to tilt the balance in our favour. They do not always consciously connect this aspect of propitiation with God's concomitant transformative and paschal (cross over from evil to God) action in us. The average Africans experience the present rite of Mass as too cerebral and Cartesian,¹⁵⁴¹ paying more attention to the structure of thought than the language of symbols, whereas it is in the world of symbols that the African is more at home. Would it not be good for the Eucharistic to take up an African pattern, incarnating itself in African rite of initiation? Let us look at the area of preparation and purification.

6.2.4 Preparation and Personal Purification

In the African traditional setting, most sacrifices take place early at dawn. Adequate preparation and personal purification characterize sacrifice. It is common that before a householder offers a sacrifice, the first ritual he performs upon waking is to perform the ritual action of washing his face, chest, forehead and arms. He then invokes the ancestors and spirits and the Creator. The morning hour is a good time for commerce with the spirit world before *Muona Mmadu* (spirits and human beings) merge at day. Harmony with the spirit world is vital for welfare and for the successful completion of the business of the day. Here, the morning Masses in Nigeria suit very well this traditional African pattern. No one appears before the spirits empty-handed or anyhow. The object for sacrifice is usually prepared the evening before. In West Africa, "uncleanness" is a serious offence against most cultic spirits. There are various taboos to ensure cleanness and which indicate the necessity of purification and personal preparation. A man and his wife, for instance, will avoid intercourse before worship among the Yoruba and Ashanti.¹⁵⁴² The same applies to young boys and girls undergoing the rite of initiation.

Consequently, as regards the Eucharist, it may be good first to introduce a period of dead silence and recollection somewhere at the beginning of Mass. Such silence may serve as

¹⁵³⁷ Cf. F. A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan: 1970, 70.

¹⁵³⁸ Cf. Chapter four, subsection 4.4.4.5 on sacrifice.

¹⁵³⁹ Morning Prayers, Sunday Week One, *The Divine Office*, vol. III, Dublin: 1974, 27.

¹⁵⁴⁰ SC 7.

¹⁵⁴¹ This term designates the rite as more of purely mental activity than it involves body and soul of the celebrating subject. Cf. E. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Hamburg: 1998, 441.

¹⁵⁴² Cf. H. Sawyer, "Sacrifice", in: *BRAB*, (1969), 79-81, 79.

symbolic of the proximate preparation for sacrifice – by drawing attention to it and by expressing it to deepen the required attitude. In addition, it would express the symbolism of withdrawal at the moment of initiation in African traditional setting. Moreover, it is good to develop a proper rite of purification, using perhaps incense, holy water and prayers, et cetera. The palm fronds which the Igbos use in initiation, is very symbolic.¹⁵⁴³ Priests could use this African symbol for sprinkling holy water at Mass instead of plastic containers. A good rite would first circumscribe the holy space, then, hallow the people within it. The use of local materials would make the Eucharist to have more meaning to the people.¹⁵⁴⁴

6.2.4.1 Participation

In the African Traditional Religion, a person (the offerer) consults the *Dibia* (priest/medicine man) on what to do concerning a particular situation. The *Dibia* prescribes sacrifices and indicates what is needed. Objects or animals offered are usually taken from the home. Where food is to be offered, it would be food from the house – i.e. the fruits of labour of one’s hands. At the sacrifice itself one is a conscious offerer, the action is not something uniquely done for one. Traditional patterns call for greater participation, a less rarefied matter for the Eucharist, and if possible, local symbols of food and drink. We need to structure the rite in such a way that it makes use of native symbols and elements. Moreover, it should adequately symbolize its sacrifice or sacrificial meal characters. E. Hillman adequately addressed this issue when he rhetorically asks: “Is it really a matter of God’s will for the Artic Inuit and for desert nomads in Africa to celebrate the eucharist with grape wine and wheat bread?”¹⁵⁴⁵ In the face of the growing need to incarnate the liturgy in African rites, some African theologians have proposed millet and palm wine, which are easily accessible to the people.¹⁵⁴⁶ Interestingly, “Bishop Dupon of Pala (Chad) actually experimented with millet, bread and beer between 1973 and 1975. He was promptly retired.”¹⁵⁴⁷ Experiments with native brew and maize meal are reported to be actually in progress somewhere in Zaire. The *Amecea Seminar* criticized the retention of a wheaten Eucharist.¹⁵⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the terms, “local” and “indigenous”, are not synonymous. Beer is local in Nigeria (there are over thirty Breweries) but it is not indigenous. What was not indigenous may become common with time. For instance, bread has become part of the diet in Nigeria just as tea and coffee have become part of European culture even though neither grows in Europe. Some foreign products may have enhanced ritual value or function specially in certain situations. For example, toast process at weddings, people prefer champagne or wine to beer and palm wine. Accepting something is one thing, having it imposed is another. Nothing should be imposed unless it is essential to the unity of faith and willed directly by Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴⁹ The Eucharist is a sacrificial meal in which Jesus Christ gives himself in the form of food and drink. But did Christ really intend this food and drink to be for all times and places wheaten bread and wine from grapes even where these cannot grow, even in periods like wartime, when they cannot be reached for any price? The present situation needs theological clarification. Not long ago, only olive oil was allowed for the oils at Holy Thursday. That has now changed, yet the sacraments of ordination, confirmation and anointing of the sick are still intact. Should one argue that the tradition of olive derived from the Church and could hence be altered by her? As regards the Eucharistic species, the conservative theological position is that even if it is possible to make unleavened wafers out of maize or millet, such would not be allowed since they would not be of

¹⁵⁴³ Cf. C. J. Okoye, “The Eucharist and African Culture”, in: L. Ijezie, (1992), 12.

¹⁵⁴⁴ LG 49.

¹⁵⁴⁵ E. Hillman, (1982), 74.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, “Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist (an inquiry into the use of African Symbols in the Eucharistic Celebration)”, in: *AFER*, 22,6, (1980), 370-385; cf. J. D. Mvuanda, Jean de Dieu, *Incultuer pour evangeliser en profondeur*. Frankfurt: 1998, 325.

¹⁵⁴⁷ C. J. Okoye, (1992), 13.

¹⁵⁴⁸ *Amecea Synod Seminar*, 4.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Cf. J. D. Mvuanda, (1998), 358-359; cf. C. J. Okoye, (1992), 13.

wheat, even if the look and taste might be identical. “Wine” can now be produced from bananas, pineapples in Africa; they would still not be allowed because they would not be out of grapes.¹⁵⁵⁰ We may not forget bread and wine happen to be the food and drink of Mediterranean countries, the original bosom of the Church. Therefore, is it not possible to dissociate food and drink from bread and wine? Or perhaps, since greater uniformity in such a central mystery might be desirable as a symbol of unity, would it be possible to settle for whatever qualifies as bread and wine, leaving the basic material to the judgement of the local Conferences of Bishops in dialogue with Rome? A. Thaler expresses it thus: “Could the symbols of bread and wine not be removed from food and drink as union with the Lord? Does bread and wine belong in the same way to the absolute constitutive elements of meal in every culture where the Eucharist is celebrated?”¹⁵⁵¹

We should not forget that in the liturgy of the Mass, bread and wine are offered as “fruits of the earth and works of human hands.” In African and Asian, where bread and wine are imported elements, they cannot come under the title of “fruits of the earth”. E. E. Uzukwu confronted this issue in his observation: “The moment we bring our thanks offering, we profess and praise God of the poor who has made it possible for us to accept our poverty and has moved our hearts to conversion. Soon after the African spirit will be disappointed or even silenced, because these gifts – which come from the Source of life, which manifest his unity with his universe, which manifest the poverty of the labour of his hands – will be artfully removed to a safe place. And when the Eucharistic Prayer invokes the divine Spirit to come on the gifts which originally came from the Creator, wafers from flour imported from Europe and America, and wine from the same regions strangely represent us.”¹⁵⁵² A pity! We suggest that, in the Eucharistic consecration, the Church should make use of the indigenous materials, which make more meaning to the people? Any celebration in Igboland, for instance, where cola-nut, yam, foo-foo with soup, rice and palm wine do not feature, such a feast has not commenced. These are indigenous food materials, “fruits of the earth” and “work of human hands”. Moreover, they serve as the principle source of unity and communality for the people. The Church should utilize these elements. As regards bread and wine, which some orthodox theologians argue that Christ used them to institute the Eucharist, R. Luneau gives a scriptural interpretation, indicating the symbolism of *sharing* as central. According to him, “the symbols do not originally lie with bread and wine, but in *Gemeinschaft* (community). Jesus used bread and wine because they were fruits of his culture. These later acquired symbolic significance and were enforced by law to designate the unity and self-offering of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁵³ But the question is: does the sharing of cola-nut, millet or rice, bier or palm wine have less meaning than the thanksgiving in the Eucharist? What is most important is the participation in the shared fruits of the earth should be the highest factor in the sustenance the Christian life. The *truth* of sharing should underscore the materiality of the symbol and the sacrament of the Lord.¹⁵⁵⁴ The Africans should experience the symbolism of sharing more, through the use of their local food materials, than imported wafers and wine from Europe and America.

On the social, economic and ethical implications of the above problems (use of local products in the Eucharist) to Africans, B. Bujo maintains that it is not a liturgical or dogmatic question, rather ultimately concerns ethics. The Eucharist has an essential connection with the hospitality that is so significant in Africa. Meals play an extremely important role here, and the kind of food which is eaten is not a neutral issue. He suggests we should reflect on whether the Eucharistic matter under the forms of bread and wine - non-African products – is not an appropriate expression of hospitality shared with Christ and with all believers. Africans are left with the unpleasant feeling that God ultimately does not accept them completely, since he is not willing to identify himself with the fruits of their own soil and fields. What then does ‘incarnation’ mean? He raises boiling questions: “Does not the rejection of the African fruits

¹⁵⁵⁰ Cf. C. J. Okoye, (1992), 12.

¹⁵⁵¹ A. Thaler, “Inkulturation der Liturgie am Beispiel der Mahlelemente”, in: *Diakonia*: 20 (1989), 172-182, 175.

¹⁵⁵² E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 32-33.

¹⁵⁵³ Cf. L. Luneau, “Une eucharistie sans pains et sans vin?”, in: *LM* 48 (1972), Tom XII, 3-11; cf. A. Thaler, (1989), 176.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Cf. C. J. Okoye, “The Eucharist and African Culture”, in: L. Ijezie, (1992), 13.

amount to discrimination? Besides this, one cannot resist the impression that bread and wine imported from abroad also serve commercial interests, that is, that this is an economic exploitation of black people. In view of all these questions, we need a palaver, and the magisterium ought not to intervene *ab extra*, but rather charge the local churches with the task of examining this issue in depth, involving all the members of the church including the laity.”¹⁵⁵⁵ A. Thaler offers the following conditions for any local material to qualify for Eucharistic element, namely:

1. The elements of meal must affect the original gesture of breaking by way of sharing. It should be fruit of the earth.
2. They must be fruits of the earth. In that sense, they are fruits of the creator.
3. They must be essentiality of life (like bread) and presented as the highest element of the maintenance of life (like wine). Perhaps, attention should be given, that in the choice of drink it should be analogous with the wine, able to be produced from fruits, to be seen as the symbol of the blood of Jesus. When these conditions are fulfilled, according to him, it would be possible to celebrate the Eucharist with the actual cultural elements.¹⁵⁵⁶

If the above should be the basic criteria, African local materials already qualify for use in the Eucharist. It challenges the church, therefore, to intensify efforts towards the inculturation of local elements in the Eucharist. The essence and meaning they have to the people should have a paramount role.¹⁵⁵⁷ Consequently, in the theology of sacraments we need to move from “a theology of confection” (sacrament as a “thing”, emphasis on the species) to “a theology of celebration” (sacramental action as a whole and its signification). The overemphasis on bread and wine as equivalent to Jesus Christ has excluded the other meanings of bread and wine as well as excluded the liturgical assembly as a symbol of Christ’s real Eucharistic presence. More still, it tends to make the bread and wine and their reception of greater importance than the love and personal relationships that are necessary for the Church to be Body of Christ.¹⁵⁵⁸ Above all, their inculturation would facilitate the creation of an African liturgical rite. Let us see the dimension of communication.

6.2.5 Communication

Communication is another important aspect of Eucharistic celebration. E. Hillman highlights its significance in religion: “Hermeneutical principles are important in the realm of religious practices, as they are in the biblical interpretation and in the official teaching of the Church.”¹⁵⁵⁹ In relation to religion, symbolic language appears to be the ideal especially in the question of the Supreme Being and His gender.¹⁵⁶⁰ To ascertain the intended meanings of words, symbols and gestures from another age and different culture, the Vatican II Council’s document on Divine Inspiration, *Dei Verbum*, stresses the need to pay attention to the customary patterns of perception and communication, and the established conventions peculiar to the people of that particular time and place. This is because all communication is historically conditioned and culturally shaped.¹⁵⁶¹ The use of local language, therefore, is of paramount importance in communication.

For H. O. Meuffels, the place of the worship of the community (the subject of faith) is linked with the communication of God to man. This communication is understood in the context of the agape.¹⁵⁶² It forms the basis of the presentation of the gospel. And for the gospel to be

¹⁵⁵⁵ B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic. Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, New York: 2001, 159.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Cf. A. Thaler, (1989), 176.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid 176.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Cf. J. Emperor, *Worship: Exploring the Sacred*, Washington D.C.: 1987, 44, 55, cf. C. J. Okoye, (1992), 14.

¹⁵⁵⁹ E. Hillman, “Missionary Approach to African culture”, in: T. Okure, (1982); 153.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Cf. J. O. Ukaegbu, *Igbo Identity and Personality vis-a-vis Igbo Cultural Symbols*; 12.

¹⁵⁶¹ Cf. DV 18, subsection 1-4.

¹⁵⁶² Cf. H. O. Meuffels, (1995), 319.

effective, it must apply the human language, incarnating itself in the historical condition and understanding of the people to whom it is addressed. Only on this basis does it have the chance of influencing the lives and destiny of the people. Symbolic language is an important vehicle of communication and expression of a people's world-view. Metuh compares the people's world with a compass by which the gospel finds its way through the vast, strange and often threatening universe.¹⁵⁶³ This world-view must be seriously taken account of in the presentation of the Word of God. The human language, as part of human culture, is a symbolic category that helps man to define the existence of God, who is the ultimate source of his existence. Similarly, it helps man to define rules and ways to relate to God. In theology, it is a way to convey the mystery of God who is the object of theology.¹⁵⁶⁴

Languages are often culturally created systems, and so are most of the communication forms: concepts, signs, narratives, myths, gestures, poems, images, rules, conventions and structures, through which religion is experienced, expressed and communicated.¹⁵⁶⁵ It is a vehicle of expression of a people's thought pattern, feelings, and mode of reception.¹⁵⁶⁶ The experience, expression and communication of the Christian faith to a people require not only the use of the locally understood language, but also all the other indigenous media. In the use of language, we need to accept the historicity and the cultural embeddedness of the modes of communication in order to make communication effective. To grasp its meaning, we need to understand the symbol of communication – whether a devotional hymn, prayer-form, juridical directive, philosophical formulation, conceptual model, mythical narrative, liturgical gesture, dogmatic assertion or whatever symbol or literary genre may be used, as a means of communication – in terms of its own limited historico-cultural matrix, however ancient or foreign.¹⁵⁶⁷ A literalistic interpretation of the symbol simply in terms of our own present historico-cultural situation could be grossly misleading. We should note that our own familiar sounds and gestures (symbol of communication) do not convey the same meanings everywhere and at all times. Both the indigenous prayer-forms and the whole culture¹⁵⁶⁸ of a people should be regarded as valid and indispensable. No human being can exist outside some inherited symbol system which not only mediates the person's experience of reality but also provides the identity and prescribes the conduct of each one. The person is reached in and through his or her ephemeral cultural world: not by substituting for it the cultural world of some other people, ancient or modern. This is relevant to Africa. The individual or group can hardly function without this small and temporary network, which is like the fragile web spun by a spider, as its habitat and its prison.¹⁵⁶⁹

If God, in Jesus Christ, truly enlightens human being that comes into this world (cf. Joh 1:9, 16), proffering divine saving love to every member of redeemed humanity (cf. Tim 2:4); and if people are expected to answer to this grace in a free and human manner; allowing for the possibility of rejection through an evil decision of conscience, then this must happen in the concretely available terms of each person's historical moment and cultural context. Evangelization must focus on human persons within their socio-cultural worlds.¹⁵⁷⁰ The liturgy must take on African symbolic language. The Church's celebration of the Eucharist; the mystery of salvation must make use of African native languages and symbols. In this sense, "Biblical

¹⁵⁶³ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1993), 20-21.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Cf. W. W. Müller, *Das Symbol in der dogmatische Theologie*, Frankfurt am Main: 1990, 20.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 154.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Cf. E. I. Metuh, (1993), 20-21.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 153.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Culture is a complex of symbol systems, embodying, codifying and communicating a humanly constructed and historically transmitted pattern of meanings, values, perceptions, ideas, attitudes, myths, judgements, aspirations, beliefs, commitments and actions, through which the experience of reality can be interpreted coherently and structured consistently in accord with a commonly shared ethos and world-view. cf. C. C. Geertz, "Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols", in: *Antioch Review*, (1957), 421-422; cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 154.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Cf. E. Hillman, 1993, 155.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid* 155.

readings in African languages in the liturgy and the commentaries which follow constitute another locus for creativity: homilies expressing a real encounter between biblical revelation and the totality of the African situation.”¹⁵⁷¹ A compilation and systematic analysis of sermons arising from a deep living condition of this African situation would reveal how the normative deposit of the mirroring of the “Jesus-event in its effect’ on the ‘the Christian movement that took its impetus from Jesus of Nazareth’ confronts and is confronted by a living confessing African Christian community.”¹⁵⁷²

6.2.6 Music and Hymns

On music and hymns, the Church has always recognized and favoured the promotion of the arts, admitting to the service of religion of everything good and beautiful, discovered by genius in the course of ages. African music is accepted in the church since it furnishes compositions of such excellence, sobriety and gravity that they are in no way unworthy of the liturgical functions.¹⁵⁷³ Music should not only arouse and inspire the people to profess the faith and cultivate piety, but it is also a welcome and important help to the Church in carrying out its apostolic ministry and celebration of the sacraments more effectively. Music is a language, a way of expressing oneself. The religious sensibility of the African can best be aroused by using the African musical language since the mother tongue is best understood in its wealth and abundance of expression better than any other language. The elements of songs and dance that express the significance of initiation in the African Traditional Religion need to be inculcated in the liturgy. A mere carry-over or translation of the musical notes and tones of the West into Igbo Christian Liturgy does not encourage active participation in liturgy since such musical texts and tones are not natural but foreign to the people. Such translations always lack the living and soul-stirring effect engendered by the *African* native songs.¹⁵⁷⁴ H. Weman states it more categorical: “Anyone who has had the privilege of witnessing at close quarters the inherent vitality and artful expressivity of African Music dreams of the time when this music will be given its full right and recognition, its opportunity of reforming and recreating the worship and the service of Christian Church in Africa.”¹⁵⁷⁵

The latent profundity and creativity of African liturgies is particularly manifest in the parishes that have abandoned the Western hymnody and melodies “plastered” on African languages, for example, *Holy God we Praise Thy Name* or *O Come Divine Messiah* sung to Western melodies in Swahili or Igbo language. The vitality and vibrancy of the African musical spirit become manifest when a song coming from African experience of reality is intoned and accompanied by instruments communicative of the African grasp of rhythm – be it in the profane or religious sphere, or in the traditional or modern set-up.¹⁵⁷⁶ During initiation in the traditional religion, one needs to watch candidates dance to the tunes of *Udu, Ekwe, Igba, Ogene na Oyo*.¹⁵⁷⁷ The clapping of the hands and tapping of the foot add special rhythm. Not only are words bearers of force-energy in the African universe but also in worship. Singing, which punctuates African life and cult, set this force free: “Worship, bears (...) the character of *dromenon*, a complex ‘drama’ of words and actions in which music may help bring mental physical activity together in unity or counterpoint”¹⁵⁷⁸ In Africa, presenting gifts to dignitaries or to members of the community on special occasions, is often accompanied by singing, clapping, drumming and dancing, as a natural sign of the irruption of the African personality. In a liturgical setting, the songs express the deep sentiments of the worshipping community. It becomes a simple

¹⁵⁷¹ J. S. Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis in Present Trends of African Theology”, in: *BATh* 1, 1 (1979), 11-22; cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 35.

¹⁵⁷² Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 33.

¹⁵⁷³ Cf. E. Hillman, (1993), 166.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Cf. G. T. Basden, (1937), 192.

¹⁵⁷⁵ W. Weman, “African Folkmusic in Christian Churches in Africa”, Nairobi: 1974, 2.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 31-32.

¹⁵⁷⁷ These are different instruments in Igbo Land.

¹⁵⁷⁸ E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 32.

adaptation when dancing and clapping are used in a foreign liturgy to introduce or display something African to the admiration of an inquisitive though largely dormant worshipping audience. The unity of word and movement in African music liberates the crying spirit of the African to live his faith-experience within its transformed and transforming universe.¹⁵⁷⁹

Hymns to the Dead: Not only the offertory hymns manifest the process of liberating the chained African spirit in worship. In many regions of Africa, the cult of the dead is very developed and widespread.¹⁵⁸⁰ Among the Igbo people, songs that characterize initiation and express the passage of the dead into the land of the ancestors abound. Perhaps such songs could be incorporated into the liturgy to form the locus of encounter between the African and Jewish-Christian spirits in the African experience. The finality of death characteristic of Western culture, despite the Christian teaching on the resurrection of the dead, is not part of the African traditional and modern vision of reality. Among the Africans, death is a stage in life, another ritual of process or *rite de passage*, indeed the most important. A Latin Preface for the Mass of the Dead has it: “Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended”.¹⁵⁸¹ The *change* in Africa is experienced as initiation. The community of life, as the Igbo songs show, continues in death: the living pray on behalf of the dead for a safe journey to the abode of God. The two experiences of reality, African and Jewish-Christian, merge in the African faith in terms of mutual affirmation, confirmation and transformation. The dead still have a voice to be heeded as active members of the human; they do not only express their own needs, but also point out the way towards greater intensification of community life. The community grasps anew the totality of this reality and draws energy from the mourning or celebration of the passage of one of its members to its God, all dramatized in a funeral song.

The place of hymns in worship cannot be over-emphasized, especially where the language and rhythm have been drawn from the tradition common to the worshipping community. It leads to popular participation and becomes not only the people’s doxology addressed to God, but also a school of doctrine. African theologians should work closely with composers to popularize in their communities the results of their reflection: theology must always strive to be doxology.¹⁵⁸²

The discussion so far provides systematic, theological and dogmatic justifications for the authentic incarnation of the liturgy in Africa. It calls for an emergence of an authentic African liturgical rite – one that takes account of the African cultural rites and symbolisms. With reference to the Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), such a rite would help remove the danger of presenting empty liturgical celebrations that have little or no bearing on the life and experience of the people of Africa. Perhaps, the Mass according to the Zairean rite could provide an incentive for the local churches in Africa.

6.3 Towards An African Christian Liturgical Rite

The question of developing African Christian liturgical rites has enjoyed heated discussions in inculturation and much progress has been made in this regard.¹⁵⁸³ The Church in Zaire has made notable contribution by developing what is today known as “the Mass according to Zairian

¹⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Ibid

¹⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Burial rite in Ezza rite of Circumcision in Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁸¹ Cf. The Weekday Missal, A New Edition, London: 1975, 363.

¹⁵⁸² E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 34.

¹⁵⁸³ Examples are: the Anglophone West Africa (Ghana and Nigeria), Francophone (Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal and Togo), Central Africa (Zaire). Zaire is not the only country in Central Africa, but her contribution to inculturation of the liturgy becomes remarkable, especially with her development of the Zairean rite. Others are East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). Cf. C. P. Chibuko, *Paschal Mystery of Christ*, Frankfurt am Main: 1999, 81-91; In Nigeria, for instance, much progress has been made in the various provinces. The Inter-Diocesan Liturgical Commission instituted by the Bishops of the Igbo -Speaking areas of Nigeria to embark on a study of traditional and Christian rites of marriage and baptism is one of the genuine efforts of the local church to come with rites that take account of African/Igbo culture. Cf. Interdiocesan Liturgy Commission for the Igbo-Speaking Areas of Nigeria, “Inculturation and Igbo Marriage Rite”, in: *The Leader*, 18, (Owerri, 1990), 1.

Rite”¹⁵⁸⁴ The broadening of research work to include all regions of Africa aimed at developing a common rite for the local Church in Africa that would enable African Christians to express and celebrate their faith experience in their own cultural context. The Zairian Rite could provide an impetus for this. Let us see the nature of this rite.

6.3.1 The Zairian Rite

The *Decree* of the Congregation for Worship¹⁵⁸⁵ in April, 30, 1988 gave this rite an official recognition in the Church in Zaire.¹⁵⁸⁶ The Congregation for Liturgy and Worship, already, in 1970, gave the Episcopal Conference of Zaire an indult to carry out a research on the possible development of a Zairian rite of the Eucharist. In response to this, the permanent Committee of the Zairian Bishops created a research commission to produce a Eucharist liturgy that responds to the realities of the Zairian culture. The three years of intensive study of this commission on how to evolve a rite that takes account of the initiatory elements of the local culture, gave birth to the rite the Mass according to Zairian Rite. This rite, produced in 1972, constitutes an example of the movement towards systematic liturgical creativity in Africa. The effort of the Zairian Church to come out with their own rite is in response to the letter of Vatican II on the question of research and inculturation. Its right to possess a different liturgical rite is in conformity with the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism. In *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Council exhorts the local Churches in the following words: “While preserving unity in essentials let all members of the Church, according to the office entrusted to each, preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological celebration of revealed truth.”¹⁵⁸⁷

6.3.1.1 The Nature of the Zairian Mass

This mass is typically reintegration ritual, characterised by luminary and separation, - typical elements of traditional African initiation. Reintegration forms the basis for understanding the behaviour of this Christian assembly.¹⁵⁸⁸ In the assembly of reintegration, which is convoked by one in authority, relationship is established between the community and God, spirits and ancestors, and the community experiences its unity.¹⁵⁸⁹ Having discovered that the assembly is not simply a Zairian traditional assembly, the commission set up by the Zairian Bishops’ Conference had to do immense work to lay the foundations for a Zairian Christian Eucharistic assembly. The point at issue is that “if the village chief who is the principal ritual man in traditional Zairian cult understands the Eucharist, how would he celebrate it in the village or in the city?” To bring it home, if the *Eze* or *Erisi*, the principal ritual man in Edda cult, understands the Eucharist, how would he celebrate it in the village or in the city?¹⁵⁹⁰ What is the relevance of the Eucharist to the local culture or reversely, what is the relevance of the local culture to the Eucharist? These questions touch on the understanding and celebration of the Eucharist in the African context. The commission realized that it had to abandon the already-made Roman Missal as the starting point. Instead, the confrontation of the constitutive elements of a Eucharistic celebration with the local culture formed the starting point. The norms for the sources which gave birth to this rite were established by the Permanent Committee of the Bishops of Zaire on November 2, 1972. On December 4, 1973, it was presented to the Sacred Congregation of Rites for study and approval.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Cf. Uzukwu, (1982), 58.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Congregation for Worship, *Zairensium Dioecesium*, Prot. N. 1520/ 85; cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire. Ein Beispiel kontextueller Liturgie*, Freiburg: 1993, 33.

¹⁵⁸⁶ The name of this country has changed to Démocratique République du Congo (Engl: Democratic Republic of Congo). Therefore, wherever the name “Zaire” and adjective “Zairian” stand in this thesis, they should read: “Congo” and “Congolese” respectively:

¹⁵⁸⁷ UR 4.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Cf. L. Mpongo, “Le Rite Zaïrois de la Messe”, in: *Spiritus*, (1978), 436-441, 437.

¹⁵⁸⁹ *Der Neue Messritus im Zaire*, (1993), 36.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Cf. E.E. Uzukwu, (1982), 59,

6.3.1.2 Analysis of Zairian Mass

6.3.1.2.1 Entrance Rite

The Zairian accentuation appears in the Entrance rite, the Invocation of the Ancestors, the liturgy of the Word and the realism of the Penitential rite. The Mass is an assembly of ritual reintegration. On arrival, the faithful greet one another. As the people already know that God is assembling them in Christ, the reason for the convocation in many African assemblies is not given before the master of ceremony calls for silence. The people also bring their gifts for the Eucharist.

An Announcer: At the ringing of the bell, the announcer whose function can be likened to a tribal herald or a liturgical commentator, goes to the pulpit, salutes the assembly and introduces the chief celebrant and important visitors who have come to pray with the community. He calls for the entrance hymn and withdraws to his seat.¹⁵⁹¹

Entrance of the Priest and Ministers: The celebrant and other ministers enter the Church in a procession¹⁵⁹², swaying graciously to the rhythm of the entrance song. Each carries a symbol of office that varies according to regions. The chief celebrant wears vestments and hats peculiar to the regional practice of traditional chiefs, who constitute a link between the spiritual and the human worlds. Adult males and females form the ministers. Each wears special vestment. It may be good to observe: "The entrance of the Roman rite might look quaint folklore. The judgment could be justified if the insignia no longer speak to the people. But the Zairean rite is conscious of the fact that the purpose of the liturgy is not folklore, but rather the creation of a good atmosphere for the encounter between the community and God. Where the people express the joy of this encounter in colours like red, in swaying, tapping, singing, dancing with strident cries, one should not be surprised, since worship should lead to external expression of collective sentiments arising from collective experience. This external expression is closely bound to culture."¹⁵⁹³ This external dimension should not be overlooked in the Eucharistic celebration of the mystery of Christ in the African context.

Veneration of the Altar: On approaching the altar, this should be venerated as in the Roman rite; or the celebrant could stand before the altar, hands raised in "W" shape, and then bend to touch the altar with his forehead. He repeats this gesture at the other three sides of the altar. The number four linked to the four-cardinal points of the earth symbolise the base of the universe. It is a sacred number both in many regions of Africa and the Jewish tradition. For example, the Igbo of Nigeria and the Baakongo have a four-day week. In the Jewish tradition, the four animals in the Apocalypse represent the principal constellations of the zodiac. The four animals in Ezekiel 1:1ff symbolise the basis, the pillars - the constitutive elements of creation.¹⁵⁹⁴ Therefore, the reverence of the four sides of the altar in the Zairean rite is a way of honouring the Creator, He who presides over the cosmos.¹⁵⁹⁵

Greeting of the people. The priest then greets the people who are gathered for the celebration and makes them clearly of the Lord's presence. He then leads them to the liturgy of the text.¹⁵⁹⁶

Invocation of the Ancestors. The traditional cult is always celebrated in union with the ancestors. The Zairian Mass, therefore, has the possible invocation of the ancestors in the faith as one of its preliminary ritual. A significant feature is that the traditional African ancestors, who are "pure of heart", who "aided by God, have faithfully served him", are mentioned. The Conference of Bishops explains that by becoming a Christian an African does not sever all relationship with the ancestors. Invoking them in Christian worship is consequently a pastoral and liturgical

¹⁵⁹¹ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 36.

¹⁵⁹² Cf. *Ibid*

¹⁵⁹³ E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 59.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Cf. P. Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, Delachaux et Niestel, 1964, 46-55; cf. *Der Neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 37.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 59.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 37.

imperative. “The conference urges further that the ancestors of righteous heart are, through the merits of Christ, in communion with God and hence can be invoked in the liturgy just as Abel, Abraham and Melchizedek are remembered in the Roman liturgy.”¹⁵⁹⁷ This view is supported by the Vatican II declaration of salvation in non-Christian religions and modern theology of non-Christian religions.¹⁵⁹⁸ At the singing of the *Gloria*, the assembly is invited to perform the traditional rhythmic movements, while the president of the assembly and the other ministers dance around the altar.

6.3.1.2.2 *Liturgy Of The Word.*

The Mass highlights the important role of the Word by a ritual delegation of the readers and a ceremonial enthronement of the Gospel, elements which already form part of the Roman rite. During the reading all remain seated. This is a proper attitude for receiving and assimilating an important message, which has as much value as the medieval interpretation of standing for the Gospel, as the attitude of a servant awaiting his master. This “servant-master” attitude does no longer speak to the minds of Africans today and, therefore, requires revision!¹⁵⁹⁹

Penitential Rite. This precedes the homily or the Creed and permits the Word to challenge the assembly in this ceremony of ritual reintegration, leading to real conversion.¹⁶⁰⁰ The penitential rite, “become a solemn affirmation of the desire to belong to God and to remain in communion with the other and the cosmos.”¹⁶⁰¹ The 11th century *I Confess* and the 5th century *Lord Have Mercy* that are inserted at the beginning of the Roman Mass, underline the aspect of purification before entering the heart of the celebration, which are the Word and Eucharist. The Zairian Mass, on the other hand, lays emphasis on being confronted by the Word of God, allowing the community to recognize its sin and invoke the mercy of God. It goes this way:

Lord our God, as the leech sticks to the skin

And sucks the human blood, evil has invaded us.

Our life is diminished.

Who will save us, if not you, our Lord? Lord have mercy!

*All: Lord have mercy!*¹⁶⁰²

As the mercy of God is invoked, all bend profoundly with arms crossed on the chest. The Priest sprinkles Holy water as a sign of purification, and the conversion-reconciliation rite is sealed by the exchange of the sign of peace, normally a warm hand-shake. The first part of the Mass or liturgy of the Word should embrace not just the dress and gestures like dancing, swaying, tapping, bowing, et cetera but also verbal expressions such as prayers, invocations, responses, which reveal the spirit of the community and the meaning of the gestures.¹⁶⁰³ The exchange of the sign of peace concludes the Penitential rite. The former is an external expression of one’s inward reconciliation with God and fellow human beings. Then the Prayer of the Faithful follows.¹⁶⁰⁴

6.3.1.2.3 *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

¹⁵⁹⁷ The dossier reads: “Dans le contexte de l’Eglise universelle, associer la vénération de nos ancêtres au cœur droit a celle des saints reconnus par l’Eglise, exprime la volonté d’ouverture des chrétiens d’Afrique aux ancêtres d’autres people dans la foi. Par conséquent, leur intégration de soi-même tout entier au Christ”. (Conférence Episcopale du Zaïre, *Rite zaïrois de la célébration eucharistique*, Kinshasa, 1985, 32-38; Cf. C. P. Chibuko, (1999), 79.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Cf. NA 2; cf. J. Dupuis, (2001b), 145; cf. J. Dupuis, (2001a), 16; cf. M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 61.

¹⁵⁹⁹ E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 59.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 37.

¹⁶⁰¹ L. Mpongo, (1978), 441.

¹⁶⁰² Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 75.

¹⁶⁰³ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 62.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 39.

There is significant creativity in this second part of the Mass, marked by the presentation of gifts

6.3.1.2.3.1.1 Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer.¹⁶⁰⁵

Presentation of the Gifts. In the traditional reintegration ritual, participants do not assemble empty handed. In the Zairian Mass, those who come with gifts deposit them, before Mass, in an offertory collection; those appointed bring the offertory gifts in an offertory dance. First, the gifts other than bread and wine are brought to the celebrant by a designated member of the assembly with the following words:

*O priest of God,
Here are our gifts,
Receive them; they manifest
that we love one another as the Lord loves us.*¹⁶⁰⁶

The priest receives them with a gesture of thanks. Then, the bread and wine are presented in words echoing the normal presentation prayer of the Roman rite. The rite insists that those who present the gifts should announce the address. The celebrant commends the bread and wine to God with the *Prayer over the Gifts*.

Eucharistic Prayer. The Roman Eucharistic Prayer is based on the 3rd century prayer of Hippolytus of Rome and is the source of the second Eucharistic Prayer of the reformed Roman liturgy. Here, the Zairian rite is full of creativity. In the first praise, which is the theological part, images which characterize traditional African experience of God are converted into honorific titles. The priest prays this in the preface:

*(...) You are God,
You, the sun that is not gazed at directly,
You, sight itself,
You, the master¹⁶⁰⁷ of human beings,
You, the Lord of life,
You, the master of all things
We praise you
We thank you (...)*¹⁶⁰⁸

The above Eucharistic Prayer that plants the community in its world, a world presented to the Creator in the community's praise, is again brought out in the praise of the God who creates through his Christ, reflecting the Christological dimension:

*Through him, you created heaven and earth;
Through him, you created the waters of the world,
the rivers, streams, lakes and all the fish which live in them.
Through him, you created forests, plains, savannas, mountains and all the animals which live in them (...)*¹⁶⁰⁹

Not only does the Eucharistic Prayer make use of familiar imagery, it also assures intense participation by interspersing the prayer with congregational responses. This is a mark of

¹⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Ibid 40.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Ibid 79.

¹⁶⁰⁷ The images of God as a "master" and "Lord", which derive from the Western world need to be changed with the images of God either as a "friend", "companion" or any other more suitable one. In Africa, the images of "Father" and "Son" do not go with the ideas of "mastership" and "lordship" rather, the former goes with a guardian, protector, companion, loving one and provider. While the later goes more with respect not in terms of a slave. "Master" and "Lord" always connote the ideas of ownership, dictatorship and slavery. They usually engender "master-servant" relationship instead of the freedom of the children of God. The use of such terms to God, consciously or unconsciously influences our relationship not only with God but also our fellow human beings in the society. cf. F. C. Welsing, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colours*, Chicago: 1991, 100.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 81.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid 82.

traditional African cult that has been given a unique place in many attempts at composing African Eucharistic Prayers.¹⁶¹⁰

The highly developed sense of participation comes out in the doxology, which seals the Eucharistic Prayer. The one most often used in Zairian Churches reflects traditional affirmation of decisions or the style of traditional African oath-taking; or again, it could be compared to the customary way of shouting slogans during political rallies in Zaire:¹⁶¹¹

Lord, May we glorify your name,

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Your name,*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Very honourable,*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Father*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Son*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Holy Spirit*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *May we glorify it*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Today*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *Tomorrow*

People: *Yes*

Celebrant: *For ever and ever*

People: *Yes.*¹⁶¹²

“This is a good seal of the heart of the community’s gratitude for the experience of divine goodness. The rite takes account of the Zairian culture and tries to incorporate some initiatory elements into the liturgy. The composers had made genuine effort to translate the local church’s faith-experience into ritual and have succeeded in making a translation which keeps the Zairean world, with its dynamism, in healthy dialogical tension with the living Jewish-Christian tradition.”¹⁶¹³

Communion: After Our Father, the priest says the prayer of embolism and the faithful prays the Doxology. He then breaks the bread, while the people sing the *Lamb of God*.¹⁶¹⁴

Concluding Rite: The Final blessings by the priest with the sign of the cross bring the mass to an end. He can also stretch his hands over the people as he says the blessings.¹⁶¹⁵

6.3.2 Evaluation

The interesting character of the Zairean rite is that the Eucharistic prayer is a good example of euchology for the local Church. It is drawn up in accord with biblical values, the nature of the Catholic liturgy, Roman and yet Zairian. Its outline, from the initial dialogue and preface to the final doxology, follows faithfully the Roman model: preface and sanctus, consecratory epiclesis, institution narrative, anamnesis and memorial offering, communion epiclesis, intercessions and finally doxology. In content it does not differ from the other Eucharistic prayers in the Roman missal.¹⁶¹⁶ Closer observation shows that, the Zairian

¹⁶¹⁰ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, “Igbo/Nigerian Eucharistic Prayer”, in: *AFER* (1980), 17-32, 18.

¹⁶¹¹ Cf. *Ibid* 19.

¹⁶¹² Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 86.

¹⁶¹³ E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 65.

¹⁶¹⁴ Cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 40.

¹⁶¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid* 41.

¹⁶¹⁶ C. P. Chibuko, (1999), 80.

inculturational exercise has been inspired by both Christian and native usages. “Some of them, like the sign of venerating the altar and the sign of peace, are dynamic equivalents of the traditional Roman practices. Others, like the dance and the use of incense, elaborate on the different parts of the Mass. Several elements belong to the people of other cultures”¹⁶¹⁷ Although the Congregation for divine Worship notified the Zairian Bishops Conference that the Mass according to Zairian Rite would go under the title, “Roman Missal for the Diocese of Zaire”¹⁶¹⁸, the composition is typically Zairian and remains Zairian.

A very interesting character of the rite is its encouragement of active participation in the preface, intercessions, and final doxology and which has been worked out in such a way that the assembly can easily respond or, in typically African tradition, interject at appropriate moments. The text was originally composed in *Lingala* and was translated later into French. Obviously a translation, however good it might be, cannot capture adequately the images, nuances and idioms present in the original text. The Zairian bishops assured the Sacred Congregation, however, that a great effort was exerted to incorporate into the original text the traits of the African language, namely its expressions and allusions.¹⁶¹⁹ This is encouraging.

All said and done, the Zairian Mass has created a new prospect and given practical example of how the Church in Africa could successively achieve new alternative forms to the Roman Order of Mass.¹⁶²⁰ The Zairean rite paid attention to the theological and spiritual treasures of tradition and enriched this tradition with new textual and ritual forms derived from the culture and customs of the African people. This is a major step forward in liturgical tradition, a legitimate progress based on sound tradition and which ultimately may lead the faithful to a more lively participation and a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ being celebrated.¹⁶²¹ We could no longer say with E. E. Uzukwu that “(...) a Zairian rite as such does not yet exist, or (...) to say that for Zaire in particular, and for Africa in general, the question of typical rites is on the level of already and not yet.”¹⁶²² The *Decree* of the Congregation for Worship in April, 30, 1988, gave it an official recognition.¹⁶²³ It is a remarkable contribution to the Universal Church. It is a remarkable contribution to the Universal Church. Therefore, what the Zairian Episcopal Conference achieved provides a motivation to other Episcopal Conferences of Africa, to work more closely to develop an African liturgical rite. The Church in Africa has both the human and spiritual resources as well as the right to express their faith-experience in a way peculiar to this continent. She has the right to develop her own rite. But since faith-experience is not based on human authority, but on the authority of God, *propter auctoritatem Dei revelantis*¹⁶²⁴, it would be presumptuously daring to stand in the way of the African local Churches who, in common with the Universal Church, want to live out this faith in an authentic African way. Initiation in the African Traditional Religion provides the raw materials and the means to achieving this goal. It challenges greatly the Christian theology. Only then will the liturgy no longer be a foreign ritual, but a living celebration of the mystery of Christ who also incarnates himself in the African culture. Such an effort would help to produce An African Rite that would truly reflect authentic Christian and African values.¹⁶²⁵ None should be severed from the other.

¹⁶¹⁷ Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship: *Decree Zairensium Dioecesium, Notitiae* 264 (1988), 457.

¹⁶¹⁸ Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship, *Prot. N. 1520/8*; cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, 33.

¹⁶¹⁹ Cf. E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 53-54. There are already other models of liturgical inculturation like *the New Orders of the Mass for India*, Bangalore, 1974 and the Misang Bayang Filipino, *The Order of Mass for the Filipino*, 1976. But none of these met with as much success as the Zairian liturgy. Cf. C. P. Chibuko, (1999), 181.

¹⁶²⁰ Cf. C. P. Chibuko, (1999), 80.

¹⁶²¹ Cf. A. J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future, The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, New York: 1989, 56.

¹⁶²² E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 66.

¹⁶²³ Cf. Congregation for Worship, *Zairensium Dioecesium, Prot. N. 1520/ 85*; cf. *Der neue Messritus in Zaire*, (1993), 33.

¹⁶²⁴ Cf. DH 3008.

¹⁶²⁵ E. E. Uzukwu, (1982), 66.

6.4 The Epilogue

This dissertation successfully examined initiation in African Traditional Religion from the perspective of systematic theology, with special reference to aspects of Igbo religion. It appraises, in a critical manner, the symbolisms of initiation in African Traditional Religion, and establishes points of contraries and harmonies with the Christian faith. It did not fail to correct some biases some people have on African traditional initiation rites, offering systematic theological justifications for their authentic inculturation.

In relation to the Christian liturgy, it addresses certain questions that hitherto, no concrete answers have been found. Similarly, it addresses some areas that would not only promote active participation, but also lively celebration of the liturgy in African context. It calls for an emergence of an authentic African liturgical rite that takes account of the African cultural background: its rites and symbolisms, elements, myths and forms of celebrations. The development of such a rite would enable the African Christian to live and express his/her faith in his historical and cultural worlds. Therefore, it contends that it would not only be improper but inadequate for the Church to continue to celebrate the sacred mysteries (of the same God who incarnates Himself in the human world and African culture inclusive) in African setting with foreign symbols and forms of expressions without proper recognition of the African cultural world. Consequently, it would be against the spirit of the incarnation for the Church to remain aloof on this important area and continue to remain foreign to the people; both in her liturgical rites and proclamation of the gospel. It highlights that worship that is not incarnation-oriented, that finds root in the cultural context of the worshiping community is nothing but a pure form of liturgical conceptualization and abstraction that is directed to westernization of Africans. Such is an ineffective means of evangelization and inculturation of the gospel.¹⁶²⁶

Therefore, as long as we praise the efforts of the local Churches in Africa in promoting liturgical inculturation, the dissertation calls on her to do more to produce something that would serve the local needs of the sons and daughters of Africa, who are Christians as well as Africans; without alienating or uprooting them from their culture. The time is ripe for this!

Therefore, while surveying the possibilities for realizing this, the dissertation provides adequate knowledge on African culture and Christian initiation rites, as means for producing authentic African-Christian initiation rites. This would only be possible where positive attitude is extended to African Traditional Religion. It requires on the Church to go beyond the level of Orthodoxy and dogmatism to Ortho-praxis, to see how the liturgy would reflect authentic African cultural values.

As essential requisite for evangelization, it recommends basic and thorough knowledge of the culture of the people by the agents of evangelization, that is, both the clergy and Lay faithful. Therefore, since the effort of all the baptised is necessary for the progress of evangelisation, they should give mutual co-operation for the authentic realization of this goal. In addition, the Church should provide special training for all those who are preparing for the apostolate in any form, especially, candidates to the priesthood, on African missionary anthropology and Culture.

When this is done, the Church in Africa would not only be fulfilling the objectives of Vatican II on the incarnation of the liturgy in the people's culture, but also facilitate a proper expression of the Christian faith in African context. It recommends cultural awareness on the part of Christians, to devote more interest in the various aspects of the human culture. Above all, it recommends the establishment of Cultural and Liturgical Commissions on the Diocesan, Parochial, town and village levels of all the Dioceses in Africa whose function, among others, would be the coordination of activities on inculturation. Such Commissions should be staffed by Specialists in different fields of theology, African cultural Anthropology, Liturgy, and so on. Constructive criticisms, exchange of ideas among these experts, and evaluation of research works

¹⁶²⁶ E. M. Wedig, *Evangelization, Inculturation and the RCIA*, New York: 1999, 2.

that deal on this theme in the various regions of Africa, would be necessary in the progress of inculturation.¹⁶²⁷

Similarly, the Church should provide enough funds to the Commission to function well. Joseph McCabe articulated its urgency in liturgical inculturation. He writes: “By working together on this, and by accepting our mission of incarnating the message of Jesus Christ for the peoples of every nation and age, we are accepting our prophetic call to reawaken, in the People of God, a deep faith experience grounded in their own cultural milieu and yet, unified with the faith experience of the whole Church.”¹⁶²⁸ This is the constant challenge of the Church of today and tomorrow. Therefore, with T. Okere, we surmise: “*the task confronting the Church in Africa* is not a question merely of making Christianity acceptable to the African but rather of making African values (including initiation rites) acceptable to Christianity, of fermenting them with the leaven of the gospel and incorporating them into the value scheme of people who are as genuinely Christian as they are African.”¹⁶²⁹ When this is done, the Church would not only be a home for all, but the liturgy of Christian initiation would be a living celebration of the same mystery of Christ who also incarnates himself/herself in African culture. The Church only needs to discover its urgency and work towards realizing it, and the Holy Spirit would complete the rest - all to the Glory of God and good of humankind!

¹⁶²⁷ Cf. F. Arinze, *The Church And Nigerian Culture*, Lenten Pastoral, Onitisha: 1973, 28.

¹⁶²⁸ J. V. McCabe, “The Challenge of Liturgical Inculturation: Directions”, in: *Spearhead*, 92 (1986), 10-12, 11.

¹⁶²⁹ T. Okere, “Assumption of African Values As Christian Values”, in: *Lucerna*, 1, 1 (1978), 9-10, 9. My italics.

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