UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

FACULDADE DE TEOLOGIA

MESTRADO INTEGRADO EM TEOLOGIA *(1.º grau canónico)*

ANDREW PRINCE FOFIE-NIMOH

AKAN RITES OF PASSAGE AND THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION: A THEOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Dissertação Final

sob orientação de:

Doutor D. Bernardino Ferreira da Costa

Porto

2014

SUMMARY OF THE TABLE OF CONTENT

Abbreviations

Abstract

Introduction

I. CHAPTER …… Contextualisation

II. CHAPTER…… Akan Religion and Rites of Passage

III. CHAPTER……Sacraments of Christian Initiation

IV. CHAPTER……Rites of Passage vis-a-vis Sacraments of Christian Initiation

General Conclusion

Bibliography

Table of Content

ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	*Acta Apostólica Sedis,* Vaticana, Roma 1909.
Acts.	Acts of the Apostles
BAC	Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, (Madrid)
CDC	Código de Direito Canónico, Editorial Apostolado da Oração, Braga, [3]1983.
Cf.	Confer
CIC	Catecismo Da Igreja Católica, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1993.
CONST. DOGM	Constitutio Dogmatica
CONST. PAST.	Constitutio Pastoralis
Cor.	Corinthians
Ed.	Edition
ed.	Editor
eds.	Editors
Ex.	Example
Ex.	Exodus
Gen.	Genesis
GS	*Gaudium et Spes,* SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesial in Mundo Huius Temporis Gaudium et Spes», in *AAS* 58 (1966).
Jer.	Jeremiah
Jn	John
Lev.	Leviticus
LG	Lumen Gentium, SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia Lumen Gentium», in *AAS* 57 (1965).
Lk.	Luke

Macc.	Maccabees
Matt.	Matthew
Mk.	Mark
N.T	New Testament
O.T	Old Testament
p.	Page
pp.	Pages
PUG	Pontifícia Universidade Gregoriana, Roma.
RCIA	Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, Liturgical Training Publications, Chicago, 1988.
Rm	Romans
S. Th.	THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1957.
SC	*Sacrosanctum Concilium,* SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosantum Concilium», *AAS* 56 (1964).
Vol.	Volume

ABSTRACT

This academic research seeks to address theologically the question of the possible ways in which certain elements of the African culture (Akan Culture) can serve as the foundation to Christian Doctrinal Instruction. It attempts a theological and anthropological enquiry into some Akan Rites of Passage and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. The dissertation also encounters the points of convergence and divergence in relation to both initiation rites. Having established the fact that in most human societies, rites of initiation are inevitable, the dissertation asserts that there are indeed similarities and differences between the Akan Rites of Passage and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. A critical survey at the Rites of Passage such as birth and childhood (Naming ceremony: "edin to") and adulthood and initiation (Bragoro) with its future goal of marriage and procreation affirms that these rites have their corresponding Christian rites of initiation like baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.

However, this research does not intend to raise the rites of passage above the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. In other words, our objective is not to equate the former rites to the Christian Sacraments. Thus, there may be common ritual elements and processes but different theological significances. As such, water used in baptism washes away our sins while when used in the Akan Naming Ceremony signifies truthfulness which should lead to a befitting moral life. This, notwithstanding, both baptism and naming ceremony welcomes and initiates one into the community of believers.

The dissertation again recommends and establishes that a profound knowledge of rites of initiation would lead to a better understanding of Christian Initiation Sacraments. Therefore, when the rites of initiation (rites of passage) of the local culture is well understood, catechetical instructions leading to the celebration of the rites of Christian Initiation becomes secured and comprehensively appreciated. This is to affirm that in evangelisation, the culture of the people must not be underestimated because it serves as the first contact of every human person. They mark important transitions through the lifecycle, from one stage, role and social position to the other and they serve as key factors in the socialisation process of the individual into the larger group.

OS RITOS DE PASSAGEM DA ETNIA AKAN E OS SACRAMENTOS DA INICIAÇÃO CRISTÃ: UMA APROXIMAÇÃO TEOLÓGICA.

Esta investigação académica procura apresentar teologicamente os caminhos possíveis em que certos elementos da cultura africana, nomeadamente da etnia Akan podem servir como fundamento do ensinamento da doutrina Cristã, no caso específico do continente africano. Esta dissertação tenta uma abordagem teológico e antropológico da questão dos Ritos de Passagem e os Sacramentos da Iniciação Cristã. Partindo do fato que os ritos de iniciação são pontos chaves em certas culturas e sociedades humanas, a minha investigação vai mostrar as convergências e divergências entre os dois ritos supra mencionados. Um estudo atento dos ritos de passagem ligados ao nascimento, puberdade, casamento e procriação sugerem correspondência com os Sacramentos da Iniciação Cristã, nomeadamente o baptismo, confirmação e a Eucaristia.

Todavia quero fazer notar que esta abordagem não pretende igualizar ou pôr no mesmo patamar os ritos de passagem africanos e os Sacramentos da iniciação Cristã. Dito de outra maneira, o nosso objectivo não é substituir os Sacramentos supervalorizando os ritos de passagem. Embora possa haver alguns elementos e procedimentos rituais comum aos dois ritos, o sentido teológico não é sempre o mesmo tanto nos ritos de passagem como nos Sacramentos da Iniciação Cristã. Assim por exemplo, o símbolo da água no batismo purifica os pecados dando ao batizado um novo nascimento. No rito de iniciação da etnia Akan, a água é usada como um símbolo de verdade e honestidade que o individuo deve cultivar daí em diante na sua vida. Há porém a semelhança com o batismo quanto ao acolhimento do iniciado na vida social da etnia, aceitação e participação em todo o sistema de vida social do grupo.

Esta abordagem sugere que se estabeleça uma análise profunda dos ritos de passagem étnicos porque o seu conhecimento leva a uma maior compreensão e inserção dos sacramentos Iniciação Cristã nas culturas étnicas. Portanto, quando os ritos locais de passagem são aceites e compreendidos, uma instrução catequética dirigida aos Catecúmenos até a recepção dos Sacramentos da Iniciação Cristã, será bem apreciada e termo de garantia da nova vida do cristão. Isto quer dizer que na evangelização a cultura do povo em questão deve ser conhecida, respeitada e até assimilada quanto possível, porque a religião entra tanto mais em um povo quanto entra em o espírito da sua cultura. Os ritos de passagem marcam momentos importantes e etapas sucessivas na vida das

pessoas. Os ritos promovem a pessoa socialmente, dão-lhe uma nova dimensão de comunhão de direitos e responsabilidades na sua sociedade, tornam o indivíduo consciente de que não vive solitário, é um parceiro no bem e mal da mesma comunidade.

INTRODUCTION

Rites of Initiation are very vital in every human institution, be it religious, academic, social or political. They serve as the background and means through which cherished cultural values and code of ethics of a given group are inculcated and imparted onto the future generation.

The African knowledge of God and his relation with God to a greater extent influences and shapes his life. The desire to be in constant communion with Him is religiously marked by rites. Thus, the life of an African is marked by different stages and each of these cycles is initiated by rites (rites of passage). As such rites become expressions in which man feels that he is sharing in the divine action, an action which God performs through and in man, as much as man himself performs it in and through God[1].

In the light of the above, rites become an essential ingredient to religion. Christianity has its own rites of initiation for new converts, even though, certain basic theological differences may be observed from one denomination to the other. As such Roman Catholics hold that the Sacraments of baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist are the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. It is upon these that the other sacramental life of the church is constructed. The three sacraments mentioned above therefore serves as the foundational elements to the belongingness of the Christian community. There is a very close theological relationship among them that connotes the fact of their classification as the Sacrament of Christian Initiation. Hence the RCIA affirms:

> «In the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ´s death, burial and resurrection. We receive the spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord´s death and resurrection»[2]

African Traditional Religions do not turn deaf ear to these fundamental anthro-theological rites for members within its society. These lifecycle rites are called rites of passage. They are seen as the rites accompanying theses crucial transition of the individual from one stage of life to the other. There are essentially three main stages of

---

[1] L. BOUYER,*Rite and Man: the Sense of the Sacred and Christian Liturgy*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1963, 57.

[2]*Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, «General Introduction 1»*, Liturgical Training Publications, Chicago, 1988, p. xiv.

lifecycle recognised by the Traditional African Religions, namely Birth and Childhood, Adulthood and Puberty with its finality of marriage and procreation and finally death and Ancestorship. These are inevitable human rituals that according to the African Religious conception every human being must go through. These rites of passage are performed with a varying degree of intensity and seriousness. This characteristic is affirmed by the fact that there are rituals formally instituted at three major turning points of a person´s life. Therefore the rites of passage follow the following order:

> «(1) The time a person enters the world through birth, (2) when he comes of aged and enters the world of adults, (3) when through death, he departs from this world and enters the world of his forbears»[3].

As regards the question at hand, thus a theological attempt at studying the rites of passage and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation respectively, not so much research has been done on the topic by Scholars. However, it is worthy to note that rites of passage as part of ritual studies have been undertaken by several Anthropologists and Sociologists such as Arnold Van Gennep (the Rites of Passage, 1960), Victor Turner (The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti - Structure, 1969), Catherine Bell (Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, 1997), Roy A. Rappaport (Ritual and Religion in the making of humanity, 1999), Maxwell Johnson (the Rites of Christian Initiation: their Evolution and Interpretation, 2007) to mention but few. On the other hand, in the area of the Akan tradition and Religion, mention can also be made of Most Rev. Peter K. Sarpong (Emeritus Archbishop of Kumasi) whose published books include the following; Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti (1977), Ghana in Retrospect (1974) and People Differ : An approach to inculturation in Evangelisation (2002). I must state that some of the scholarly works mentioned above shall be employed in this dissertation.

This academic research seeks to address theologically the points of convergences and divergence between the Akan Rites of Passage and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation. It is important to note that the aim of this dissertation is not to equate the traditional African rites of passage to the Christian Sacraments, but rather to theologically consider and appreciate both as initiation rites and how pastorally the former can serve as the foundation to the latter in the Akan Society. I strongly believe

[3] P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Accra, 1974, 71.

that the Christian Sacrament of baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist can be better and more understood if they are presented to the local people as the fulfilment of the numerous rites of initiation that are ritually performed in the whole of the continent of Africa, namely entrance into the world, initiation into manhood or womanhood or into specific societies like the Asafo companies of early Ghana, the Poro society of the Mendes of Sierra Leone, to mention but few.

In the light of the above the catechumens should first learn the seriousness and efficacy of these rites and they should also appreciate that these rites are only a shadow of the reality which they shall receive during the celebration of the Sacrament of Christian Initiation. In addition, the dissertation shall also attempt to respond to some basic questions like why rites of initiation are very critical and vital in nation building, religious belongingness and identity formation; the role of rites of passage in a socialisation process and how the African reality can be brought out of its own shell so as to face the challenges of the advancing epistemological generation and to also make amendments where necessary.

It is worthy to note that for the purpose of this dissertation, death and Ancestorship as rites of passage shall not be discussed. This is to enable me to do a better theological enquiry as long as the essay discusses rites of initiation common to both religions. In the Roman Catholic, death and Ancestor does not form part of the Christian Sacraments of Initiation.

The methodology that shall be employed in this dissertation include descriptive-analytical and hermeneutical approach. The descriptive approach indicated will allow us to deepen the description of the culture through a careful consideration at Akan Rites of Passage and Christian Sacraments of Initiation. We shall develop our thesis through anthropological, sociological, religious, liturgical and pastoral perspectives. The anthropological and sociological studies seek to focus on the culture and social life of the people. It will be an attempt to reveal and equip us to comprehend the people´s lifestyle, their way of thinking, their perspective of life and initiation through ritual significance.

To achieve these academic objectives already enumerated, this dissertation shall be composed of four chapters. In the first chapter captioned contextualisation, we shall broaden our horizon on the general phenomena of rites and rituals, characteristics which

can be found in almost every ritual action. We shall come to appreciate that ritual actions are distinct from of our daily routines and in this vein, this dissertation will explain some basic types of rituals. A biblical view on rituals shall also form part of our consideration as well as the roles that rituals play in society, how to analyse and interpret ritual action accepting the fact that they are actions embedded with symbols and their interpretation is exclusively in accordance to the traditions of the group.

The second chapter shall be dealt with in two fundamental ways; the first part explains the Akan worldview with respect to their theological positions. It also discusses their basic doctrinal views on God (Onyankopon), Lesser Spirits, Ancestors and how they approach God in worship and above all their cosmological ideologies. The second part of this chapter will then introduce us into the Akan Rites of Passage where an emphasis shall dwell on birth and childhood rites (naming ceremony), adulthood and initiation (puberty rites) with its finality of marriage and procreation. It is worthy to note that for the African, a separation between his daily activity and his religion becomes a herculean task to undertake because the African man is described as incurably religious; religion pertains to all aspects of his or her life whether in the formal or informal presence of the Sacred.

In chapter three, we shall deal with each of the three Christian Initiatory Sacraments. It also elucidates the ritual significance of the essential matter and form used in each of them; their sacramental effects in the life of recipients. Sacraments are at the heart of Catholics and in the celebrations; we bring our faith to light and express our belongingness and togetherness as a family of believers. As such, celebrations of baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist become a community activity. We shall also appreciate that through baptism, a person is reborn as a child to the Christian community and into the Body of Christ. Through confirmation, our faith is rooted in the believing community and we express a sign of maturity. Finally in the Eucharist we grow into a more intimacy with Christ through the participation in His Body and Blood.

The fourth chapter shall attempt to consider theologically and anthropologically the points of convergence and divergence between the Christian Sacraments of Initiation and the Akan Rites of Passage. Sacraments can be rites of passage in initiation, for the reason that every rite of passage is seen as initiatory. Therefore they are meant to introduce the person into another phase of life. This chapter also throws more light on

the fact that even though the Akan Rites of Passage are neither Sacraments, nor are they equal to them. Our enquiry shall unveil that there are indeed certain similarities that can be found in both Akan Rites of Passage and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation and there are equally great disparities between them.

In constructing this chapter a special appeal shall be made to Arnold Van Gennep´s three phases on the rites of passage ; Rites of separation, transition and incorporation. We shall also situate ourselves within the context of the rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, the various stages and periods involved in the formation of adults; the evangelisation and precatechumenate(election to the catechumenate), Catechumenate (election and enrolment for initiation) and finally the Celebrations of the Rites of Christian Initiation of baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.

I am hopeful that this academic research in its final phase may help to erase some erroneous views with respect to rituals in the Traditional African religions. It is to be noted that on many occasions people have referred to them as fetishism, Satanism, animism, paganism and used several derogatory adjectives in describing them. Again, I would like to affirm that it is not the objective of this dissertation to raise the African Traditional Rites superior to the Raman Catholic Sacraments of Initiation. It rather seeks to consider in what sense can the former serve as a foundation in our evangelisation activity and how can we build on the existing knowledge of the people to arrive at our objective. Above all the dissertation seeks to open wide the doors of investigation and instil the taste for further research on the topic as a theological discourse admitting the inevitable fact that this dissertation does not answer all questions but only an attempt.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 CONTEXTUALISATION

This chapter seeks to clarify and to give a vivid connotation to some of the words that may be employed in the course of this essay. It will also attempt to give a distinctive and a real communicative value to the language that my readers are bound to encounter in their attempt to read and comprehend the topic at hand. This contextualisation shall be carried out within the broader spectrum of Rites and Rituals, Genres and Characteristics of rituals, a biblical reflection on rituals, Rituals and their significance and it shall be concluded with some models for a better approach to the interpretation of rituals. In this first chapter, it is worthy to note that our survey shall centre on scholarly literatures done on this field. These shall be gathered and synthesized. We shall attempt to understand what ritual is and the question that, whether ritual is a type of action distinct from daily routines. This has the objective of introducing my readers to the general worldview of the topic in context before embarking on our investigation into the specific study of the Akan people of southern Ghana.

1.1 RITES AND RITUALS IN GENERAL

In our everyday parlance and composition, we come to the realization that the words Rites and Rituals are very often used interchangeably. Rite is used in accordance with common practice as a synonym for ritual. However, a careful approach to their roots even though appear synonymous in meaning, indicates that the term Rite signifies the generic usage of the term Ritual. In classical Latin *"ritus*" denote the form and manner of any religious observance or ceremony. It has been employed in theological discourses while in the domain of the Social Sciences or Religious Studies, we come across the constant usage of the term ritual[4].

According to the Merriam-Webster´s Dictionary & Thesaurus, the two most frequent used words in Ritual Studies, rite and ritual have been defined in the below;

[4]Cf. G. A. KLINGBEIL, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 1), Eisenbrauns, Warsaw, 2007, 18.

> «a rite is a set of form for conducting a ceremony, the liturgy of a church and a ceremonial act or action whereas the term ritual has been expressed as the established form especially for a religious ceremony, a system of rites, a ceremonial act or action, an act or series of act regularly repeated in a precise manner»[5].

According to Talal Asad, «ritual is a type of routine behaviour that symbolises or expresses something and as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social behaviour»[6]. There are therefore rites and rituals practices in all the cultures and they help the human beings to get in touch with events and passages, inasmuch as such moments are considered as delicate and pivotal. It is worthy to note that there is a clear distinction between the common everyday usage of the term ritual and its technical use in an academic context. It is therefore expedient to appreciate the three basic notions with respect to the application of the word ritual; we have the habitual action sense which refers to our day to day activities as they unfold and becomes repetitive to our way of living. For example, one can say that it has become a ritual for him or her to take breakfast at nine o´clock each morning.

Ritual can also be seen in a formalised action; when used in this sense it connotes a pattern, form of shape which gives meaning to that action and an example can be cited of a graduation ceremony rituals in the field of formal education. Finally, we have the case of a ritual that situates itself with transcendental values. In other words, that seeks to treat actions only in relation to the Supreme Being. In this third category, we approach closely to the realm of religion.

In this first chapter, we shall from time to time make some appeals to the definition of rituals as any formalised action not neglecting the fact that it is not our object of study in this dissertation. The aim of this will be to give my readers a general worldview on rituals before journeying into the arena of religion. However, the definition given above with regard to religious ceremonies forms the nucleus of this academic investigation.

This definition ushers us into the sphere of Religion whether Christianity, Islam or the Traditional African Religions. Hence we can say that rite means the ceremonies, prayers and functions of any religious body that are geared towards the service of God and the

---

[5]*Merriam-Webster´s Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Merriam- Webster Incorporated, Springfield, 2006.

[6] T. ASAD, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reason of Power in Christianity and Islam*, John Hopkins University Press, London, 1993, 56-62.

enhancement of the human person. Human beings are socio-cultural animals and as such are considered as ritual animals. When ritual is stifled in one form or the other, it is believed that it will crop up in another form and this will occur more strongly the more intense the social interaction is. Thus one may even lose his or her social dignity[7].

The word "ritual" on the other hand comes from the Latin word "*ritualis*" which belongs to the family of "ritus" (Rite). As earlier indicated, the word ritual pertains to the broader horizon of rite. In this regard, the term ritual, from the point of Rappaport denotes the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers[8]. Thus in rituals there are formalities but it is not always that rituals manifest the meaning intended to portray to observers and passive participants. Rituals serve as one of the characteristics of every human society being it religious or in the secular sphere. They are indeed pertinent to the life of the individual and the community from cradle to the grave. The study of ritual became very prominent and controversial only in the late nineteenth century when scholars began to reflect on the etymology of religion and culture (civilisation) and began to investigate whether these two concepts are rooted in ritual or in myth.[9] In other words, it is to assert the period when an academic attempt was made to ascertain the relationships among ritual, myth and religion.

At this moment, we shall consider some theories that have been explored in an attempt to tracing the contextual framework of Ritual and its relation to the human race. Basically three major theories can be identified; there are the myth and ritual Theorists like Frederich Max Muller who base their analysis on the fact that to critically understand religion, a massive attention must be focused on ritual and myth. On the other hand ritual and myth help to explain some actual or imaginary reality which is not adequately understood and as a result cannot be fathomed through normal elucidation. The value of myth in African societies should not be underestimated. Secondly, we have the social functionalists who consider ritual actions and values in their attempt to

---

[7]Cf. O. V. DER HART, *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, Irvington Publishers, New York, 1983, 3.

[8] Cf. R. RAPPAPORT, *A Ritual and Religion in the making of humanity*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1999, 24.

[9] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, 3.

understand society and the nature of social phenomenon[10]. The renowned sociologist Emile Durkheim belongs to this group of thought. Finally, there is also the group of the symbolic anthropologists who stipulates and uphold ritual as very fundamental to the study of the dynamic of culture[11]. One of the famous among them was Victor Turner. These anthropologists centred their research on cultural symbols and their use in particular social context.

It is perceptibly necessary for us to comprehend some of the most important scholarly perspectives before arriving at any working definition of the term ritual. According to the book entitled "*Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Catherine Bell describes ritual in the following words:

> «A ritual is a complex sociocultural medium variously constructed of tradition, exigency and self- expression; it is understood to play a wide variety of roles and to communicate a rich density of over-determined messages and attitude»[12].

Moreover, we can assert that rituals may be prescribed by the cherished traditions of the community. In our study on rituals, it must be noted that it is a social act which takes place in a specific socio-cultural context. Ritual can therefore be secular or sacred, private or communal[13] and it plays a central part in the life of every human being.

> «A Ritual can also refer to a complex performance of a symbolic acts, characterised by its formality, order and sequence which tends to take place in specific situations and has as one of its central goals the regulation of the social order»[14].

Besides all these, it can therefore be observed from the above that ritual involves a series of actions and their basic composition include words, to be read out aloud, chanted, sung and otherwise enacted or performed by moving the body. In rituals there gestures and words are inseparably joined as expression of the inner being. They are also flanked by a number of colour ceremonies, symbols and above all traditions that have been handed down from generations. They consist of stereotyped symbolic acts or interactions and in the ritual, people express their ideologies, opinions, values, norms

---

[10] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual Theory,Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, 14.
[11] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual Theory,Ritual Practice*, 14
[12] C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* preface xi.
[13] Cf. F. H. GORMAN, *the Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology*, Sheffield Academy Press, Worcester, 1990, 14.
[14]F.H. GORMAN, *the Ideology of Ritual*, 19.

and emotions through those symbolic acts[15]. These symbolic acts are carried out in a certain way and order and may or may not be accompanied by verbal formulas.

A Ritual has also been identified as a form of communication where meanings are transported and people are incited to action[16]. This refers to the meaningful dimension of rituals: what is staged as a theatre has a deeper and profound meaning to the human race. The restricted code that is contained in the symbolic acts must be untied for a better comprehension through interpretation. For example, in a typical initiation ceremony for boys among some African societies, the boy is presented with a gun as a symbol that he is the Protector and the bread winner of the family. It is to be noted that the word symbol (symbolic) used in the context refers to any object, activity, movement, relation, event, gesture, spatial unit or temporal unit in which serves as a vehicle for a conception and this conveys a socially meaningful message[17].

From the perspective of Ângelo Cardita, a very close link can be observed between ritual and symbol. He is of the view that ritual is only a symbol in action and that there cannot be a rite without a symbolic dimension or the vice-versa is foreseeable. In his article entitled "*Rito e Símbolo: O Jogo das Transcrições*" he asserts that a rite can be defined as a pragmatic transcription of symbols[18]. In this vein, we can therefore envisage a communicative value in symbols. Hence, it can be deduced that communication is based on the transmission of symbols and the interpretation of these symbols by the receiver of the communication.

According to David Parkin (1991), a ritual may be defined as

> «A formulaic spatiality carried out by groups of people who are conscious of its imperative or compulsory nature and who may or may not further inform this spatiality with spoken words»[19].

In this definition we can deduce three basic distinctive elements of rituals; the fact that it is situated within a physical reality thus it has spatiality, it has a particular formula, which conveys its repetitive character and finally it has a social function in the sense

[15]Cf. O. V. DER HART, *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, 3.
[16]Cf. O. V. DER HART, *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, 13.
[17]Cf. F. H. GORMAN, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology*, 22.
[18] Cf. A. CARDITA, «*Rito e Símbolo: O Jogo das Transcrições*», *Communio* 30:2 (2013) 135.
[19] G. A. KLINGBEIL, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible*, 15.

that it involves a conscious recognition of the ritual act. This goes to buttress the point that ritual is not any involuntary act at all but it is a well-planned and defined act with a particular function to the society[20]. And from the point of Jonathan Smith we cannot leave out the question of space in any meaning discussion on ritual because it serves as one of the pillars of ritual. He considers it as the force that converts action that may elsewhere have no meaning or a different meaning into a meaningful structure that can communicates to participants and observers[21].

From a pragmatic point of view, it can be asserted that it is in rites that rituals are realized. Rite is not simply one type of action among many others but it is seen as the distinctive human action in as much as it is associated with the word as the expression and realization of human beings in the cosmos. It can further be considered as a human action in which human beings apprehend themselves as religious beings[22].

Furthermore, it's worthy to consider the divine nature of rites and rituals; even though rites are defined by their very nature as actions of human beings, in these actions man feels that he is deeply participating in a divine activity. It is also a religious action directed to obtain a divine blessing or favour from some mystical and supernatural power. Ritual in this sense can be seen as an act of a solemn ceremony which is usually an organised expression of prescribed customs of religious beliefs or social behaviour. We therefore see a close link between rituals and beliefs. Hence as Bouyer puts it

> «What a man does in the rite is a divine action, an action which God performs through and in man, as much as man himself performs it in and through God»[23].

This is to accentuate the bond of relationship that exists between Religion and Rites or Rituals and it also explains why ritual is mostly treated synonymously with religion. It is in this regard that Emile Durkheim will not hesitate to argue that Religion is composed of beliefs and rites and whereas beliefs are considered as the representations of the Sacred, Rites on the other hand are determined modes of actions that can be categorized only in terms of the reflection on the Sacred[24]. According to Durkheim, rituals belong basically to a domain, he called magico-religious. His point of view was

---

[20]Cf.G. A. KLINGBEIL, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible*, 15.
[21] Cf. G. A. KLINGBEIL, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible*, 17.
[22] Cf. L. BOUYER, *Rite & Man*: *The sense of the Sacral and Christian Liturgy*, 57.
[23] L. BOUYER, *Rite & Man*, 57
[24] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual Theory,Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, 20.

based on his premise that a critical survey into religion shows one thing in common and that is the classification done between the opposing classes of the Profane and the Sacred[25].

At this juncture, let us attempt an operational definition of Rite or Ritual and this will be employed along the discourses in this essay.

> «A rite or ritual is a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. It is a means of communicating something of a religious significance, through word, symbols and action. Therefore a ritual embodies a belief or beliefs»[26].

The definition given above informs us that it is the doctrine and belief (dogma) of the group that influence what should constitute their worldview on a particular ritual. For instance, the Catholic Church holds the belief that the Holy Eucharist was instituted by Christ on the night before he suffered (Holy Thursday) by offering himself in the form of bread and wine for his disciples. As a matter of its institution, the church proclaims that bread and wine constitute the matter of the sacrament while the words of the institution offered by Jesus become the form. This has a firm base elaborated in the Holy Scriptures (Mk 14:22-25, Matt 26:26-29 &Lk 22:13-20). No one under any circumstance can change either the matter or the form. It is therefore in this context that I emphasize that essential link between ritual and the belief of the group. It is interesting to note that ritual word is powerful and it is of paramount importance. It is again spoken with seriousness and solemnity. This is again repeated every time that ritual is done.

The term rite also applies to some particular liturgical traditions of the church, for instance the Ambrosian Rite, Coptic Rite, and Ethiopic Rite. Even though each rite use symbolic actions and words that has their origin from the Apostles, the forms of those symbolic actions and words are influenced by local churches. This, notwithstanding, they are all legitimate expression of the Liturgy and they make present the same saving power of God and symbolize the same mysteries of Christ. On the other hand, they make visible the catholic nature of the church (universality) and affirm that the church is a composition of people from all walks of life. Whatever is important in all these rites

[25] Cf. O. V. DER HART, *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, 3.
[26] J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford, [2]1991, 131.

is the fact that the core truth of the sacrament should be maintained; for example the use of bread and wine in the Eucharist as indicated earlier.

In conclusion, we can assert that ritual occurs in a unique social space, set aside from the routines of daily life like eating lunch at 13 hours every day and it must also follow at least a prepared scheme and it communicates through symbols, senses and heightened emotions, rather than relying heavily on the use of words. A ritual undeniably marks and assists in the process of change as we shall later in our discussion on the rites of passage[27].

Apart from the usage of the words rites and rituals, we shall very often meet the word Ritualization in the study of ritual. Ritualization can therefore be described as the process in which different forms of behaviour are modified and combined to form a ritual.[28] In this regard we affirm the fact that ritual is a well programmed behaviour and not any reflex action at all. With such a general worldview on rites or rituals, let us now consider the various types that can be identified in a community.

1.1.1 GENRES OF RITUAL

Human societies have come out with various types of rituals and these can be viewed from several perspectives and categories in a given socio-cultural milieu. In this section, we shall consider examples from rituals of main Religions; Christianity and Islam and rituals from the Traditional Religions. In the main religions, it is to be noted that ritual actions are recorded in their respective scriptures whereas the Traditional African Religions have no scripture; it is a religion inscribed on the hearts, in the history and the experience of people whether in the formal or informal presence of the Sacred. Hence the famous assertion of Samuel Mbiti that the African can be classified as notoriously religious[29]. Ritual is an important feature of every religion and there is no religion devoid of one ritual or the other. In the Traditional African Religions for example, rituals, ceremonies and festivals play an indispensable role. It is through these moments

[27]Cf. L. SCHIRCH, *Ritual and Symbol in Peace building*, Kumarian Press, Inc., Bloomfield, 2005, 2.
[28] Cf. M. VERHOEVEN, «The many dimensions of ritual», in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of ritual and Religio*n, ed. T. Insoll, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, 123.
[29] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 27.

that the beliefs of the people are publicly outdoored. Christianity is also a religion embedded with a number of Rituals. These sacred rituals are often called as Sacraments in some of the Christian denominations especially in the Roman Catholic Church and it is defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as the efficacious signs of grace instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with their required disposition[30].

The Church believes that through the ritual elements found in the Sacraments, the faith of the recipients is nourished and strengthened. The faithful are again encouraged to comprehend the sacramental signs manifested in the administration of the sacraments[31]. It is in the light of this the Mother Church never ceases in calling her children consciously to this fountain of faith and grace. In this regard, the Church outlines and approves seven sacraments through which the faithful are called to a life of union with Christ. They are Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony. Even though other Christian denominations do not accept all these seven in totality, it is almost clear that the first three are unanimously adhered to by all but with points of divergences in the doctrines surrounding them.

Islam, on the other hand has a whole lot of rituals centring its belief systems and practices. The Holy Quran of the Islamic Religion stipulates the necessity of observing basically five main rituals or otherwise stated fundamental duties of every well-informed Muslim. In other words, the five fundamental pillars of Islam; the Profession of faith (shahada): a declaration that there is no god except God and Mohammed is his Messenger. Salat (Regular worship), Zakãh (it is also called the poor´s due), Sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan) and the great hajj (Pilgrimage)[32]. Each of these carries its associated rituals and respective ritual elements.

---

[30] Cf. *Catecismo Da Igreja Católica*, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1993,1131, p. 260.
[31] Cf. SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitution de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosantum Concilium, 59», *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964) 97 -138.
[32] Cf. A. H. A NADWI, *The 4 Pillars of Islam*, Islamic Book Trust, Malaysia, 2011,vii

For a better understanding of the Islamic rituals, let us briefly discuss three of the five fundamental pillars listed above. In brief, we shall discuss the Salat (Regular worship), Zakãh (alms-giving) and Hajj (Pilgrimage).

The *Salat* is the five daily prayers of Islamic believers and all who have attained the age of maturity are consciously advised to observe them to the latter. It is believed that they are the spiritual sustenance and panacea prescribed for mankind by the All-Knowing and All-Wise Creator, Allah. These prayers are to be observed at the hours and in the forms, measure and manner laid down by God[33]. As a ritual, each of them carries its own significances. One of the important rituals performed before each of the Salat is the ablution rites or the ritual cleansing (*wudu)* and the covering of the body. Below is the rule governing the ablution ritual and it is to be observed by all.

> «O ye who believe! When ye rise up for prayers, wash your face, and your hands up to the elbows and lightly rub your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. And if ye are sick or on a journey or anyone of you have had contact with women, and ye find not water, then go to clean, high ground and rub your faces, and your hands with some of it. Allah would not place a burden on you,but He would purify you and would perfect His Grace upon you, that ye may give thanks»(Quran 5:6)[34].

As illustrated by the quotation above, it should be understood that this ritual has nothing to do with bodily cleanliness but it is an outward sign showing a deeper meaning. The ritual makes one more fit and worthy to stand before the presence of Allah, the Most Holy One.

Moreover, there is the Islamic ritual called the Zakãh. It is the ritual act of giving money to people who are in great difficulties. It is an obligation for all Muslims to give about 2.5 % of all the money they have left after the purchase of their household basic necessities of life like food and clothes. In other words, it is the giving of a prescribed proportion of one´s income for certain defined charitable ends, It is the giving of a prescribed proportion of one´s income for certain defined charitable ends. This quota

[33] Cf. A. H. A. NADWI, *The 4 Pillars of Islam*, 13.
[34]A. H. A. NADWI, *The 4 Pillars of Islam*, 41.

serves as one´s contribution to Allah and it is also a duty to offer help to other Islamic brothers and sisters. Negligence on the part of any Muslim is seen as a cheat to Allah[35].

Another ritual worthy of noting is the Hajj (Pilgrimage). This is the ritual visit by Muslims to Mecca, the Holy Land. It is obligatory for all adult Muslims who can afford to embark on the journey and who are in a stable condition of health. It is advised that every Muslim should make this journey at least once in a life time. It has again been seen as a rite of spiritual renewal for Pilgrims.

The Islamic worship itself involves a number of prostrations, genuflexions, standing observances and the recitation of several prayers.

In analysing genres of rituals available to our study, a careful attention must be focused on the distinctive difference that can be encountered in religious rituals and non-religious rituals. Religious rituals have their focus on the Sacred as it occurs in many religions while the non- religious rituals do not directly draw attention to the Sacred. Examples of the former include prayer, baptism, pilgrimages and others pertaining to religion that has already been mentioned. We can also cite the coronation ritual observed by some monarchical countries like Great Britain. This is an initiation ceremony in which the monarch of the United Kingdom is formally and religiously crowned and invested with regalia. This ritual ceremony is often performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury who is considered as the senior cleric in the Church of England. What is more, among the Ashanti´s of Ghana, for example, the king begins his reign by being raised and lowered on the Golden Stool (sika dwa). This ritual object is believed to embody the very soul of the Ashanti people and it is only the King who has the authority to touch it. On the other hand the non- religious rituals include birthday celebration, graduation ceremonies, club meetings, presidential inauguration and some greeting observances[36].

An attempt to classify the number of rituals in the world is admittedly a herculean task, but for the purpose of our study, we shall concentrate on some of the fundamental categories of rituals that can be witnessed in almost all human societies.

---

[35] Cf. S. PENNEY, Islam: Foundational Edition, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford, 1999, 14-15.
[36] Cf. M. VERHOEVEN, The many dimensions of ritual, 118.

These may include the below;

- **Personal Rituals**: these are the rituals performed along the life´s journey of the individual. They are also referred to as the rites of life cycle and they mark the transition of a person from one stage to another. In other areas, they are also named as the rites of passage. These rituals include birth, naming, puberty rites, circumcision, marriage, childbearing, eldership, old age, death and Ancestorship[37]. These are often referred to as the rites of passage.

- **Calendrical and Commemorative Rituals[38]:** these are rituals that are basically structured by time. These are rituals performed to mark some important events in the life of the people and the society at large. In Africa for example, there are what we call the agricultural rituals which include the farming rituals that have to do with the earth, the soil, the crops and the seasons. In the agricultural rituals can also be found the rain-making ritual which involves a specialist who prays for the abundance of rain in the community[39]. Besides all these, there are the rituals in making new fields when farmers clear their lands and are about to sow their seeds or start any activity of cultivation on the land., rituals are performed by asking God to remove all dangers and bless the land for a bounty harvest. Even before the farmer plants, there are planting rituals performed and when they are ready for harvesting, the first fruits ritual takes place. These rituals are performed as a form of appreciation to God for the harvest and also to ask Him to sanctify the fruits of their hands against dangers and bad spirits of the earth. And animal rearing also, there are a number of rituals associated such as the milking ritual, stock-keeping ritual and many others[40].

- **Health Rituals:** these rituals pertain mainly to the African Religion. According to the Traditional African way of thinking, sickness or disease has a cause; it strongly believes in the cause and effect hypothesis. Therefore disease is not just considered as part of the physical condition. They have to find out why it occurred and who is responsible. In an attempt to arriving at an affordable

[37] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 127.
[38] Cf. M. VERHOEVEN, The many dimensions of ritual, 120.
[39] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 129.
[40] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 130-131.

conclusion, they resort to the mystical realm. It is therefore common in these societies to find rituals that are performed with the purposes of preventing death, cure ailments and protecting the future against any disease of any kind. Rituals concerning menstruation, miscarriage and birth are also performed[41].

- **Homestead Rituals:** these are rituals that concerns life in the homestead. They are performed at the beginning of a new building project and storage facilities like the barn for storing maize and grains. It also applies to the reception and departure of Visitors to and from our homes. Before one embarks on a journey and upon his return, certain rituals are solemnly performed. These rituals are intended to bring prosperity and blessing upon the homestead and drive out sickness[42].

- **Professional Rituals:** these are classified as the rituals that attempt to cover the activities for which a certain measure of skill and training is essential.

«They are used in connection with hunting and fishing, the making and using of spears, bows and arrows, canoes, the trapping and tracking of animals, and the sharing out of the kill in hunting expeditions»[43].

In the Traditional African society, there are other rituals performed that are linked with formal profession like the medicine men, diviners, oracles, priests, rain-makers, to mention but a few. The objective of the ritual is that in their work, they may encounter a good and high professional standard[44].

- **Political Rites:** By this ritual, we mean to signify all the ceremonial practices that significantly construct, display and promote the power of political institutions. Mention can be made of the transition and constitution of power in the state that are found among Kings, village Elders or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups[45]. According to the point of view of the Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, political ritual actually constructs power and it

[41] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 134-135.
[42] Cf. J. S. MBITI, I*ntroduction to African Religion*, 135.
[43] J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 136.
[44] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 136.
[45] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* 128.

structures interactions between sovereigns and the ruled. Political ritual therefore makes an efficient and tangible use of power[46]. Examples include enthronement or coronation rituals performed to welcome and usher in a new leader to the throne or office.

- Finally **the rites of feasting, fasting and festivals** merit some point of consideration in as much as they are celebrated with millions of rituals. This is where the communitarian aspect of ritual is brought to light because the ceremony often public, comprises of the celebration of a unique and cherished value of the community. In Ghana for example a number of festivals are held and some examples include the *Akwasidae* celebrated by the Asantes in a period of every six weeks and *the Fetu Afahye* also celebrated on the first Saturday in September. There are several activities embedded in this ceremony and mention can be made of dancing, feasting, making offerings and sacrifices, praying, blessing people and above all a high sense of jubilation[47].

1.1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF RITUAL ACTIONS

Ritual has been an integral part of every civilisation and every historical era. As a human phenomenon, rituals in every category however have certain fundamental characteristics. One or two of these can be observed in any every ritual action.

According to Bell Catherine, there are basically six characteristics that can be found in almost every ritual; formalism or formality, Traditionalism, discipline invariance, rule- governance, sacral symbolism and performance[48]. She was of the opinion that in every ritual-like activity, one or more of these features are observed being it secular or religious and public or private.

Formalism is one of the essential features of rituals, however not all rituals action show a high degree of this characteristic. It is mainly associated with the Christian religious denomination where specific texts are written down for certain performances and there are a group of persons with authority to lead such rituals. In

[46] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions* 136.
[47] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 137.
[48] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 138.

the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation for example, in the absence of the Bishop or a Priest, a Deacon cannot under any circumstances administer it[49]. This characteristic of ritual refers to the fact that in rituals there can be found a limited and rigidly organised set of expressions and gestures and there are also a certain code of communication or behaviour[50]. Catherine Bell was certain in her analysis on the formality of ritual and insinuates that when social encounters are organised into various formal acts and events, people are therefore trained to be self-regulating participants. In this way, they will live by a set of moral and social rules that will define their identity in that particular culture[51]. Again in ritual act, there is a formal, limited and rigidly organised set of expressions. This is because the choice of words is often restricted and influenced by the tradition of the people. From the point of view of Maurice Bloch, ritual participants are in some way obliged to use the formal oratorical style that will induce acceptance and compliance more than a challenge to the ritual[52]. It also helps to relate events thereby helping to communicate them effectively and persuasively. In this light it should be noted that several figures of speech are utilised in a given ritual action and this may include proverbs and metaphors. Formal oratorical style favours repetition and indirect rather than direct expressions[53]. We can therefore assert that this oratorical performance relies constantly upon special and formalised genres of speaking that can both seduce and demand an audience´s attention and active participation.

The second characteristic is that of **Traditionalism**. It refers to the fact that in ritual, there is an appeal to the past which furnishes the ritual with historical weight and importance[54]. There is always a consistent repetition of the value of tradition that has been passed on from the ancestors to the present generation and how ritual activities were performed by the previous generation. According to Mircea Eliade, traditionalism is one of the essential and influential characteristics of ritual actions. He asserted that when rituals are given the mythical and traditional basis, they become very authoritative as explanations for how things came into existence. He

[49] Cf. J. MARTOS, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*: Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2009, 83.
[50] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 139.
[51] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 141.
[52] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* 140.
[53] Cf. L. LINDSTROM, "Oratory" in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. A. Bernard, Routlegde Collections, New York, [2]2010, 517.
[54] Cf. J. MARTOS, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*, 84.

was of the opinion that myth helps to narrate how through the deeds of a Supernatural Being a reality came into being and myth also belongs to traditions[55]. Therefore, we cannot study the characteristics of ritual-like activities without the mention of tradition.

Thirdly, we have the element of **disciplined invariance.** It is the aspect that has to do with a careful rehearsed choreography and it is directly associated with the bodily discipline or language. It is the self-control required by the actor. The individual´s mode of behaviour is formed or moulded in order to respond to the role given him with respect to the lay down procedure for the performance of such ritual. This characteristic is essential in as much as ritual is said to be an activity of the community with a reflection on their traditional beliefs and practices. Hence disciplined invariance may be asserted as «A disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control»[56].

Knowing what to do and what follows give the actor a sense of comfort and relaxation to execute his functions creditably. This helps one to enter more deeply into the meaning and objective of the ritual as it unfolds[57].

Rituals are also **rule-governing** actions. This is to say that ritual actions in the community are held or performed according to the rules laid down by the community. They have as their end result the restriction of human actions and behaviours. Actors are expected to respect the decorum set out by the ritual. In the Catholic Church´s liturgy, for instance there are gestures of kneeling, bowing down the head, exchanging of peace etc. The necessity of rules in all sectors of our daily routines cannot be downplayed. It is this unforgettable dimension of ritual that made Frits Staal of the University of California to stipulate his provisional definition of ritual as « a system of acts and sounds related to each other in accordance with rules without reference to meaning»[58] In a nut shell we can say that the experience of

[55] Cf. P. VAN NESS, "Religious rituals, spiritually disciplined practices and health" in *thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. K. Schilbrack, Taylor & Francis, New York, 2004, 261.
[56] Cf. B. CATHERINE, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, 150.
[57] Cf. J. MARTOS, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*, 85.
[58] Cf. R. GANE, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, First Gorgias Press, New Jersey, 2004, 2.

worship can be enhanced by encouraging appropriate behaviour and it can be worsened by inappropriate behaviour[59].

Moreover, there is the element of the **Sacral Symbolism**. This is also seen as one of the indispensable elements in Religion; the relationship between the Believer to his or her object of worship (Sacred). Ritual action is oriented towards the Sacred to whom human beings ask for favour. The presence of sacred, non-profane symbols is found in rituals. According to Bell Catherine;

> «Sacredness is not related to the Supernatural only but also to special activities that evoke experiences of a greater, higher or more universalised reality-the group, the nation, humankind, the power of God or the balance of the cosmos»[60].

The objects to be used in rituals are sanctified through several prayers and invocations.

Finally in every ritual, there is a **performance.** The two words ritual and performance are said to be birds of the same feathers, in the logic that we unless there is a performance we cannot talk about a ritual. Performance can be considered as the deliberate self-conscious practice of the ritual action before the partakers or the audience. For example, the RCIA[61] presents norms and instructions for the formation of Catechumens right from their conversion to the faith to their greater maturity. It also spells out their initiation into the mystery of salvation, the practice of faith, hope and love with their corresponding liturgical rites. However, these are considered as mere instruction on rituals; it is only when they are performed or administered that we can affirm that a ritual has taken place. Ritual is something that is very often staged like a drama in the theatre. There are actors who performed specific roles assigned to them. Rituals require actions. They are a form of behaviour that is done and it is not an abstract entity but a concrete one with an inbuilt meaning. They also have a ceremonial presence, that is to say that they require preparation and a display of various associated elements such as garments, colours, amulets, charms, masks, olfactory materials and many others[62].

---

[59] Cf. J. MARTOS, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study,* 93.
[60] C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* 159.
[61] RCIA is an abbreviation for the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.
[62] Cf. M. VERHOEVEN, *The many dimensions of ritual*, 117.

To conclude, it is worthy to note that several characteristics can be found in rituals of various communities; however the afore-mentioned are the common ones that can be observed from our everyday approach to rituals. Moreover, the actions that constitute a ritual do not have inherent meaning; rather the meanings are determined by the religious and cultural context in which a ritual was enacted. This is to say that it is the tradition of the community that gives interpretation to the actions performed and the symbols used in the ritual.

1.2 A BIBLICAL VIEW ON RITUAL

The term Ritual is one that is not foreign to the biblical language especially in the Israelites world, Judaism and the early Christianity. It can be observed from the significant role played in the religious practices of the people of Israel. In the biblical tradition, a religious ritual provided a means for the faith community to discover, enact and reflect upon its faith[63]. This section seeks to delve into the question of ritual within a synthesized context of biblical and theological studies. I must therefore admit wholly that it is woefully inadequate to this justice to the theme of biblical rituals in some few pages; however, at the end of the section, it is my fervent desire that the essentials with regard to ritual in the Sacred Scripture shall be unveiled. We shall undertake this investigation from two main perspectives or branches; the Old Testament and the New Testament divisions of the Bible.

1.2.1 SOME OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL RITUALS

In the Old Testament times, the notion of rituals was very pertinent in the lives of the people of Israel as it is reflected in a number of ceremonies and rites that took place in their daily activity. Under this section, we shall attempt to underline the idea of Sacrifice, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), The Passover feast and Circumcision rites as found in the Sacred Scripture.

The notion of ***sacrifice*** has been with the human race since time immemorial and several definitions have been propounded to this effect but in most cases stressing the

[63] Cf. F. H. GORMAN JR., "Ritual" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible,* ed. D. N. Freemann, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2000, 1131.

relationship of a worshipper to his or her deity. It can be seen in the following expressions:

> «A religious ritual in which something of value is ritually transferred to the Sacred realm for utilization by a deity. Again it can be considered as a ritual in which a deity or deities is or are offered some form of inducement, rendered humanly irretrievable with a view to some life-effect for the offerer(s)»[64].

In the Ancient Israel world view, sacrifices were classified as blood sacrifices (animal) and bloodless sacrifice (grains/ wine). Human Sacrifice was also somewhat practiced and mention can be made of the near- sacrifice of Isaac by his father when God wanted to test his faith (Gen.22:1-24). Secondly, in Judges 11:31-40, we encounter the episode of the promise of Jephthah and his willingness to sacrifice his daughter, should Yahweh grant his request.

> «And Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh, if you deliver the Ammonites into my grasp, the first thing to come out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from fighting the Ammonites shall belong to Yahweh, and I shall sacrifice it as burnt offering»(Jg 11:30-31).

The first seven opening chapters of the Book of Leviticus present us with a clear picture of the ritual of sacrifice that Israelites engaged in; the burnt offering (1:1-17), The cereal offering (2:1-16), the communion sacrifice (3:1-17), the sacrifice for sin (4:1-35) and some cases of sacrifice for sin (5:1-26). Chapter six discusses the Priesthood and Sacrifice and gives a general vision of the types of offerings and sacrifices already indicated but buttresses with the sacrifice of reparation and the general rules concerning the communion sacrifices. As the proper title of the book depicts, it spells out the massive roles played by the Levite tribe in the offering of Sacrifice (priestly tribe). It has a particular theological significance of stressing the relationship between Israel and their God. The people of Israel practiced the ritual presentation of first fruits and offerings from one´s harvest being it crops or animals. It was to thank Yahweh for the blessings of good harvest and to ask for favour in the approaching year as happens in the Traditional African Societies. This was received as a

---

[64] R. GANE, *Cult & Character: Purification offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy*, Eisenbrauns, U.S.A, 2005, 16.

command from God which needed to be observed to the latter. It was the responsibility of the people to bring offering of what God has blessed them with.

There was also ***the ritual of atonement*** for the whole people or the great day of expiation (Yom Kippur). This was indeed the most solemn Holy day of the religious life and calendar of the Israelites and it was called the Sabbath of Sabbath because on this day, they people were to rest and fast. This was in fact a gracious day each year when all Israelites could experience a new beginning by being cleansed from their sins and restored to the new friendship with Yahweh. The purpose of this ritual is explicitly stated in the book of Leviticus.

> «For, this is the day on which the rite of expiation will be performed for you to purify you, to purify you before Yahweh from all your sins. It will be a sabbatical rest for you and you will fast. This is a perpetual law»(Lev. 16:30-31).

The ritual was meant to purify the people and to make them clean in order to have a befitting relationship with Yahweh. Sacrifices were performed to seek favour and divine mercy from Yahweh and to strengthen one´s relations with Him.

Furthermore, another most famous and essential Jewish Old Testament ***Ritual is the Passover Feast*** *(Ex. 12).* This feast was celebration in the commemoration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from the bondage of Pharaoh, the King of the Egyptians. It was held on the evening of the 14th day of the month (Nisan)[65]. As Yahweh, the ritual elements and their associated symbolic acts were spelt out to the people through their leader Moses and Aaron. A lamb without blemish was to be slaughtered and some of its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of each house where it was eaten. The meat was to be roasted over fire and it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Again it was to be eaten with a belt around the waist, with staff in their hands and sandals on their feet (Ex. 12:1-14).

In verses 13 & 14, some of the ritual elements indicated by Yahweh are explained and this goes to affirm the fact that in every ritual, each act performed has an inner meaning and a message to communicate. In the process of executing the first-borns of all Egyptians, the blood at the doorpost and lintels was to be a sign that an Israelite existed

[65] Cf. J. D LOURENÇO, *O Mundo Judaico em que Jesus Viveu (Cultura Judaica do Novo Testamento*), Universidade Católica, Lisboa, 2005, 129.

in that house hence Yahweh will pass over. This ritual was to be kept and observed from one generation to the other as Yahweh decreed;

> «This day must be commemorated by you and you must keep it as a feast in Yahweh´s honour. You must keep it as a feast-day for all generations; this is a decree for all time» (Ex. 12:14).

It is to be noted that even today this ritual is still celebrated to remind the people of Israel Yahweh´s saving acts on behalf of their community. It is commemorated in such as a way that the Exodus from Egypt becomes a reality. We can therefore affirm that ritual practices provides the platform for maintaining traditional types of beliefs and also assist in the construction of a new faith[66].

A thorough survey into the Old Testament also reveals the ***Ritual of Circumcision*** practiced by the Jewish people and their interior significance. Circumcision can be seen as the removal of the foreskin from the penis. The book of Genesis presents with the ritual of circumcision as was first applied to the entire male born in the household of Abraham. It was seen as one of the requirement to be found worthy to celebrate the Passover (Gen 34:13-24)[67]. One of the biblical narratives on the rite of circumcision can be found in the book of Genesis chapter 17:9-14 where circumcision was considered as one of the essential elements of distinction between Israelites and the surrounding people. Circumcision was seen as a covenant and as a sign of Israel´s identity as the covenant people of God[68]. This is a theme driven from the book of Maccabees (1 Macc.1:14-15, 60-61; 2 Macc.6:10). The importance of this ritual can be found in a number of passages whereby circumcision was used metaphorically. Let's us take a clue from the below biblical passages for a better appreciation of our enquiry.

> «To whom should I speak, whom warn, for them to hear? Look, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen. Look, for them Yahweh´s word is something to sneer at, they have no taste for it» (Jer. 6:10).

> « …you will regard its fruits as uncircumcised. For three years you will count it as uncircumcised and it will not be eaten»(Lev. 19:23-24).

---

[66] Cf. F. H. GORMAN JR., "Ritual" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 1131.
[67] Cf. A. R. BEVERE, "Circumcision" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N Freeman, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 2000, 256.
[68] Cf. A. R. BEVERE, «Circumcision», 256.

From these biblical citations, we underline the fact that one who is circumcised is the person with the capacity to participate in the dictates of God. Hence circumcision made Israel able to participate in their choice as the chosen people of God. Only those circumcised were found worthy in the presence of God. The uncircumcised ears cannot hear the warnings of God and do not walk in the way of the Lord. Therefore to participate in the covenant between God and Israelites, one needs to be circumcised. It can therefore be concluded that the rite of circumcision was a common one among the Israelites and it serves as a distinguishing mark of God´s covenant with his people. To this effect, slaves and conquered people to Judaism had to be circumcised (1 Macc. 2:46). The question of circumcision will be taken up again in our consideration of rituals in the New Testament.

1.2.2 SOME NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL RITUALS

In the New Testament, we come across a number of passages whereby different types of rituals took place whether in the accomplishment of a laid down law or as introducing new sets of practices.

Circumcision as a religious ritual among the Israelites was also carried out at the time of Jesus. As a Jew himself, he was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth (Lk.2:21). This was a ritual performed to keep the Jewish law that a child be circumcised on the eighth day and given a name (Lev.12:2-3). In the N.T, the question on the ritual of circumcision comes to the fore with the Council of Jerusalem about the circumcision of the Gentiles who converted into Christianity (Acts 15:1-35). In the early church, there were different opinions in relation to circumcision; those who asserted the necessity of circumcision and those who affirmed that it was irrelevant.

The Gospel according to Luke presents us with the ***ritual of purification in the temple*** (Lk. 2:22-40). Mary and Joseph took Jesus forty days his birth to complete Mary´s ritual purification[69] and to also perform the redemption of the firstborn in conformity to the laws of Moses. This law stipulates that

[69]*«If a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy, she will be unclean for seven days as when in a state of pollution due to menstruation. On the eighth day the child´s foreskin must be circumcised and she will wait another thirty-three days for her blood to be purified. She will not*

«Consecrate all first-born to me, the first birth from every womb, among the Israelites» (Ex.13:2).

The ritual elements as indicated by the rites were a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeon for those who cannot afford a lamb (Lev.5:7).

The gospel of Mark chapter 1:9-11 also presents us with the first public gesture of Jesus[70] as baptism and this had a cultural significance. Ritual self-immersion was a well-developed and accepted part of Jewish life. Jews were required to undergo ritual self-immersion if there was question pertaining to impurity. Jesus as a Jew went to be baptised but not with the notion of purification but as an observance to the Jew and to lay an example worthy of emulating.

Among other New Testament Rituals include baptism and ***the ritual meal of communion*** (Luke 22:20, Matt26:17-30, Mk 14:12-26) which Jesus, the night before his death celebrated with his disciples. It was not a meal that has the purpose of satisfying bodily hunger but it was a ritual meal with significance; Jesus was going to offer himself as the sacrificial lamb for the remission of sins. In comparison with the Passover meal which was oriented at the liberation of the Israelites from slavery, in the last supper, he offers his very self for the redemption of humanity. However, these shall be analysed in a more detailed and extensive form in our treatment of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation in the chapter four of this dissertation. We will come to appreciate the fact that these rituals contribute immensely to the formulation of our Christian identity[71]

1.3 RITUALS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Having established the fact that rituals are part of the daily routines of human beings in the society as long we remain socio-cultural beings and being acquainted with the necessary tools on its etymology, genres, characteristics, a biblical perspective on rituals for further investigation, let us now consider of what importance are rituals to human

---

touch anything consecrated nor go to the sanctuary until the time of her purification is over»(Lev. 12:2-4).

[70] Cf. J. T. MENDONÇA, «*Vocabulário e Gestos Rituais no N.T: Pequeno Guia para viajar no aberto*» *Communio* 30:2 (2013) 150.

[71] Cf. F. H. GORMAN JR., "Ritual" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 1131.

beings and the society? It is to be asserted that the roles that rituals play in the society cannot be underestimated because our daily life is marked by one ritual or the other.

According to the point of view of Victor Turner in the absence of rituals, religion will die because he sees the former as the platform whereby the new and old members of the society are socialised and educated on their values, beliefs and cultural lifestyle[72]. In rituals, we observe that the values of the group are revealed and implemented at their deepest level. Ritual scenes also serve as a source of education; knowledge of a particular culture is impacted to bystanders through observation and appreciation of the ritual actions.

What is more, from the point of view of a Gestalt Therapist, Frederich Salomon Perls (Fritz Perls), rituals are an expression of the human need to belong and to be part of a group[73]. The fact that no man is an island implies that we all need one another to live and within man there is this inner sense of belongingness which mostly leads us to act and to relate with others in a group. The fact that one accepts to belong to such a group signifies his or her obligation to the social norms set out. It can therefore be deduced that an individual's participation in a ritual act encourages him or her either directly or indirectly to observe the values and the moral standards put forth by the group. The symbolic acts in rituals help people and society to express their ideologies, opinions, values, norms and emotions. Hence within the social environment the contribution of each member is unavoidably needed. Therefore in a typical Traditional African set up, the individual is defined in terms of his relation to the entire community; thus the individual exists only because others exist[74].

Rituals, in another vein, unite human beings with the divine spheres[75]. Through rituals, human beings ask for favours from the God and secure his blessing, purification, protection and prosperity. We can therefore assert that rituals serve as the most profound ways through which the profane world is brought into contact with the sacred. For instance during rituals like agricultural rituals, festivals, pregnancy rituals whereby the family pray for protection for the foetus (unborn baby) and the mother. Mention can

---

[72] Cf. L. SCHIRCH, *Ritual and Symbol in Peace building*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, 2005, 19.
[73] Cf. O. V. DER HART, *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, 3.
[74] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 175.
[75]Cf. T. OESTIGAARD, «Cosmogony», in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of ritual and Religio*n, ed. T. Insoll ,Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, 78.

also be made of occasional rituals which are performed when there is a war, raids, a locust invasion or natural calamity to ask for protection and blessing from the Supreme Being. This ritual significant is mainly witnessed in the Traditional African Society.

Moreover, it also serves to bring together the people as a group thereby strengthening unity and cohesion. Thus it has the social role in securing and maintaining the unity of the group. It also establishes a unified social order principally by reaffirming the sentiments on which the social order is founded[76].

Having studied closely the Ndembu society (a Bantu speaking tribe in the north-west Zambia), and witnessed the collaborative aspect that the inhabitants showed during their initiation ceremonies, Turner asserts that a ritual possesses a politically integrative role thus it is seen as part of the social mechanism that restores the equilibrium and solidarity of the group. He indicated that such ritual actions reveal some sort of animosity and lacunas that exist between members of the community and the social structure respectively. These breaches are redressed and renewal of bonds takes place and solidarity is strengthened[77]. In this regard, I see ritual as "conditio sine qua non" in the development of the human person and the well- being of the society at large.

Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski, one of the famous Anthropologists concentrates the significance that rituals have on the individual emotion. He was of the opinion that some rituals have the practical function of alleviating anxiety, distress, fear, doubt and sorrow[78]. For instance there are magic and agricultural rituals performed in case of a drought and land infertility when the soil is unable to yield fruits and results in anxiety. The rites performed ginger the farmers giving them confidence to undertake extra productive and practical works on the land. In fact, it is believed that their energies are replenished and they work with higher determination. On the other hand, ritual places (sacred places) create a certain form of an interactive environment where various people meet and participate in the life of the community through music and dancing.

[76] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions, 27.*
[77] Cf. B. MORRIS, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1987, 240-241.
[78] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions*, 28.

1.4 INTERPRETATION OF RITUALS

In as much as ritual behaviour is an activity full of symbols and their appropriate meaning is not explicitly revealed at the contact of the eye, a due course for the interpretation of rituals always remains a worthy approach. A Ritual can be seen as a symbol that is acted out. Nonetheless, not all symbols are rituals but all rituals are symbols. In other words, it is only when the symbol is put into its pragmatic meaning that it becomes a ritual. The language of ritual is therefore said to be symbolism. However it is expedient to note that since there are various societies with different beliefs and practices, a specific interpretative model may not be applicable to all. In other ways, no two rituals can be explained from the same perspective. In most of these explanations, language is seen as a necessary factor in the theory concerning the nature of ritual and we can observe that the specific from of language tied to the interpretation of ritual is the language of myth. As seen earlier, myth and ritual play an active and influential role in the life and practice of every religion.

At this juncture, it's worthy to ascertain that in the part of the study, an extensive appeal shall be made to the interpretative models of Dr. Turner Victor that he elucidated after his practical research done on the Initiation rites among the Ndembu Society of Zambia. However, some other studies done on the subject shall be utilised where necessary. An interpretation to any ritual seeks to evaluate why a particular ritual is being performed in a particular time and place.

The symbolism of objects is one of the fundamental theories of Turner Victor with respect to the phenomenon of ritual. He saw symbol as one of the essential elements to be considered in any attempt to interpret a particular ritual. According to him, symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour. On the other hand, it can be seen as «the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context»[79]. Indeed ritual is an activity full of symbols.

[79] V. W. TURNER, *The forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University, New York, 1967, 19.

Turner Victor presents three main models for the interpretation of rituals and symbolic behaviour; ***the Exegetical Meaning, Operational Meaning and the Positional Meaning***[80]**.**

In the first place, the **Exegetical meaning** is the interpretation given by the indigenous actors and this may be in the form of myth, doctrine and dogma. The interpreter may be a layman or a ritual specialist. In this model, indigenous informants are questioned about the observed ritual behaviour[81]. This model is quite similar to the functionalist position as regards rituals and religion; here researchers are interested first and foremost in what the institution is doing, what are the functions, aims and effects of a particular ritual action on the lives of the people and the society. It affirms that every custom has a function for the people and that is what matters and not the etymology of the ritual. It probes into knowing what the benefits of the ritual are to the society. In other words, the nature of a ritual is to be defined in terms of its function in a society. This approach seeks to explain ritual behaviour in terms of individual´s needs and social equilibrium. All these information are obtained in a form of questions and the answers given are basically the exegesis of what happens in the ritual.

Secondly, there is the **operational meaning** which shows how the symbols are utilised in the ritual context. In this category, the investigator takes part in the ritual even though not as an active participant. His main duties will be to observe, watch and ask questions where necessary to clarify areas of doubt. From the questioning, one begins to appreciate the composition of ritual elements and why they are used in a given ritual action. In this approach, the emphasis is placed on what the people or participants do rather than say. It is simply observing the actions of the actors. In this model, high premium is given to the structure and composition of the group performing the rites. The point that each society has its values, beliefs and practices sets in here. Some societies are patrilineal while others are matrilineal. In this light if one observes in a particular ritual activity, the influence of men over women or the absence of either of them or the vice-versa, it goes to show which type of society is performing the rite.

---

[80] Cf. B. MORRIS, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1987, 241.

[81] Cf. HENRI GEERTS, An inquiry into the meaning of ritual symbolism: Turner and Peirce, in. *Current Studies of Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion*, ed. H. Barbara, Rodopi B.V., Netherlands, 1990, 23.

Moreover, the affective quality of the acts expressed during the rites are likewise analysed and considered[82].

Finally, we approach the **positional level of meaning** to the interpretation of rituals and symbols. In this context, the meaning of symbols is determined by its relationship to other symbols in a totality[83]. Symbols possess many senses but it is important to contextualise the meaning of the symbol used in a particular ritual action. In this approach, the importance is not very much laid on the custom of the people but on the symbols utilised in the ritual performance. For example, among the Gurune Tribe of the Northern part of Ghana, during a male initiation rite, the novice is presented with a bow and arrow and the significances are that the man is supposed to defend the family in moments of pain and terror. He is also to serve as the breadwinner of the family through hunting. In this respect, an investigator seeks to ascertain the general notion of bows and arrows and its importance in a particular ritual context.

In another development, there are certain basic criteria that are to be taken into critical condition in any attempt to interpret a ritual from an observational point of view. Even though, some of these have one way or the other being developed in Turner´s analysis, it stands out as a matter of necessity at this moment to underline them for a better appreciation of ritual interpretation. These include a consideration on the required situation and context, form, order and sequence of the ritual, ritual space, ritual time, ritual objects, ritual actions, ritual participants and roles and ritual sound and language[84].

In the first place, an interpretation to a ritual should analyse its ***required situation, context and structure of the ritual***. What is the *"sitzimleben*" of the ritual? Why are they performing the ritual? And what category of ritual is in context; is it an initiation ritual, agricultural ritual, baptism, confirmation and many others. For instance, in case of a drought, in most African communities, rain makers perform rituals to ask for favour from the Supreme Being for an abundant of rains. Therefore, a maximum attention is due in respect for an interpretation of a particular ritual. Closely related to this is the consideration on the form, order and sequence of the ritual; which of the rites come first and why is it so? For example in the administration of baptism, why are the white cloth

[82] Cf. HENRI GEERTS, An inquiry into the meaning of ritual symbolism, 23.
[83]Cf. B. MORRIS, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*, 241.
[84] Cf. G. A. KLINGBEIL, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible* , 3.

and candle given after the immersion in the water and what are their significances. These are the fundamental questions that occupy this stage of ritual interpretation.

In the second place, there is the need to consider ***the ritual objects*** used in a particular ritual. These are mostly determined by the category of ritual concerned and they include ritual drums, sacred stools, and masks for certain festivals, incense, water, wine. Without these, rituals may be meaningful and impressive. They are seen as the external concrete symbols of the internal ideas, beliefs and values of the people. For example, in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, without the material aspect of wine and host (bread) in addition to the form which is the Eucharist prayers, we cannot in any way talk about Mass. An investigator observes and questions, for example what type of object used and how many are presented in the rituals? Therefore, in every ritual, ritual objects serve as necessary condition[85].

Thirdly, in every ritual, there are ***participants with specific roles*** assigned to them. We can distinguish among the ritual elders or leader, their assistances, and if is an initiation rite, the person to be initiated and finally the larger community, on whose behalf the ritual is being performed. The ritual elders are men and women who are responsible for leading the proceedings of the rituals. They are people well-versed in the prayers, words, actions and traditions of the people. This office in most cases may be hereditary as in the case of the Traditional African Religions, however in the world´s main religions, people are specially trained and received vocations to the exercise of this function. In most cases, ritual participants put on special costumes and masks in order to emphasize the positional and character identification.

The ***Ritual Space and Time*** must also be look at in the interpretation of rituals. These are places considered as sacred in the religious sense and most of the ritual activities of the community take place there. It is believed that the communication between the Supreme Being and adherents is more effective at these places. These places serve as the ground for prayers, making sacrifices and major rituals in the life of the community. Ritual Space includes Temples, altars, shrines and graves[86]. In the Traditional African set up, the shrines are the commonly located ones. Ritual time on the other hand, situates in the context of when does the ritual takes place and what is its social

[85] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 141-142.
[86] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 144.

significance to the people, the duration of the ritual, what time and season is the ritual performed? For example, in planting rituals such first fruits rituals and harvest rituals, this aspect becomes evident. At the time for sowing their seeds, rituals are performed to ask God for a fruitful germination of foodstuffs and at the harvest time too, rituals are performed to thank Him for the abundance of food products and to beseech Him for future prospects. The sacrament of baptism even though can be administered at any day or month in the church´s liturgical calendar, it is said to be appropriate during the Easter Vigil to show its significance that in baptism we die with Christ and resurrect with Him. Thus in his death we bury our sins through the immersion into water and rise with Him as new creatures. Therefore as an investigator in ritual interpretation, these details help to ascertain the fundamental basis of the ritual.

Another element worthy of noting is the ***ritual action*** itself; how the events unfold and the various processes that the ritual goes through to the end. It should be noted again the use of symbols which serve to carry home the intended message. In this vein, attention must apart from critically observing the unfolding of the ritual be focused on the symbols used and their acquired meaning through questioning and explanations.

Finally, an interpretation of Ritual must also take into consideration the presence of ***ritual sound and language*** witnessed in the performing of the ritual. The ritual language can be verbal or non-verbal and this depends on the type of ritual in context. In most cases both of them are utilised whether as gestures or as spoken words. Among the Asante, during libation and worship, several names for God are used with distinguishable meanings, for example; *Toturobonso* (Provider of rain), *Tetekwaframoa* (the Great Ancestor) to mention but few. In this respect, to interpret such a ritual, the investigator through questioning must first comprehend the meaning of such language[87].

1.5 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

We can assert that the construction of a specific definition of ritual is a difficult task to realise based on the assumption that rituals are part and parcel of our daily life. However situating ourselves into the realm of symbolic acts with profound meaning, we stand in a better position to propose an operational definition for this dissertation as

[87] Cf. J. P. OBENG, *Asante Catholicism: Religions and Cultural Reproduction among the Akan of Ghana*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1996, X.

already indicated. It can be said that the fundamental building blocks of rituals are stereotypical acts and this must be distinguished from the individual´s habit. Ritual act belongs to the community and its modes and contents of performance are determined by the community based on the type of ritual to be performed.

We affirm that there are several categories of rituals around human beings´ existence in the cosmos. In as much as there are rituals, there are characteristics proper to each ritual. It has also been established that ritual formed an active part in the lives of the biblical Jewish people and in the New Testament; we see Jesus undergoing some of these in the fulfilment of laid down laws.

Having asserted that in rituals, symbols play significant and inevitable role is to affirm the necessity of an in-depth interpretation in understanding its role in the society. Hence, some interpretative models have been studied in this chapter. A greater emphasis was also laid on the significance of rituals to the individual in particular and to the society at large. What is more in this study, our concentration is based on ritual inasmuch as is religious in nature and not just any other ritual like the graduation ceremony and many other secular rituals. We therefore situate ourselves directly into the religious domain. In this we see a very close and intimate union between religion and ritual.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 AKAN RELIGION AND RITES OF PASSAGE

This second chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part presents a descriptive and interpretive knowledge about the Traditional Akan Religion of Ghana. It also reflects on their philosophical and theological worldview; who the Akan people are, a bit of their historical background and geographical location, their basic conceptions on God (Onyankopon), traditional beliefs in the Lesser Spirits (gods & goddesses), Ancestors (Nsamanfo), their cosmological position as well as an attempt to see how some of the aforementioned fundamental theological views reflect in their liturgy (worship). By understanding their worldview, we can be in a better position to introduce the second part which forms one of the nucleus of this dissertation; Rites of Passage. At the end, we shall come to appreciate how rituals influence and continue to impact on the lives of the people. As one of the basic goals, this chapter finds its fulfilment in the Akan proverb «Knowledge is like a Garden, if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested»[88]. This is to illustrate that in our quest to ascertain what constitutes the Akan rites of passage and its importance to the daily lives of the people, it is expedient that we make a thorough journey into the thought of the people with respect to their ethnic group and Religion. The African is said to be incurably religious[89], thus he carries with him his religion wherever he goes. In fact, it is extremely difficult to understand the African without a link to his religion. In other words, the African identity cannot be separated from his religion.

2.1 A GEOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF GHANA

Ghana is an independent state located along the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa. It borders the nations of Cote D´lvoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the north and Togo to the east. The name Ghana was coined from the Great Sudanic Empire of Ghana which existed from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. The name was

[88] N. A. KYEREMATENG OPOKUWAA, *The Akan Protocol: Remembering the Traditions of our Ancestors*, iUniverse Inc., Lincoln, 2005, 19.
[89]Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 27.

therefore linked directly to signify a Warrior King or Nation[90]. This was to convey to the nations how strong and gallant the nation Ghana was. The first Europeans who sailed the coast of Ghana were the Portuguese in the year 1470. This was followed by many others. The country before her independence in the year 1957 was known as the Gold Coast because of the abundance of gold. The trade in gold was the most lucrative commodity at the time[91].

2.2 AKAN PEOPLE

The indigenous people of Ghana can be classified into five major ethnic groups based on language and culture. An ethnic group is formed when groups of tribes come together. An ethnic group can best be defined as «a large aggregate of people or tribes who exhibit a high degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity achieved over a long period of interaction»[92]. A tribe on the other hand is seen as people of different clan backgrounds who form communities. On the basis of the above-mentioned, we can group the ethnic groups of Ghana into the Akan, the Ewe, the Mole-Dagbani, the Guan and the Ga-Adangbe[93]. Each of them can be identified in almost all the ten regions of Ghana. However in this academic research, we shall concentrate on the Akan Ethnic group, being the foundation upon which we shall construct our future chapters on the Rites of Passage.

The Akan ethnic group is the largest that can be seen in Ghana and they occupy practically the whole of Ghana south and west of the Black Volta. This group constitutes about 49.1% of the total population of the Republic of Ghana. The Akans can be subdivided into eleven subgroups, the largest of which are the Asante, the Fante, the Akyem, the Akwamu and the Nzemas. The Akans presently occupy the middle belt of Ghana and extend west to Cote d`lvoire. The Akans speak dialects of a common

[90]Cf. R. GOCKING, *The History of Ghana*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, 2005, 1.
[91] Cf. *Encyclopaedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East*, ed. J. Stokes, InfoBase Publishing Inc., New York, 2009, 245.
[92] N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana*: *their Customs, History and Institutions,* Sebewie De Ventures, Kumasi, 2010, 8.
[93]Cf. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana,* 9.

language also called Akan. The two main branches are the Twi and Mfantse. The former is spoken in the hinterland while the latter is spoken in the Coastal part of the country[94].

Etymologically, the word "Akan" is believed to have been coined from the Asante word "kan (e)" which signifies first or foremost. This was an attempt to illustrate that they were the first settlers of Ghana in order to express their superiority complex over the rest of the people. From the point of view of J.B Danquah the word "Okanni" (an Akan person) ordinarily means a nice, refined, well-mannered man, a civilised or cultured person. All these expressions are oriented at asserting how important they consider themselves to be. This is affirmed in a profound linguistic manner in the Asante proverb «Animguase mfata Okanniba» which is literally translated to mean that disgrace should not be a bedfellow of the Akan[95]. The moral implication of the above-stated axiom is to signify that an Akan should be brave and exhibit good signs of moral comportments that give no breathing space to laziness and other immoral acts.

At this juncture, there are some basic Akan worldviews on the human being that need to be considered for a better appreciation of their religion and rites of passage.

The Akan affirms that the primary constituents of the human being are made up of some essential elements and without them we cannot have a human being. In the first place every Akan born belongs to the clan (abusua) which is the mother´s blood which runs through the baby and it is asserted that one inherits only from the mother at conception. In the Akan land there are eight of these clans which include the Aduana, Agona, and Asona. The clan serve as the basic unit on which the form of the Akan social organisation is built. The individual´s status, inheritance, succession to wealth is determined by this very factor. The word "abusua" is simply the name given in Akan culture to a group of people that share a common maternal ancestor[96].

Secondly, every human being is made up of an "ntoro" which is believed to have its origin from the father of the child. Some scholars translate it as the semen of the man. The "ntoro" is said to be the link between the father and the child and it is the spirit of the father that holds and protects the child. There are twelve of such in the Akan tradition like the Bosommuru and Bosomtwe and they are mostly associated with names

[94] Cf. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana*, 9.
[95] N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana*, 26.
[96] Cf. B. PHILIP, *Ghana*, The Globe Pequot Press Inc., Guilford, 2010, 28.

of rivers in the Akan land. What is more it is this same spirit that determines the child´s level of intelligence, wisdom, knowledge and general character. Among the Akan ethnic group, a child belongs to the "abusua" and not the "ntoro" because the Akan society is purely a matrilineal[97].

Finally, it is also believed that at birth, a child gets the "kra" (soul) from God. It is that which constitutes the individual´s innermost self and very identical with life. The kra is referred to as having a divine existence and it is the living force in man (okrateasefo) which means the living soul. The departure of the soul means death and it is seen as the only moment that the soul takes leave off the body[98]. The Akan traditional thought views the body as the tangible part and the kra as the spiritual part even though there is the belief that there are people with extrasensory capacities to communicate with the kra (soul) of a person. Important to note here is the fact that this concept of the human person has nothing to do with the Platonic dualism where the soul is only seen in the sense of being a prisoner to the body. In the Akan concept, all are important and serve as the essential inevitable elements of the human being. The human being is therefore called upon to live in morally in union with the status quo of the community because he or she is defined in terms of his relationship to the group; we are because I am and not I am because we are.

In another development as a way of improving and maintaining the accepted norms of the Akan traditional culture, certain acts are classified as taboos. They refer to strong prohibitions in a particular culture against certain actions or utterances considered abominable or abhorrent. For example it is a taboo to have sex in the bush not even with your wife, to insult a King or engage in pre-marital sex. Incest is also considered a great taboo. With respect to the initiation rites, an elaborate explanation shall be offered in our discussion on the rites of passage[99].

---

[97] Cf. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana*, 33.

[98] Cf. K. GYEKYE, *African Philosophical thought: An Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1995, 85-86.

[99]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2002, 104.

2.3 AKAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS

The existence and practice of religion by any group of people implies a faith in some basic principles that guide and nourish their innermost quest. In this regard the term belief system means what any people´s religion has fashioned as constituting the sum total of the people´s existence which they are expected to observe in order to preserve the community[100]. The total self-giving to the belief boils from the comprehension, confidence and hope that the adherents have in them. Belief systems are sometimes used interchangeably with the worldview of the group. It is the binding force that puts the people together as one. It is also the basic conception of the people that has informed their tradition from one generation to the next. Every religion has its own belief systems that relate humanity to the order of existence. There are sacred histories and traditions that tend to trace the origin of human beings, the cosmos and all the questions about reality in its totality. This tradition attempts an explanation of the existence of the Supreme Being who is believed by many religions to be the Creator of the cosmos. Christianity for example, from the book of Genesis presents how the cosmos was created by God in an orderly manner. Religion therefore has a close link to belief systems. In this amicable relation between religion and belief systems, Emile Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices[101]. Clifford Geertz also considers religion as:

> «system of symbols which acts to establish powerful pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in man by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic»[102].

The Traditional Akan Religion like all other religions has her basic religious belief systems ranging from a belief in the Supreme Being (Onyankopon) to the Ancestors (Nsamanfo). Several myths are also told in relation to how the cosmos came into existence.

---

[100] Cf. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana*, 88.
[101] Cf. M. D. STRINGER, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2008, 8.
[102] C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, 1973, 90.

2.3.1 ONYANKOPON (SUPREME BEING - GOD)

The belief in God forms the basic fundamental principle of most of the world´s religions. The Akans hold a very solid concept of the Supreme Being. The Akan word for God has various versions and each of them connotes a given meaning. They call God "Onyankopon or Nyame" which signifies that than which a Greater cannot be conceived. Hence God is the one that occupies the apex of the Akan belief systems. However the origin of such a powerful being is not known concretely but as the case may be in Christianity, the Akan religion also has some possible explanations for his existence. Faith in the Akan religion is therefore not one without reason; it is always accompanied by a thorough reflection. Faith complements reason and vice-versa in the Akan worldview. A critical look at the Akan language reveals certain expressions that allude to this fact; expressions like "Gyidi hunu" and Gyidi aenni nkyerease" all purporting to the fact that we cannot have a useless belief (former) and also we cannot talk about belief and faith without explanation (latter). The Akan therefore is one who attempts a daily search in a quest to seeking answers to the realities around him. This shows that our irrationality is not a characteristic of the traditional Akan culture and religion. The question of the relationship between faith and reason in religion formed a greater preoccupation of the former Pope John Paul II and in his encyclical on "*fides et ratio*", he made a lot of contribution to this effect. The Pope expressed in the encyclical the fact that faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth. He again asserted that the relationship between faith and reason was considered to be the sources of justification for religious belief. He therefore advised that the two must complement each other[103].

How then does the Akan come to the knowledge or a belief in God?

The Akan´s knowledge and proofs for the existence of God is fundamentally through observation; it is an empirical knowledge based on perceptual observations by the sense and the reflections he made on those realities around him.

In the first place, the Akan ethnic group like most of the African societies holds the view that the knowledge of God is through reflecting on the universe[104]. This cosmological argument is based on the fact that God is the Creator of the universe. The

[103]Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, Litterae Encyclicae, «*Fides et Ratio*», in *AAS 91* (1999) 5-88.
[104] Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 40.

Akan shares the view that there should be a Greater force that caused the universe into existence. Therefore whatever begins to exist must have a cause. Through observation and reflection on the enormity of the universe, they came to the conclusion that there is a Being who created it and for this they called Onyankopon (God). This is to insinuate the position that "nothing comes from nothing"; to be must have been moved by someone or something. Another reason came about after considering and thinking of the efficacious nature of the earth which produces fruits of all kind for their daily consumption. What they only do is to put the seed on the ground and water it and from nowhere come a great harvest. This made them to arrive at the realisation that there should be a Greater Being who looks keeps and sustains the earth and this Being could be God[105]. In fact the Akan´s argument for the proof of the existence of God is based on the fact that there is a first cause behind the existence of the universe.

The second argument is through the realisation of their limitations and weakness which they saw that they were beyond their mode of imagination[106]. At a point in time through their daily living, the Akan man saw how limited his power and knowledge were in the face of calamities like earthquake, high drainages and sicknesses. To some of these he realised he had no answer or not even an idea of an answer to give. It was through this means that the Akan found out that if life is all about this then there should be a Superior Being somewhere. This can be likened to the contingency argument put forward by St. Thomas Aquinas in his attempt to proof the existence of God. He was of the view that having observed how things come into existence and later on they cease to exist, there would exist nothing that could bring anything into existence. Who can be responsible for their bringing and disappearance? Hence there must have been a time when nothing existed and therefore there must have been a necessary being that caused everything into being and whose non-existence is impossibility. According to him this necessary being is God. His conclusion was that if God did not exist, then nothing would exist[107]. When the Akan man in the face of death and sickness saw how miserable and helpless he was, he began to think of the Supreme Being than themselves and affirmed that this being really existed.

---

[105]Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion,* 40.
[106] Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion,* 40-41.
[107] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, "Summa Theologica", STh.1.q.2,a.3.

The third argument used by the Akans for proving the origin and existence of God was by observing the forces of nature. The belief in God was also spearheaded by the presence of the weather-storms, thunder and lighting, the phenomenon of day and light, the expanse of the sky, moon and stars[108]. The Ancient Akans depended basically on the essential benefits that these heavenly bodies transmit; source of warmth, light, rain, to mention but few. These supernatural forces assisted the people daily in their livelihood. From this experience, the people conceived the idea of a Superior being who lives in the heavens above and provides these benefits for their everyday consumption. Thoughtful of the existence of the Supreme Being, the Akan man began to see himself not as the all in all being but as a being who stands between the heavens and the earth.

We can also analysis this very fact of the existence of God from the several names attributed to him in the Akan language. Some of them are descriptive; thus they tell us who God is and what he does. In the traditional Akan culture names are very essentials and they serve as worthy marks of identification. The Supreme Being in the Akan language has millions of names or attributes with different description but all purporting to the same Being. God in the Akan language can also be called Onyame or Onyankopon and this name stands as a rational, eternal and absolute being. He is seen as the creator of the universe and He is the guiding and operating force behind it. He is again the source of life[109]. These names given to God express the idea of the uniqueness of God and reflect also on some of His fundamental attributes. Even though God is a pure spirit; that is invisible to humankind, He is also omnipresent and He can be felt everywhere. Hence the Akan maxim that "if you want to speak to God, talk to the wind" that is to say that Onyame (Alone, The Great One) can be called upon everywhere and at any point in time.

"Borebore" is also one of the many names given to God but in the context of "*creatio ex-nihilo*" (creation out of nothing), this term seeks to present some problems. The term "Borebore" means an Excavator, Hewer, Carver and Originator and it can also mean Creator[110]. In this regard, the Akans describe the universe as having its architectural origin and design from God (Borebore). This belief indicates that right from conception a child is acquainted with the knowledge of God. Therefore the famous Akan maxim

---

[108] Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion,* 41.
[109]Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion,* 42.
[110]Cf. J.S MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy,* Heinemann, Oxford, [2]1989, 39.

that "obi nkyere abofra Nyame" (nobody needs show God to a Child). The knowledge of God is said to be an innate quality of man[111].

There are still many attributes of God that stem from the Akan Language which help in describing a concept of God proper to the Akan ethnic group. The Supreme Being is referred to "Tweaduampon" (Dependable One), "Otumfo" (The Powerful One), "Odumankoma" (The Eternal One), "Ananse Kokroko" (The Great Spider) and this name connotes that God is the Wisest One[112]. The Akans also have several human images for God; God is described as a Father, as Friend (total trust and confidence in God). Finally they express the nature of God in the following ways;

- God is good, merciful, holy, and all powerful.
- God is all-knowing, present everywhere, limitless and self-existent.
- God is the first cause, Spirit and God never changes[113].

2.3.2 LESSER SPIRITS (ABOSOM)

In the Akan Religious Belief Systems apart from the belief in the existence of the Supreme Being, there is also a firm belief in the presence of divinities and spirits which have been called "*abosom*" (gods and goddesses). The Akan term "obosom" which is the singular form of the former is a composition of two words; "obo" which means stone and "*som*" which signifies to serve (worship). This name came about because the gods worshipped by the Akans were thought to be only stones. This is where the bone of contention between the main Monotheistic Religions and the Traditional African Religions is. However at this point it is expedient to affirm that as mentioned in the earlier section the Akans hold the Supreme Being as the sole creator. He is the Greatest that can be thought of and that these spirits and divinities have their origin from Him. These spirits are therefore subordinate to Him. On the other hand, they serve as the intermediaries between the Supreme Being and the human race. Some people even

---

[111] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of the Ghanaian Culture*, Ghana Publishing Company, Accra, 1974, 9.
[112] Cf. K.A. BUSIA, "The Ashanti" in*African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. C. Daryll Forde, James Currey Publishers, Oxford, 1999, 190-192.
[113]Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 44-53.

describe them as children of the Onyame. They assist devotees to serve and give reverence to the Onyame.

The Akan worldview holds the belief that this created universe is full of spirits and on top of the hierarchy is the Onyankopon who manifests his power through a host of lesser gods and goddesses[114]. These spirits can be grouped into the sky spirits, the earth spirits, human spirits and many others. The spirits serve the Onyame as His ministers and mouthpiece in the cosmos. Adherents attribute personal characteristics to natural objects and regard them as living knowledgeable beings. We can cite some few examples like the spirits of the sun, the moon, stars, rainbow, wind and thunder. There are also natural spirits of the earth such as the earth, hills, mountains, rocks, trees, forests, metals, water, to mention but few. Many are these spirits spread over the traditional Akan land[115].

There is also the presence of the earth goddesses which is considered as the second of importance to the Supreme Being. The local name given to her is "*Asaase Yaa*" ("Asaase" is the local name for the earth and "Yaa" is a female born on Thursday). Thursday is therefore her divinity day. On this day no one can go to the farm because she is the mother of the earth. As such she is also considered as the mother of the dead. In farming rituals, before a farmer begins to till the ground she is invoked for protection against pests and a successful germination of the fruits of the land. During libation a special prayer is said to invoke her maternal intercession[116]. The earth goddess is the animating principle of fertility and should therefore not be polluted. This is the origin of the strong eco-spirituality of the Akans and their morality is essentially derived from this belief system[117]. It is worthy to note that these abosom have no powers in themselves but depend on the Onyame who work through them.

Furthermore, there are also divinities of the waters and these are mainly spirits of the rivers and seas. They perform intermediary role between humanity and the Supreme Being. These divinities have Priests and Priestesses who receive special vocation and are trained to serve as servants of the gods and goddesses. Their basic role is to

---

[114] Cf. K.A. BUSIA, "The Ashanti", 191.
[115] Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 67.
[116] Cf. R. J. GEHMAN, *Biblical Perspectives (Revised Edition*), East African Educational Publishing Ltd., Nairobi, 2005, 191-192.
[117] Cf. C. N. OMENYO, "Akan Religion" in Encyclopaedia *of African and African- American Religions*, ed. S. D. Glazier, Routlegde, New York, 2001, 27.

administer to the needs of those who visit their sacred shrines to ask for favours from the Supreme Being (Onyankopon).

2.3.3 BELIEF IN ANCESTRAL SPIRITS (NSAMANFO)

The belief in Ancestors is one that cuts across all the world's religions but with a different appearance and approach to analyse from their own lenses. Again they take on various names depending on the religion. This belief in the spirits of the dead can only be understood from the perspectives of those who practice it. For example in Christianity especially in Catholicism a similar doctrine is held when the Church talks about the intercession and the invocation of the Saints in the Sacred Liturgy. The church believes that some of their deceased persons lived and died in an exemplary and holy way in their earthly existence and have proven beyond all reasonable doubt through their acts and deeds they believe that they are in an eternal bliss and heavenly glory with the Creator; to these the Church canonise as Saints after a long and extensive process. Even though in the Akan Religion these processes of canonisation do not exist but we shall come to the appreciation that not all the dead among the group are considered as Ancestors; there are certain criteria that one has to meet just as in Christianity not all the dead are considered as Saints. I humbly admit here that this enquiry is not in any way an attempt to equate the Ancestors of the Akan Religion to the Saints of Catholicism but it's an adequate means to comprehend the traditional concept. The Ancestors are only those deceased who in their lifetime lived well and worthy lives of emulation that are venerated as Ancestors after their death.

In Traditional Akan Religion, these deceased persons are called "*Nananom Nsamanfo*". They are dead relatives who have daily contacts with the living and influence their lives in so many instances. It is believed that they have the power to either reward or punish the living and it is a power that has its source from the Onyame as already indicated. To be an Ancestor one has to meet certain criteria; one has to die a natural death at a good, ripe age and must have been given a proper burial and funeral rites[118]. In this sense one who commits suicide cannot be called an Ancestor. With respect to dying a natural death, the Akan believed that those who die through accident and other calamities like

[118]Cf. C. N. OMENYO, "Akan Religion", 27.

drowning are punishments or curse from the gods. In the Akan tradition the principle of retribution and the doctrine of cause and effect were in this perspective at their apex; sufferings were considered as the results of sins one committed. Hence, one dies through a motor accident because he has sinned[119]. The literal interpretation of the story of Job from the point of his friends would have fit well in the Akan Tradition; the suffering of the just was unfathomable by this ethnic group. Moreover, to qualify for an Ancestor, the deceased should have had a wife or married because among the Akans one who dies a bachelor cannot be an Ancestor. It is asserted that being a bachelor while a matured adult is a total refusal to increase the number of one´s generation and for the Akans a woman is highly respected based on the number of children that she gave birth to. In the Ancient Akan society, there was even a tradition of slaughtering a sheep in honour of a woman who gave birth to her tenth child. The rationale behind this tradition is that the Akans were basically people of the land and farming was their means of survival. Since they needed more hands on the land, they encourage couples to give birth to many children.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Ancestors are not worshipped as affirmed by onlooker from other religions. They are rather venerated because in the Akan Tradition, the act of worship is only directed to the Supreme Being.

2.3.4 AKAN WORSHIP (LITURGY)

The belief in Onyankopon (Supreme Being) as the Creator, Sustainer and Provider of the universe gives the Akans the urgency to worship the Supreme Being. Worship can therefore be seen at the centre of their daily existence. His daily life is reflection on how his relationship to the Onyankopon is. The Akan worshipper invokes the attention of the Supreme Being in all facets of his life and worship is considered as one of the unique and solemn moments to get close to Him or approach Him. The idea of worship has existed with the traditional people since time immemorial and it can also be found in all religions. To express a greater sense of intimacy with the Divine, an emphasis is always accentuated on how can one organizes such as spiritual action.

[119]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of the Ghanaian Culture*, 34.

From the point of Catholicism, its importance was best explained by the Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*" where a vivid and elaborate exposition was done in a more systematic manner on the Church´s liturgy. The Council affirmed that Christian worship is enacted by the whole mystical body of Christ head and members[120]. The document also indicates that Christ is always present in this solemn action. On the other hand, the purpose of the Liturgy was affirmed as the glorification of God and the sanctification of the liturgical assembly.

It is this bond of relationships between the Supreme Being and creatures that is emphasized in the daily Akan Liturgical worship. However it is necessary to note that these are two different realities. Their only similarity lies in the fact both worships are directed towards The Supreme Being. Therefore for the Akan «worship can be defined as the means of renewing contact between the people and God or between people and the invisible world»[121]. According to the Akan worldview man inculcates a spiritual outlook on life through worship. He gains a deep sense of consciousness on who he is in the universe or in other words his rightful place in the universe; his basic identity as the caretaker and not the master of it. In moments of great difficulties, the Akan man offers worship either communally or privately to thank Him and ask for His mercy, protection and assistance.

Besides all these benefits, onlookers and investigators due to lack of profound knowledge about the religion have attributed several derogatory words to depict it. Some of these known words include a description of the religion as Fetishism, nature-worship and idolatry. Nonetheless, it is important to note that through the observation of nature the Akan man was able to construct his own arguments for the existence of God. The Akan sees that there are natural objects superior to him and he affirmed their creation or origin to a being that he called the Supreme Being. The presence of divinities and lesser gods are all intermediaries. Through them, the Akan believes he approach the Onyankopon. They have a necessary presence among the people of Akan and we shall see later, how God separated Himself from the people due to disobedience and how the direct and cordial relationship between the Supreme Being and human beings was defamed.

---

[120] SC 7

[121] J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion,* 54.

At this juncture, let us consider how the Traditional Akan Religion approaches God in her worship.

Firstly, it is generally accepted among all Africans that prayer is the commonest way of approaching God. This prayer can be private or communal when done by the entire community. There are also people who perform some prayer rituals on behalf of other people. Mention can be made of medicine men, ritual specialists, rain-makers and many others. At prayers invocations are made to rekindle the communion with the deity and this act can be in a form of incantation or songs. John Samuel Mbiti was of the opinion that in most of the traditional African Societies prayer generally include or has the below format «praise, thanksgiving, a declaration of the state of affairs in which the prayers are offered and request»[122].

An act of prayer may contain several intentions such as protection from dangers, good health and prosperity. One of the essential modes of prayer performed by the Traditional Akan Religion is Libation. It is often referred to as Nsaguo (literally the pouring of drink) because libation involves the act whereby adherents pour down drinks and some prayers are said for particular intentions such fertility of sex (potency and procreativity). In pouring libation the elders recognised the Omnipotence of God, calls on the deities and spirits for intercession. These deities are never worshipped but venerated. In the Akan land what may call for the out pouring of libation include the following; festivals, a national calamity, a war situation, enstoolment of a Chief and during some rituals performed for Ancestors on the sacred stools. Other ceremonies that call for the pouring of libation are child naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriage and funeral rites[123].

The act of libation follows a certain formula which I believe its worthy of appreciation.

> «The beginning of the libation is marked by an invocation addressed in the following order; to the Supreme Being (Onyankopon), to the earth (Asaase Yaa), to earth deities (abosom) and to the Ancestors (Nsamanfo). This is followed by the reasons for the pouring of libation, the petition or request (supplication), a prayer for general blessings and a conclusion»[124].

---

[122] J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 55.
[123] Cf. K. AMPENE, *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Hampshire, 2005, 127.
[124] K. AMPENE, *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana*, 128.

The Supreme Being can also be approached through the making of Sacrifices and Offerings. There is a close link between sacrifice, offerings and prayers. These are the media through which the Akan tradition maintains and restores broken relationships between God, deities, Ancestors and the communities. Whereas Sacrifices involve the shedding of the human blood, animals or birds, offerings tend to illustrate the giving of foodstuffs, water, milk, honey and money[125]. It is to be ascertained that thanks to modern influence and religion like Christianity and Islam, human sacrifice is no longer practice and it has become a thing of the past. In the past each Akan and Ashanti have altars in the homes where sacrifices and offerings were made to God. Like prayers, sacrifice and offerings can also be offered communally or privately by a family or tribe. The communal sacrifice are very often undertaken at the shrines or holy places such as hills, lakes, mountains and many other places whereas private offerings are basically made at homes. Sacrifices and offerings are made when great calamity befalls the people like earthquake, drought, bush burning and several others that pin the local people down to the bone[126].

Sacrifices are offered to ask for favour from the Supreme Being or to thank Him for a request granted. There is also the third dimension that people approached the Supreme Being in worship through singing and dancing.

2.3.5 AKAN COSMOLOGY

In the Traditional African Religions there are mythological expressions based on some historical facts on the origin, evolution and the futuristic destination of the universe. The Akans of Ghana are no exception to this belief held by many. Thus in the Akan Traditional Religion there are stories told about how man and the universe came into existence, particularly, the place of man within creation.

There are several views about how the world came into existence. In the Christian realm the Holy Scripture (Genesis 1-2) records that God created the world in a very systematic manner and how he rested on the seventh day. Science on the other hand has stipulated the theory of the big bang as how the universe came into existence. According to this

[125] Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 59.
[126]Cf. J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 59.

big bang theory, the cosmos expanded from an extremely dense and hot state and continues to expanse today. However one basic question associated with the theory is the issue of who caused the universe into that expansion mood.

Akan Scholars on cosmology postulate fundamentally three essential features; in the first place existence is comprised of visible and invisible realms. Secondly the universe contains a hierarchy of beings, all of which derive from the Onyankopon. Next to Onyankopon in order come the abosom (deities), the Nsamanfo (Ancestral spirit), human beings and physical objects. And finally the universe is endowed with varying degrees of force or power, all of which derive ultimately from Onyame[127]

The Akan cosmology therefore presents the Onyame as the Creator of the universe even though the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex- nihilo* does not make sense in the Akan Religion. According to the Akan, God is "Borebore" which means a Carver or a Hewer. In this perspective, God is a Cosmic Architect of the universe. This presupposes that he created out of something, for example, a carpenter makes a chair from wood; he does not invent this raw material but only made something out of it. Notwithstanding this fundamental doctrine, the Akan Religion hold a very firm belief that the universe was created by Onyame (God) and under no circumstances would a believer deny this basic doctrine on God as the Creator of the entire universe. The Akan cosmology is basically constructed on myth that seeks to describe their version of the creation story. These myths help them to answer the why´s, how´s and the when´s of the existence of the universe. In the Akan thought man occupies the central position in the cosmos and human beings are considered as the union of spirits and physical beings within a physical realm of existence[128].

Another traditional myth also indicates that God created the earth by carving it from an inert substance that had no kra (soul). He created the sky by pressing the earth down and

[127] Cf. C. GRILLS ; M. AJEI, "African- Centred Conceptualisation of Self and Consciousness: The Akan model" in *Counselling Persons of African Descent; Raising the Bar of Practitioner Competence*, ed. T. A. Parham, Sage Publication Inc., California, 2002, 76.
[128]Cf. K. AKOTO ; A. NSON AKOTO "African Cosmology" in *Encyclopaedia of Black Studies*, ed. M. Kete, Sage Publication Inc., California, 2005, 34.

raising the sky up. After that he made all things of the world, animals and human beings[129].

The creation myths in their totality seek to describe the peoples earliest beginnings, how the world they know began and how they first came into it. Again it can be observed that creation myth explains some of the deeply meaning questions held by the society and it also reveals the framework for the identity of the culture. Therefore Peter Sarpong says that;

> «Myths are stories that relate to creation, divine or supernatural beings, their family descent, activities and adventures, whether they are supposed to have caused the world or created mankind. Thus myth is a symbolic projection of a people's hopes, values, fears and aspirations»[130]

In addition to the afore-mentioned, one of the famous myth with regard to the Akan cosmology is presented by Captain Rattray. He states that a very long time ago one man and one woman came down from the sky and one man and one woman also came up from the earth. From the sky God (Onyame), also came a python and it made its home in the river now called Bosommuru. These first parents did not conceive and they had no desire and so conception and birth were not known at the time. One day the python asked them if they had no offspring and on being told that they had not, he promised them that he will cause the women to conceive. As a remedy, he bade the couples to stand face to face, then he plunged into the river and rising up sprayed water upon their bellies with some incantations and then ordered them to return home and lay together. Due to this ritual performed by the python the women conceived and brought forth many children into the world. They all took Bosommuru as their ntoro and each male passed it unto his succeeding generation[131]. Bosommuru is one of the twelve ntoro(s) found among the Akans as already discussed in the previous sections. It is the river Birim in the Akyem area in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

What is more, according to the general African worldview, the work of creation is attributed to God; God created man and placed him at the centre of the universe. He was given the basic task of taking care of it and to remain in harmony with the created order

---

[129] Cf. *African Mythology, A-Z,* eds. P. Ann Lynch - J. Roberts, Chelsea House, New York, [2]2010, 97.
[130] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of the Ghanaian Culture,* 125.
[131] Cf. C. RATTRAY, *Ashanti,* The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1923, 48-49.

and not as master of it; it was a stewardship and not a dominionship role. However, it is believed that man could not maintain this cordial relationship but disobeyed. In this light, God withdrew to the skies to stay far from the attitude of man. This primitive harmony between God and humanity got defaced. This myth on the separation of God from man is narrated in the below sequence; the Akan people have "fufu" (pounded cassava or yam) as their staple food and the instrument for pounding is a pestle in a mortar. In their daily preparation of this food, as the abode of God was in the Skies, the pestle continually hit God who complained on several occasions for human beings to refrain but led to no avail. The Akan woman kept her daily and usual practice and this irritated God who withdrew to live more deeply into the skies where man will no longer have a direct contact with him[132].

Furthermore, the basic components of man according to the Akan worldview provide the clue to how man came into existence. They believe that man is a direct creature from God because at conception he is gifted with "kra" (soul) which without it we cannot identify a human being. It is believed that the soul has a pre-existence and a post- existence. A person is only alive when the kra is in the body but dies when the kra departs from the body and journeys to its source which is God. In our discussion on the rites of passage, we shall come to the appreciation that it is this very reason that makes the Akans see death not as annihilation but a return of the soul its originator.

With such a firm and solid background to the Akan Religion, let us now consider the second part of this chapter which seeks to situate fundamentally on the Rites of Passage.

2. 4. SOME AKAN RITES OF PASSAGE

The human life is marked by certain significant changes; we are conceived, born, grow, mature and die. Fortunately or unfortunately this happens to be the pattern that each human being goes through. Rites of initiation can therefore be seen as fundamental to human growth and development in as much as we remain socio- dynamic creatures. Thus we are not in a static state in our existence and we acknowledge the fact of our finite nature. In other words, we are beings with a definite or limited existence.

[132]Cf.J.S MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 80.

As social animals, each and every one belongs to a society or a community with sets of norms for introducing and socializing new members into the complete communion with the status quo of the larger group. The passages that occur with respect to the individual´s entrance to the group and its associated rites are what have been referred to as the Rites of Passage. The individual´s life in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another[133]. Thus, the Rites of Passages are considered as the ritual events that mark a person´s transition from one status to another. However it is to be noted that not all passages are classified as rites of passage only those that are strictly related to the transition that the individual undergoes in his life with respect to growth be it physical or spiritual. For example, the passage between national frontiers and promotion in school from one stage to the other can not in any way be considered as rites of passage in this academic research.

The idea of rites of passage as a study in sociology and anthropology was led by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in his attempt to study the human behaviour in the area of changing status in social life. He observed that there are millions of ceremonies and rites that mark the transition of people from one status to another in preliterate and primitive or traditional societies. In his evaluation on the situation studied, he published his work "Les rites de passage" (rites of passage) in 1909 in which he established the fact that in these rites of passages, there are basically three stages worthy to know; separation (where the individual is separated from their original status), Transition(it is the movement from the original status to the other accompanied the necessary rites) and reincorporation[134](this is where a new status is conferred on the individual both psychologically and spiritually). This Belgian anthropologist had the desire of studying human action within a broader context of social life[135]. Rites of passage were therefore appreciated as a necessary tool in interpreting changes of status in the human society. A more detailed analysis on these three phases shall be done in our consideration on the fourth chapter entitled the convergences and divergences that can be found on the Akan Rites of Passage and the Christian Sacrament of Initiation.

In the traditional African Societies, these transition moments include conception and birth, initiation and nubility stage (adulthood), marriage and procreation and finally

[133] Cf. A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960, 2.
[134] Cf. D. DAVIES " Introduction: Raising the Issues" *in Rites of Passage*, eds. J. Holm - J. Bowker, Printer Publishers Ltd., London, 1994, 3.
[135] Cf. D. DAVIES , *Introduction: Raising the Issues* , 2.

death and hereafter. The human community has put certain rites and rituals in place as marks of symbolic commemoration introducing the individual from one stage of life to another. Rites of Passages therefore can be seen as those ceremonies that accompany and dramatize such major events already mentioned. They are also referred to as life-cycle or life crisis as they introduce the individual from one state of being to the other. Experience has always taught us that such transition always come in its train with several challenges and responsibilities. It is again to be noted that these rites are culturally oriented[136].

Even though these initiation rites are fundamental to African societies, its performance can not only be limited to this sphere because in the world´s religions like Christianity and Islam there are traces of this practice that are observed however they may take a different nomenclature or form. For example in Christianity, baptism and confirmation are essentially initiatory rites. In Islam, there are rites such as the elaborate naming ceremony and the female genital mutilation practiced by some Islamic countries. In this regard it seems worthy to affirm that initiation rites are fundamental and inevitable in every religion in as much as there are great works done on evangelisation and its subsequent conversion. Initiation is said to connote a body of rites and oral traditions and it also has the aim of producing a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. It can also serve as the medium through which the person is introduced into the community and to be able to observe the do´s and don'ts of the group[137].

In his book "Rites and Symbols" Mircea Eliade distinguishes traditionally three categories of initiation that can be found in almost all societies. The first category is the one that constitutes the collective rituals whose function is to effect the transition from childhood to adulthood. What many have called the rites of passage. This category is obligatory for all members of the society[138].

The second group addresses and introduces one into some extra societies prevalent in the same community which is widely known as the secret society. An example can be

---

[136] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, 94.
[137]Cf. M. ELIADE, *Rites & Symbols of Initiation*, Harper & Row Publishers Inc., New York, 1975, X.
[138]Cf. M. ELIADE, *Rites & Symbols of Initiation*, 2.

cited of the Asafo Companies that existed in the Ancient Asanteland to fight against the enemies to the Asante state. It was the warrior group of the Akans.

Finally, he indicates that the third category is closely linked to a mystical vocation. These are the individuals who receive special calls to serve as medicine men, priests and priestesses in the shrines and there are ceremonies surrounding their initiation into this new religious status of life[139].

Among the Akans, they consider the rites of circumcision and marriage as most important rites of passage. This is based on the fact that the former marks the end of childhood while the latter initiates an individual into the culturally and religiously defined roles of adulthood.

According to Douglas James Davies (University of Durham, England) rites of passage can be elucidated in the following words;

> «Describe the ritual process accompanying the movement of people from one social status to another, as from being a boy to a man or from being a married woman to becoming a mother»[140].

In another development, there are several significances attached or derived from these initiation rites from the individual point of view and the community as well. These initiation rites serve as one of the means through which the values and belief systems are transmitted to the person, thus the institutionalised ethics of the group. In the African Traditional Society set up, the process of socialization is very essential and influential and it contributes to the development of the individual person and the growth of the entire community since the community is the aggregation of individuals. These acquired values are therefore shared for the enrichment and benefit of all societal members.

Moreover, the existence and practice of these rites of passage has also been considered as one of the medium through which the indigenous Akan man ensured social control. Among the Akans for example the puberty rites ensured a mandatory chastity for all the

---

[139] Cf. M. ELIADE, *Rites & Symbols of Initiation*, 2.
[140] D. DAVIES , *Introduction: Raising the Issues*, 1.

youth. The rites of passage changes children into adulthood, childless individuals into parents and living people into ancestors[141].

During rites of passage, the individual undergoes certain instituted rites laid down by the tradition of the community and their basic function is to ensure that the initiate accepts and welcomes the events fully and whole heartedly both psychologically and spiritually. The rites of initiation effects a transformation which should be integral because when one is initiated into the community he is expected from the point of view of moral to observe all societal regulations and the status quo to the letter. As our future elaborations on each of the rites shall reveal, we will come to the appreciation that before the day on which the ritual action is fixed several preparations are undertaken. This is to show how important and worthy these initiation rites are to the human race[142].

Rites of Passage should never be considered as a mere moment when initiates get carried away emotionally and only to return to their original condition after the ceremony but it should be seen as the performance of some rituals that come to effect great changes in the life of the individual. They are believed to link the individual (living) to the spiritual world. In fact the rites are to be observed as natural and necessary part of the community. It´s importance can be expressed as constituting the arms and legs of the human body which without them the human being cannot move about effectively.

Having elaborated a general view on the Rites of Passage, let us at this juncture concentrate on some of the main rites of passage recognised and observed by the Akan Ethnic group of Ghana. These are Birth and Childhood Stage, Initiation and Puberty Rites which result in Marriage and Procreation and finally death and hereafter. However, for the purpose of this academic research, death as rite of passage shall not be discussed. It is in this vein that the adjective “some” has been used to qualify rites of passage. We therefore consider the first two phases; Birth and Childhood, Adulthood and its subsequent result of marriage and procreation. Alongside each of these stages, their respective significances to the individual and the community shall also be established.

---

[141] Cf. R. L GRIMES, *Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage*, University of California Press, Los Angelos, 2000, 6.
[142] Cf. R. L GRIMES, *Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage*, 6.

2.4.1 BIRTH & CHILDHOOD AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

Birth is considered as the first of the rites of passage of the Traditional Akan Religion and as such it involves initiating the infant into the world through ritual in the form of a naming ceremony. Among the Akans it is believed that the child has come from the spirit world with some important message from that world to offer the present generation and his community. He carries with him or her, the message of the ancestors.

Birth logically implies conception and its subsequent period of pregnancy. Therefore birth can be described as a long process which starts from conception to pregnancy and the Akan marks each of these moments with the performance of certain rituals. They attach great importance to procreation as the basis of life and this extends to the point of even looking with disdain on those who fail to assist in increasing the number of one´s relatives or members of the society[143]. This is to affirm that children are highly cherished as gifts to the family and the community at large. It is interesting to note that for a man to be socially recognised it depends on the number of children that he possesses. Hence the birth of a new born child is a moment that evokes great joy, anxiety and a serene atmosphere because a visitor has entered the land. According to John Samuel Mbiti, there is a close relationship between nature (the origin of the child) and the society that welcomes him or her. He therefore asserted that «Nature brings the child into the world but society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person»[144]. This expresses how important the society is in the process of socialisation specifically in the impacting of the cultural traits of the group to the new born.

In addition, among the Akans the most significant ritual that the child goes through is the naming ceremony (edin to). The Akan term "edin" means name and "to" connotes to throw. This ritual is considered as one of the most primitive birth rites that even the modern society has preserved till our present generation.

In Africa especially in Ghana there are different ways of naming a child. Among the Akans it is the father who gives the name to the child through her sister who announces at the ceremony. As said in the first chapter on the basic conception of the human being according to the Akan, it is the father who is responsible for the character of the child;

---

[143]Cf. K. N. KEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana: their Customs, History and Institutions*, 67.
[144] J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 107.

hence he chooses a name that best depicts his life style for the new born child[145]. A baby before the naming ceremony is only considered as a spiritual visitor, he is not therefore seen as a human being because he does not have what identifies him as belonging to the human community. He also ensures that the baby has come to stay.

The naming ceremony is conducted on the eighth day counting from the day of the delivery and it is performed at the child´s father house. However the main celebrant for this ritual action is not the father of the child but an elder chosen by the family depending on the sex of the baby. Besides the name given by the father, there is also the "kra din" (the day, on which the baby was born; if he was born on Monday and is a male, he shall be called Kwadwo and if is a female, Adwoa[146].

The ritual symbols involved in the naming ceremony include;

- Gin (nsa) or palm wine
- Glass cups (nkuruwa)
- A mat (kete)
- Calabash (kora)
- Broom (prae) for female child
- Cutlass (nkrante) for male child
- White Cloth

In the process of the unfolding of the ceremony, the significance of these ritual symbols shall be highlighted.

Early in the morning the child is dressed in a white dress (a sign of happiness and purity that he or she is supposed to manifest in his daily life)[147]. The ceremony begins with an opening prayer by the act of libation and this is performed by an elder who announces the occasion and the purpose of it. Two of such libations are performed with two drinks (gin) provided by the two families respectively. This is seen as a symbol of corporate upbringing of the child. In this libation, the child is then told about the Onyankopon (God), Abosom (Lesser gods & goddesses) and the Nsamanfo (Ancestors). This ritual intercession is to invoke their blessings for the child and the ceremony about to be

[145] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2002, 108.
[146]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation*, 108.
[147]Cf. E. YUSSIF, *The Facet of Black Culture 1*, Trafford Publishing, Bloomington, 2013, 15.

held[148]. It is to be noted that the values of the community are maintained and strengthened through the spiritual rituals, ceremonies and festivals that are observed throughout the year. We can affirm that the Akan culture and its spirituality are one[149]. The culture basically reflects the beliefs systems that the people hold dear to.

After the libation is poured, the child who was kept in-door is then brought out. This is where the actual naming ceremony is going to take place. In the first place, water and gin are poured into separate glasses. The assistant celebrant (the sister or any member from the father´s family) dips her forefingers into the gin and then drops it onto the child´s tongue and says when we say that it is gin, say it is gin (se yeka se nsa a ka se nsa). This symbolic action is to signify that the child should be truthful. This same ritual act is repeated three times but with the second element which is water. When we say that it is water, say it is water (se yeka se nsuo ka se nsuo). The symbolism of these objects is to teach the chid that he should always seek the truth and also to distinguish it from falsehood as she or he tries to live a righteous and ethical life[150]. Due to modern influence and the hard nature of the gin used in the past, nowadays the family chooses any beverage drink without alcohol.

This is followed by the proper naming rite where the child is given a name. He is officially welcomed to the community and can now be called a human being because can be identified as A or B. The child is then presented with a broom or a cutlass based on the sex of the child. These ritual objects symbolize the ethics of hard work, safeguarding and protecting his family when grown up. With respect to the symbol of the broom given to the girl, it signifies that when married she is supposed to be the care taker of the house basically the household chores. This is not to allude that a woman is only restricted to the household. The child is then outdoored and ethical values like obedient, truth and righteousness are proclaimed to him to emulate in his daily community living[151].

The calabash mentioned in the ritual objects is filled with water and throw on the rooftop while the child is laid naked on a mat or a cushion. This water trickles on the

---

[148] Cf. N. A. K. OPOKUWAA, *Akan Protocol: Remembering the Traditions of our Ancestors*, iUniverse, U.S.A, 2005, 26.
[149] Cf. N.A. K. OPOKUWAA, *Akan Protocol: Remembering the Traditions of our Ancestors*, 26.
[150] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation*, 108.
[151] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation*, 109.

child as rain. This ritual action is to introduce the child to rain and to earth[152]. These signify the realities of life.

At this juncture, it is important to add that in the choice of names certain birth circumstances are considered. For example when the child was born at the time when the parents lived in prosperity, the child may be called "Afriyie" (he\she came well). On the other hand if he was born after the father´s death, he may also be called "Anto" which literally means the child did not meet the father.

Furthermore, it is to be ascertained that in some Akan societies, the birth rite can be separated into three major events; the birth of the baby, the naming of the baby and the outdooring of the baby. There are also some delivery rituals performed by some African societies such as the purification, protection and thanksgiving purposes even before the eighth day for the naming ceremony[153]. This type of purification ritual is mostly performed by the medicine men. In fact the birth rite starts from conception thus when the woman becomes pregnant certain rituals are performed to ask for protection for the baby still unborn.

The whole birth and childhood ceremony is then concluded with the ritual of the outpouring of libation.

What importance or benefits can we derived from these twined rites: in fact their significance cannot be underestimated and under no circumstance should they be neglected or overlooked. These ceremonies are very important in the sense that it identifies the child as an individual. It introduces the child to the community and from that moment can therefore be called by name; a name that has a meaning traditionally and he is supposed to live according to the expectation of the name that he or she bears. In the moral sense, the rite of birth and childhood «also marks the beginning of the laying of the foundation for good morals and values such as obedience, respect and truthfulness»[154]. The child may also be named after an elder or an ancestor for him to imitate the good character of the person. Therefore we can say that the choice of naming is as essential as the birth of the child.

---

[152]Cf. E. YUSSIF, *The Facet of Black Culture1*, 15.
[153] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 85.
[154]E. YUSSIF, *the Facet of Black Culture 1*, 16.

2.4.2 INITIATION (ADULTHOOD) & NUBILITY RITES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

As a child grows and develops physically, emotionally and psychologically, there are rites that are performed to usher her from childhood to adolescence or adulthood. This is what has been referred to as puberty stage with its associated traditional rituals. In Ghana, elaborate rites of puberty are mostly performed for the female children especially among the Akans and it is significant in the Eastern and Ashanti regions where they are referred to as "Bragoro" and "Dipo" respectively. In the past it was a form of vocational training given to young girls who are about to enter into maturity since there was no formal education, the girls were taught how to clean, cook and raise up children. The reasons for its female dominance can be explained in the below expression;

> «In the Akan culture women represent beauty, purity and dignity of the society and are guarded against corruption by our traditional laws and regulations. The most lasting impressions about life and the character of children are built during early and formative years which they spend mostly with their mothers. So the Akan believe that they need properly trained mothers with good morals to bring up children»[155].

It is in the light of the above-mentioned citation that it does not become too awkward that the initiation into womanhood is given greater prominence than that of the male.

The initiation and nubility rites among the Akans is seen as symbolizing a rebirth and it comes in train with a number of ceremonies that teach the neophyte about the cultural, social and religious values[156]. The Akan traditional society performs rites of adulthood for the males but not so ritualistically held as compared to that of the female counterpart. In the male initiation rites we can identify two essential acts; circumcision and the offering of the gift of a cutlass and in some cases a gun to the child. It is also because these two symbols are very often realised during the birth and naming ceremonies that is why the Akan does not magnify the male initiation rites if not a further initiation into one of the secret societies like the Asafo Companies. The boy is

---

[155] P. ADDAI-MENSAH, *Mission, Communion and Relationship: A Roman Catholic Response to the Crisis*, Lang Publishing Inc., New York, 2009, 61.
[156] Cf. S. J. SALM ; T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, Greenwood Press, New York, 2002, 128.

encouraged to cultivate the spirit of hard work and to be essentially responsible for his family.

With respect to circumcision, it was to usher the boy into the manhood through the painful moments that he endures at the face of the circumcision ritual. It is only after the performance of this ritual that the boy can now be called a man.

The circumcision ritual is performed by a specialist and as regards the age of the initiate it is not a universally fact. Among most of the societies especially the Akans special attention is given to physical adulthood; the developments as observed on the body-hair on certain parts of the body, growing of beard and there is an outbreak in voice. Another criteria closely related to the physical growth is the sociological adulthood and in this respect we consider how mature and intelligent is the candidate in the areas of personal responsibilities, cleanliness, farming, hunting activities and interpersonal relationships. The basic objective of these signs is to ensure that the adolescent is ready for marriage because once initiated he can freely marry or engage in a sexual activity[157].

What is more, in most of the societies it is observed that the child to be initiated is taken into seclusion for some period of time where they undergo a form of training and specialised in basic home management and learn certain societal values. After this period, they are initiated and reincorporated into the community as full member with rights and obligations.

Unlike the boys, the girls undergo extensive initiation rites in the Akan society. The Akans use the term "Bragoro" and it is a composition of two Akan words "bra" (life) and "goro" (dance). The word therefore signifies a life dance and it is to communicate to her that life is not static and that she has to grow into a new stage of life as a continuation. She receives spiritual and physical transition into the other stage of life where she needs to approach with joy and responsibility. During this period, certain fundamental information are transmitted onto them and these may include sex education, health, folklore, beliefs, farming and the performance of some daily house chores[158]. In this initiation rite too what qualifies one to be a candidate is based on the physical puberty of girls. These are marked by the swelling of the breast, an enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair and above all it is crowned with

[157]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation,* 106-107.
[158] Cf. S. J. SALM & T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana,* 128.

the first menstrual flow[159]. It should be noted that the rites of birth and childhood served as an introduction to the other rites of passage. This is so because without the afore-mentioned rites in the first place, one does not qualify to proceed to the performance of the initiation and nubility rites. The child is supposed to grow out of this stage into adulthood in the physical, social, and religious perspectives[160].

Among the Akans when a mother discovers the first menstruation of her daughter, it becomes a great source of joy not only to the nuclear family but to the whole community. The Queen Mother of the village is informed and after several enquires to ascertain the veracity of the matter whether the girl has really menstruated and as to whether she is physically and spiritually ready for the ceremony. In the normal stream of events, the puberty age is estimated between thirteen and twenty years, however this may not be applicable to all since some menstruate at eleven. Once the Queen Mother declares one as fit for the ceremony, the ritual processes begin which include the following with their respective ritual symbols like an egg and a brass basin filled with water.

- Announcement
- Enstoolment rites
- Libation
- Hair- cutting ritual
- Ritual bath
- Ritual meal

It should be noted that the synthesis on the nubility rites that we are about to embark on takes great inspiration from the Anthropologist, Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Akwasi Sarpong (Archbishop Emeritus of Kumasi, Ghana) in his book " Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti" (1991).

Firstly, there is the announcement made by the mother of the girl at dawn to inform the entire community about what has happened in her household and the event that is about to take place in her vicinity. This is accompanied by poems and songs.

[159] Cf. A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, 65.
[160] Cf. J. S.MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 118.

Secondly it is followed by the enstoolment rite. This is where the girl is made to sit on a stool and rises three times and finally sits on it[161]. This action is basically pictured as the presentation of the candidate to be initiated.

The main celebrant of this ritual is a chosen old woman from the community. It is not any one at all that is chosen; it is the one considered as having an extremely moral character that can easily influence the girl. Next to the seated girl is positioned a brass basin filled with water which will serve as protecting the girl from all evil spirits. It is into this basin filled with water that well-wishers are going to drop their presents in the form of coins (money). It is believed that on this day the girl can be cursed with barrenness by some well- wishers with strong evil spirits and bad intentions, as experience has taught that not all those present are good. There are those sent by devils (sasabonsam) to cause infertility in the girl and disgrace to the entire family.

Thirdly, there is the invocation of the Onyankopon (God), lesser gods and the Ancestors through libation. They thank Onyankopon for having protected the girl and bringing her safely to this adulthood rites. This rite is followed by the presentation of gifts[162].

Again, there is the hair-cutting ceremony. This rite is seen in the economic sense. Before the initiation, the girl´s hair is shaved and a portion is left untouched. It is this hair that the father of the girl is to pay for. He pays a certain amount of money for the hair to be finally shaved and it is believed that this is the money that the father offers the adolescent to begin life[163]. It is also called capital. There is also another dimension or explanation given to this ritual; thus it is believed that the hair is reserved for any future occurrence. The hair is hidden in a crack so that should the girl die outside the home where her body could not be found or retrieved, the final funeral rites shall be performed with the hair representing the corpse.

After the said ritual is performed the girl´s body is the prepared for the initiation. She is ritually bathed, her finger nails and toe nails and she is dressed in a new white cloth and adorned with beads and expensive jewelleries[164]. The river bath mentioned above is done in a flowing river. In addition to these, after the bath and the return to the community, the girl is seated and an old woman puts a boiled egg into her mouth which

[161] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 21.
[162] Cf. S. J. SALM ; T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 129.
[163] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 27.
[164] Cf. S. J. SALM ; T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 129.

symbolizes that she should be fertile so that her lineage shall not be exterminated. In this way, the egg is not to be bitten but swallowed whole. The egg therefore becomes the ritual symbol for fertility to most of the Akan tribes especially the Ashanti. To bite the egg implies that she has bitten the seeds in her womb. She will therefore be barren[165].

The girl is solemnly welcomed by the community into adulthood; there is feasting and merry making amidst traditional music and dance. The initiate receives several gifts on this ceremony and it is followed by the pouring of libation. At the last stage of the ritual, the girl who is now considered a woman performs the thanksgiving ritual by walking around the whole community and thanking all members and partakers.

Let us at this moment consider besides the physical scenes *what importance and significance has the initiation and nubility rites to the individual and the community as a whole.*

The Adolescents are ritually introduced into the community living. In some cultures the initiates are separated from the community for a long period to live either in the bush or in an erected hut in a near-by village. This is where they receive instruction for their future life. This separation has been described as the process of dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn. According to John Samuel Mbiti, this symbolic experience can be described in the following words;

> «The rebirth, which is the act of re-joining their families emphasizes and dramatizes that the young people are now new, they have new personalities, they have lost their childhood»[166].

The rites of initiation and nubility are seen as an introduction and preparation stage to an adult life; sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities.

Mention can also be made of the significance attached to the circumcision ritual. Through the shedding of the blood, a bond is created between the living community and the Ancestors. As an outsider (before the initiation of naming and circumcision), he now enters into a new covenant with the community through his blood. To buttress, the initiation serves as a gateway to the other rites of passage especially marriage. It is also

---

[165] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 34.
[166] J.S.MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 118.

seen as the bridge between the youth age group and adulthood. After the initiation and nubility rites, the girl is considered a complete adult with responsibilities, a period of education for life and above all it bestows prestige on the family[167].

Having established the necessary and efficacious nature of the initiation and nubility rites, let us devote some few lines and attempt to comprehend the adverse effects of who does not go through these initiation rites and becomes pregnant.

Morality is something that is deeply rooted in the life of the traditional Akan and it permeates at all facets of his existence. There are people who assume that it is morality that determines religion and vice-versa in an African society. This is because it is extremely difficult to separate the African either from his culture or from his religion. In this light, there are rituals meant to curtail immorality in the community like engaging in pre-marital sex before the performance of puberty rites.

Any Akan girl child who became pregnant without going through the initiation rites faced disastrous consequences and went through a purification ritual called "Kyiribra". The word is a fusion of two Akan language words "kyiri" denotes "to hate" and "bra" connote to have one´s menses. In this perspective Kyiribra:

> « is therefore the offence which a girl with her accomplice commits by taking seed before the performance of her nubility rites. It can also refer to the ceremony that is performed to ward off the evil repercussions of the sinful act»[168].

The Kyiribra is indeed a pathetic scene but it tries to fulfil its social control mechanism role even if not in totality, it deterred young people who have not gone through initiation to indulge in sexual relationship. The girl is banished from the village to live in the bush and she is escorted out of the village amidst shouting, deriding and hooting. Several purifications are performed to ask for forgiveness from the gods for the abomination that happened before she is led out of the village. She only returns when the sentence period is over and in the Traditional Akan this period lasted for at least until the child is delivered. Hence in the past teenage pregnancy was not a reality in the Akan society. It was really considered immoral and the society abhorred it. Even on a more serious Kyiribra was constituted a taboo among the Akans, therefore all families

[167] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religions*, 93-98.
[168] P. SARPONG, *Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 48.

ensured that their girl child is safeguarded and trained to avoid such a community disgrace.

2.4.2.1 MARRIAGE & PROCREATION AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

Marriage is considered by many societies to be the most important human institution especially among the so-called primitive societies. It is the end product of the second phase (Adulthood and Nubility Rites) of the world-known life-cycle or rites of passage discussed above.

In marriage, new social relations are built and kinship ties are also extended[169]. The puberty rite opens the door for this sacred union. All who have gone through initiation rites are socially permitted to marry. Marriage in the Akan society is not just an individual affair or relates only to the couple but it seeks to cement the ties between families and communities. It is considered as a group union between two matrilineages. Among the Akans, marriage is directly associated with procreation because of the exclusive value put on children in the society. It is the expectation that marriage results in the bearing of children. A critical look at the Akan social relations reveals how childless couples are ridiculed and insulted and above all loose social prestige and honour. The end product of this so called considered miserable marriage is always the dissolution of the union[170].

Moreover, the traditional Akan man believes that from the very beginning of human life, God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children abundantly and that is why in their cosmological position they affirm that from the sky came one man and one woman. All this is to convey the importance of marriage to the human community in as much as the extension of one´s generation is concerned. Therefore in the thought of the Akan, marriage is something which is obligatory for all normal people to undergo. Any person who refuses to marry is termed as one who cuts the flow of generation and humanity and society will always looks down on such a person[171].

---

[169] Cf. S. J. SALM; T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 130.
[170] Cf. P. ADDAI-MENSAH, *Mission, Communion and Relationship: A Roman Catholic Response to the Crisis*, 62.
[171] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religions*, 98.

Furthermore, in the Akan culture, polygyny which is the practice whereby a man can marry more than one woman is allowed. However, polyandry which is the opposite of polygyny is strictly prohibited. A man can marry a woman outside his clan as it happens in most of the African societies. It is to be noted that the Akan marriage is first and foremost a customary marriage.

Among the rituals and symbols involved in the Akan Marriage ceremony includes the following;

- Mate selection
- Formal request (knocking ceremony)
- Interval of investigation
- Satisfaction of both parties
- Schnapps (drink)
- Bride price

The Akan culture observes the below marital processes; the marriage process begins when the man´s family officially request the woman´s hand in marriage from her family. The woman´s family ask for some intervals during which they will investigate the background of the man´s family. On the other hand, the man´s family also undertake a similar project. Basically it situates in the verification of their level of responsibility, the presence of diseases in the family, or to ascertain if there is barrenness in either of the families. It is only after both parties are satisfied, that the pre-marital procedures are allowed to take place.

To buttress the above, once both parties have agreed on the suitability of the couple for marriage, it is now the turn of the groom´s family to pay the bride wealth or price which is very significant in this union of the two families. In the past this could be clothing, labour service in the bride´s family. However presently, money is the widely used medium in paying the bride price. It is to be appreciated that this ritual symbol is not the purchase of the woman. But in the first place it is a symbol that seals this sacred union between the couple and their families. It is again to compensate for the loss of service of the bride groom´s parents. The bride price is indispensable in every marriage ceremony among the Akans. It confers dignity into the love affair between the man and the woman and it serves as an instrument for the legitimation of the marriage. Closely

related to the payment of the bride price is the presentation of gifts like cloth, drinks to the bride´s family. All are aimed at expressing the appreciation of the groom´s family to the bride´s family.

During the traditional marriage ceremony, there is the custom of providing two experienced married person to the newly married couples. Their duty is to assist them in resolving most difficult marital issues that they are bound to encounter. One is chosen from the groom´s family and the other from the bride´s family. However, couples are advised that in a very calmly and possible they should try to resolve all their differences themselves and it is only in extreme cases should they call upon these helpers. These people are traditionally called "otaa aware akyi" which literally means marriage supporters or backers.

Mentioned should also made of the virginity test observed by the Akans on the couple's first night. To prove that the man really married a virgin, a white bed sheet was used on the first night. If the next day it was found to contain stains of blood, that confirmed that the woman was a virgin and this caused for a great rejoicing in the whole village[172] and if the contrary happens, it was a big shame to the bride´s family.

In the Akan society, two major types of marriage can be identified; the normal marriage contract between a man and a woman and secondly the betrothal marriage where a man can seek the hand in marriage of a girl who has not yet performed the "Bragoro" initiation rites or an unborn baby as his future wife. In this last case, the man performs all the necessary functions which include taking care of the child up to when she is matured for the formal marriage ceremony[173].

What is more, during marriage ceremonies, there is also the pouring of libation to invoke the blessings of the Supreme Being, lesser gods and the Ancestors for the couple, for fertility, protection and good health for their offspring. In Africa, particularly in Ghana, several meanings and purposes are attached to marriage and these may include the obligation to bear children and build a family[174]. Through procreation, new members are introduced into the family and it serves as an occasion for reconciling

---

[172]Cf. K. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana: their customs, History and Institutions,* 68.

[173] Cf. K. N. KYEREMATENG, *The Akans of Ghana: their customs, History and Institutions,* 68.

[174]Cf.J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religions,* 104-106.

disputes thereby helping to breach the gap between some family members. There is a total communion and get-together and it gives social and religious status to the couples. They are now recognised fully in the community when they are blessed with the fruit of the womb and the subsequent birth.

2.5 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

This first part of the second chapter has aided us into the comprehension of the general worldview of the Akan Religion especially with respect to their philosophical and theological conceptions. As a group of believers, the Akans have firm belief and confidence in the Supreme Being who is believed to have created the universe. There are several myths from the oral tradition sources that allude to this very fact. Inasmuch as they hold the belief in the existence of God, they attempt to prove by what means is this belief solidly rooted. Their approach to the verification of the existence of God is through empirical method. The Akan has a theistic outlook with regards to the universe.

The Supreme Being lived in a total harmony with humanity until the latter disobeyed the former and the former moved to make his home in the deepest of the skies and from that moment humanity had no direct access to the Onyame except through intermediaries who are also sons of the Supreme Being. These children include the divinities, lesser gods and the Ancestral spirits. They totally depend on the Supreme Being. In the Akan Religion therefore these are not worshipped as researchers and other people think but they are seen as messengers of the Supreme Being.

Through the Akan cosmology we come to the appreciation that it is God who created the universe but for the Akan this word “to create” comes in its train with a lot of difficulties in comprehension. A typical example is from the linguistical analysis on the word “Borebore” which means a Carver or a Hewer. God is therefore seen as a cosmic architect. This is to say that God created out of something and this view is contrary to the Christian doctrine of creation ex-nihilo (creation out of nothing).

According to the Akan Religion, man is a being composed of some basic elements like the body, the kra (soul) which he gets directly from God, the “ntoro” (semen) which is believed to be what he gets from the father and finally the “mogya” (blood) which is the part from the woman. The Religion also holds that worship is an essential means

through which the believer can approach the Supreme Being. It can be done through prayers, libations, Sacrifices and offerings, singing and dancing and many others. At the various shrines, there are priest and priestesses who administer to the needs of adherents.

The Akan Religion presents the below hierarchical belief systems: Supreme Being, Lesser gods and goddesses and the Ancestral spirits.

On the other hand,we can affirm that the second part of the chapter two of this academic work seeks to throw more light on the necessities of the rites of passage among the Akans and Africa as whole. It has illustrated the inevitable nature and roles that the rites of birth and childhood, initiation and procreation and marriage and procreation played in the traditional Akan society and continue to play today. It showed that in all spheres of life the Akan man surrounded himself with millions of rituals that helped to shape the behaviour of the young boys and girls in the society and raised the moral standard of the group. An individual was welcomed from one stage of life to the other with meaningful and significant rituals that tend to transform and translate into his daily life in the community. Inasmuch as physical development was taken into consideration, the psychological and sociological ones were not left in isolation. Even though presently, several factors like the disintegration of the extended family system, the disdain look in these rites and the globalised nature of the modern world have been seen as contributing to the non-performance of these rites, I believe more attention should be centred on how the latter can be studied to suit the modern age and make it appreciative for the young people of today to embrace.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

As presented in the previous chapter on Akan Rites of Passage, it becomes an inevitable assertion that Religion can not be devoid of rites of initiation whether formal or informal set up of rituals. In the arena of Christianity, there are also rites of initiation for new converts. These form part of an entire group of symbolic actions that are performed to usher new ones into the Christian community; they are referred to as Sacraments by the Roman Church and a great deal of importance and priority are devoted to them. From the point of view of Thomas Aquinas, the sacrament can be seen as «*signum rei sacrae inquantum est sanctificans homines*» (signs of a sacred reality inasmuch as it sanctify man)[175]. We therefore come to the appreciation that even though the sacraments are signs witnessed in our everyday life, they have soteriological effects on human beings. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas develops an elaborate discussion on the sacraments; from its divine institution to their efficacy and the question of their necessity for salvation. He was of the view that the sacraments have been instituted by Christ as remedies for the defects arising from sin. In his viewpoints, the sacraments have a supernatural correspondence with various aspects of natural life. He expresses an efficacious relationship between the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church and asserts that:

> «in baptism we are reborn into a new life with Christ; in confirmation, the Holy Spirit strengthens us further; in the Eucharist, we receive help to fight against temptation; in penance, we are healed from actual sins committed after baptism; in anointing of the sick, we receive a balm for the remainders of sins and many other remedies derived from the sacraments»[176].

The Mother Church acknowledges essentially seven main sacraments, not more or less and these are grouped into three main branches according to the belief and the theological significance held for each of them respectively. They are the sacraments of initiation namely baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. In the second group, we also have the sacraments of healing which consists of Penance or Reconciliation and the

[175]THOMAS AQUINAS, STh., III, q. 60, a.2
[176]THOMAS AQUINAS, STh., III, q.65, a.1

Anointing of the sick. The last category is what has been called the sacraments at the service of communion or popularly known as the sacraments of service and these are the Holy Orders and the Holy Matrimony. The church reflects the mystery of God in these seven sacraments:

> «Baptism - his leading to new life, Confirmation - his showing of the power of the Holy Spirit, Anointing - his healing ministry, Penance-his forgiveness of sins, Ordination - his ministry to people´s spiritual needs, Marriage - his faithful love of his bride, the church, Holy Communion - his sacrifice of love»[177].

It is highly important to note that the liturgical life of the church revolves around these symbolic ritual actions.

Even though not all the seven sacraments mentioned above are accepted by other Christian denominations, the first category which is the Christian initiation is basically accepted by most of the Christian Churches, however they may not ascribed the terminology sacraments as done by the Catholic Church. Even with respect to those who hold some of them as sacraments, there are various divergent doctrines surrounding their essential liturgical rites. A vivid example can be cited on the Catholic and Anglican dogmatic conception on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist; whereas the Roman Catholics hold the doctrine of the "Transubstantiation" which seeks to establish the reality that after the consecration, the substance of the bread is changed into the body of Christ and the substance of the wine is also transformed into the blood of the same Christ, the Anglicans, on the contrary, believe that it is rather "consubstantiation". Thus the substance of the body and blood are present alongside the substance of the bread and wine. In this regard, they believe that what is consecrated is just a symbol of the body and blood of Christ and not the real present of Christ visible in the Sacrament[178].

To avoid some misconceptions among the Catholic faithful and for the people of God to faithfully adhere to the magisterium of the Church with respect to the sacraments, the Council of Trent discussed the question of the Christian sacraments, spelt out and

---

[177] R. THOPMSON, *The Sacraments*, SCM Press, London, 2006, 62.
[178]Cf. J. GONZALEZ, *Essential Theological Terms*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 2005, 38.

refuted the contrary views regarding them. The Council finally promulgated certain canons to this effect.

The Council of Trent (canon 1) affirmed that;

> «If anyone saith that Sacraments of the New Law were not instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord, that they are more or less than seven, to wit, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order and Matrimony: or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; let him be anathema»[179].

From the foregoing discussion, three essential dimensions of the sacraments can be highlighted. These are the Christological, Soteriological-Ecclesiological and the Anthropological dimensions of the Christian Sacraments.

In the first place, in the Christological aspect, it seeks to signify the fact that the Sacraments were instituted by Christ himself as confirmed by the Council of Trent. In the perspective of the Soteriological-Ecclesiological sphere, it is established that the sacraments were given to the church for the sanctification of human beings. They are found within the domain of the church and they exist in the church. Finally, there is the Anthropological dimension which situates the sacraments in the context of the visible signs that exist with human beings but have a profound meaning[180]. What are perceptible to the eyes have proper interpretations with respect to its significance. The Anthropological dimension is fundamentally linked to the matter, form and the Minister inasmuch as these are visible realities of the human race. It is important to note that all the sacraments are composed of sensible things and that is why they are also described as visible signs of inward grace. Thomas Aquinas affirms this dimension when he asserted that it is connatural for human persons to acquire knowledge of the intelligible and spiritual through sensible things[181]. That is to affirm that when human elements conversant to the people are used, they can easily grasp their meaning.

In the same circle of the anthropological dimension, we can assert that the matter of the sacrament is that which is utilized in the carrying out of the sacrament, for example water is the matter in the sacrament of baptism whereas the form on the other hand is

---

[179] *The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 53-67.
[180] Cf. B. SESBOÜÉ, *Pensar e Viver a Fé no Terceiro Milénio*, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1999, 579.
[181] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III, q. 60, a. 2.

the prayer, the pronunciations offered by the Minister; I baptise you in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit serve as the form of this initiation sacrament. It is one of the external signs of each of the sacraments. The Minister also serves as one of the signs and he performs what the Church does with the rightful intention. He stands in the person of Christ[182]. The Minister must use the form and matter presented by the church in the performance of the rite. The validity of every sacrament depends essentially on the matter and the form used. The Minister represents and performs the actions of the same church. However, inasmuch as his presence is validly recommended, in administering the sacraments the unworthiness of the Minister does not affect the validity of the sacraments.

The church´s position lies in the affirmation of "*ex-opereoperato*" of Augustine of Hippo. The church sees Christ as the author of the sacraments and that the Minister is just an instrument; he acts *in persona Christi*. Notwithstanding these the mother church affirms that while a proper disposition is necessary to receive grace in the sacraments, it is not the cause of grace[183]. Grace is a gift and it does not depend on human beings piety before God. On the other hand, it is highly recommended that we live lives worthy of our Christian calling. The doctrine of Saint Augustine on the *ex-opereoperato* was born out of his controversy with the Donatist movement who held the belief that the validity of Sacerdotal acts depended on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Minister. They also believed that the unworthiness of the Minister affects greatly the validity of the sacrament. Therefore, a Minister who was not in a state of grace could not administer a valid sacrament[184].

Moreover, Augustine of Hippo was of the view that, the sacraments are signs that have references to divine things. In the sacraments, one thing is seen and another thing is understood. Again what is seen has a bodily appearance but what is understood has a spiritual fruit. According to him, every Christian sacrament must consist of two things; an outward material element (water or bread and wine) and the elucidating word which

[182]Cf. P. HAFFNER, *the Sacramental Mystery*, Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, 1999, 14-15.
[183] Cf. P. HAFFNER, *the Sacramental Mystery*, 14.
[184] Cf. A. E. McGRATH, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Wiley Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Chichester, [5]2011, 405.

accompany it and it is this words that he considered as the means of conveying the inner reality of the grace of God[185].

From the perspectives of Edward Schillebeekx, the sacraments should be seen as a personal encounter with God which is achieved through Christ. He described Christ as the primordial sacrament; in the sense that Christ is the one who guides and leads us in this love with God[186]. We encounter the mystery of God in Christ. He also emphasized the idea that through the sacraments, «Christ continues to be sacramentally embodied in the world through his body or embodiment, the Church»[187].

Having established a general theology on the Sacraments let us, at this moment, consider the first group mentioned earlier, specifically ***the Sacraments of Christian Initiation***.

Initiation is a general human phenomenon which helps the individual to adapt to his physical, social, cultural and religious environment. In the Christian sense, it is the beginning of the Christian life[188]. Christian Initiation was a decisive event in the lives of those who professed faith in God. It was a kind of new birth and in this ritual, candidates were initiated into a new way of life that brought them enlightenment and made them sharers in the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this initiation, it is evangelisation that occupies the first place followed by conversion and it subsequent acquisition of the Christian faith[189]. We can therefore affirm that Christian Initiation is a journey, a process, an extended event. It is also the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent at work throughout the Christian initiation and it is to be appreciated that the sacramental dimension of initiation is not exhausted by baptism. Confirmation, on the other hand, brings a further gift of grace that is strengthened and equipped by the Holy Spirit[190].

---

[185] Cf. D. K. McKIM, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 1998, 119.
[186] Cf. R. THOPMSON, *The Sacraments*, 62
[187] R. THOPMSON, *The Sacraments*, 62.
[188] Cf. D. BOROBIO, *La Iniciacion Cristiana*, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca, 1996, 1.
[189] Cf. I. OÑTIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2011, 7.
[190] Cf. P. ALVIS "Is baptism complete Sacramental Initiation?" in *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological & Pastoral Perspectives*, eds. M. Davie - H. Harris, Church House Publishing, England, 2011, 20.

The first three Sacraments of the Church, baptism, Confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist have been described as the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. This is because by their nature, they seek to establish or lay the foundation of Christian life. It is upon these that the other sacraments are constructed[191]. They are the primary sacraments on which the rest of the sacraments are based. Through them the Christian is brought or infused into the life of Christ, and he is also made full member of the church and begin to share in God´s life through Christ who is the head of the Church. Thus the new- born is welcomed in baptism, strengthened through confirmation and nourished by the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist[192].

3.1 THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Baptism is the first of the sacrament of Christian initiation. Several names are given to this sacrament such as the gateway and door to the sacraments. It is to insinuate that baptism opens the entrance to other Christian sacraments. Etymologically, the word baptism is derived from the Greek verb "*baptizein*" which is the New Testament term for baptise. It denotes the senses of immerse, sink, drown, go under, sink into and bathe[193]. It is therefore the sacramental cleansing of the body and the visibility of pouring water on the body which carries an inward meaning[194]. It is in the light of this that Thomas Aquinas defines baptism as the external ablution of the body, performed with the prescribed form of words[195]. The Sacrament of baptism gives the beginning of a new life as Christians and it inaugurates the individual into the Christian community. It is again the commencement of a new life in the Spirit.

Baptism is theologically believed to blot out original sin and all personal sins. It also makes the Christian sharer of the divine nature through sanctifying grace. We are given new birth and re-birth in the image of Christ[196].

---

[191] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*, 9.
[192] Cf. CIC, 1212.
[193] Cf. D. K. McKIM, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought*, 125.
[194] Cf. C. J. S. MARTINS, *Baptismo e Crisma*, Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa, 2002, 21.
[195] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III, q.66, a.1.
[196]Cf. B. NEUNHEUSER, "Baptism" *in Encyclopaedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner, Burns & Oates, London, 1975, 66.

In the Roman Catholic Church there are essentially two main rites for the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. In the first place, there is the rite for adults, generally known as the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). This rite is reserved for adults who were never baptised as infants and have come now to believe in Jesus Christ as God´s Son and our Saviour. In most cases, such persons receive all the three sacraments of Christian initiation. Secondly, there is the rite for those who receive baptism as infants. This is what has liturgically been called infant baptism. These infants are baptised based on the faith of the church and their parents. They are only admitted to the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation when grown up[197].

In baptism, the Neophyte is incorporated into Christ and they are made members of God´s people, receive the forgiveness of sins and are made adoptive children of God. Baptism can also be seen as sacrament of faith[198]. The Christian is enlightened and illuminated by the Spirit to respond to the Gospel of Christ.

Baptism is also considered as a sacrament of incorporation[199]. The new convert is welcomed into the Church to observe and maintain the beliefs and practices. In this regard, it is essential to buttress that baptism imprints an indelible mark on the believer. Hence it is one of the sacraments that cannot be received twice.

Baptism is also seen in its dimension of the cleansing water of rebirth. The Neophyte is sealed in the name of the Trinity and it is due to this very reason that the Trinitarian formula is applied and serves as the form of this sacrament and it is therefore essentially inevitable. In addition, in baptism we participate in the paschal mystery of Christ; through his death and resurrection. By immersion, we die with Christ in the waters of baptism and rise again to new life with Him. This doctrine on baptism as death and resurrection with Christ is best expressed by Saint Paul´s theology on baptism (Romans 6:3-4). This Pauline doctrine of being buried with Christ in baptism is elucidated by Joseph Fitzmyer in the following:

> «The baptismal rite symbolically represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ: the convert descends into the baptismal bath, is covered with its waters and emerges to a

[197] Cf. W. MICHAEL, *The Sacrament of Baptism*, Order of Saint Benedict, Minnesota, 2011, XIV-XV.
[198] Cf. D. POWER "Baptism and Confirmation" in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. F. S. Fiorenza - J. Calvin, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, [2]2011, 509.
[199]Cf. D. POWER, Baptism and Confirmation, 510.

new life. In that act, one goes through the experience of dying to sin, being buried and rising as did Christ»[200].

Moreover, baptism like any of the Christian Sacrament has Christological institution as was extensively promulgated by the Council of Trent. This is to Say that the sacrament of baptism was instituted by Christ himself. We can therefore establish a biblical foundation for this divine institution both in the Old and New Testament respectively. However, it should be noted that in the Old Testament there were no explicit mention of baptism but rather several rituals that were performed and that prefigured what shall come to be termed as baptism in the New Testament biblical references.

In the Old Testament times, rites of washing, ablution and ritual purification occupied an integral part of the daily of the Jews. Circumcision was seen as one of the most important covenant ritual action. It was a seal and sign of the covenant between God and Abraham which extended to the whole household of Abraham and his descendants. The idea of circumcision provided the remedies against original sin and actual sin (the people involvement in the worship of other gods which were considered as idolatry in the sight of Yahweh). However, it did not confer any grace on the individual as understood today of baptism. It rather gave an admission to be part of the covenant people and as a mark of a true Jew. Circumcision required of the Jews an acceptance and obedience to the sanction and commandments of God and it therefore became the badge of membership within the covenant community (Gen.17, Lev. 26:41, Deut. 10:16). All these passages support the idea that circumcision was indeed an active ingredient and a requirement for the covenant between God and Abraham. Hence it was not just seen in its exteriority. In other words, it was not just a mere physical and external practice, it carried with it several significances as mentioned above[201].

Furthermore, another prefiguration can be said of the primordial waters on which the spirit of God hovered (Gen. 1:2), the episode of Noah and his family who were saved in the flood (Gen.7:17-20), the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19-22) and Naaman who also undertook a ritual bath in the River Jordan to cleanse his leprosy (I Kgs 5:1-4). In the already-indicated passages, we appreciated how the element of water

[200] J. FITZMYER, "The Letter to the Romans" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1990, 847.
[201] Cf. G.R. EVANS, "Masters and Disciples: Aspects of Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament in the eleventh and Twelfth centuries" in *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Interpretation*, ed. M. Saebo, Hubert & Co., Gottingen, 2000, 243.

served a purification purpose and it was very important in the lives of the Jews. Again several savings works were worked in their midst by the same water.

Baptism as a Christian Sacramental doctrine wipes away our sins and aims at the individual's incorporation into the community[202].

In the New Testament times, there are also references on baptism and its divine institution. The Christian Sacrament of baptism is believed to have its roots in the missionary commission of the Risen Lord. «Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit» (Matthew 28:19).

Another reference can be deduced from the midnight conversion between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn 3:4) where Jesus highlighted the need to be born again to enter as a prerequisite to enter the Kingdom of God. In the passage, Jesus underlined two essential concepts in the baptism ritual; to be born of water and the Spirit.

In the first episode, we encounter the institution of water baptism as an initiatory rite of the new covenant community. The Acts of the Apostles also contain passages where the followers of Jesus proclaimed the Good News and the power of it invited people to the conversion of heart and they received baptism by water (Acts 2:42). A critical look at the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch as narrated in Acts 8:26-40 shows one of the many cases in the New Testament where a new convert to Christianity was baptised immediately. It should be noted that Luke does not identify the Eunuch as a Gentile convert or a God-fearer but rather a pious man according to the Jewish faith who was returning after a pilgrimage from Jerusalem. Having being enlightened by Philip on the passage from Isaiah 53:7-8, he received baptism. He was incorporated into the fellowship of those who have experienced Christ´s salvation blessings. The Christian initiation can therefore be seen as long pattern of learning and conversion, living and dying in imitation of Jesus Christ[203].

With respect to the Sacraments Divine Institution, Thomas Aquinas, in his Summa Theologica emphasizes that the sacrament of baptism was instituted by Christ himself when he went to John the Baptist for baptism in the Jordan. But he also adds that the

---

[202]Cf. P. HAFFNER, *the Sacramental Mystery, 28.*

[203] Cf. G. KLEIN, *Pastoral Foundations of the Sacraments: A Catholic Perspective*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1998, 40.

obligation of receiving this sacrament was only proclaimed to mankind after the passion and resurrection[204]. This is to affirm the idea that according to him, the ritual act of baptism was only visualised after the paschal mystery.

3.1.2 THE BAPTISMAL RITUAL AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

In this approach, we shall consider the various ritual elements used in the sacrament of baptism, their significances and the liturgical ritual processes involved in administering the sacrament. For any sacrament to be validly performed, the right material and form should be utilized.

In the case of the sacrament of baptism, the matter recommended by the Church is water while the form is the liturgical words attached to the material during the reception of the sacrament. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults states affirms the below as the formula to be used in conferring baptism in the Latin Church «Name….I baptised you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit»[205] and the most suitable place for conferring this sacrament is also the baptistery or in the Liturgy. This is where Christians are reborn through the waters of baptism and the Holy Spirit[206].

Thomas Aquinas describes the form as the principal cause of the sacrament, the Minister as the instrumental cause and the material as the principal sacramental effect[207]. It is the composition of the matter and the stipulated form that produces the effect.

There are certain requirements or essential ritual elements used in the liturgical rite of the sacrament of baptism and in every celebration of baptism[208], the following can be observed:

- Water
- Oil of Catechumens
- White Garment

[204] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III, q. 66, a. 2.
[205] RCIA: General Introduction 23, p. xvii.
[206]RCIA: General Introduction 24-25, p. xvii.
[207] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III. q. 66. a. 3,4,5.
[208] Cf. RCIA 209, p.123.

- Lighted Candle

In the first place, in ritual baptism, ***water***[209] is the element divinely appointed to be used. The natural substance of water which is the ordinary medium of washing and cleansing comes to have several layers of meaning when used in the sacrament of baptism. The use of water is to signify by its physically purifying nature, what is the spiritually purifying nature of baptism by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the physical substance of water comes to gain a spiritual meaning when used in this sacrament. The form of the baptism has also been varied; immersion in water or pouring water over the head or simply sprinkling with water. However in the Roman Catholic Church, the pouring of water over the head has been widely used and accepted as the baptismal rite[210].

The Council of Trent (1543-1563) without hesitation and to also affirm the importance of water as an element in baptism (canon II) asserted that;

> «If anyone says that true and natural water is not necessary in baptism and therefore interprets metaphorically the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, "unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit" (John 3:5): let him be anathema»[211].

Hence, water is the matter of the sacrament of baptism. It is precisely this element which reveals to us the meaning of baptism and this revelation becomes evident in the blessing of the water and its accompanied prayer. The blessing of water as indicated in the baptismal rite itself shows in its totality all the dimensions and significance of the baptismal mystery, it's truly cosmic content and depth[212]. In this blessing prayer[213] over the water, we can identify the relevance of baptism, its relation to the world. The mystery of water therefore gives its real context and significance. Water is seen as the principle of purification, of cleanliness and therefore of regeneration and renewal[214].

---

[209]RCIA: General Introduction 18, p. xvii.
[210] Cf. K. OSBORNE, *the Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1987, 14.
[211]*The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 53-67.
[212] Cf. A. SCHMEMANN, *of water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism*, St. Vladimir´s Seminary Press, New York, 1974, 38.
[213]Cf. RCIA 210, p. 123.
[214] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*, 107.

Secondly, what can be said about the theological significance of the ***Oil of Catechumens?***The Catechumens are anointed during the baptismal liturgical rite. The purpose of the anointing is intended to strengthen and invigorate those neophytes entering the faith community[215]. The symbol of the oil is to give extra vitality to the new converts who are preparing to be fully incorporated into the body of Christ[216]. Theologically the Catechumens are anointed so that they can have the strength and wisdom to understand the Gospel and to accept the challenges of Christian living. It helps the new-converts to turn away from evil, temptation and sin[217]. According to an old tradition, Athletes and Footballers before starting each game massaged their bodies with oil which was to help them warm up and limber the muscles before exercise, others also indicated that the oil protected them from sun and other elements. Again, the oil prevented the loss of bodily fluids during the exercise[218]. The new-convert is also prepared spiritually for the journey ahead through the anointing with the oil of Catechumens. This is to make him strong enough to encounter the Christian life amidst temptation and disheartening situations.

What is more, the anointing is also seen as a sign of the royal priesthood of the baptised and that they are now numbered in the company of the people of God[219].They are therefore to live according to the standard and dictates of their new state of life and as belonging to a new family of Christ. Through the sacrament of baptism, the new-convert is anointed to share in the three roles of Jesus; Priesthood, Prophetship and Kingship. The anointing also signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit[220] which will be deepened at the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.

The third ritual element in the sacrament of baptism is the ***white garment***[221]which is put on the head of the newly-baptized. This ritual object symbolizes the state of life of the new-convert. It depicts him as bright in body and radiant in soul. The newly baptized is clothed with the tunic of righteousness and he or she receives a new life and abandons the old. This is the newness of the life which God gives having died and resurrected

---

[215]Cf. RCIA 98-99, p. 52; RCIA 214, p. 125.
[216] Cf. R. GAILLARDETZ, *Theology of the Diaconate: The State of the Question*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2005, 17.
[217] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación,*109.
[218] Cf. S. MILLER, *Ancient Greek Athletics*, Yale University, New Haven, 2004, 15.
[219] Cf. RCIA 98, p. 52.
[220] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación,*109.
[221] Cf. RCIA 214, p.125.

with Christ through baptism. There is an obligation therefore for him to live a life that corresponds to the language of regeneration and rebirth[222].

In the Pauline Epistles, especially to the Galatians (3:27-28) and Colossians (3:9-13), Paul expresses that the white garment is a symbol of dropping off one´s old distinctions and prejudices and now the believer must put on Christ. Hence, he emphasized that we should let our garments indicate a new state of life that has been attained through baptism. The newly baptized receives a new dignity as fully initiated into the body of Christ. The white garment given to the newly-baptized is not a prohibition to wear other cloths but it is a sign of the glorious resurrection to which we are born through baptism. It is also to designate and convey to him or her that purity of life without stains which he ought to observe after baptism. The white garment is indeed a mark of a new exigency required of the life of the baptized. The Neophyte is now dressed in the clothes of salvation and a tunic of joy.

Finally, the newly baptized is presented with a ***lighted candle*** after the imposition of the white garment[223]. It is a symbol that represents the sacrament of baptism as an illumination[224]. He or She is supposed to brighten the universe with his life. Thus the newly baptized becomes a light to the world by sharing in the life of Christ who is the light of the world. The Neophyte is encouraged to walk as a child and participant of the light of the world who is Christ. The baptized experiences a spiritual awakening, becoming a child of God and becomes a witness of the Gospel. The newly baptized is to handle the Good News with care and proclaim with their exemplary lives what he or she preaches. He or she is supposed to transmit the light to the world[225].

With such a foundational analysis on the ritual elements in the sacrament of baptism, let us now consider the ritual process for a better appreciation of their theological significances. This seeks to highlight the liturgical ceremonies that are celebrated in the presence of the worshipping community. Even though baptism can be celebrated on any other day and season of the church´s liturgical year, it is highly recommended that it is

---

[222]Cf. G. WAINWRIGHT, *Doxology: A Systematic Theology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980, 414.
[223] Cf. RCIA 214, p. 125.
[224] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*,109.
[225] Cf. J. PUGLISI "Rites of Baptism in the Catholic Church: A Theological-Pastoral Commentary" *in Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. T. Best, Liturgical Press, Saint John Abbey, Minnesota, 2008, 36.

celebrated on the Easter Vigil to reflect the profound significance that the sacrament has to offer the human race. On Easter vigil, we celebrate the victory of Christ over sin and death and the new incorporation of new members through the waters of baptism into the Body of Christ[226]. On this same night, the Church celebrates the mystery of God´s saving love for his creation. The material womb of the church also brings forth new life as the elect are reborn of water and the Holy Spirit[227]. Those who have prepared themselves through the catechumenate come officially to be received into the Christian community.

According to the Roman Rite for administering the Sacrament of baptism for adults, the sequence of the ritual process (Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults)[228] is as follows;

- The Presentation of the Elect.
- Litany of Saints
- Benediction of water
- The renunciation of sin
- Profession of faith
- Then comes the actual baptism
- This is followed by the explicative rites
- A. post- baptismal anointing (this rite is performed when confirmation does not follow immediately).
- B. Giving of a white garment
- C. Giving of the lighted candle.

Even though the Code of Canon Law does not explicitly indicate the age to be considered as an adult in relation to the sacrament of baptism for adults, the age due is those who have attained the age of discretion or reason. It is generally accepted as the one who has actually completed the seventh year of his life[229].

---

[226] Cf. J. PUGLISI "Rites of Baptism in the Catholic Church, 33.
[227] Cf. J. PUGLISI "Rites of Baptism in the Catholic Church, 34.
[228] Cf. RCIA 218-243, pp. 127-206.
[229]Cf. K. HART "The Sacrament of Confirmation" in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law (commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America*), eds. J. Beal - J. Coriden, Paulist Press, New York, [2] 2000 (cc. 879-896), 1073.

In another development, there is the question of Sponsors or Godparents of which the Code of Canon Law[230] indicates in the sacrament of the baptism. Notwithstanding the fact that it is not a necessity and does not add any value or grace to the sacrament, it is highly recommended if possible for any Catechumen to have one at baptism. His or Her duty will be to assist the new-convert in his Christian journey. The Sponsor must have a moral value and must be willing to fulfil the function of accompanying the Neophyte. He must be a Catholic, confirmed and also receives the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and must be one who lives a life worthy of emulation.

As regards the Minister for this sacrament, the Code of Canon Law stipulates that «The Ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, a presbyter or a deacon without prejudice to the prescript of Can.530§1». However, in the case of necessity, any person with the right intention to do what the church does can licitly confer baptism (Can.861§2).

3.1.3 EFFECTS OF BAPTISM ON THE CHRISTIAN

Our investigation on the sacrament of baptism will be woefully inadequate if we fail to acknowledge some of the effects that this initiatory sacrament has on the Christian.

The first effect of baptism is ***the remission of sins***. This has been considered as the essential of baptism[231]. Through the grace of baptism, all our sins are forgiven and we are given the grace to fight future temptations. This forgiveness of sins includes both original and actual sins respectively[232]. It is grounded on this premise that the church teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation and hence advocate the need for infant baptism. In this light, the Sacred Congregation for the doctrine of the faith published a general instruction on infant baptism and affirmed this urgency when it stated that:

> «Baptism which is necessary for salvation is the sign and the means of God´s prevenient love which frees us from original sin and communicates to us a share in divine life. Considered itself, the gift of these blessings to infants must not be delayed»[233].

[230] Cf. CDC, 872.
[231] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*, 177.
[232]Cf. RCIA, General Introduction 5, p. xv.
[233] SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI «*Instructo de Baptismo Parvulorum*, 28» in *AAS72* (1980) 1137-1156.

The question of infant baptism has been a problematic one since the beginning of the church. However, the church has always fought hard to retain this inevitable ritual action. St. Augustine of Hippo, on his part, reaffirms the sacramental effect of baptism as the remission of sins in his controversies with the Pelagians. The Pelagians denied any concept of inherited sin (original sin) contracted from Adam by regeneration such that even newly born infants require baptism for their forgiveness of sins[234]. Saint Augustine, on the other hand, defended by asserting the fact that all human beings are born with the guilt of Adam´s sin and therefore there is the need for baptism to wipe away this inherited sin for us to be free from guilt. This applies to even newly born infants[235]. The children are baptised in the faith of the Church and it is faith that is proclaimed for them by their parents, who represent both the local church and the whole society of saints and believers[236]. However, with respect to children who die at birth without receiving baptism or those who die as infants without been baptized, the Mother Church holds the belief that they can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. indeed the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved and Jesus´ tenderness toward children which caused him to say; let the children come to me, do not hinder them, allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who die without baptism[237].

Therefore, through the water of baptism, our sins are buried and we rise again to new life in Christ. This belief in the remission of sins is also expressed in the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople when the church proclaims that «we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins». The purification of the human being through baptism is one of the chief effects of this sacrament to the Christian[238]. It is the effect that the element of water accompanied by the right liturgical words and by the grace of God realises in the life of new converts.

Secondly, the sacrament of baptism incorporates the baptized into Christ. Through baptism, a new life is created between Christ and the Neophyte. This is because to be baptized is to choose Christ as the only Saviour. We can see in Jesus´ resurrection a

---

[234] Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE*: Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, ed. B. Ramsey, New City Press, New York, 2011, 73

[235]Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE*: Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, ed. B. Ramsey, 79.

[236] Cf. S. WOOD, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2009, 174.

[237] CIC, 1261.

[238] Cf. I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*, 178.

definite human victory over sin. Baptism serves as the first and basic contact with the body of Christ and it is said to incorporate us into Him. This is indeed a typical Pauline theology on Christology and Soteriology when he affirms in first Corinthians 6:15 that «do you not realise that your bodies are members of Christ´s body; do you think one can take parts of Christ´s body and join them to the body of a prostitute? ». In baptism we are configured in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Thirdly, through baptism, we are regenerated in the grace of the Holy Spirit and by this cleansing through the baptismal water; we participate in the life of the Trinity. In this doctrine of regeneration, the action of the Holy Spirit in the baptized comes to light. Literally the word regeneration means rebirth but in this context it stands to connote the passage through the waters of death and burial to a new birth from the womb of the same waters[239]. It is also believed that through baptism, we become alive in the Body of Christ by giving one rebirth in the Spirit. The sacrament of baptism is indeed essentially one in water and in the Holy Spirit whereby our sins are washed away and we are endowed with the baptismal grace[240].

What is more, through the sacrament of baptism, we are also given adoption to Divine Sonship. Our regeneration in the Spirit and the incorporation in the Son make us also children of the Father[241]. Baptism also endows us with a new birth for which Jesus´ encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:3-7) helps to elucidate what is meant to be born again in water and in the Spirit.

We can conclude that the sacramental effects of baptism enumerated sufficiently prove that baptism is necessary for salvation inasmuch as we remain Christian.

---

[239] Cf. L. WALSH, *Sacrament of Initiation: A Theology of Rite, Word and Life*, Liturgical Publications, Chicago, [2]2011, 118.
[240] L. BERKHOF, *Systematic Theology* (New Combined Edition), Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, 477.
[241] Cf.I. OÑATIBIA, *Bautismo y Confirmación*,180.

3.2 THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The Sacrament of Confirmation is the second in the order of the rites of Christian Initiation[242]. In confirmation, there is an intensification of our baptismal relationship with Christ[243] and our identity as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father is deepened and brought to a new level of maturity. It is a sacrament that confirms our maturity in the Christian life. Therefore, those who receive it are considered old enough and ready to live very active and responsible Christian life. But this is not to assert that the candidate is wholly matured in the Christian Faith. It is only an extra strength that he or she receives to continue the Christian journey. In this sacrament, the baptized is given a spiritual sealed[244] as a witness for Christ and fortified by an increase of the Holy Spirit´s gift to fight, suffer and die for the faith. Confirmation is to be seen in the broader perspective with the other sacraments of Christian Initiation. In this respect, the Catechism of the Catholic Church making reference to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, asserts that for the Sacrament of Confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed[245].

In this sense, we can identify that in the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized is given a further degree of participation which completes and perfects what was begun in baptism. The baptized is endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to duly fortify them and are specially sealed to bear testimony to their faith[246]. Having being confirmed in the Christian faith, the baptized is therefore seen as an evangelizer of the Good News. Thus all the Confirmed have an inevitable role to participate in the mission of God entrusted to the Church of which the Holy Spirit is the Protagonist. It is in this perspective that Pope John Paul´s Encyclical on *"Redemptoris Missio"* establishes the fact that;

---

[242] Cf. RCIA 215, p. 125.
[243] Cf. CIC 1285.
[244] Cf. CIC 1293.
[245] Cf. CIC 1285.
[246] Cf. A. CARDINAL DULLES "The Theology of Worship: Saint Thomas" *in Rediscovering Aquinas and the Sacraments: Studies in Sacramental Theology*, eds. M. Levering - M. Dauphinas, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2009, 9.

> «The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the church´s mission. His action is preeminent in the mission ad gentes: as can clearly be seen in the early church: in the conversion of Cornelius(Acts 10), in the decisions made about emerging problems (Acts 15) and in the choice of regions and people to be evangelized (Acts 16:6)»[247].

The Sacrament of Confirmation is also described as the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. There are biblical foundations that seek to affirm or allude to this fact or where the active intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believer cannot be underestimated. These passages include the following; at the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon him to energise Him for his pubic ministry which he was about to commence as recorded in all four canonical gospels (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23 and John 1:29-33).

Moreover, in the same New Testament, we can highlight the relationship between pneumatology and confirmation as can be appreciated in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus undertook his public ministry (Luke 4:14). Jesus also taught concerning this divine spirit that God the Father will give to those who ask (Luke 11:13)[248].

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit fills the Christian and enables him or her to actively participate in the mission of the Divine Trinity. The book of the Acts of the Apostles portrays a vivid and active involvement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian community. Mention can be made of the sending of Peter and John to Samaria (Acts 8:14-17) when the apostles heard that Samaria has accepted the Word of God[249]. In this episode, we see the gesture of the laying on of the hands to invoke the Holy Spirit upon these new converts. The Holy Spirit is therefore bestowed on the baptized more actively during confirmation.

Moreover, the Pentecost episode (Acts 2:1-11) is considered by the Church as the principal Scriptural foundation for the sacrament of confirmation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church throws more light on it when it states that on several occasions Christ

---

[247] IOANNIS PAULI PP II, « Litterae Encyclicae "*Redemptoris Missio*" 21» in AAS 83 (1991) 268-340.
[248] Cf. H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992, 122.
[249]Cf. H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 124.

promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday (by breathing upon the Apostles) and then more strikingly at Pentecost[250].

The church highlights this special connection between Pentecost and the sacrament off confirmation. Thus the apostles were strengthened and confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this symbolic action of confirmation, the baptised renew and strengthen their ultimate union with Christ. Confirmation is therefore a sacrament of commitment to the Christian faith. It is also one of the three sacraments that imprint a character on the soul and by the help of the Holy Spirit the baptised is able to continue on the path of Christian initiation[251].

In his Apostolic Constitution "Divine Consortium Naturae" on the Sacrament of Confirmation, Pope Paul VI calls the attention of all Christians to always see the sacrament of confirmation as an initiation that is placed between baptism and Confirmation. He further explains that in baptism, the Holy Spirit is truly given, but in confirmation he is given in a way that completes the grace of baptism and impacts a special strength upon the recipient[252].

In addition to these, confirmation puts a seal on baptism as Pentecost completes Easter[253]. Baptism is rooted in the paschal mystery (death and resurrection) whereby the sacrament of confirmation is founded on the mystery of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost. This inaugurated the life of the church and the mission of the apostles and believers in faith.

3.2.1 THE ESSENTIAL RITE OF CONFIRMATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

In this context, the essential rite refers to the matter and the form of the sacrament of confirmation. These are the two basic rites which according to the validity of a sacrament cannot be denied in addition to the minister. In the case of confirmation, the bishop is the ordinary minister or a presbyter provided with the faculty in virtue of

[250] Cf. CIC 1287.
[251] Cf. CDC, 879.
[252] Cf. PAULUS PP. VI, «Constitutio Apostolica de Sacramento Confirmationis *"Divinae Consortium Naturae"*», in *AAS63* (1971) 657-664.
[253]Cf. P. HAFFNER, *the Sacramental Mystery*, 72.

universal law or the special grant of the competent authority also confers this sacrament validly[254].

The rite of Confirmation contains fundamentally two main ritual actions;

- Anointing of chrism on the forehead done by the imposition of the hand (the matter of the sacrament of confirmation).
- The words prescribed in the approved liturgical books that accompany the imposition of the hand and the chrism (the form of the sacrament)[255].

It is important to note that the chrism to be used in the sacrament of confirmation must be consecrated by a bishop even if the presbyter administers the sacrament[256]. As indicated earlier the ordinary minister is the bishop but can also delegate a presbyter to administer it and it is validly just as an administering by a bishop.

3.2.1.1 THE MATTER AND FORM OF THE SACRAMENT

The gesture of laying-on of the hands has been seen both as a symbolic and formal method of invoking the Holy Spirit during the sacrament of confirmation, baptism and the Holy Orders. The three catholic sacraments that imprints a character an indelible mark on the believer and they cannot be repeated in any way. A fundamental biblical reference can be cited on the role played by Peter and John in Samaria as seen earlier. The episode shows a close relationship between baptism and the imposition of hands and how the two sacramental gestures complement each other with respect to the integration of new members into the Christian community. Therefore the laying-on of he hands is a symbol to invoke the Holy Spirit to bless, sanctify and to transform the baptized according to His own dictates and instruction[257]. We can also make reference to the incident of Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7), when he prayed for the disciples in Ephesus to receive the Holy Spirit. This ritual gesture of the laying-on of the hands

[254] CDC, 882.
[255] CDC 880§1, Cf. CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA, *Celebração da Confirmação* 9, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1991, p.23.
[256] CDC 880§2, Cf. CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA, *Celebração da Confirmação,* 10, p.24.
[257] Cf. D. BOROBIO, *La Iniciacion Cristiana*, 401-402.

comes to play. By the laying-on of the hands, Paul prays the Holy Spirit on the believers in Ephesus.

In several indigenous and modern cultures, the act of laying-on of the hands is a fundamental symbol which signifies power and it is a transmission or communication of an active force to a person. It is this force that enables the Christian to convey the Good News of God through words and deeds to the entire universe[258].

The laying on of the hands can also be seen as an authentic spiritual experience in the life of the church. In this ritual gesture we contemplate the God of Messianic gifts and the emptiness of the person before God seeking for salvation. In the sacrament of confirmation, the fullness of divine communion reaches the faithful so that the Christian might proclaim to the world the mighty works of divine love[259].

Intimately related to the divine gesture of the laying on of the hands is the anointing with chrism and these two divine ritual actions are referred to as the matter of the sacrament of confirmation. Even though, this gesture is done in baptism, in confirmation it takes a profound completeness of the rites received in baptism. It is an invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the Christian. The Christian is called into an active participation in the community and it is also a symbol that he or she should be firm in his life as a Christian.

In the Old Testament times, the gesture of anointing indicated a sense of divine election by God and a consciousness of belonging to Him. It emphasised the need that the person has been chosen by God to undertake a specific mission from God. In this gesture of anointing, the person is put in a position of docility before God[260]. Saul was anointed by Samuel (I Sam. 10:1) as the King of the Israelites and later on David also was anointed at God´s command (I Sam. 16:1-13). The anointing of a King was also seen as being carried out at God´s instructions and on His behalf as the Anointer is always being accompanied by divine phrases such as «thus saith the Lord God of Israel I anointed thee over Israel» (2 Sam. 12:7, 23:1).

---

[258] Cf. V. CODINA; D. IRARRZAVAL, *Sacramentos de Iniciação*, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis, 1998, 124.
[259] Cf. A. DONGHI, *Words and Gestures in the Liturgy*, Liturgical Press, Saint John´s Abbey, Minnesota, 2009, 50.
[260] Cf. A. DONGHI, *Words and Gestures in the Liturgy*, 52.

In the sacrament of confirmation, the Christian is anointed so that he or she becomes united in Christ to operate and cooperate in the salvific mission of God entrusted to the Church. By this anointing they share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit which he or she is filled so that their lives may give off the aroma of Christ[261].

There is also the sign of the cross made with the chrism on the forehead of the candidate which signifies the seal that the Christian receives at confirmation. A seal that makes him or her united to Christ and to also serve as a sign of protection[262].

The form of the sacrament of confirmation, on the other hand, is the prayer which accompanies the matter and as such it is the prayer laid down in the liturgical rite of confirmation. No minister for convenience sake can use his own wording.

The Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation (1971) emphasized the fact that upon several consideration on the ritual formula for confirmation, the church now resorts to the following as the correct wording instituted by the mother church; «…be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit». The magisterium of the church believes that the words contained in this expression fundamentally expresses the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself and it also calls to mind the outpouring of the spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 38)[263]. According to Pope Paul VI in this very apostolic constitution, the reception of the Holy Spirit as a gift concerns the very essence of the rite of confirmation. He was of the view that the gift of the Spirit was given in a special way on the day of Pentecost and from then on the spirit-filled church has brought new members into this life by preaching that leads to baptism[264].

---

[261] Cf. CIC, 1294.

[262] Cf. V. M. GOEDERT, *O Sacramento da Confirmação: Perspectivas Teológico - Pastorais*, Edições Paulinas, São Paulo, 1989, 36.

[263]Cf. PAULUS PP. VI, «Constitutio Apostolica de Sacramento Confirmationis *"Divinae Consortium Naturae"*», in *AAS 63* (1971) 657-664.

[264] Cf. G. AUSTIN, *Anointing with the Spirit: The Rite of Confirmation: The use of oil and chrism*, Liturgical Press, Saint John´s Abbey, Minnesota, 2004, 46.

3.2.2 EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION ON THE CHRISTIAN

Even though, along this academic investigation, several effects of this sacrament have been mentioned, it is highly essential to highlight the major sacramental effects of confirmation on the Christian.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is in the first place, the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who first hovered on us at our baptism now comes in a special and fuller way perfecting and increasing the gifts and graces of baptism. Hence, we can assert that the Sacrament of confirmation strengthens and confirms the grace of baptism.

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we can deduce the following sacramental effects of Confirmation in the life of the Christian; in the first place, this sacrament unites us more firmly to Christ and it also increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us. What is more, it renders our bond with the Church more perfectly and it also gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ. Above all, by the strength obtained in this sacrament we shall be in a courageous position to further proclaim the name of Christ boldly and never to be abashed of the cross[265].

In addition to these, it can be appreciated that in this sacramental mystery, the symbolic ritual communicates acceptance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit whereby initiates pledge their lives to God by accepting a share in the mission of Jesus Christ according to the spirit´s fullness of life[266]. The faithful is also enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit in his or her path of the Christian initiation such as wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. They adhere to the dictates and promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps them to bear testimony to Christ by word and deed.

---

[265] Cf. CIC 1302-1303.

[266] Cf. J.J MUELLER, *Theological Foundations: Concepts and Methods for Understanding Christian Faith*, Saint Marys Press, New York, 2005, 195.

3.3 THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST AND ITS NATURE

The Eucharist is seen as the sacramental act which completes the sacrament of Christian Initiation[267]; an initiation which begins through the celebration of water baptism as a symbol of purification and a deepening of this Christian faith through confirmation to the Altar table. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is one of the few Christian Sacraments that is accepted and practiced by most of the denominations. However, it has varied degree of doctrinal elucidations and nomenclature. It has been called the Holy Communion, because by the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, we are bound together as one people in faith. It is also called the Lord´s Supper (I Cor 11:20-21) as Christ laid down this sacred ritual on the night before His passion and instituting it as a Sacrament to the church. The Eucharist has also been called by others as the breaking of bread (Luke 24:35, Acts 2:24) as was practice by the Early Christians and finally as the table of the Lord[268].

St. Thomas Aquinas describes the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist as the summit of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments[269]. In the Eucharist, the faithful comes into a real communion with God and are enriched by the power and strength that flows from the blessed body and blood of Christ.

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is offered to those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood[270] by baptism and configured more intensely and deeply in a spiritual union to Christ by confirmation, with an active participation in the Lord´s own sacrifice among the community of believers by means of the Holy Eucharist[271]. Therefore, the Eucharist apart from being its effect of incorporation into Christ, it also strengthens the bond of communal living as a family of believers.

In the Old Testament, we encounter certain figures and foreshadowing that are today held as prefiguring the Eucharist in the ancient times. In the first place, mention can be made of the manna that rained down from heaven on the Israelites in the desert

[267]Cf. RCIA 217, p.125.
[268] Cf. C. J. S. MARTINS, *Eucharistia*, Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa, 2002, 9.
[269] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III, q. 73., a.3.
[270] Cf. RCIA 217, p.125.
[271] Cf. CIC, 1322.

(Ex.16:4-35) and fed them to the full and more essentially, of which Jesus himself referred to in his discourse on the bread of life (John 6:31ff)[272].

In the second place, another prefiguration is the sacrifice of the Priest Melchizedech who offered bread and wine after blessing Abraham (Gen. 14:18, Ps 109). He is referred to as being attributed with an extraordinary priestly character that God has directly conferred on him. Hence the Psalmist says «You are a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedech» (Ps. 109:4)[273].

Thirdly, we have the episode of the Passover lamb (Ex.12). During the Passover, the Israelites prepared a sacrificial meal in haste as they prepared to be set free from their slavery in Egypt[274]. The ritual element used was an unblemished lamb which was sacrificed. In the New Testament , Jesus becomes the unblemished lamb who offers himself as a sacrifice to save us from death of sin as occurred during his last supper meal with his disciples. He sets us free from our slavery of sin. In this we can assert that the Passover lamb is a type of the Lamb of God. In the passage on Melchizedech, he becomes a type[275] of Christ, the Eternal High Priest (Cf: Heb 7, Heb 6:20) and the sacrifice that he offered prefigures the Eucharist[276].

In the sense of history, the Eucharist can be viewed from three different perspectives along the history of humanity´s salvation. In the Old Testament it is presented as a figure; as enumerated above, the prefiguration of the Eucharist in the salvific history of the human race. In the New Testament, it is seen as an event (the Last Supper) and finally in the time of the Church, it is dogmatically considered as a sacrament. It is this third dimension that forms the nucleus of this academic endeavour: the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist. Therefore «the figure anticipates and prepares the event, the sacrament prolongs the event and actualises it»[277] as shall be accentuated by the doctrine which holds that in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Christ is really present.

---

[272] Cf. R. CANTALAMESSA, *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1995, 6.
[273] Cf. JOHN PAUL II «Homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, 2» in *L´osservatore Romano* 27 (1 July 2000) 2-3.
[274] Cf. C. J. S. MARTINS, *Eucharistia*,194.
[275]*A type is a prophetic prefiguration of something greater.*
[276] Cf. C. J. S. MARTINS, *Eucharistia*, 194.
[277] R. CANTALAMESSA, *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification*, 6.

The word Eucharist is derived from the Greek word "*Eucharistein*" which denotes an act of thanksgiving and praises of God[278]. This thanksgiving is offered under the species and signs of bread and wine accompanied by the institution narratives as Christ himself offered to be done in memory of him. The term "Eucharist" in the early church, besides its use in reference to the Body and Blood of Christ designated the ritual of worship which accompanies their use. In this sense, in the Eucharist, it is not only the sacramental objects that are celebrated but also its associated sacramental action[279].

With respect to *the divine institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist*, based on scriptural affirmations and traditions of the Church, it is dogmatically declared that it was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper with the divine words« Do this in memory of me»[280].

The New Testament offers us the institutional narratives in the synoptic gospels (Mk 14:22-24, Matt. 26:26-28 and Lk. 22:19-20) and a fourth scriptural basis from the epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (I Cor 11:23-25) respectively. These four accounts given above give evidences to the institution of the Eucharist by Christ himself[281]. Even though, there are some discrepancies in their presentation of the event, this does not negate the fact of its divine institution. Remarkably, we encounter the elements of bread and wine and the accompanied words that make a valid sacrament. The Eucharist is therefore a mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord that is the life and death of the Lord. It is his life that he offered for many for the remission of sins.

On the other hand, it is however important to appreciate that the word« do this in memory of me» has a deep theological significance from its everyday usage.

The word "memorial" from its Jewish background *"zikkarôn"* denotes much more than a mere recollection or repetition of an event and it also symbolises an actualisation. Therefore the act instituted by Christ has been experienced and actualised in the Church. It is a present event and not a remembrance of the past[282]. To remember was to actualise

---

[278] Cf. J. EMMINGHAUS, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1997, 3.
[279] Cf. J. MARTOS, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, Image Books, New York, 1982, 233
[280] R. CANTALAMESSA, *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification*, 12.
[281] Cf. J. EMMINGHAUS, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, 4.
[282] Cf. P. KARIATLIS, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia*, St. Andrew´s Orthodox Press, Redfern, 2011, 122-123.

the past and the Eucharistic rite is a ritual memorial that renders the historical event operative now. Therefore when the Sacrament of the Eucharist is described as a memorial, it is in the sense of actualising and living the past, here and now.

The Church also considers the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice and this sacrificial character is best expressed in the institutional narratives «this is my body which is given for you» and this cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood»[283]. It is sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice on the cross[284]. From the general audience given by Pope John II on 4 of October 2000, he stressed the profound meaning of the biblical term memorial and affirmed that when *zikkarôn* is used, it does not connote a mere recollection of past events, but the proclamation of the mighty wrought by God for men. According to him,

> «to remember is to bring back to the heart in memory and affection, but it is also to celebrate a presence, only the Eucharist the true memorial of Christ´s paschal mystery, is capable of keeping alive in us the memory of his love»[285]

The Pope also indicated that Christ is always present in the liturgical celebration and the act observed is not just a mere symbol but that there is the real presence of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Christ is present in all her liturgical activities especially under the Eucharistic species.

The Council of Trent also affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in his decrees concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. It professed that after the consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and True man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those sensible things[286].

---

[283] Cf. CIC, 1365.
[284] Cf. CIC, 1366.
[285] JOHN PAUL II, «Alocução da AudiênciaGeral *"A Eucarístia é memorial das maravilhas de Deus"*, 5» in *L´osservatore Romano* 41 (7 Out. 2000) 12.
[286]*The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 75-91.

In his Encyclical on the Eucharist "Ecclesial de Eucharistia", Pope John Paul II reiterates the idea that it is necessary and valuable to be able to recognise Christ in His many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of His body and blood[287].

What is more, based on other traditions and documents of the Church, we come to the following essential contributions made by the Second Vatican Council to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

- The Eucharistic Sacrifice is presented as the source and summit of the Christian life[288].
- In the dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the modern world, it emphasizes that in this Christian life journey, the faithful can gain strength through the sacrament of faith where natural elements refined by man are gloriously changed into His body and blood. The Magisterium underlines that this provides a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet[289].
- In the decree on Priestly Training, it emphasizes the need for seminarians to be taught to seek Christ in the faithful meditation on God´s word in the active participation in the mysteries of the church especially in the Eucharist[290].
- The decree on the Pastoral office of Bishops in the Church provides us with the doctrine that the faithful should be taught to know and live the paschal mystery more deeply through the Eucharist[291].
- The decree on the Apostolate of the lay people explains the role of the laity in the church and states that charity which is, as it were, the soul of the whole Apostolate is given to them and nourished them by the sacraments, the Eucharist above all[292].

---

[287]IOANNIS PAULI PP.II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesiae de Eucharistia" 6*» in *AAS* 95 (2003) 433-475.

[288] SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia Lumen Gentium 11», in *AAS* 57 (1965) 5-75.

[289] SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesial in Mundo Huius Temporis Gaudium et Spes 38», in *AAS* 58 (1966) 1025-1120.

[290] SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Decretum de Institutione Sacerdotali Optatam Totius 8» in *AAS* 58 (1966) 713-727.

[291] SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II «Decretum *de Pastorali Episcoporum Munere in Ecclesia Christus Dominus 15*» in *AAS* 58 (1966) 673-701.

[292] CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II «Decretum de Apostolatu Laicorum Apostolicam Actuositatem 3», in *AAS* 58 (1966) 837-864.

- Above all, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Church draws attention to the fact that the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed and it is also the source from which all her power flows. In this vein, it is essential for those who have been incorporated into the church through faith and baptism to come together and praise God and to also participate in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord´s supper[293].

We can conclude from the above that the Magisterium has indeed given a base for which every doctrine on the Eucharist can be constructed and it has actually unveiled the essence of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in the life of the church, among her faithful and finally in the mission of God undertaken by the Holy Church.

3.3.1 THE LITURGICAL RITUAL (ESSENTIAL MATTER AND FORM) OF THE EUCHARIST.

In the Liturgical celebration of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the matter is in twofold; the first element which is *bread* and the second is the *wine* of the grape. The form are the words of institution as laid down by Jesus on the night of the Last Supper[294] and as recorded by the Sacred Scripture approved by the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Synoptic gospels present to us (Matt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24 & Lk 22:19-20), we can establish the fact that Jesus instituted this sacrament when he performed that gesture on the eve of his passion. Therefore Jesus instituted it by his very words;

> «The he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body given for you; do this in memory of me. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you» (Luke 22:19-20).

Again, there is also the fourth text which is Paul´s Letter to the Corinthians (11:23-25) in which the Apostle recalls for the Corinthians the legacy received from the Lord. Jesus Christ at the Last Supper entrusted this mandate to his disciples to offer this sacrifice in memorial of him; «*Do this in memory of me*» (Luke 22:19). From the four accounts we

[293] SC 10.
[294] Cf. CIC 1333.

can identify the human elements of bread and wine used by Jesus to give it a mysterious meaning; his body and bread. It is this tradition that the church has continued till today.

The Code of Canon Law 924 rightly states what is supposed to be the matter and form of the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist.

> «The most holy Eucharistic sacrifice must be offered with bread and with wine in which a little water must be mixed. The bread must be only wheat and recently made so that there is no danger of spoiling. The wine must be natural from the fruit of the wine and not spoiled».

In the teachings (canons) of the Council of Trent on the Holy Eucharist, we come to the appreciation that it is the bread and which after consecration are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus Christ[295]. Thus there occurs a change in substance from the ordinary bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. It is this ontological change that the church has theologically called Transubstantiation. Christ is truly and mysteriously present in what is visible to the human sight; bread and wine. The Transubstantiation is therefore the means by which the faithful enter into a mystical union with God[296].

Besides the matter and the form, for the validity of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the Code of Canon Law 900 states that «the minister who is able to confect the sacrament of the Eucharist in the person of Christ is a validly ordained priest alone». This is to affirm that unlike the case of baptism where in circumstances of danger and death, anybody with the intention of doing what the church does can validly administer, in the case of the Eucharist, there is nothing like danger of death, it is only a validly ordained priest who can administer. The Priest acts in the person of Christ and hence by the words of the institution narratives and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis), the bread and the wine become truly the body and blood of Christ and not a symbol of the body and blood of Christ.

---

[295] Cf. *The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 75-91.
[296] Cf. R. NICHOLAS, *The Eucharist as the Centre of Theology: A Comparative Study*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2008, 292.

3.3.2 THE SACRAMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE EUCHARIST ON THE CHRISTIAN

The Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist as the summit and centre of the Christian life endows recipients with a number of sacramental effects.

According to Karl Rahner, the first effect of this sacrament is a more profound and intimate incorporation into the unity of the Body of Christ that is the Church[297]. The first effect of this sacrament can therefore be called as the Christological effect[298].

By eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, Christians come to share in eternal life and also to participate in a union with Christ by love. This intimate union with Christ through the Eucharist is stressed by John Paul II[299] when he reiterated that the Eucharistic sacrifice is intrinsically directed towards the inward union of the faithful with Christ through the Holy Communion. In this sacrament, he emphasized that we receive the very Christ who offered himself for us. Thus we receive His body which He gave for us on the cross and His blood which He poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). Christ offers Himself as our nourishment in this banquet when He promised His disciples that «whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and l live in that person» (John 6:56). Through the Eucharist, we are intimately related to Him. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ´s passion, according as a man is made perfect in union with Christ who suffered[300]. It is therefore to be noted that the crucified and resurrected Christ is always present in the Eucharist and as such we begin to participate in the intimate relationship that exist between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through the passion of Christ. It is thus a participation in the life of the Trinity. It is the love of Christ for humanity that made him to sacrifice himself.

What is more, love reaches its ideal in the Eucharistic sacrament. It is a unity that assimilates us more and more to Christ and through total identification with the

---

[297] Cf. G. VASS, *The Sacramento of the future: An Evaluation of Karl Rahner´s concept of the Sacraments and the End of Time*, Action Publishing, Gloucester, 2005, 43.
[298] Cf. C.J.S MARTINS, *Eucaristia*, 250.
[299] Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 16-17*» in *AAS95* (2003) 433-475.
[300] THOMAS AQUINAS STh. III, q. 73, a.3.

suffering Christ, we are led to real holiness[301]. This communion with Christ is expressed in the Dogmatic Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*" 7 that really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread (1Cor 10:17).

The second effect of the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist on the Christian is what has been called the Soteriological effect[302]. In the intimate union with Christ, we attain an increase of sanctifying grace in the soul by eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ. Even though each sacrament confers a particular grace on the soul of the recipient, the Eucharist is considered as the source from which grace is poured forth upon us and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way[303]. For example, as in baptism, the outward sign of water confers grace that cleanses the soul, in the Eucharist too, the outward sign of bread and wine confer grace that nourishes the soul; a grace that fortifies and encourages spiritual growth. The Eucharist also stands at the heart and centre of the Church´s liturgical celebration since it is the font of life by which we are cleansed and strengthened to live not for ourselves but for God and to be united in love among ourselves[304].

Furthermore, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is very instrumental in its ecclesiological effect. Through the body and blood of Christ, the Christian is united more closely to Christ who is also the head of the church. It is indeed a sacrament of ecclesial communion. Therefore, the Christian becomes an integral part of this family of believers which is led by Christ through the apostolic succession. Again the incorporation into this Christian community that we received at baptism is renewed and consolidated[305]. In the epistles of St. Paul especially to the Corinthians, this dimension is highly underlined. Christians receive unifying power by participating in the Eucharistic banquet. Our union with Christ which is a gift and grace for each of us

---

[301] Cf. T. J. McGOVERN, *The Most Holy Eucharist: Our Passover and our living Bread*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, 2013, x.
[302]Cf. C.J.S MARTINS, *Eucaristia*, 256.
[303] SC 10
[304] Cf. PAULUS PP. VI, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Mysterium Fidei"* 3» in *AAS 57* (1965) 753-774.
[305]Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 22*» in *AAS* 95 (2003) 433-475.

makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the church[306]. It is expedient to appreciate therefore that through the Eucharist we are formed into the ecclesial body of Christ.

In the addition to the above -mentioned, the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist also remits venial sins and preserves us from mortal sin. It is to this effect that the Council of Trent admonished all her faithful to receive the Eucharist as the spiritual food of souls and by so doing we are liberated from daily faults and preserved from mortal sin[307]. St. Thomas Aquinas echoes the efficacy of the Eucharist in this perspective when he distinguishes the effects of physical food for the body of the human person to that of spiritual food which is the Eucharist. According to him, man is preserved from death and bodily illness by means of food and medicine, the sacrament of the Church also preserves man from sin by uniting him with Christ through grace. The Eucharist strengthens the Christian in his spiritual life as food and as medicine[308].

Moreover, there are other sacramental effects such as the pledge of our glorious resurrection and eternal happiness which can be called the eschatological vision. Our daily communion with Christ makes us partake in His eternal bliss. St. John in his gospel affirms this in the following; « he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day» (John 6:54). The Christian becomes united to Christ through his body and blood and he or she receives a promise of a future resurrection[309].

The Eucharist is therefore necessary for the spiritual growth and nourishment of the Christian.

---

[306] Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 23* » in *AAS* 95 (2003) 433-475.
[307]*The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 75-91
[308] Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, STh. III, q. 79, a.6.
[309]*The canons and decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Dolman, London, 1848, 75-91.

3.4 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

This chapter has unveiled that rites of initiation is not only restricted to the Traditional African Religion but it is an anthropological concept which exist inasmuch as human beings decide to live in community under a set of norms and values. Christianity adores and initiates her new converts into the ecclesial community through elaborate rites of initiation, not to mention the intense period of preparation that accompanies each of them.

There are basically three initiation sacraments performed by Christians; baptism, Confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist. Through baptism, the neophyte is made clean to participate in the life of the community; our faith in the doctrines of the community is deepened by confirmation through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are declared as mature to follow the Christian way of life by observing all the precepts and commandments laid down and to withstand temptations and difficult moment. We also receive the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist to enter into a profound encounter with Christ through his body and blood. The Church holds that our venial sins are remitted and we are preserved from mortal sin.

It is important to note that in each of the sacraments, there are ritual elements and processes prescribed by the Roman Rites as seen earlier and their importance cannot under any circumstances be neglected. Mention can be made of water which cleanses and purifies us from our iniquities, by the imposition of the hand and chrism, we receive the Holy Spirit and bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ through consecration. Therefore, in every sacrament there is the visible aspect which is the matter accompanied by the form and the grace which the sacraments endows the Christian which is the invisible aspect.

The inevitability of these sacraments is seen from the point of view of their necessity for salvation as the doctrine of the church teaches especially baptism which is the entrance of all the sacraments. New converts are always admonished to a proper disposition integrally to receive the sacraments.

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation are essential for the spiritual growth and active participation in the ecclesial community and should therefore be encouraged. However,

its essential ritual elements should be explained to the letter for a better appreciation by the Neophytes.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RITES OF PASSAGE VIS-Á-VIS THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION.

Life is said to be in stages, and each stage is marked with a special rite to end the old stage and to usher in the new. It is not a complete break or separation between the old and the new, but rather a phenomenon of continuity and discontinuity. The celebration of life´s transition is something distinguishably necessary in every human society and culture. To participate in the life of the wider society, the individual has to undergo an initiation. These are special times in the life of the entire community totally different from the daily routines and are dedicated to thank the Holy and Mysterious Beings who offer help to the living. Thus, there are initiation rites from birth to life, childhood to adulthood as well as rites for oath-taking and title-taking in most cultures. In both Christianity and Traditional African Religions, this phenomenon is very significant and there are ceremonies programmed to accompany these indispensable moments of life. These ceremonies are what we call rites of passage (Rite de Passage).

Some rites of passage such as birth and naming ceremony, puberty and adulthood (marriage and procreation) are essential African values, and they are the ritual threads that introduce and bind people to a specific group and assign to them societal roles in the Traditional African Societies. They also provide the needed structure for growth and development[310]. Every human faith (religion) has its rites of passage, event though, not all may be celebrated in a magnificent style. These rites mark who we are in our life´s journey, thus to affirm that we are people who are born, who live and transcend into the after-life. Therefore, the process of initiation seeks to fundamentally focus on the sets of rites that assist us to start a new phase or a new beginning in life.

The rite of passage symbolizes and effects a transition sociologically – a transition from an outsider to an insider, and biologically from the point of view of a movement from childhood to adulthood. In these rites, we see a set of symbols laden actions by which

[310] Cf. G. TANYE, *The Church - as-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2010, 264.

one passes through a dangerous zone, negotiating it safely and memorably[311]. A particular trend is also observed in the rites of passage; individuals experience a second-birth through the significance of the rituals. Thus they die to one phase of their lives and the current responsibilities which they are attached and they leave it behind and embrace a new stage of life with a new identity. In the Christian Sacraments of Initiation, we can also identify a similar theological importance in this regard; the Neophyte is called upon to abandon the old self and cloth himself or herself with a new self and is encouraged to continue with that, all the days of his or her life[312].The African Traditional Initiations also present us certain elements of essential human values like respect for each other and a community living that shows how the human culture is enriched.

This fourth and last chapter of this academic research seeks to unveil the points of convergence and divergence between the Rites of Passage and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation; Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. I deem it fundamentally vital to reiterate that it is not the objective of this research to equate the former to the latter nor it is to underestimate the efficacy of the latter with respect to the former. It is rather to theologically consider, and at the end become appreciative of what extent the rites of passage can serve as a foundation upon which the Christian Initiations can be constructed. Especially in the missionary activities of the Church in the African continent and other parts of the globe where the rites of passage are religiously observed, accepting the fact that the primitive people practised these rites before the advent of Christianity and subsequently Roman Catholicism, would do a lot of help. In the light of this, the Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy asserts that:

> «In mission lands it is found that some of the peoples already make use of initiation rites. Elements from these, when capable of being adapted to Christian ritual, may be admitted along with those already found in Christian tradition, according to the norm laid down in Art. 37- 40, of this Constitution»[313].

[311] Cf. R. GRIMES, Deeply into the Bone, 6.
[312] Cf. C. GROF, "Rites of Passage: A Necessary Step toward wholeness" in *Crossroads: the Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage,* eds. L. Carus – N. G. Christopher, Carus Publishing Company, Illinois, 1996, 5.
[313]SC 65.

The Church however does not leave it open, rather, there are norms to be considered as referred in the above-mentioned affirmation. We shall also come to value the fundamental idea that the Christian Sacraments are rooted in primordial humanexperiences like birth, the transition to manhood and womanhood, the assumption of leadership and finally death, the transition to the beyond[314] and they also share in some traditional rituals like purification, initiation and Sanctification.

Again, this chapter brings to light the necessary nature of initiation rites seen from the Traditional African Religions and Roman Catholicism respectively. Christians are initiated into the effable mystery of faith and it is the fruits of this faith obtained through evangelisation that leads one into the acceptance of the Christian initiations. When one is initiated, he or she is integrated and incorporated profoundly into this mystery.

Another objective of this chapter is to consider whether it is even possible theologically to talk about the convergence and divergence between the Traditional African Initiation Rites and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

The approach to this academic enterprise shall be carried out in their holistic perspective as both can be considered as initiation rites, with specific examples and ritual cases taken from the Traditional African Religions, particularly the Akan of Southern Ghana, where I belong.

4.1 CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

Human beings naturally and necessarily move from one level of growth to another physiologically, spiritually, socially, biologically and other forms of growth that can be witnessed in almost every society. In this life movement certain rites and rituals are prescribed by the community to depict such a change and to usher in the new phase. Therefore, it is this change and their associated rites that Anthropologists have called Rites of Passage and also as initiations in the Christian world, they are referred to as Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Traditional African Religions present birth, puberty,

[314] Cf. V. TWOMEY, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age, A theological Portrait*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, 46.

marriage, death and the hereafter as the essential passages of every human life. On the other hand, Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, teaches thatthe Sacraments of Christian Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist[315].

It is important to note that Christian Initiation Rites are not just a mere practise of rituals. Indeed, it involves an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, thereby teaching the Christian the practical ways to live a life worthy of his or her calling into the community of believers. In much the same vein, in the Traditional African Religions, there are several symbolic actions visualised in a given ritual and these convey a set of meanings known to the believers. Thus, symbolism is a great tool occupying a very important position in Traditional African Religions.

In the first place, in his book "*Rites of Passage*" Arnold Van Gennep asserts that in most of the rites of passage namely birth, puberty rites, marriage and death and beyond, there are constantly three phases that human beings go through. To these phases, he called the rites of separation, the rites of transition and the rites of incorporation[316].

A critical look at the Christian Rites of Initiation illustrates that in the process and period of formation into the Christian life a similar pattern is also evident. The various periods and steps and their associated rites mark one´s entry into the community of believers and they give us a participation in the share of the Triune God. The periods of precatechumenate[317], Catechumenate[318], Purification and Enlightenment[319] and the Post-baptismal Catechesis[320] aim at conversion and as well, the deepening of the experience of the sacraments already received. The steps involved in this spiritual journey include the acceptance into the order of Catechumens, the election or enrolment of names and above all, the celebration of the Sacraments of initiation.

We shall also come to appreciate how this anthropological structure can immensely elucidate our understanding of the Christian Initiation Rites. Rites of passage have been observed to follow a similar pattern and share certain basic features. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the three phases mentioned above from the point of view of

---

[315]Cf. M. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: their Evolution and Interpretation*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1999, xvii.
[316] Cf. A. V. GENNEP, *Rites of Passage*, viii.
[317] Cf. RCIA 36-40, p. 15-16.
[318] Cf. RCIA 75-117, p. 37-55
[319] Cf. RCIA 138-205, p.77-123.
[320] Cf. RCIA 244-251, p. 151-154.

Arnold Van Gennep, can as well, in some cases be linked intimately to the periods and steps already enumerated in the Christian Initiation journey. In this essay, we shall attempt to trace in what sense are they related and not related and some necessary examples from both initiation rites will be provided respectively.

I would like to stress that this academic investigation is only an anthropological analogy. The ritual process may be similar, thus between the Rites of Passage of Traditional African Religions and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation, but the contents, goals and the theological interpretations are not necessarily the same, even though certain strong theological convergences may be encountered. It is in this vein that I emphasized at the beginning of this dissertation that my objective is not to equate the Traditional Rites of Passage to the Christian Sacraments nor is it to underestimate the latter. This, notwithstanding, I deem it worthily important to highlight the good values that the rite of passage has to offer Christianity and for that matter Catholicism in our approach to evangelisation leading to catechetical instructions and the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

4.1.1 RITES OF SEPARATION AND THE PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION AND PRE- CATECHUMENATE (ENTRANCE TO THE CATECHUMENATE).

In the Traditional African Religions, the process of initiation begins with the rites of separation and the journey to the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation also starts with the first period of evangelization and precatechumenate[321] which leads to the acceptance into order of Catechumens[322] and the subsequent period of Catechumenate. The Candidate makes enquiry about the Christian faith and the Church. On her part, the Church introduces him or her to the Gospel message of Christ. As this is the preparatory stage among Roman Catholics, this period has no specific duration; rather, it has the objective of ascertaining the capacity and limit of the candidate who is going to begin the instructive journey when admitted into the order of Catechumens[323].In the course of this period, prospective candidates are educated on the Catholic faith. This period seeks to inculcate a good disposition in the prospective candidate through evangelisation.

[321]Cf. RCIA, Introduction 7, p. 3.
[322] Cf. M. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, xviii.
[323]Cf. M. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 391.

There is a constant teaching of the Gospel and explanations are given on the basic tenets of the Christian faith and Candidates finally enter the stage of the Catechumenate when fully convinced[324]. It is the task of the entire Christian community to help and make the Christian life appealing to the prospective candidate and this help is expected not only during this period of evangelisation and pre-catechumenate but throughout the whole process of Christian Initiation as shall be seen in the unfolding of this academic research. This inevitable help becomes evident during the period of post-baptismal mystagogy[325].

The journey to the Rites of Christian Initiation which generally commences with the entrance into Catechumenate after the initial period of evangelisation can be analysed and considered as the phase of rites of separation for Christianity as happens in the Traditional African Religions. In the rites of separation, among the traditional Akan people, those to be initiated are segregated from the social structure, legal status, rank, role or professions because before the initiation rites are performed, the initiate is not regarded as a full-fledged member of the community. It is a period that is purely characterised by isolation and segregation of the initiates[326].

The separation phase involves the camping or seclusion of candidates from their normal everyday lives to a more intense preparation for the next phase of life. This seclusion gives them a break from their current state and allows for a smooth transformation process to take place. In the secluded camp, they are supervised by well experienced persons such as the Queen Mother. It is a period that mostly takes several weeks and months depending on the programme laid down by the community. Sometimes, it takes between one to three weeks[327]. What is more, among the Akan of Ghana, in the nubility rites, the timing of the rites depends on several factors. Before the rites are performed, the novice goes through a period of questioning with the objective of helping the leaders' number to find out whether she really qualifies for the initiation. The enquiry is headed by the Queen Mother of the Village who always insists on seeing the girl´s bleeding for at least three consecutive menstrual periods. The Candidate is also tested

[324] Cf. RCIA 36, p.15.
[325] Cf. RCIA 9, p.4.
[326] Cf. G. A. PLUNKA, *The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet: The Art and Aesthetics of Risk - Taking*, Associated University Press, Inc., Cranbury, New Jersey, 1992, 143.
[327] Cf. E. YUSIF, *The Facets of Black Culture*, 164.

physically to prove her maturity for the next stage of life[328]. It is only when the Queen Mother is satisfied with the enquiries that the novice is finally admitted into the initial stage, of which this academic research shall call the Transition and Preparation stage.

In the Christian Initiation rites, a similar trend can be observed; it is only after the prospective Christian has had contact with the Gospel message through evangelisation and having been taught the fundamentals of the faith, that he or she receives the rite of acceptance into the order of Catechumens. There must always be a personal conversion; to take away from sin and be drawn into the mystery of God´s love before this rite can take place[329]. They declare their intention to join the Church wholly and actively and the Church, on the other hand, accepts to journey with them to achieve this objective. According to the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the rite of admission consists in the reception of the Candidates, the celebration of the Word of God and the dismissal of the Candidates[330]. It is only after the said rite has been performed that they are referred to as Catechumens and their names are recorded in the register of Catechumens. With such a warm reception they seek to begin their spiritual journey. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "*Lumen Gentium*" expresses the eagerness of the Mother Church in welcoming and accompanying them in their catechetical instruction. Hence she asserts that:

> «Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother church already embraces them as her own»[331]

Furthermore, the Rites of Separation are very dominant in ethnic groups and tribes with an initiation into secret societies and a special vocation to the priesthood. The initiation into such societies may last for several days to months depending on the tribe. Among some of the African known secret societies include the *Poro* society of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Boyhood Rites of the *Afikpo* village in the South Eastern Nigeria and the Great *Asafo* Companies of Ancient Ghana[332]. The novice is separated from his previous environment in relation to which he or she is considered dead in order to be

---

[328] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 13.
[329] Cf. RCIA 41, p. 17.
[330] Cf. RCIA 44, p. 17.
[331] LG 14
[332] Cf. S. OTTENBERG, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation*, University of Washington Press, Washington DC, 1989, xiii.

incorporated into the new stage[333]. In most cases, candidates are gathered together in the bush and upon their arrival; they are seen as a social blank, in other words, a tabula rasa. It is believed that the stage of transition and preparation which follows the rites of separation will help them to conceive new ideas about life and how to handle difficult situations[334]. Having been separated from the ordinary daily life to focus on the respective initiation, the candidate now enters the next stage which is the Transition stage

4.1.2 TRANSITIONAL PHASE AND THE CATECHUMENATE (ELECTION FOR INITIATION).

This is the phase during which the Catechumen or the Novice is already admitted to begin the process or the spiritual journey leading to the administration of the rites of initiation in both the Traditional African Religions and Christianity.

The transition phase is the time of learning the basic ethics and moral conduct of the community, not neglecting the fundamental doctrines that hold the group or believers together. Among the Akans of Ghana, this phase was a kind of vocational training especially for young girls. They were taught how to assume their roles as responsible women in the society and the practise was well encouraged and it was highly emphasized since formal education as we know it today was virtually absent from the community[335]. During this phase the Novices were taught basic housekeeping and childrearing skills, the secrets of sexuality and fundamental religious traditions of the community. We shall come to appreciate how the rites of passage help to curb societal decadence among the youth.

It has also been called the liminal stage and it is the period between the rites of separation and the rites of incorporation. The transition and preparation stage is seen as the most difficult moment as it is not always easy to change one´s status. It is associated with ambiguity and disorientation as the novice is introduced to new concepts of the tradition, some may be scary and difficult to comprehend. The novice with the constant

---

[333] Cf. A. V. GENNEP, *Rites of Passage*, 81.
[334]Cf. S. OTTENBERG, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation, xv.*
[335] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites*, 12.

help of her instructors tries to construct an identity and a new vision on societal realities[336].

Victor Turner used the Latin origin of liminality stage or threshold to refer to this all important phase of life´s movement. He was of the view that in the liminal period or threshold, the candidate is caught up between one existence and another. It is a crossing of borders and boundaries in their movement towards incorporation and ultimately self[337]. From his point of view «liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun or moon»[338]. To use the expression of Victor Turner, «the liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the position assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial»[339]. The inferred entities mentioned above, like the neophytes in initiation or puberty rites as happens in the Akan land and many African Traditional Areas may be represented as possessing nothing[340] due to the fact that in the Transition phase, they are classified as dead and empty.

Moreover during this stage male children who were not circumcised at birth are circumcised accordingly. This happens in societies where there is an elaborate initiation rites for male born children apart from an entrance to secret society where obviously extensive and elaborate rites are held. As indicated in the section on the initiation rites among the Akan, in the Akan land, male children do not undergo extensive initiation rites into adulthood. However during the birth and naming ceremony, they are presented with a cutlass or a gun as a symbol of being the bread winner of the family and above all, as the head who is supposed to protect the family in times of difficulties and great anxiety against external forces.

The Transition stage is also seen as the moment of stripping off the candidate of all ties to society through a period of intense isolation, degradation and self- abasement[341]. This stripping off helps the individual to develop a better and a profound comprehensive vision of the societal values and it also assists in the formation of an individual moral

---

[336] Cf. R. SLATER, "Transitions" in *Rites of Passage in Post-colonial Women´s Writing*, eds. P. Dodgson-G. Wisker, Editions Rodopi B.V, Amsterdam, 2010, 208.
[337]Cf. R. SLATER, "Transitions" in *Rites of Passage in Post-colonial Women´s Writing*, 209.
[338]V. TURNER, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*, Aldine Transaction, New Brunswick, [2]2008, 95.
[339]V. TURNER, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*, 95.
[340]V. TURNER, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*, 95.
[341]Cf. G. A. PLUNKA, *The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet*, 145.

conscience. This seclusion aids the candidate to assess man´s relationship to institutionalised behaviour, roles and norms. Hence it can be described as period of reflection.[342] The candidate goes into his or her inner self to reform and give an identity to his future community life.

In addition, it can also be noted that the separation and the transitional phases are all meant for spiritual as well as material preparation into the reception of the ritual ceremony which takes place on the day of incorporation into the larger community. Among the Akan, for instance, every human being is said to possess the "kra" (spirit) which is responsible for his or her destiny. Therefore spiritually, before the initiation rites, a consultation is made by a diviner into ascertaining whether the rite should be performed for the initiate or not. Even though the initiation rites form an essential part of the lives of the people, tradition has it that not all the individual spirits desire the rites and that if the rites are preformed contrary to the taste of the person´s spirit, the candidate may be struck down by a severe sickness, infertility, bad fortunes and possibly, death. As a result it is only when the diviner after the consultation responds in a positive manner that the actual ceremony can be performed. On the other hand, when a negative response is obtained from the diviner, to show the essentiality of the initiation rites, there are indoor rites performed to usher the candidate into embracing his or her new phase of life.

In the case of girl's nubility rites, she receives the "Anoka[343]" ceremony and is later enstooled for couples of hours[344]. Libation is poured and each of the food items is put into her mouth for her to taste it. Each food tasted is followed by a prayer. When the elephant skin is tasted the officiating minister (elderly woman) prays thus: «may the elephant give you her womb so that you can bear many children»[345]. With respect to the boiled egg, she is supposed to swallow it entirely and not to chew it, and if chewed, she indirectly kills all the fruits of her womb and as such she will be barren forever. The

[342]Cf. G. A. PLUNKA, *The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet*, 145.
[343]*This is the dedication ceremony. The ritual elements used are boiled eggs, mashed yam or plantain, elephant skin, banana and roasted groundnut*.
[344]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 18.
[345]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 18.

groundnut and the mashed yam or plantains are part of the ritual meal for the ceremony and this is followed by a declaration that she has successfully been initiated[346].

The material preparation, on the other hand, consists in providing all the necessary things such as food items, money, Kente cloth, beads, cooking pots and many other ingredients needed for the actual ceremony. It is the duty of the parents of the initiate to supply all these items. It is important to note that they are not obliged to buy all when they are financially incapable, they can as well borrow from friends and relatives and this stresses the fact of the communal nature of the rites and the we are because I am philosophy of the traditional African Societies[347].

In another development, the Rites of Christian Initiation also present similar features with respect to the rites of transition and preparation which is seen in Roman Catholicism as the period of the Catechumenate. This period is seen as «extended one during which Catechumens are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life»[348]. Like the vocational training education that takes place during the liminal phase of the Akan traditional culture, in Christianity too, there is a well-designed catechism to accompany this whole process. The Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults throws more light on this when it asserts that Catechesis is a well-planned programme that has been designed to inculturate and germinates the Christian doctrine in the lives of the candidates. This phase also illuminates them on the mystery of salvation for which they desire expediently to share with the community of believers[349].

Moreover, in this transition and preparation stage (Catechumenate) the candidates are helped to grow more closely to the mystery of Christ through examples of other Christian believers especially their Sponsors. On the part of the mother church she welcomes and embraces them and also ensures that there are proper instructive measures for their spiritual journey, their spiritual nourishment and ecclesiastical incorporation[350]. The Catechumens during this phase receive the Catholic teachings so

[346]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 18.
[347]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Girl´s Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, 18.
[348] RCIA 75,p. 37.
[349] Cf. RCIA 75 no. 1, p. 37.
[350] Cf. RCIA 75, p. 37.

that their faith may be enlightened and their hearts directed toward God. They are advised to live lives worthy of their calling as Catechumens.

Furthermore, the Catechumenate stage consists of certain fundamental rites as observed in the Traditional African Rites such as the spiritual and material preparation and circumcision for those who were not circumcised at birth. Among the rites belonging to the Catechumenate phase may include the following; the celebration of the Word of God, minor exorcisms, blessings of the Catechumens and anointing of the Catechumens. There are also subsequent rites performed after the period of purification and enlightenment and these include the moments of scrutiny, the presentations of the Lord´s Prayer and the Creed, Ephphetha[351], to mention but few. Let us consider some of the few rites not mentioned already in this essay. For instance, Catechumens are helped through the Celebration of the Word of God[352]:

- To implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving; for example the morality characteristic of the New Testament (NT), the forgiving of injuries and insults, a sense of sin and repentance, the duties of Christian must carry out in the world.
- To give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer.
- To explain to them the signs, celebrations and seasons of the Liturgy.
- To prepare them to enter the worshipping assembly of the entire community.

Secondly, there is the minor exorcism where the attention of the Catechumens is drawn to the reality of the struggle between flesh and the Spirit. They are taught the importance of self- denial for reaching the blessedness of God´s kingdom and how they should always seek the unending source of God´s love for human kind[353]. The Catechumens also receive the rite of blessing by which it signifies God´s love and the Church´s tender care for them.

Moreover, there is also the presentation of Catechumens which leads to the rites of election or enrolment of names. It usually takes place on the first Sunday of Lent. This rite is called Election because Catechumens have been elected and chosen by God

[351] Cf. RCIA 75-203, p. 37-122.
[352] RCIA 82, p. 40.
[353] Cf. RCIA 90, p. 40.

through the church to participate in the divine mystery of salvation[354] and enrolment due to the fact that their names are written as candidates due for initiation. To buttress this point, the RCIA indicates that the Catechumens are now called the Elect, *competentes* and *illuminandi*. They are *competentes* because they are joined together in asking for and aspiring to receive the three sacraments of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Again, they are referred to as *illuminandi* because they are those who will be enlightened[355] through the reception of the sacraments. As mentioned earlier, for example, the sacrament of baptism has been called illumination because it enlightens the Christian on his or her life journey.

They now enter the period of purification and enlightenment with its various rites of scrutiny, the presentation and recitation of the Creed and the Lord´s prayer, the Ephphetha and many others. The symbol of the Creed is to prepare the elect for the profession of faith before their baptism[356] since they are going to be incorporated into a faith, it is worth knowing what entails in the faith of the community. The three scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent which have the objective of introducing the elect to undergo self-searching and repentance. They are also meant to uncover and to heal all that is weak, defective or sinful in the hearts of the elect and to bring them out while it is also to strengthen all that is upright, strong and good[357].

What is more, there is the *ephphetha rite* which is literally the opening of the ears and mouths. In this context, the significance of this rite is to emphasize the elect´s need for the grace of God to be able to serve as a hearer, proclaimer and doer of the Good News[358]. Like the Traditional African Religions, the symbols used in all the ritual processes have their respective meanings and when well understood, they go a long way to help the Christian to live up to his or her Christian calling.

From the Transition and Catechumenate stage discussed above between the two Religions, we have established the important place that these rites occupy in the daily lives of the people. There are adequate preparations to make sure that candidates are fully and wholly prepared for the new stage of lifecycle.

[354] Cf. RCIA 106, p. 63.
[355] Cf. RCIA 111, p. 63-75.
[356] Cf. RCIA 193, p. 117.
[357] Cf. RCIA 128, p. 81-103.
[358] Cf. RCIA 184, p. 120.

The importance of the Catechumenate stage was reiterated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Scared Liturgy that:

> «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»[359].

4.1.3 RITES OF INCORPORATION AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE RITES OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION.

This is the third stage in the rites of passage where the Candidate is initiated and incorporated into the community as a full member. It is the reintegration into his or her previous environment having acquired the necessary skills to live up to societal expectations. This is the initiation into adulthood and subsequently marriage and procreation. This is because as indicated earlier, once the puberty rites are performed, the girl is considered mature for marriage. On the other hand, in the Christian realm when one is initiated by the reception of the three Sacraments of initiation, namely, baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist by the Elect, he or she is no longer called Catechumen or Elect but a member of the Christian community with rights and responsibilities[360]. The incorporation phase is also seen as the moment when one has finally decided to abide by and to live according to the doctrinal instruction that was learnt during the transition and preparation stage. At this stage with respect to the Traditional African rites of passage and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation, there is the external expression of the inner spiritual convictions.

Closely related to the incorporation rites of the Traditional African Religions and the Celebration of the Christian Initiation Rites are the *further stages of On-going formation* for theTraditional African people *and the Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy* of the Christians. It is the period arranged for the neophytes who have just been initiated into the Christian Family[361]. It can also be considered as the period for the explaining of the mysteries received in the celebration and their associated pragmatic values and it

[359] SC 64.
[360]Cf. M. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation,* 391.
[361] Cf. RCIA 306, pp. 151-154.

further incorporates the neophytes into the community[362]. During this stage, the role of the godparent as well as the entire community is highly recommended as the neophyte needs to fully deepen their understanding of the paschal mystery. This is achieved through a shared life in the community; reflecting on the Gospel, celebrating the Eucharist and giving a special dedication to the welfare of the new family[363].

The above described situation is not totally different from what happens in the Traditional African rites of on-going formation after the initiation ceremony. The neophyte continues to live in the community after the incorporation and reintegration. This deepens their sense of commitment to the social and moral order of their community. For instance, among the Akans, when a young married woman gives birth for the first time, in most cases it is the duty of her mother to assist the young mother in undertaking certain basic house chores such as bathing the new born baby, cooking and washing. Through these rendered services, the young adult takes the opportunity to broaden her horizon about what she learnt during the Transition and preparation stage before the rite.

It is important to note that these threefold rites enumerated above may not be applicable in all known rites of passage. This notwithstanding, there may be two or three present in some particular rites. For instance, in the rite of betrothal, marriage and procreation we may encounter both transitional and incorporation rites but absent will be the rites of separation. This is because that had been performed during the period preceding the marriage, that is, the puberty rites. To this effect, according to Arnold Van Gennep:

> «These three subcategories are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every set of ceremonies. Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriage. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal and initiation: or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group»[364].

In the Christian Initiation is also witnessed a similar pattern, especially the Christian Initiation of Adult where the candidates receive all the three Sacraments during the

---

[362]Cf. M. JOHNSON, *the Rites of Christian Initiation,* xviii.
[363] Cf. T. H MORRIS, *the RCIA: Transforming the Church: a Resource for Pastoral Implementation*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1997, 262.
[364] Cf. A. V. GENNEP, *Rites of Passage,* vii-viii.

Liturgical celebration. Once the person is baptised as an adult he does not go through the periods of evangelisation and pre-catechumenate, election and enrolment of names and the various rites belonging to this stage before confirmation and Eucharist. He or she receives the two other sacraments immediately without going through another catechumenate period. This is well grounded in the RCIA when it states that:

> «In accord with ancient practise followed in the Roman Liturgy, adults are not to be baptised without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reasons stands in the way»[365]

4.1.4 A FURTHER SURVEY ON THE RITES OF PASSAGE DISCUSSED AND THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

A further investigation into the Rites of Passage and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation reveals that some of the local rites have their corresponding ceremonies in the Christian Initiation rites. I must admit here that even though their theological elucidations may differ, there is always the theological need for an anthropological approach to sacramental theology[366]. The Christian Sacraments may share some ritual processes common to the Traditional African Religions as may be seen later in this presentation. Accordingly, the lifecycle rituals like birth, adulthood, marriage and death come into the area of cultural and social anthropology that analogically explain the Christian Sacraments. It is the human being who is invited into a relationship with God and therefore we cannot totally rule out his or her anthropological set up. The Sacraments can also be identified as a kind of rites of passage because of their role in the life of Christians; they initiate them into a further friendship and union with God.

A close look at the theological significance of baptism and the anthropological conception of the birth and naming rites among the Akans illustrates some point of convergence inasmuch as both are considered initiation rites.

---

[365]RCIA 215, p. 125.

[366] Cf. L. J. LEIJSSEN, *With the Silent Glimmer of God´s Spirit: A Postmodern Look at the Sacraments*, Paulist Press, New York, 2007, 1.

Baptism can be classified as rite of initiation (passage) because it usually occurs at the beginning or near the start of a person´s life[367]. It is a rite of incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Baptism is akin to the rites of passage performed in various forms, in almost every culture, religion and institution in the world. In the African context, naming ceremonies mark the official social recognition of a new born baby as a member of the society, even though he or she becomes a full grown member only after the rites of nubility or adulthood are performed. On the other hand, in Christianity baptism also makes one a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. Like the naming ceremony, baptism is the sacrament that gives us access to the Christian Community for the first time and introduces us to the reception of other Christian Sacraments[368]. It is a reborn that makes us sons and daughters of God and we are also regenerated through water in the Word and our sins are washed away.

Among the Akans, the first rite of passage is the birth and naming ceremony and in this rite, the significance of name is brought to the fore. In the context of the Akan of Ghana, a child is considered a human being only after the rite of name-giving has been duly performed. Until this official rite has been performed, he or she is seen as a mere spiritual visitor who has come to the physical world and who is capable of returning, if he or she is not pleased or satisfied with the way of life and the environment that he or she meets[369]. It only qualifies to be named on the eighth day.

In the light of the above, similar parallels could be drawn from both Christian baptism and traditional naming ceremonies. The naming ceremony makes one a human being and it is considered as the first identity of the person. This plays an essential role in his or her upbringing and on the individual´s destiny. There are millions of circumstances for giving a name and these may include when a child is born on a festive occasion such as *Adae, Fofie or Fodwoo.* A child born posthumously is named *Anto* (did not meet) or *Adiyia*(has suffered)[370]. Such names are added to other names, for instance when born on Monday, he shall be called *Kwadwo Fofie* and when it is a female, *Adwoa Fofie.*

Another dimension worthy to note is the fact that among the Akans, children are also named after some ancestors and persons of great reputation in the community. During

[367]Cf. R. HATER, *Journeys of Discovery: Transitions, Rites of Passage and the Sacramental life of Faith*, Twenty-third Publications, London, 2009, 159.
[368] Cf. CIC 1213.
[369] Cf. P. SARPONG, *People Differ*, 108.
[370] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 89.

the naming ceremony, the children are urged to emulate the good lifestyles of such people. They serve as role models or sponsors to the children. As such, in the Akan ethnic group, one cannot be named just after anybody at all since for them, names have real significance. In Christianity for example, in the preparation for baptism, the Elect are allowed to choose a name[371]. In most cases, where names are chosen, they mostly reflect those of Saints in the Roman Catholic Church.

It is interesting to note that neophytes in their spiritual journey are encouraged to imitate such names. I deem it appropriate to add that the Akan conception of the ancestors, to whom most children are named after, is quite similar to the Christian doctrine on Sainthood. The ancestors were once human beings on earth and so were the Christian Saints. They, like the Saints are believed to live now in a special and profound union with *Onyankopon* (God). Their current place is believed to be the fruits of the positive and good moral lifestyles lived while alive. They are again believed to stand in a position to help believers on earth to create a transcendental relationship with the Supreme Being[372]. The birth and naming ceremony is accompanied by several beautiful and colourful rituals and this becomes the cause of great jubilation by the community.

In both cases, names are given. Hence, baptism could be inculturated into the African context in which the traditional naming ceremony could coincide with the baptism of the infant or better still serve as the foundation upon which we can build the doctrinal instructions of Christian initiation. As a matter of fact, canonical regulations stress that parents are obliged to see that their infants are baptised within few weeks; that even before birth, baptism should be anticipated, hence it says: «as soon as possible after birth, indeed even before it, they are to approach the parish priest to ask for the sacrament for their child, and to be themselves prepared for it»[373]. In this perspective, the celebration of both the traditional naming ceremony and baptism can be appreciated as constituting a unique identity, namely, of being a true African and a true Christian. This will enable them to hold on firmly to their rich cultural values thereby germinating a sense of love and interest for the traditional setting and its fundamental moral values.

[371] Cf. RCIA 200-202, p. 121.
[372] Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ancestral Stool Veneration in Asante (Revised edition*), Good Shepherd Publishers Ltd., Kumasi, 2011, 31.
[373] CDC867§1.

Moreover, the Elect are also permitted to choose godparents whose duties will be to accompany them on their Christian journey. It is to be noted that this is not an obligatory rite as the Code of Canon law rightly affirms:

> «insofar as possible, a person to be baptised is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism, a sponsor also helps the baptised person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations inherent in it»[374].

From the aforementioned, we see that it is rather a recommendation and the question of godparent does not add any sacramental grace to the life of the neophyte even though it helps a lot in growing and mentoring good Christian character.

In both the Traditional Rites of Passage and the Christian Initiation Rites, there are always well-skilled people to undertake the training or the instruction such as Catechists, Deacons and on the other hand we have ritual leaders and traditional elders. During the rites of separation to the incorporation phase and in the Christian initiations too, from the pre-catechumenate to the post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy, the roles played by these people cannot be underestimated.

Again, some elements of culture, namely water, palm wine and working implements such as farm tools are used symbolically during Akan naming ceremony. These elements are synonymous with Christian baptismal symbols. During the ritual process as already observed, drops of water as well as palm wine or gin is put on the infant´s tongue and addressed *"….nsu a, nsu; nsa a, nsa"*[375](if it is water then let it be water; but if it is alcohol, then let it be alcohol). This is the way Akans attempt to emphasize the centrality of integrity, truthfulness, the virtue of hard work and the power of freedom and responsibility, that yes must be yes, and no must be no. On the other hand in Christianity, a similar trend can be identified. The use of candle and white garment or cloth in baptism is to signify light and newness of life respectively[376]. Therefore when these parallels are well integrated, they can bridge the gap between Christianity and African Traditional values through the means of dialogue and effective catechism.

---

[374]CDC 872.
[375] Cf. P. SARPONG, *People Differ*, 108.
[376] Cf. RCIA 214, p. 125.

Be that as it may, the above-mentioned convergences are not in any way a suggestion that these rites of passage are sacraments, and even on a more theological base, there are so many divergences that can be realised between these rites.

Water as ritual element is used in both cases; however, in the Akan traditional set up, it is not associated with the remission of sin as the Christian doctrine teaches. It is rather a rite of protection against evil spirits who may wish for the early return of the infant and it is also to give it a spiritual fortification[377]. It is believed that the baby who has come from the spiritual world needs to be purified to be able to live in the physical world as it was a common sight the birth and death of infants[378]. Such transition according to the local traditional people is to be performed with water as it plays a cleansing role in their daily lives. During the naming ceremony water as a ritual element is used in several ways and it is always accompanied by ritual words. Water symbolises life and it gives a guarantee of new birth, new life and rebirth in the society. The Celebration of the Christian Sacrament also emphasizes the matter and the form of the Sacrament for baptism to be validly conferred[379].

Again, in the Traditional Africa Religions, to express this theological meaning of purification, separation and newness, the infant´s hair is shaved off, this is to symbolise that anything bad is cut off since the old hair has been done away with. It is also a sign that the baby is now separated from the mother´s womb and that it belongs to the whole family and the community at large. The shaving off of hair is also linked to newness due to the fact that the baby will grow new hair inasmuch as it approaches a new phase of life[380].

Closely linked to the theological importance of water in both rites, is the question of the baptismal formula which presents an indispensable divergent view between the two cases under study. In Christian initiation, baptism is conferred invoking the Trinitarian formula[381]; it is an act done in union with the three persons in one God. Hence, the baptismal formula indicates that: I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son

---

[377]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 71.
[378]Cf. V. TURNER, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1967, 9.
[379]Cf. CDC 849.
[380] J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 86-87.
[381]Cf.K . B. OSBORNE, *the Christian Sacraments of Initiation; Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, 14.

and of the Holy Spirit[382]. In the Traditional Akan ritual setting, this theological vision is totally absent and one cannot find the doctrine of the Trinity from any angle. In every Akan ritual action, *Onyankopon* is first invoked followed by the deities or divinities as well as the ancestors who are intermediaries. The basic African belief is that *Onyankopon* is the overall head of the universe and all that exists. However, due to the disobedience of human beings, he moved into the skies and now we can only approach him through intermediaries and messengers. The latter is not in any way equal to *Onyankopon* nor are they the same in power and majesty. They are not persons in the Supreme Being. In fact, they are just his mere servants[383]. Hence, in the Akan traditional setting, we cannot talk about the Trinity in relation with the union between *Onyankopon* and the other intermediaries. During ritual celebrations especially the puberty rites, they are invoked on the initiates for protection from evil, and also for prosperity, joy and above all, the fruit of the womb. It is however this Akan Theological conception that makes several researchers and outsiders to consider the Religion as strongly polytheistic without a sufficient knowledge of the fundamentals of the Religion.

Again it should be noted that Catholic Sacraments are not simply rites of passage, they may also be seen as rites of affliction[384]. These are rites that seek to mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune. They have the basic role of rectifying «a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect and purify»[385]. Baptism delivers us from the bondage and affliction of original sin, but it does so by plunging us into death and resurrection of Christ.

With respect to the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Initiation into adulthood, in both cases one has to undergo the initial stages of initiation. Therefore in Christianity, an individual cannot be confirmed without first been baptised and on the other hand in Traditional African religions, without the rites of birth and naming ceremony, one cannot proceed to the adulthood rites. Hence, baptism qualifies a neophyte for confirmation. Thus, the one who can receive the sacrament of confirmation is a baptised

[382]RCIA: General Introduction 23, p. xvii.
[383]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 10.
[384] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 115.
[385] Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 115.

Christian.[386] In the Traditional African parallel, a naming ceremony qualifies one for the next stage of rites of passage: initiation and adulthood.

Furthermore, the Sacrament of Confirmation is a sign of mature Christian Community[387]. It is also the Sacrament that intensifies the baptismal grace, and roots us more closely to God in the community of believers which is the church. The Traditional African Religions consider the puberty stage and its associated rites as very essential in the life of the community and it is seen as an initiation into maturity[388] and that is the reason why marriage rites in most cases follow this phase shortly.

The Puberty rites make a candidate worthy for marriage. It serves the fundamental function of consolidating childhood education, instructing and integrating adolescents into the norms of adult life in a more fathomable and exhaustive approach[389]. After the initiation into adulthood ceremonies are performed, an individual is socially considered worthy and capable of duties and responsibilities and he or she is expected to live as such in the community. In this regard, before puberty rites are performed, candidates are tested physically and psychologically to ascertain whether they are qualified to undergo the initiation. As seen in the first section of this chapter, such investigations are done during the phase of Rites of separation and the training continues in the transition and preparation phase. He or she is also made to understand the sexual life, marital implications and certain basic tasks that go with it[390]. Thus, he or she is made to be a community-oriented adult.

What is more, as confirmation expresses the deepening of faith in the life of the Christian, the Puberty rites, on the other hand, establishes the fact that the person is well educated in the faith of the community such as the customs, what constitutes a taboo and has been prepared adequately to be abreast with the status quo of the group. There is therefore a social integration, self-identity and a profound orientation in life[391].

---

[386]Cf.CDC 889§1.
[387] Cf. G. K. TANYE, *The Church- as- Family and Ethnocentricism in Sub- Saharan Africa,* 295.
[388]Cf. CCCE 1308.
[389]Cf. G. K. TANYE,*The Church- as- Family and Ethnocentricism in Sub- Saharan Africa,* 334.
[390]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect,* 71.
[391]Cf. G. K. TANYE, *The Church- as- Family and Ethnocentricism in Sub- Saharan Africa,* 334.

A sharp distinguishable divergent that can be identified in both rites is the mode of instruction during the transition and preparation phase. In the Christian or the Catholic context, the preparation is carried out in a more formalised manner through textbooks like the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Holy Bible up to the phase of the celebration of the Rites of Christian Initiation and beyond to cover the whole of life´s journey. There is also the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults which is a programme well-structured for those searching and enquiring about the Catholic way of life. Instruction is carried out in a serene and conducive atmosphere. On the other hand, in the Traditional Akan preparation for initiation, there are certain initiatory ordeals practised in the initiation into adulthood in the puberty rites and especially the entry or admission into a secret society. Notable among these ordeals include the male and female circumcisions and other bodily operations which results in cicatrices on the face, stomach and other parts of the body[392].

Notwithstanding these painful moments that candidates undergo, there are symbolic meanings attached to these practices. These ordeals show the neophytes' ability to accept and yet to withstand death and it is also seen as a passage from the profane to the sacred world. This therefore implies what they have to go through. Therefore, the initiates die to one life in order to gain access to another[393]. According to John Samuel Mbiti:

> «The shedding of his or her blood into ground binds him mystically to the living-dead who are symbolically living on the ground or are reached at least through the pouring of libation on the ground. It is the blood of new birth»[394]

By the above, Mbiti is of the view that the physical pain inflicted on the candidates is just a preparation to concretise them for the difficulties and hardships in life. It is due to this very reason that they are all encouraged to endure to the end of the whole ritual process. Rites of Incorporation are performed for those who are able to endure to the end and they gain the names of "man" and "woman". The idea of entering into such rite is considered as death by boys going into the bush for the transition and preparing stage and the subsequent return, incorporation which is seen in the context of resurrection[395].

---

[392]Cf. P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 72.
[393] Cf. J. HENDERSON, Threshold of Initiation, Chiron Publications, Asheville, 2005, 90.
[394] J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 120.
[395] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 128

In some cultures, this break from childhood to adulthood is symbolised by an act of ritual washing. According to Mbiti, «this ritual also carries with it the deeper religious idea of purification from the state of unproductive sexual life»[396].

Confirmation can therefore be classified as the puberty rite of passage into Christian adulthood. Through this sacramental rite, the neophytes declare publicly to the faith community that they are mature to live the faith according to the dictates, renewal and strength of the Holy Spirit.

In some of the initiation rites in African Traditional Religions especially those of secret society there is a secret character and a rigorously difficult instruction period. The ceremonies are usually conducted in secrecy, either in the bush or another secluded area and there is always a swearing of an oath of secrecy. Initiates are strictly prohibited to reveal to outsiders, not even members of one´s family and this serves as a mystery that exists between the individual and the sacred. Punishments are always associated with the violation of the oath of secrecy, and among such is flogging. A candidate may be flogged for several days[397]. Several tests are conducted on candidates to prove their worthiness and as a form of fortifying them for their future task of breadwinning and protecting their families and communities.

They are carried out in a sadistic and painful atmosphere[398].An example of these societies can be cited of the Poro-Society of the Republic of Sierra Leone in West Africa. The ordeals that prospective members go through give them a powerful sense of attachment to the status quo of the group[399]. This crucial transition from childhood to manhood and womanhood and from a state of ignorance to knowledge is indeed very influential among several African societies and special priorities are accorded it due to its very nature. The Poro Society, for instance, has the goal of regulating sexual identity and social conduct and it is also to mediate relations with the spirit world. Apart from the basic objective of the society, candidates are also taught on essential farming practises such as food cultivation, hunting and community warfare; how to defend.

---

[396]J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 128

[397] S. OTTENBERG, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation*, 70.

[398] Cf. A. DUNDES, *Blood Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristic*, University Press of Mississippi, 2002, 96.

[399] Cf. K. MANSON; J. KNIGHT, *Sierra Leone*, the Global Pequot Press Inc., Guilford, [2]2012, 45.

On the contrary, in the instructions (Catechumenate) leading to the rite of incorporation (celebration of the Christian Sacraments of initiation), there is no mention of an oath of secrecy, rather neophytes are expected to witness to the Gospel message by word and by deed. The Word is supposed to form part of their daily life and it is to be visible in all facets of their being. He is called upon to participate in the mission of God which the Church shares[400]. The Sacrament of Confirmation, like all liturgical celebration, is conferred publicly and that is why the Dogmatic Constitution on Sacred Liturgy does not hesitate to affirm that:

> «Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the church which is the sacrament of unity namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it; but they concern the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their different rank, office and actual participation»[401]

Let us at this moment consider the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Traditional African Marriage in their totality as the third phase of Christian initiation and rites of passage respectively. To proceed, I must sincerely acknowledge that with respect to these two ritual actions, theologically and anthropologically speaking, there are huge and inevitable differences than similarities. Therefore I find it interesting to reiterate that this dissertation does not intend to do a thorough comparative study between the Eucharist and the Traditional marriage, rather it seeks to outline certain fundamental theological elements worthy of consideration in their respective rite and to evaluate how these elements can be constructed upon for proper evangelisation on African lands.

The Holy Eucharist can be seen as the culmination of the Christian Initiation process; the period which began with evangelisation and pre-catechumenate to the celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. It is only after baptism that neophytes are admitted to the table of the Eucharist to participate in the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that he or she may have eternal life[402]. The Eucharist also renews the incorporation with Christ which is brought about by baptism and we are dignified to have a full share in the Sacramental communion. Eucharistic communion therefore

[400] Cf. CIC 1285.
[401]SC 26.
[402] Cf. RCIA, *General Introduction 2*, p. xv.

confirms the Church in her unity as the Body of Christ[403]. Through it, we enter into a profound participation in the Lord´s own sacrifice[404]. In its strictest sense, the Eucharist does not purport to create a relationship but rather it fosters that which was already created by baptism and that is why baptism is the entrance to all other sacraments.

In the Traditional Akan Rites of Passage, once a person goes through the birth and childhood rites followed by the Nubility rites when the person is mature emotionally, physically and socially, the next most important rite is the Marriage ceremony and procreation. I shall call this rite the last of the physical Traditional Rites of passage, for the purpose of our investigation. The reason behind my assertion is the fact that in the death and hereafter rites, which is generally considered as the last of the lifecycle, the dead does not take an active part in the ritual action. However, it is rather performed in his or her honour. Hence, according to this mode of thinking, we shall consider Marriage as that which completes the physical traditional rites of passage and incorporates members into a high social status in the community. The basic goal of all the initiation rites is to prepare the individual for the most responsible phase of life which is marriage and the raising of children. Therefore among the Akans, there is an obligation on each one to get married[405]. Accordingly, it is seen as indeed a sacred duty to which every normal person must fulfil because it was held as the only means to ensure continuity of the human race[406].

The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life[407] as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church rightly puts it. It is seen as the umbrella to which all other sacraments and all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up and are also oriented towards it[408]. Therefore, this stresses the fact that Christians cannot do without the Eucharist and it becomes a necessary condition for our spiritual nourishment. On the other, the Akan Marriage and procreation can also be seen as the fountain from which and through which all the other traditional rites of initiation flow. It is through marriage that off springs are realised as gifts from the Supreme Being to undergo both the naming rites (first rites of passage) and the adulthood rites (second

---

[403]IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, « Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesiae de Eucharistia" 22-23*» in *AAS95* (2003) 433- 475.
[404] Cf. RCIA 217, p. 125; Cf. CIC 1322.
[405] Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 98.
[406]Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 99.
[407] LG. 11.
[408] Cf. CIC 1324.

rite of passage). It is indeed at the centre of human life. In this respect, its importance in the Akan society is over emphasized[409].

In addition, marriage establishes a cordial relationship between two families. It is not an individual affair between the couples only but it extends to their two families, relatives and the entire community[410]. It unites clans and brings people together and expresses a sense of commitment and dedication to the relationship already established. As a rite of passage, marriage commands attention and respect because it is sacred encounter which leads to procreation. The Eucharist on the other hand, glues us to the community of believers and to Christ who is the Head of this sacred family. It brings unity by uniting people of various races and nations to participate in the one and same Body and Blood of Christ. As a spiritual encounter between Christ and His faithful, it becomes the focal point of our Catholic life and worship[411]. It assists us in appreciating the real presence of Christ among us.

4.2. CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

We have come to appreciate in this academic enquiry that the Sacrament of baptism which together with that of Confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist form the Christian Sacraments of Initiations can be better and basically comprehended if they are evaluated as the fulfilment of the various rites of initiation that are scattered over the African world. Initiations or rituals accompanying the various lifecycles such as birth and childhood, adulthood with its fruits of marriage and procreation, and death even though this essay does not discuss the question of death have all been brought on board.

We have also been enlightened on the analysis on the three phases of the rites of passage, namely the rites of separation, transition and preparation and incorporation, as well as their corresponding Christian Initiation processes; Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate (Entrance to the Catechumenate), Catechumenate (Election and Enrolment for initiation) and the Celebration of the Rites of Christian Initiation (baptism, Confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist).

---

[409] Cf. K. N. KYEREMATENG, *the Akans of Ghana*, 67.
[410]Cf. J. S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 98.
[411]Cf. R. HATER, *Journeys of Discovery: Transitions, Rites of Passage and the Sacramental*, Twenty- third Publications, New London, 2009, 159.

In most of the rites, the candidate is separated from the social order, from the routine of daily life to a state of transition and preparation where he or she is instructed on the basic ethics and professions of life. They are also instructed on how to function well in the community. Having gone through all these stages, there approaches the actual day for the celebration of the Sacrament or the performance of the ritual action. On this day the candidate is incorporated into the community from where he or she was taken out. After that he becomes a member of the community with duties and responsibilities. In this regard, he or she undergoes an on-going formation, whereby by the help of the older people in the community, they continue to learn and to attain a further incorporation for life. In the Christian sense, this is what has been called the post-baptismal catechesis or the period of mystagogy.

It has been established that these two initiation rites can be studied in their holistic manner thereby helping to draw out some points of convergence and divergence. Theologically speaking, there may be several divergences as the meanings of symbolic actions as happened in one ritual may be totally different from the other, even though the ritual element may be synonymous. For example, the use of water in baptism as washing away our sins and regenerating us as sons and daughters of God as the Christian doctrine teaches is different from the same use of water in a naming ceremony that carries the meaning of truthfulness and alluding to other moral qualities. On the other hand, the use of candle and garments come to affirm the idea that the neophyte has to abandon his or her old way of life and be clothed with a garment of newness, joy and to live a life worthy of emulation.

This essay has also unveiled the fact that both birth and naming ceremony and baptism can be seen as entrance rites. Baptism opens the door for other Christian sacraments while the naming ceremony gives access to other Traditional African initiation rites like nubility and marriage. We are deepened in our Christian commitment by confirmation, our baptismal grace is also renewed and in the nubility rites, candidates affirm their maturity and readiness to commit to the status quo of the community and to assume responsibilities as adults. After the nubility rites, one can marry and through procreation, ensure the survival of the community´s lineage. With respect to the Eucharist, we are united more closely with Christ through the sharing of His Body and Blood. Christ comes to us and we feel His presence by the Eucharistic actions of the Church. Also, marriage brings two families together thereby creating unity between

ethnic groups and tribes. Through the Eucharist, our human differences are resolved at the table of the Lord and we become one in Him. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, for Christ is the centre of our life and in the sacrament, we are drawn to His real presence.

Above all, it is important to appreciate how necessary the rites of passage can help the people to understand and accept the Sacraments of Christian Initiation when the former is well grounded in the believer. Even though, we must wholeheartedly confess that there are great and vast differences as have been seen but the points of convergence are those that must be encouraged.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation an effort has been made to the effect that the African Rites of Passage can be studied alongside the Christian Sacraments of Initiation and can also be observed as the foundation to the Sacraments of Initiation when the former is properly understood and appreciated in their wholistic approach. An evangelisation which accords a dignity and respect to the positive elements within a particular culture and constructs on it, yields fruits abundantly. Before the advent of Christianity and western education, the "primitive" African practiced her own religion and had several ways of cementing a cordial and paternal relationship with the Supreme Being (God). An acquisition of knowledge that is based on the known to the unknown renders many and good results and it also facilitates an easy comprehension of the new knowledge.

In this vein this academic enquiry which attempts a theological reflection on the Akan rites of Passage and the Christian Sacraments of Initiation seeks to establish that the rites of passage as long as they are initiatory in a given cultural context can best serve as grass roots in our catechetical instructions leading to the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. They should be seen as the means through which God in his infinite wisdom and compassion used to prepare the traditional people to receive the message of Christ, the Only Saviour of humanity.

This dissertation has also shown that there are common elements that can be found in both rites and this notwithstanding, there may be some disparities between them. Above all, their theological significance of various ritual elements used may also be totally different and in some cases may not even exist in the particular culture. Moreover, the ritual elements used and ritual words pronounced during the celebration of the rites marking the passages are very significant. For instance a drop of water and alcohol are placed on the tongue of the child during the naming ceremonial rites of the Akans of Ghana. The water as seen in the dissertation represents goodness and blessings of life, while alcohol represents suffering, difficulties and challenges. They also serve as symbols of truthfulness (water) and untruthfulness(alcohol).

On the other hand during the celebration of the Christian Sacrament of baptism, similar elements are used like white garment, lighted candle which informs the baptised that he or she is clothed with a tunic of righteousness and that he or she is to live according to the dictates of the Christian faith. With the symbol of the lighted candle, the baptised is

supposed to shine in the world and to transmit Christ who is the light to and of the world. Both baptism and naming ceremony makes us members of the community and we are formally introduced to the same community.

The Sacrament of Confirmation and the Rites of adulthood or Puberty can also be seen as sources of empowerment; to be more responsible in the church and in the society respectively. Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states. For the Sacrament of confirmation too, the Neophyte is more perfectly bound to the church and enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as true witnesses of Christ, they become more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed[412]. The rites of adulthood and initiation also make one a complete member of the traditional community and it is this rite of maturity which leads to marriage and procreation. The individual is only recognised and fully accepted as a member of the group after the initiation ceremony has been performed. The Nubility rites serve as integrating adolescents into the norms of adult life in a more comprehensive and detailed manner. In fact they introduce the Nubiles into a more responsible person and that is why one is ready to marry after the said rite.

By the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the baptised is united more intimately with Christ and to the Church. Marriage is undoubtedly one of the most vital values of the African culture as seen in the presentation of this academic enquiry. It contains a strong unitive value; in the sense that it is not only a union between the couple but the entire extended family and it is also a community activity. It unites people from all walks of life to a profound communion with others. However, having said that, I must admit that any further attempt to construct a parallel between the traditional marriage and the Holy Eucharist is a herculean task to undertake. This notwithstanding, our aim has been to consider both rites as initiatory and to study them in their totality as such and how possible it is to present the Akan Rites of Passage as the foundation to the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

I strongly believe that when the culture of the local people is respected and appreciated in this manner, further attempt at imparting Christian doctrines may be easily carried out and an in depth acquisition can also be achieved. The rites of passage, therefore only

[412]Cf. LG 11.

seek to initiate the individual from one phase of life to the other and makes one a recognised member of the community. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation also lays the foundation of every Christian life. In other words they serve as the bedrock to the Christian journey. By the reception of these three sacraments, the Christian receives in an increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and he or she advances toward the perfection of charity[413].

[413] Cf. Cf. PAULUS PP. VI, «Constitutio Apostolica de Sacramento Confirmationis *"Divinae Consortium Naturae"*», in *AAS* 63 (1971) 657-664.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. CHURCH DOCUMENTS

- CATECISMO DA IGREJA CATÓLICA, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1993.
- CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA, Código de Direito Canónico, Editorial Apostolado da Oração, Braga, [3]1983.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Redemptoris Missio*" 21» in *AAS 83* (1991) 268-340.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 22*» in *AAS 95* (2003) 433-475.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 23* » in *AAS 95* (2003) 433-475.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 16-17*» in *AAS 95* (2003) 433-475.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Ecclesiae de Eucharistia" 6*» in *AAS 95* (2003) 433-475.
- IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, Litterae Encyclicae, «*Fides et Ratio»,* in *AAS 91* (1999) 5-88.
- JOHN PAUL II «Homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, 2» in *L´osservatore Romano* 27 (1 July 2000) 2-3.
- JOHN PAUL II, «Alocução da AudiênciaGeral *"A Eucaristia é memorial das maravilhas de Deus"*, 5» in *L´osservatore Romano* 41 (7 Out. 2000) 12.
- PAULUS PP. VI, «Constitutio Apostolica de Sacramento Confirmationis *"Divinae Consortium Naturae"*», in *AAS 63* (1971) 657-664.
- PAULUS PP. VI, «Litterae Encyclicae "*Mysterium Fidei"* 3» in *AAS 57* (1965) 753-774.
- SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI «*Instructo de Baptismo Parvulorum*, 28» in *AAS 72* (1980) 1137-1156.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II «Decretum de Apostolatu Laicorum Apostolicam Actuositatem 3», in *AAS58* (1966) 837-864.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II «Decretum *de Pastorali Episcoporum Munere in Ecclesia Christus Dominus 15*» in *AAS58* (1966) 673- 701.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia Lumen Gentium 11», in *AAS 57* (1965) 5-75.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesial in Mundo Huius Temporis Gaudium et Spes 38», in *AAS 58* (1966) 1025-1120.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitution de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosantum Concilium, 7», *AAS56* (1964) 97-138.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Constitution de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosantum Concilium, 59», *AAS56* (1964) 97-138.

- SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, «Decretum de Institutione Sacerdotali Optatam Totius 8» in *AAS 58* (1966) 713-727.

2. LITURGICAL BOOKS

- CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA, *Celebração da Confirmação*, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1991.

- RITES OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS, Liturgical Training Publications, Chicago, 1988.

3. STUDIES

- ADDAI-MENSAH P., *Mission, Communion and Relationship: A Roman Catholic Response to the Crisis*, Lang Publishing Inc. New York, 2009.
- AMPENE K., *Female Song Tradition and the Akan of Ghana*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Hampshire, 2005.
- ARNAU-GARCIA, R., *Tratado general de Los sacramentos*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2007.
- ASAD T., *Toward a genealogy of the Concept of ritual, Genealogy of Religion*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.
- AUSTIN G., *Anointing with the Spirit: The Rite of Confirmation: The use of oil and chrism*, Liturgical Press, Saint John´s Abbey, Minnesota, 2004.
- AYISI E. O., *An Introduction to the study of African Culture*, East African Educational Publishers Ltd, Nairobi, 1992.
- BERKHOF L., *Systematic Theology* (New Combined Edition), Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996.
- BOROBIO D., *La Iniciacion Cristiana*, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca, 1996.
- CANTALAMESSA R., *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1995.
- CATHERINE B., *Ritual Theory,Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992.
- CATHERINE B., *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.
- COOKE B; MACY G., Christian Symbols and Ritual: An Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- DANQUAH J.B., *The Akan Doctrine of God: A fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1944.
- DURKHEIM E., *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, The Free Press, New York, 1965.

- ELIADE M., *Rites & Symbols of Initiation*, Harper & Row Publishers Inc., New York, 1975.
- GANE R., *Cult & Character: Purification offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy*, Eisenbrauns, 2005.
- GANE R., *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, First Gorgias Press, New Jersey, 2004.
- GEERTZ C., *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.
- GEHMAN R.J., *Biblical Perspectives (Revised Edition*), East African Educational Publishing Ltd., Nairobi, 2005.
- GOCKING R., *The History of Ghana*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, 2005.
- GOEDERT V. M, *O Sacramento da Confirmação: Perspectivas Teológico-Pastorais*, Edições Paulinas, São Paulo, 1989.
- GONZALEZ J., *Essential Theological Terms*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 2005.
- GORMAN F.H., *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology***,** Sheffield Academy Press & Billing and Sons Ltd., Worcester, England, 1990.
- GRIMES R.L., *Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage*, University of California Press, Los Angelos, 2000.
- GYEKYE K., *African Philosophical thought: An Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1995.
- HAFFNER P., *the Sacramental Mystery*, Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, 1999.
- HENDERSON J., Threshold of Initiation, Chiron Publications, Asheville, 2005.
- JOHNSON M., *The Rites of Christian Initiation: their evolution and Interpretation***,** Order of St. Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2007.
- JONATHAN S. Z.**,** *to take Place; Toward Theology in Ritual*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987.
- KAVANAGH A., *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation,*The Order of St. Benedict Inc., Collegeville, Minnesota, 1991.
- KLEIN G., *Pastoral Foundations of the Sacraments: A Catholic Perspective*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1998.

- KYEREMATENG OPOKUWAA A., *Akan Protocol: Remembering the Traditions of our Ancestors*, iUniverse, U.S.A, 2005.
- LEIJSSEN L. J., *With the Silent Glimmer of God´s Spirit: A Postmodern Look at the Sacraments*, Paulist Press, New York, 2007.
- LOURENÇO J. D, *O Mundo Judaico em que Jesus Viveu (Cultura Judaica do Novo Testamento*), Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa, 2005.
- MARTINS C.J.S., *Baptismo e Crisma*, Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa, 2002.
- MARTOS J., *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study*: Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2009.
- MBITI J. S., *Introduction to African Religion***,** Heinemann Educational Books Inc. London, 1975.
- McGRATH A. E., *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Wiley Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Chichester, [5]2011.
- McKIM K. D., *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought*, Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 1998.
- MICHAEL W., *The Sacrament of Baptism*, Order of Saint Benedict, Minnesota, 2011.
- MILLER S., *Ancient Greek Athletics*, Yale University, New Haven, 2004.
- MIRCEA E., *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Harper & Row, New York, 1958.
- MORRIS B., *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1987.
- MORRIS T. H., *The RCIA: Transforming the Church: a Resource for Pastoral Implementation*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1997.
- NADWI H.A., *The 4 Pillars of Islam*, Islamic Book Trust, Malaysia, 2011.
- NICHOLAS R., *The Eucharist as the Centre of Theology: A Comparative Study*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2008.
- NKANSAH K.K., *The Akans of Ghana: their customs, History and Institutions*, Sebewie Publishers, [2]2004.

- OBENG J. P., *Asante Catholicism: Religions and Cultural Reproduction among the Akan of Ghana*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1996.
- OÑTIBIA I., *Bautismo y Confirmación*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2011.
- OSBORNE K., *the Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1987.
- OTTENBERG S., *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation*: University of Washington Press, Washington DC, 1989.
- PENNEY S., Islam: Foundational Edition, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford, 1999.
- PHILIP B., *Ghana*, The Globe Pequot Press Inc., Guilford, 2010.
- PLUNKA G. A., *The Rites of Passage of Jean Genet: The Art and Aesthetics of Risk Taking* Associated University Press, Inc., Cranbury, New Jersey, 1992.
- RAPPAPORT R. A., *Ritual and Religion in the making of humanity:* Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999.
- RATTRAY C., *Ashanti*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1923.
- ROO WILLIAM A. V., *The Christian Sacrament*, PUG, Roma, 1992.
- SAINT AUGUSTINE*: Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, ed. B. Ramsey, New City Press, New York, 2011.
- SALM S. J; FALOLA T., *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, Greenwood Press, New York, 2002.
- SARPONG P. K., *Girls´ Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Tema, Ghana, 1977.
- SARPONG P. K., *Peoples Differ: An approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation***,** Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2002.
- SARPONG P. K.,*Ancestral Stool Veneration in Asante; A Catholic View*, (Revised edition) The Good Shepherd Publishers Ltd, Kumasi, Ghana, 2011.
- SARPONG P.K., *Ghana In Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Tema, Ghana, 1974.

- SCHIRCH L., *Ritual and Symbol in Peace building*, Kumarian Press, Inc., Bloomfield, 2005.

- SCHMEMANN A., *of water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism*, St. Vladimir´s Seminary Press, New York, 1974.

- SESBOÜÉ B., *Pensar e Viver a Fé no Terceiro Milénio*, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1999.

- SLATER R., "Transitions" in *Rites of Passage in Post-colonial Women´s Writing*, eds. P. Dodgson - G. Wisker, Editions Rodopi B.V, Amsterdam, 2010.

- STRINGER M. D., *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2008.

- TANYE G., *The Church - as-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2010.

- THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1957.

- THOMPSON R., *The Sacraments*, SCM Press, London, 2006.

- TURNER V., *The forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University, New York, 1967.

- TURNER V., *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1969.

- TWOMEY V., *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age, A theological Portrait*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007.

- VAN GENNEP A., *the Rites of Pas*sage, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1960.

- VAN. D. T., *Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity*, Irvington Publishers, Inc., New York, 1983.

- VORGRIMLER H, *Sacramental Theology*, the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992.

- VORGRIMLER H**.,** *Teologia de Los Sacramentos*, Herder, Barcelona, 1989.

- WAINWRIGHT G., *Doxology: A Systematic Theology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980.

- WALSH L., *Sacrament of Initiation: A Theology of Rite, Word and Life*, Liturgical Publications, Chicago, [2]2011.

- WOOD S., *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2009.

- YUSSIF E., *The Facet of Black Culture 1*, Trafford Publishing, Bloomington, 2013.

4. INSTRUMENTS

- A. CARDINAL DULLES "The Theology of Worship: Saint Thomas" *in Rediscovering Aquinas and the Sacraments: Studies in Sacramental Theology*, eds. M. Levering - M. Dauphinas, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2009.

- A. CARDITA, «*Rito e Símbolo: O Jogo das Transcrições*», *Communio* 30:2 (2013) 135 – 146.
- *African Mythology, A-Z*, eds. P. Ann Lynch - J. Roberts, Chelsea House, New York, [2]2010.
- AKOTO K; NSON A. A., "African Cosmology" in *Encyclopaedia of Black Studies*, ed. M. Kete, Sage Publication Inc., California, 2005.
- ALVIS P.,"Is baptism complete Sacramental Initiation?" in *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological & Pastoral Perspectives*, eds. M. Davie- H. Harris, Church House Publishing, England, 2011.
- BEVERE A.R., " Circumcision" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N Freedman ,Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, 2000.

- BUSIA K.A., "The Ashanti" in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. C. Daryll Forde, James Currey Publishers, Oxford, 1999.

- DAVIES D., "Introduction: Raising the Issues" *in Rites of Passage*, eds. J. Holm- J. Bowker, Printer Publishers Ltd., London, 1994.
- *Encyclopaedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East*, ed. J. Stokes, InfoBase Publishing Inc., New York, 2009.

- EVANS G.R., "Masters and Disciples: Aspects of Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament in the eleventh and Twelfth centuries" in *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Interpretation*, ed. M. Saebo, Hubert & Co., Gottingen, 2000.

- FITZMYER J., “The Letter to the Romans” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1990.

- GRILLS C; M. AJEI, “African- Centred Conceptualisation of Self and Consciousness: The Akan model” in *Counselling Persons of African Descent; Raising the Bar of Practitioner Competence*, ed. T. A Parham, Sage Publication Inc., California, 2002.

- GROF C., “Rites of Passage: A Necessary Step toward wholeness” *in Crossroads: the Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage*, eds. L. Carus – N. G. Christopher, Carus Publishing Company, Illinois, 1996.

- HART K., “The Sacrament of Confirmation” in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law (commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America*), eds. J. Beal - J. Coriden, Paulist Press, New York, [2]2000.

- HENRI G., An inquiry into the meaning of ritual symbolism: Turner and Peirce, in. *Current Studies of Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion*, ed. H. Barbara, Rodopi B.V., Netherlands, 1990.

- KLINGBEIL G.A., *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual texts in the Bible* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 1), Eisenbrauns, 2007.
- LINDSTROM L., “Oratory” in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. A. Bernard, Routlegde Collections, New York, [2]2010.
- MENDONÇA, J. «*Vocabulário e Gestos Rituais no N.T: Pequeno Guia para viajar no aberto*» *Communio* 30:2 (2013) 147 - 154.
- *Merriam-Webster´s Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Massachusetts, 2006.

- NEUNHEUSER B., “Baptism” *in Encyclopaedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. K. Rahner, Burns & Oates, London, 1975.

- OMENYO N., “Akan Religion” in *Encyclopaedia of African and African-American Religions*, ed. S. D. Glazier, Routlegde, New York, 2001.

- POWER D., “Baptism and Confirmation” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. F. S. Fiorenza - J. Calvin, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, [2]2011.

- PUGLISI J., “Rites of Baptism in the Catholic Church: A Theological-Pastoral Commentary” *in Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. T. Best, Liturgical Press, Saint John Abbey, Minnesota, 2008.

- *The African Presence in Black America*, ed. Jacob U. Gordon, Africa World Press Inc., Eritrea, 2004.

- *THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE*, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, London, 1990.

- VAN NESS P., "Religious rituals, spiritually disciplined practices and health" in *thinking through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed., K. Schilbrack, Taylor & Francis, New York, 2004.

- VERHOEVEN M., "The many dimensions of ritual", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of ritual and Religio*n, ed. T. Insoll, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2011.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Summary of the table of content..... i

Abbreviations ii

Abstract..... iv

Introduction 1

I CHAPTER

1.0 Contextualisation..... 6

1.1 Rites and Rituals In General..... 6

1.1.1Genres of Ritual..... 13

1.1.2Characteristics of Ritual Actions..... 19

1.2A Biblical View On Ritual 23

1.2.1Some Old Testament Biblical Rituals 23

1.2.2Some New Testament Biblical Rituals..... 27

1.3Rituals and Their Significance 28

1.4Interpretation of Rituals..... 31

1.5Conclusion to the Chapter 35

II CHAPTER

2.0 Akan Religion And Rites of Passage..... 37

2.1 A Geographical Synopsis of Ghana 37

2.2 Akan People..... 38

2.3 Akan Religious Belief Systems 40

2.3.1 Onyankopon (Supreme Being - God)..... 41

2.3.2 Lesser Spirits (Abosom) 45

2.3.3 Belief In Ancestral Spirits (nsamanfo) 47

2.3.4 Akan Worship (Liturgy) 48

2.3.5 Akan Cosmology 51

2. 4. Some Akan Rites of Passage 54

2.4.1 Birth & Childhood and Their Importance 59

2.4.2 Initiation (Adulthood) & Nubility Rites and Their Importance 63

2.4.2.1 Marriage & Procreation and Their Importance 69

2.5 Conclusion to the Chapter 72

III CHAPTER

3.0 The Sacraments of Christian of Initiation..... 74

3.1 The Sacrament of Baptism 79

3.1.2 The Baptismal Ritual and its Significance 83

3.1.3 Effects of Baptism on the Christian..... 88

3.2 The Sacrament of Confirmation 91

3.2.1 The Essential Rite of Confirmation and its Significance 93

3.2.1.1 The Matter and Form of the Sacrament..... 94

3.2.2 Effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation on the Christian 97

3.3 The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and its Nature 98

3.3.1 The Liturgical Ritual (Essential Matter and Form) of the Eucharist..... 103

3.3.2 The Sacramental Effects of the Eucharist on the Christian..... 105

3.4 Conclusion to the Chapter 108

IV CHAPTER

4.0 Rites of Passage vis-á-vis the Sacraments of Christian of Initiation. 110

4.1 Convergences and Divergences 112

4.1.1 Rites of Separation and the Period of Evangelisation and Pre- Catechumenate (Entrance to the Catechumenate). 114

4.1.2 Transition Phase and the Catechumenate (Election for Initiation). 117

4.1.3 Rites of Incorporation and the Celebration of the Rites of Christian Initiation. . 123

4.1.4 A Further Survey on the Rites of Passage discussed and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation 125

4.2. Conclusion to the Chapter 136

General conclusion 139

Bibliography 142

1. Church documents 142

2. Liturgical books 143

3. Studies 144

4. Instruments 149