



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA
FACULDADE DE TEOLOGIA

MESTRADO INTEGRADO EM TEOLOGIA (1.º grau canónico)

NTRIE-AKPABI VINCENT

**INCULTURATION AS SELF-IDENTIFICATION: AN
AFRICAN IN SEARCH OF AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN
IDENTITY. A THEOLOGICAL ENQUIRY AMONG THE
EWE OF GHANA**

Dissertação Final

sob orientação de:

Prof. Doutor José Pedro Angélico

Porto
2016

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Acta Apostolica Sedis
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
AD	Anno Domini
AG	Ad Gentes
CDC	Código de Direito Canónico
Cf.	Confer
CIC	Catecismo de Igreja Católica
Cor.	Corinthians
DLT	Darton, Longman & Todd
Dt.	Deuteronomy
Ed.	Edition
ed.	Editor
eds.	Editors
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
Ga.	Galatians
GS	Gaudium et Spes
Is.	Isaiah
ITC	International Theological Commission
Jn.	John
LG	Lumen Gentium
Mt.	Matthew
P.	Peter
Vol.	Volume

ABSTRACT

This academic research seeks to represent inculturation as an effective means to render the Christian faith more meaningful and practical to Ewe Christians in particular and Africans in general. Specifically, the study examines the assertion that inculturation is self-identification and an African search for authentic Christian identity. The historical survey of the evangelization process among the Ewe people and many African cultures indicates that their religious and cultural worldviews were not given due recognition during the evangelization. In other words, Ewe cultural context was considered as inferior and inadequate to serve as the possible fertile ground for evangelization. Christian converts were obliged to forsake their cultural identity. However, since Africans could not dissociate themselves completely from their religious and cultural beliefs, they tend to blend the Christian faith with their traditional religious beliefs, even if they contradict the Christian faith. This created instability, dualistic attitude and identity crisis among African Christians.

This research points to the fact that, it is the demand of inculturation to root the Christian faith into cultures in such a way that Christ becomes the principle that guides decisions and transforms the lives of people. When the Christian faith is integrated into African cultures it purifies them, and the wholesome elements found in them are incorporated into the life of the Church. This gives uniqueness to the African Church and also enrichment to the Universal Church. Africans will feel at home in the Church. This would liberate Africans from their schizophrenic tendencies to live their Christian faith in truth and in spirit. As such, effective inculturation would create in Africa, the Church that is truly Christian and truly African.

However, this dissertation does not intend to equate the African religious and cultural beliefs to Christian faith. The research only explores the theological and anthropological relationship in the faith experience of African Christians and seeks to affirm that Africans can reconstruct their distorted Christian identity through inculturated evangelization which does not impose but pay attention to dialogue and mutual respect for identity and dignity of cultures. While inculturation is only effective through the collaboration of all agents of the local Church, the theologians and Christian anthropologists have an urgent task to carefully study and recommend those cultural

elements which could possibly be incorporated into the Christian faith but without obliterating the essential elements of the Christian faith.

INCULTURAÇÃO COMO AUTO-IDENTIFICAÇÃO: UM AFRICANO EM BUSCA DE UMA AUTÊNTICA IDENTIDADE CRISTÃ. UMA INVESTIGAÇÃO TEOLÓGICA DA ETNIA EWE DO GHANA

Esta investigação académica procura apresentar a inculturação como um meio eficaz para tornar a fé cristã mais significativa e prática para os cristãos da etnia Ewe, em particular, e os cristãos Africanos, em geral. Especificamente, o estudo verifica a veracidade de que, para os cristãos Africanos, a inculturação é caminho de autoidentificação e de busca de uma verdadeira identidade cristã. A pesquisa histórica do processo da evangelização da etnia Ewe e de muitas outras culturas Africanas indica que a religião e a cultura tradicional não foram reconhecidas no tempo da missionação. Por outras palavras, o contexto cultural da etnia Ewe e muitas culturas Africanas foram consideradas como inferiores e inadequadas para servir como terra fecunda onde enraizar a fé cristã. Os que se converteram ao cristianismo foram obrigados a abandonar a sua matriz cultural. No entanto, uma vez que os Africanos não poderiam dissociar-se completamente das suas crenças tradicionais, eles tenderam a misturar a fé cristã com crenças tradicionais, mesmo que contraditórias com o cristianismo. Isso tem criado em muitos cristãos Africanos instabilidade, atitude dualista e crise de identidade, não só como Africanos mas também como cristãos.

Esta investigação aponta para o fato de que é necessária a inculturação para enraizar a fé cristã nas culturas, de tal maneira que Cristo se torne o princípio que guia as decisões e transforma a vida das pessoas. Quando a fé cristã é integrada nas culturas Africanas, as culturas são purificadas e os elementos de verdade que nelas se encontram são incorporados na vida da Igreja. Isso dá caráter único à Igreja Africana e também serve para enriquecer a Igreja Universal. Os Africanos sentir-se-ão em casa e terá sentido para eles pertencer à Igreja. Esta inculturação libertaria os Africanos das suas tendências esquizofrénicas para viver a sua fé na verdade e no espírito. Assim, uma inculturação bem implementada criaria em África uma Igreja verdadeiramente cristã e verdadeiramente Africana.

No entanto, esta dissertação não pretende colocar crenças religiosas e culturas Africanas ao mesmo nível da fé cristã. A investigação apenas explora a relação teológica e antropológica na experiência da fé dos cristãos Africanos, e procura afirmar que os cristãos Africanos podem reconstruir as suas identidades distorcidas através de uma inculturação não impositiva mas antes com espírito de diálogo e respeito pela identidade e dignidade das culturas. Enquanto a inculturação só é eficaz através da colaboração de todos os agentes da Igreja local, os teólogos e antropólogos cristãos têm uma tarefa urgente de estudar cuidadosamente e recomendar os elementos culturais que podem ser incorporados na fé cristã mas sem obliterar os seus elementos essenciais.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has been credited for an unprecedented growth in the number of Christian converts. Many attempts are being made especially after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council by many African theologians, bishops and missionaries to render the gospel message more meaningful and practical to African Christians. Many African theologians believe that, the survival of Christianity and the practice of authentic Christian values by African Christians depend greatly on how Africans accept the gospel and make it part of their own existence. When the gospel message is seen as exotic and external, it becomes something superficial and without any serious commitment to it. When the Christian faith does not find its roots in African cultures and traditions, the faith becomes like a dress one puts on and change it whenever he/she wants. The syncretism of the gospel message as seen in many African societies and that of Ewe people in particular hinders them from authentic communion with Christ. This unfortunate situation is contrary to the spirit and objectives of evangelization.

It is believed that when positive elements found in Ewe religious and cultural beliefs are incorporated into the Church and the gospel message interpreted to reflect the concrete realities of the Ewe people, Ewe Christian converts would feel at home, embrace Christianity with undivided hearts and live true and authentic Christian lives. Thus, inculturation designates a method of evangelization that aims at rooting the gospel message at the heart of African cultures and traditions. Through inculturation, the gospel message and its values are inserted into a particular culture without ignoring the essential elements of that culture. A healthy dialogue is established between the gospel and the Africa traditional religion. This dialogue provokes true conversion and would subsequently lead to a new perception of personal dignity and identity. Thus “authentic inculturation must be simple and transformative with enduring values which have a deep meaning in the lives of the people.”¹

Two basic experiences in my life motivated me to choose this urgent but controversial topic for my research work. In the first place, my personal experience as someone who grew up in a traditional Ewe family and now as a religious missionary. Among my kinsmen, I witness conflict of faith between traditional religious and cultural beliefs and the Christian faith. On several

¹ P. C. CHIBUKO, “A Practical Approach to Liturgical Inculturation”, *African Ecclesial Review* 43 (April, 2001) 5.

occasions, I stopped family members (all baptized Christians) from going to consult diviners to find out the cause of sickness or death of a relative. These are assumed to be normal practices and many Christians see nothing wrong with them. My pastoral activities as a missionary brought me into contact with several African cultures especially the Asante culture of Ghana where I had my seminary formation for six years and the Macua people of Mozambique where I had my missionary pastoral experience for two years. I realized that, the behaviour of many Christians in these places is not different from Ewe people. Beliefs and practice of witchcraft, divination, blood sacrifice to deities and polygyny, only to mention a few are common practices among African Christians.

Another experience which really made me to question and to reflect on this schizophrenic behaviour of my people was a painted picture I once came across. It was a picture of a man divided into two halves; the right hand held a bible pointing to the Church, and the left hand held a fowl pointing to the traditional shrine. This anonymous artist beautifully captured and represented the reality of Ewe Christians. This picture really touched me and for many years has awakened my interest to find out the cause of this dualistic behaviour. Most African Christians and Ewe Christians in particular have lost their bearings and their true Christian identity.

I am motivated to investigate and to find answers to why the Christian faith has still not taken root in African cultures especially the Ewe culture, after several years of missionaries' labour. Why is the gospel message finding it difficult to reach the interiority of African life? How can the Church in Africa affirm its uniqueness and at the same time remain loyal to the gospel message? And how can inculturated evangelization be the source of self-identification in an African search for authentic Christian identity. These and many other questions which arise from my reflection about the actual situation of an African Christians motivated me to choose this topic

The basic objective of this investigation is to affirm that inculturated evangelization is an act of self-identification. This self-identification must not be understood in the sense of nationalism or indigenization with the aim of discarding its Western past. Self-identification implies the professing of Christian faith as an African, in an African thought system, using African symbols and within African context, and not just imitation of the West as it has been over the years. This will help me to explore the actual situation of an African Christian, how he has been evangelized

and how he is now living his Christian faith. It is also my aim to explore and distinguish the possible ambiguities between inculturation and other terms associated with it along the evangelization history of the Church. This will help me to examine the various methods of evangelization employed in Africa and to propose inculturation as the best option in this discerning moment of African Christianity. Inculturation is an effective medium of dialogue between Christian faith and Africa Tradition Religion because it does not impose but reconciles the conflicts which arise in an African search for specificity. It will be affirmed that inculturation is the only sure way to create a Church that is truly African, truly Christian and truly Catholic; the Church that will interpret and express the gospel message through African values and cultures. A balanced inculturation will eventually purify and sanctify African belief systems, cure Africans from their double allegiance, help them live authentic Christian faith and to contribute in a better way to the development of Christianity in the world.

Africa has many cultures and traditions. Even though there are similarities between these cultures and traditions, they are also distinct with specific characteristics. In order not to fall into the error of generalization, I will limit my studies to the cultures and traditions of Ewe tribe in Ghana. Meanwhile I may sometimes refer to materials not specifically directed towards the Ewe people but which bears similarity and can help me explain the real situation among the Ewe people. There are many Christian Churches and sects in Ghana and among Ewe people. Even though my main focus will be on the Roman Catholic Church, I will also take into consideration other Christian denominations especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the first Church to take root among the Ewe people. The sources and materials for this work will be principally drawn from documented facts- scientific books, magazines, published reports, historical records and my own experience as a missionary who was born and grew up among the Ewe people of Ghana. In this work, I shall use the terms Africa and Africans to mean Negro race of sub-Saharan Africa.

As a methodology, we shall consider descriptive-analytical and hermeneutical approach. This approach will take into consideration sociological, anthropological, religious, biblical, and pastoral perspectives. Thus, while this academic research seeks to explore biblically and theologically the possible ways to integrate the gospel message into Ewe culture and to elevate elements of truth found in Ewe culture into the life and worship of the Church, our knowledge of

the Ewe religious and cultural beliefs shall be deepen through sociological and anthropological perspectives. We shall be exposed to Ewe people's way of perceiving the world and how this in turn affects their Christian identity.

To achieve the academic objectives mentioned above, the dissertation is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, we shall explore the nature and relevance of inculturation by examining the two basic elements involved in the process of inculturation: culture and faith. We shall also examine the biblical, theological and ecclesial foundations of inculturation. We shall affirm that, inculturation did not only start after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council but its origin could be traced to the beginning of the salvation history. However, inculturation as a method of evangelization became more explicit when the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council opened the Church's door to the riches of other cultures. We shall also discuss the different models of evangelization employed by the Church over the centuries. It shall be implied throughout this work that, inculturation is a Christocentric enterprise; it has its foundation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We shall conclude the chapter by affirming that, the agents of inculturation are not only the specialist theologians, expatriate missionaries or the indigenous clergy; inculturated evangelization is the work of the entire local Church.

The second chapter captioned Ewe Traditional worldviews, shall be divided into three sections. The first section shall discuss the history, the present location, political and economic background of the Ewe people. The second section shall deal with the Ewe religious and ontological views. Thus, Ewe people's understanding and relationship with the Supreme Being (*Mawu*), the divinities or lesser deities (*trɔwo*), the ancestors (*tɔgbewo*), beliefs in magic (*dzo/dzoka*) and witchcraft (*amedudu*), shall be discussed. We shall also examine the concepts of human being (*amegbetɔ*), death (*ku*) and life after death (*tsiefe*). The third section shall explore the socio-cultural institutions and values such as kinship and family (*fome*), the rites of passage, marriage (*srɔdɛdɛ*) and *Trɔkosi* system- a system whereby virgin girls are sent to certain traditional shrines to atone for the crime committed by a relative. This chapter shall be more anthropological, and shall describe certain basic religious and cultural beliefs in Ewe culture.

In chapter three, we shall affirm that, inculturation is an African search for authentic Christian identity. We shall prove this by recalling the encounter between the Ewe people and early Christian missionaries especially the Bremen Missionaries who were the first Christian

missionaries to start a serious evangelization among the Ewe people. We shall show that, their method of evangelization was deficient and that Ewe people were evangelized outside their cultural context. The Ewe Christian today oscillates between the Christian faith and the traditional religion. The Ewe Christian identity is deformed and needs urgent recuperation through transformation and purification in Christ. The possible way to achieve this is through inculturation. This chapter shall also explore some religious and cultural practices which can serve as grounds and seeds for Christian evangelization. Those religious and cultural practices which serve as obstacles to inculturated evangelization shall also be given attention. The final phase of this chapter shall discuss relevant themes such as inculturation as self-identification, inculturation as liberation and inculturation as dialogue. The chapter shall be sealed with some pastoral recommendations to enhance the implementation of inculturated evangelization.

I hope that, this academic research will help me to understand my traditional customs better and the schizophrenic attitude of most of the Ewe Christians so that I can be in the position to help many African Christians who are finding it difficult to respond genuinely to the call of Christ. It is also my prayer that this research will serve as a source of information and education to those who still think that, Africans are inferior and refer to African Traditional Religion as fetish, animist and pagan. I must say with all sincerity that, it is not the aim of this research to raise African religious and cultural beliefs above the Christian faith but to affirm that when the positive elements in African religious and cultural beliefs are recognized by the Church, it will help the Africans to feel belong, identify themselves with the Christian faith through unwavering fidelity to Christ and contribute generously to the richness and welfare of the Universal Church. This dissertation does not seek to provide answers to all the problems associated with African Christians identity crises but opens the door for more related researches especially among the Ewe people of Ghana.

I CHAPTER

1. THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF INCULTURATION

Inculturation as a pastoral and a missiological terminology is relatively new and a rare dictionary word. Inculturation gained popularity and became a household name for many African theologians after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. For many African bishops and theologians, inculturation is a befitting evangelization model that can help the African Church to live and express the gospel message in an authentic African way. Inculturation will make the African Church truly African and truly Christian. However, the content of inculturation is not new. The root of inculturation could be traced to the beginning of the salvation history, and its urgency could be felt throughout the evangelization activities of the Church. If the priority of the Church is to bring the gospel to all nations and to lead all people to salvation in Christ, then the Church has an urgent task to find a suitable method to present the gospel message to all cultures.

It is important to note that inculturation is a new word and opens to various interpretations. In this work, in order to avoid ambiguity and confusion, inculturation would be used in relation to the process and the effect of the encounter between a given culture and the gospel or the Christian faith. When the gospel is effectively inserted into a culture and authentically absorbed by that culture, the culture identifies its true values, reconciles these values with the Christian faith and lives a true and authentic Christian experience. Pope John Paul II puts it this way: “inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.”²

Inculturation involves a relationship between the Church as the carrier of the gospel message and cultures. In order to grasp the basic understanding of the theology of inculturation it becomes imperative to explore the relationship between culture and faith. In other words, the basic understanding of how culture and faith functions are indispensable in order to ascertain the nature of inculturation.

²IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, “Slavorum Apostoli”, 21.

1.1 THE IMPORTANCE AND FUNCTIONS OF CULTURE AND FAITH

The basic understanding of culture and faith, and their importance and functions is fundamental to the comprehension of inculturation since the drama of inculturation involves the interaction between culture and faith.

Man is a cultural being and his existence necessarily implies a culture. Man creates and fashions out a pattern of life in order to dominate his environment, and to construct his identity. Man is also a religious being. Man is conscious of his limitation and finiteness in the world. He is desperately searching for the Absolute. This search is done within a cultural context. Since culture exerts great influence on man and shapes the individual's attitude, which includes his search for the divine and his consequent relationship with the divine (faith), what one believes and how one lives his faith are not without cultural influence. In the words of M. P. Gallagher, "our receptivity for revelation is more shaped by culture than by philosophical clarities. We seldom live by ideas or ideologies but rather the images of life communicated by our surrounding worlds"³ We cannot deny the fact that one's religious belief also shapes and influences how one lives and what changes one could bring to his culture.

a) CULTURE

Culture is an ambiguous word and has various possible definitions. In an effort to classify the usage of the term culture, Kroeber and Kluckhohn in 1952 discovered about 164 definitions of culture.⁴ In this work, I would employ those definitions of culture that would help us to better understand the on-going relationship and the dialogue between the traditional cultures and the Christian faith.

Etymologically, the word culture has its roots in the Latin word *colere* which means to till or to cultivate. For example, a farmer employs certain cultural practices such as pruning, trimming, mulching, grafting and others in order to produce healthy crops and abundant yield. In the same manner, one's life could be cultivated with the aim of perfecting it, making it better. Thus, the

³ M. P. GALLAGHER, S.J., *Clashing symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, DLT, London, 1997, 4-5.

⁴ Cf. M. P. GALLAGHER, S.J., *Clashing symbols*, 13.

idea of human culture is a metaphorical extension of the use of „culture“ in crop and animal productions.⁵ The act of cultivation implies unnaturalness. Culture is a human creation, whether consciously or unconsciously in his effort to dominate and establish himself in his environment. Culture is not only the visible aspect of human behavior but it is both an interior and a living quality. This makes culture more complex and difficult to define. It is important to note that, the term „culture“ only gained wider attention in European thought in the second half of the 18th century and was identified with the process of intellectual and spiritual development which was linked with the progressive character of the modern era.⁶ For Bernard Lonergan, the contemporary view of culture is empirical while the older notion is normative. Bernard Lonergan distinguishes the two notions of culture as follow:

“The contemporary notion of culture is empirical. A culture is a set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, and there are as many cultures as there are distinct sets of such meanings and values... On the older view culture was conceived not empirically but normatively. It was the opposite of barbarism... It stressed not facts but values. It could not but claim to be Universalist.”⁷

One of the earliest definitions of culture was given by a British anthropologist E. B. Tylor in his book entitled *Primitive culture* in 1871. For E. B. Tylor, “Culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society.”⁸ This definition of culture highlights the subjective aspects that constitute our societies. Culture constitutes the basic fabrics of our societies which we assimilate either consciously or unconsciously. Thus, culture is an interior motor or the soul that propels and guides the individual’s behavior in the society.

Culture defines and interprets a society’s heritage such as beliefs, customs, traditions, institutions and philosophy of life. It is our culture that defines our identity and it is through the lens of our culture that we evaluate ourselves and others. A better understanding of our culture is essential to dialogue and to construct a positive relationship with others. M. P. Gallagher cited Lonergan to

⁵ Cf. K. TANNER, *Theories of culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997, 4.

⁶ Cf. R. G. COTE, *Re-visioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America*, Paulist Press, New York, 1996, 89-90.

⁷ B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, DLT, London, 1972, 301.

⁸ E. B. TYLOR, *Primitive Culture Vol. 1*, John Murray, London, 1871, 1.

express culture as the communal expression of our self-understanding – through art, language and through the visions implicit in how we lived and act.⁹

A. Shorter gives a holistic description of culture as follows:

“A mental world, a web of meaning clothed in images and behavioral norms. It is a pattern of human thought and behavior. It is the prism through which society views the whole of its experience, domestic, political, social, economic, religious. Culture is learned by the human being in infancy and developed throughout life. It enables the individual to relate cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally to the world, and to communicate this understanding to others. It gives identity to groups of individuals... Culture, in its true anthropological understanding, embraces the whole context of life, and is as relevant to modernity and modern problems as it is to traditional beliefs and values. Culture is not the exclusive preserve of any section of the community, nor is it an undifferentiated attribute of humanity as a whole.”¹⁰

Culture as the tradition or the social heritage of a society serves as a reference point to our way of living. But this does not imply that culture is static or is basically a thing of the past. Human beings are the creators of culture and since human beings are dynamic and constantly adapting to new situations, cultures also changes either consciously or unconsciously. Culture is not a closed system but open for modifications and constructive development due to the dynamically open-ended nature of man. However, the openness of a particular culture for changes and modifications varies. Some cultures are slow and afraid to welcome changes.

The concept of culture is universal because all people possess one. But each culture is distinct and specific. Even within the same culture, there may be subcultures. It is therefore important not to evaluate or judge other cultures from outside or use one’s culture as a yardstick to measure other cultures. No culture is perfect. Some cultures are more advanced and civilized than others. However, we should be careful to conclude that civilized cultures are more perfect than less civilized ones. I think the goodness of a culture depends on how this culture helps its members to live authentic lives, to reflect and to understand themselves, and to open them up for authentic dialogue and relationship with others. An international conference on „Cultural Policies“ held by UNESCO in Mexico in 1982 beautifully describes the functions of culture as follows:

⁹ Cf. M. P. GALLAGHER, S.J., *Clashing symbols*, 17.

¹⁰ A. SHORTER, *Christianity and the African Imagination*, Paulines Publication of Africa, Nairobi, 1996, 16.

“Culture... it includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, tradition and beliefs... It is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with a critical judgment and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievement, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.”¹¹

It is also important to note that, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council emphasizes the vital role of cultures in the Church’s evangelization process. The Pastoral Constitution of the Church with respect to the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, relates culture to human nature and claims that authentic humanity can only be possible through culture. “Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, ... The word „culture“ in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities...”¹² From the above notion of culture presented by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, we can deduce two basic essentials of culture; the intrinsic connection of culture to promotion of human dignity, and culture as a medium to realize our full humanity. As A. Dulles puts it, “culture is the materialization of the human spirit and at the same time a spiritualization of matter. It thus serves to render our world more human.”¹³

The topic of culture was given great importance in the writings of Pope John Paul II. His basic understanding of culture and its indispensable role could be found in his address to UNESCO in 2nd of June, 1980:

“The essential meaning of culture consists, according to the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, in the fact that it is a characteristic of human life as such. Man lives a really human life thanks to culture. Human life is culture in the sense too that, through it, man is distinguished and differentiated from everything that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot do without culture. Culture is a specific way of man’s „existing and being“... Man, who, in the visible world, is the only ontic subject of culture, is also its only object and its term. Culture is that through which man as man, becomes more man. This man who expresses himself and objectifies himself in and through culture is unique, complete and indivisible. He is at once subject and architect of culture. Man and only

¹¹ UNESCO Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico in 1982; cited by M. P. GALLAGHER, S.J., *Clashing symbols*, 21.

¹²GS, 53.

¹³ A. DULLES, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures 1988-2007*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2008, 148.

man expresses himself in it and find his own balance in it. A culture without human subjectivity and without human causality is inconceivable. In culture we discover who man is, as distinguished from what he has... Both spiritual and material dimensions of reality are cultural because man, the subject of culture, is both spiritual and material. He is neither a product of material systems nor a pure spirit alienated from matter and system of production. Culture is what distinguishes one human group from another. In its proper culture, a group comes to self-expression. No group identity can be so exclusive, however, that it is closed to other cultures. Man is spiritual, and this opening to transcendence makes communication and sharing with all human groups possible and desirable.¹⁴

Pope John Paul II's idea about culture reflects both the material and spiritual dimensions of man. A full humanity is only possible through culture. In this sense, culture must create appropriate conditions for human freedom and growth. Culture must liberate man and not suppress him. Culture must satisfy both the material and spiritual needs of its members. A culture that focuses only on the material and neglects the spiritual has a great deformity, it risks being dehumanizing.

Every culture has a religious dimension, a desire to search for the Absolute. If we believe and accept the fact that we are not the source of our life but we are creatures of God; then we can also agree that our true identity and the meaning of our existence can only be found in God. We can reach our full humanity only in God. Every culture must orient its members toward establishing an authentic relationship with God. As such, culture is intrinsically linked to religious faith. The religious faith (the gospel faith for us Christians) must permeate the veins of our cultures and guide them to their destiny. When our cultures including our customs, traditions, institutions etc. are being transformed and orientated by the power of the gospel, authentic inculturation is being realized. This leads to a Christian culture in which our whole life experience is lived under the dictates of the gospel message. This significant and inseparable relationship between culture and religious faith introduces us to the reflection on faith.

b) FAITH

Religious faith is an important dimension of every culture. Faith is an un-coerced response to God's revelation. For Christians, faith is a response to the gospel message and a total reliance

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, "Address to UNESCO: Man's Entire Humanity is expressed in Culture", (June 2, 1980), 6.

and trust in God through Jesus Christ. Faith orients Christians toward a personal encounter with Christ, who gave his life out of love to save humanity. Christian faith is founded on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The source of faith is God; God takes the initiative and the duty of man is to respond. Unlike culture, faith is not a human product, even though one has to be responsible for his or her assent. Faith implies a relationship with Christ; a relationship which involves faithfulness to the teachings of Christ and the tradition of the Church.

However, religious faith is not an abstract concept but a living experience. Faith is lived, expressed and communicated in and through culture. Cultural symbols, art, language, and other cultural elements provide the platform for the communication of faith. Faith on the other hand helps Christians to reflect creatively about fundamental questions and meaning of life in any cultural structure or situations because faith guides man towards full reality of God. Faith orients cultures to their final destiny. Both culture and faith require each other to flourish. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

“Culture is inseparable from religion (faith), in as much as God is the author, sustainer, and final goal of human existence. Religion often represents the transcendent dimension of the culture itself. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude a person takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God... when this question is eliminated, culture and moral life of the nations are corrupted.”¹⁵

Faith is culturally conditioned since it has to be concretely interpreted and expressed in a particular culture. But the essence of faith is independent of any particular culture. Faith uses the resources and genius of a particular culture to express itself but not limited to only that culture. Faith possesses universal values and hence transcends all cultures. The object of faith is the pursuing of the „truth“. For Christians, this truth is Jesus Christ; “I am the way, the truth and the life...” (Jn. 14:6). Christ is the truth and truth as a universal quality transcends the framework and limitations of any particular culture; faith in Christ cannot be limited to any culture.

In theory, it is easy to affirm that gospel faith transcends all cultures. But in praxis, how exactly is faith totally free from cultures? Is it possible to announce the gospel faith in its pure state without cultural influence? Was it possible for the early missionaries to evangelize Africans without the influence of the European culture? It is important to note that, if the Christian faith is

¹⁵ A. DULLES, “John Paul II as a Theologian of culture”, *Logos: Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 1:2 (1997) 19-33.

rooted in the mystery of Christ, it is possible to live and spread the gospel faith in different cultural contexts without confusing it with any particular culture. However, the problem of most early missionaries in Africa was not mainly the expression of Christian faith using European thought systems and values but the substitution of the gospel faith with the Western culture and civilization.

Pope John Paul II proposes the possibility and the need for a Christian culture. Christian culture should not be understood as a return to the medieval theocracy but a culture informed by the principles of the gospel. Since culture defines how we live our faith, a culture which is been oriented by the gospel truth would not be an obstacle for living the faith. "... faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived."¹⁶ The gospel does not liberate unless it engages the total worldview of its hearers. Christian culture does not imply uniformity of faith; different cultures can be Christianized, yet preserving their identity. Metaphorically, we can say that, what heat is to gold, faith is to culture. Heat destroys the unwanted particles, purifies and transforms without causing any harm to the gold. In the same way, faith purifies transforms and perfect culture without destroying the identity and integrity of that culture. Thus, the process of transforming a culture with the gospel is termed as inculturation. With this understanding of culture and faith, I would like to reflect on the biblical, ecclesial and theological foundations of inculturation.

1.2 INCULTURATION AND HISTORY OF SALVATION: BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIAL FOUNDATIONS

Even though inculturation is relatively a new term in theological debate, what inculturation implies has been present since the beginning of the salvation history: the desire of God is to save man from his precarious and sinful situation. Acceptance of God's offer of salvation brings about newness and transformation of life. We establish a covenant relationship with God, we conform our lives to the dictates of his precepts, and we interpret our experiences in the light of His covenant. God communicates with us within our concrete situations, within our cultures, with

¹⁶JOHN PAUL II, "Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment (January 16, 1982)", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Ed. (June 28, 1982) 1-8.

familiar symbols, languages, rites and gestures. We can only respond and live God's covenant faithfully in our concrete situations, in our proper cultures with both our weaknesses and strengths. Thus, it is both biblically and historically evident that the authentic way to make God's revelation meaningful to man is to adapt it to the particular concrete situation of man, with elements proper to his culture. For example, we should not expect the Africans' expression of Christianity to be the exact photocopy of European Christianity. I believe that God communicates to Africans as an African and in their concrete life situations. To deny this fact is to deny the universality of the salvation brought by Jesus to the whole humanity. Inculturation process is indispensable in the salvation history because the whole of revelation is, in a way, an exercise in inculturation.¹⁷

1.2.1 INCULTURATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is an undisputable fact that the incarnation of Christ is fundamental to the theological and biblical reflections on inculturation. The object of inculturation is Christ himself. With this assumption, it is quite difficult to talk about explicit inculturation in the Old Testament. However, we must not forget that, before the "Word became flesh and lived among us." (Jn. 1:14) God continually communicated with Israel. The self-revelation of God reached its fullness in Christ, but Christ himself asserts, "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them." (Mt. 5:7). The incarnation of Christ did not cancel out God's self-revelation to Israel but authenticated and completed it.

When we broaden the meaning of inculturation to imply the insertion or assimilation of the divine truth of God by human culture, it is easy to find traces of inculturation throughout the salvation history, including the Old Testament. A. Shorter affirms that, "...we already have here in the Old Testament antecedent of the word-seeding Logos, the concept that underlies the Christological approach to inculturation."¹⁸ The Old Testament reflects the different epochs and situations in Israel's history and culture, and in these, the divine revelation was embedded and expressed.

¹⁷ Cf. A. BYRNE, "Some in and out of Inculturation", *Annales Theologici* 4 (1990) 141.

¹⁸ A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 2006, 105.

In the Old Testament, God did not invent new cultural and social contexts, symbols, languages and rites to communicate with Israel. Before the biblical faith or the called of Abraham, the ancestors of Abraham had their own religious principles and convictions. God made use of the already existing cultural elements to reveal the plan of salvation to Israel. Despite the fact that, Israel's culture has been deformed by all sorts of vices, God took the initiative to purify and re-orientate it to its original status.

It is important to note that, the culture of Israel was influenced and formed by several interactions with other Near Eastern cultures. Important cultural elements such as circumcision, the spring sacrifice, the Sabbath rest were not unique to Israel but borrowed from neighbouring cultures. Also, earliest biblical traditions such as creation story, the laws of the covenant, and the formulations of the prophetic oracles of Israel bear strong resemblance to creation myths of Mesopotamia, Hammurabi codes, and the oracles discovered at Mari respectively.¹⁹ However, these borrowed elements, once incorporated into Israel's culture were given new and profound religious meanings by interpreting them in the light of the covenant and faith in the personal God of Abraham.²⁰ Thus, Israel's culture enriched itself through acculturation with other cultures and appropriated to itself several foreign cultural elements. A. Shorter describes the encounter of Israel with the Canaanite culture between the Exodus and the Exile as the most outstanding instance of inculturation in the Old Testament. Israel reinterpreted their new cultural experience, purifying and transforming it and given it a new life within the mosaic covenant tradition.²¹ Israel's relationship with the God of Abraham gave them a new identity (chosen people) and a mission (to prepare humanity for the coming of Messiah). Likewise for us Christians, the acceptance of Christ brings new identity (children of God) and a mission (to make Christ known to the whole humanity).

It is common to read and to consider the Old Testament as culturally ethnocentric and to condemn Israel for its nationalistic arrogance and pride. It is true that Israel prided itself of being „the elected“ and considered God to be in its favour against other nations. But we must agree that, at certain moments, Israel was conscious of the fact that, revelation of God to humanity is

¹⁹ Cf. A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 106-107.

²⁰ Cf. ITC, “Inculturation in the History of Salvation, 3”, in *Faith and Inculturation* (1988). (Retrieved from: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html). Accessed on 14/01/2016.

²¹ Cf. A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 109-111.

universal and not an exclusive privilege to Israel. This permitted respect and tolerance to other cultures and peoples.²²

Israel's experience with Yahweh was a unique historical fact. But this does not undermine the universality of its mission. The objective of Israel's election was the salvation of the whole world. In the second song of the servant, prophet Isaiah states "...I shall make you a light to other nations so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of earth" (Is 49:6). The creation story in Genesis recounts the common origin of all humanity. We are created by God and we are descendants of Adam and Eve. Israel was conscious of being „the elected“ through the salvific acts of God in its history; Exodus experience, mosaic covenant etc. but Israel never forgets the primitive and universal covenant God made with all humanity in creation: all creation depends on God, and God orientates all creation to himself.²³ A. Shorter cited Pietro Rossano to show that Israel acknowledges pure religions and praised certain personalities for their faith even though they were not Jews.

“When it meets with forms of pure religion or with forms that are reconcilable with faith in the God of the covenant, it welcomes them and takes them up: it is enough to refer to cases of Melchizedek, of Jethro, of Job, non-Jewish religious personalities, who were nevertheless recognized and praised for their faith.”²⁴

From Israel's experience, we can understand inculturation as an integral cultural participation in God's self-communication to humanity. God's self-communication to Israel despite its sinfulness and fragility is a sign that every culture is capable of welcoming the Good News and be transformed by it. As A. Shorter puts it, “Israel election was a pointer to the universal element that is to be found in all cultures, to the core of religious truth at the heart of every human tradition. God's self-revelation to Israel was therefore an interrogation of all cultures.”²⁵As such, the Old Testament is indispensable to the understanding of the inculturation process of the New Testament since it laid the background to the Gospel and shows God's preparation for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ.

²² Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs: O Ondjango e inculturação em Africa/ Angola*, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto, 1991, 30.

²³Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs*, 32.

²⁴ A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 107.

²⁵ A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 113.

1.2.2 INCULTURATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament presents a new vision about God self-communication to humanity. It recounts the climax of God's self-manifestation to man through Jesus Christ; "but when the completion of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons." (Ga. 4:4-5). Jesus Christ was born a Jew and was influenced by the Jewish culture and religious thoughts. But Jesus Christ is the Son of God with a mission to bring salvation to the whole world. Thus, the gospel message which is Jesus Christ himself transcends his cultural particularity as a Jew through the redemptive process.

The New Testament is not just a mere fulfillment of the messianic expectations of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the Old Testament expectations were exceeded, modified, and corrected. While the mission in the Old Testament was more of a centripetal commission (the mission was concentrated in Israel; coming of the gentiles to the old covenant), the New Testament involves centrifugal commission (the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles).²⁶ The inculturation process in the New Testament is very clear and explicit. The various books and letters which were compiled over a period of many years took into consideration different social and cultural contexts, and addressed different situations. For example, the Gospel of Saint Matthew was addressed to Jewish Christians, and that of Saint Luke was adapted to suit Gentile Christians. The content of the message (Jesus Christ) did not change but was presented in different forms to render the message more meaningful to its audience. In the same way the gospel message becomes more meaningful to Africans when adapted to suit their conditions.

The New Testament contains both the theological and pastoral motivations for the inculturation process. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Pentecost event, the Council of Jerusalem, and Saint Paul's speech before the council of Areopagus are some explicit examples of the process of inculturation in the New Testament.

²⁶ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, "Jesus and the Gentiles", *Studia Missionalia* 51 (2002) 167.

a) THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Incarnation is the basic theological model that inspires the process of inculturation. Jesus Christ the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity became one of us; he assumed our human condition in order to transform and save it. The doctrine of incarnation articulates three basic Christological truths: 1) Jesus Christ was a divine Person. 2) Jesus Christ was an authentic human being. 3) The divine nature and the human nature existed in hypostatic union in the person of Jesus Christ.²⁷

M. P. Gallagher distinguishes two tendencies in the usage of the term incarnation. Theologically, incarnation roots and relates the call of evangelization to the central mystery of the faith in Jesus Christ. Pastorally, incarnation makes real or gives human and concrete form to faith in different contexts.²⁸ Also, the incarnation of Jesus Christ denotes two basic facts; the universality of the gospel message for the salvation of humanity, and the concretization of this salvation message in a particular context. The divine „Word“ took flesh in a particular people (Jews) and drew upon the cultural and religious heritage of the Jews to make known to others his person and message. Likewise, the gospel must find embodiment in the various cultures and peoples. As such, the incarnation of the „Word“ is the archetype of the inculturation of the gospel.²⁹ However, it is important not to confuse the incarnation of the gospel message in the various cultural contexts to mean a mere humanization just to render it more meaningful to particular group of people. Jesus Christ is true God and true man, and the salvation he offers to humanity must be understood in both kenotic and redemptive sense.³⁰

It is true that incarnation represents a model *par excellence* of inculturation but we must not forget that inculturation involves the totality of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Franz Xavier SCHEUERER warns that “to base inculturation only on the mystery of the incarnation without referring to the entire mystery of Christ is highly inadequate.”³¹ M. P. GALLAGHER also underlines the importance of the totality of the mystery of Christ in the inculturation process by

²⁷ Cf. D. L. GREGG, “Incarnation”, in D. N. FREEDMAN (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids/Michigan/Cambridge, U.K., 2000, 634.

²⁸ Cf. M. P. GALLAGHER, “Inculturation debates: the relevance of Lonergan”, *Studia Missionalia* 52 (2003) 347.

²⁹ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, “The Christian Theology of Inculturation”, *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995) 28.

³⁰ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, “The Christian Theology of Inculturation”, 29.

³¹ F. X. SCHEUERER, *Interculturality- a challenge for the mission of the church*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 2001, 117.

making reference to *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul II. The encyclical explores three theological models of inculturation. Jesus Christ assumes our humanity in a definite culture and history (incarnation model); Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity, to save, to purify, and to transform what he assumes (redemption model); Jesus Christ through his Spirit unites and leads the Church towards the knowledge of the truth (Pentecost model).³²

b) THE PENTECOST EVENT

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost day fulfilled the promise of the departing Christ, “But you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea, Samaria, and indeed to earth’s remotest end.” (Acts 1:8). The Pentecost marked the foundation of the Church and also revealed its universal mission; to proclaim the gospel and to make it heard in different languages of the earth. The Pentecost event could be described as the Church’s first act of inculturation.

“Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, and each one was bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. „Surely“, they said, all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language?” (Acts 2:5-8).

The uniqueness of the Pentecost experience was that all those present heard the gospel being preached in their own languages and not just one common language. In the same way, through inculturation the Pentecost experience may be reactivated in the Church.

The inaugural event of the Church affirmed the different cultural identities within the universal Church and the opportunity for each culture to interpret and express the gospel message in its own language. During the Pentecost nobody was left unattended, all those present heard the Gospel in their native tongue. The Church as the new Pentecost is obliged to proclaim the Gospel by being sensitive to the cultural diversity within the universal Church. M. P. GALLAGHER mentions three essential points in the Pentecost event that can help us to understand the inculturation process: “inculturation seeks to echo the miracle of unity in diversity; the spirit has already been at work in cultures- even before the coming of evangelization; the Church brings a

³² Cf. M. P. GALLAGHER, “Inculturation debates”, 352-353.

gift and receives a gift in the process of inculturation.”³³ The Pentecost event is an encouragement and a challenge to the African Church to listen to Christ and to profess their faith through their culture. Through this, the African culture would be purified and we can enrich the universal Church with our customs and worldviews. Pope John Paul II writes in *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995):“Thanks to the outpouring and the action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith in Jesus, and proclaim the marvel that the Lord has done for them.”³⁴

c) THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem between 49-50AD showed a profound attempt by the Apostles to dialogue with the Gentile Christians. A Gentile could become a Christian without necessarily becoming a Jew. The view of the Christian Pharisees that one must become a Jew in order to become a Christian was rejected by the Council.³⁵ What makes us Christian and unites us are our baptism and our faith in Jesus Christ and not circumcision. The Apostles were conscious of and respected the cultural differences between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, and tried to outline the essentials of the Christian faith.

Meanwhile, the Gentile Christians were admonished to “abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from illicit marriages...” (Ac 15:29). Commenting on the decision of the Council, J. T. SANDERS writes that, it “demonstrates the proper fidelity of Gentile Christianity to the Law of Moses while at the same time freeing Gentile Christians from any need to be converted to Judaism, especially from any need to be circumcised.”³⁶The recommendation to the Gentile Christians is a sign of continuity with and fidelity to the Bible. For a meaningful evangelization, the Church has to dialogue with the African traditional cultures and to make recommendations that would promote authentic African participation in the universal Church. As Gentiles did not have to be Jews before becoming Christians, so Africans do not have to become Europeans in order to become Christians. It is true

³³ M. P. GALLAGHER S.J., *Clashing Symbols*, 108.

³⁴ IOANNIS PAULI PP. II., “*Ecclesia in Africa*”, 85.

³⁵ Cf. J. T. SANDERS, *The Jews in Luke-Acts*, SCM Press Ltd., London, 117.

³⁶ J. T. SANDERS, *The Jews in Luke-Acts*, 116.

that like Gentile Christians, there are some cultural practices that Africans have to abandon or purify. Inculturation can help the African Church to chisel out the essential elements in African cultures, test them before the furnace of the gospel and help Africans to express the gospel faith in their own way. Just like the decisions of the Council, inculturation would promote the dignity of other cultures and open the way for those who for so long felt marginalized in the Church feel welcome into the Church.

d) PAUL'S SPEECH BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF AREOPAGUS (ACTS 17:22-28)

Saint Paul's discourse to the Athenians could be seen as an attempt to contextualize the Gospel message by using the proper elements already existing in the Greek culture. Saint Paul's speech opened the hearts and minds of Athenians to see in the „altar to an unknown God“ the God of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul did not go there to preach them a new God neither did he condemn their religiousness as idolatry. Rather, Saint Paul praised their religiousness and their genuine but subconscious desire to worship God. He sought to redirect and transform their hunger for God and to guide them to the knowledge of the God of Jesus Christ. M. P. Gallagher describes Saint Paul's speech as follows:

“He gradually moves from external images to evoke the transcendence of God beyond all images. He gives special attention to the fundamental human experience of desire for God: people feel their way towards God, whereas in fact God is not far from anyone because in God we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28).”³⁷

Saint Paul's attitude towards the Athenians was remarkable. He identified the seeds of the gospel within the non-Christian culture of the Greeks. This calls into question the Church's attitude toward non-Christian cultures; is it possible, like Saint Paul to identify the seed of the Gospel in the „pagan cultures“ of Africa? The Church must not forget the pastoral principle of Saint Paul which allowed him to effectively preach the gospel and to adapt the gospel message to all cultures:

“So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself to slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the Jews I made myself a Jew, to win the Jews; to those under the Law as one under the Law (though I am not), in order to win those under the Law; to

³⁷ M. P. GALLAGHER S.J., *Clashing Symbols*, 121.

those outside the Law as one outside the Law, though I am not outside the Law but under Christ's law, to win those outside the Law. To the weak, I made myself weak to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others" (1Cor 9:19-23).

Saint Paul always adapted himself and the gospel message to the situations he encountered. Is the Church ready to learn from Saint Paul? Is the Church ready to make herself African to the Africans? The inculturation process becomes fruitless when we ignore this pastoral principle of Saint Paul. From Saint Paul, missionaries can learn that inculturation is not just a mere question of learning languages and vocabularies; it involves a profound understanding of the context in which the gospel message is to be presented.

1.2.3 INCULTURATION FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The primitive Church was conscious of her universal mission to announce the gospel to the whole world. This was evident in the zeal with which the Apostles, the early Church Fathers and the Patristic Fathers carried out their missionary activities. The spread of Christianity from its „original home“ (Jewish culture) and its meeting with other cultures obliged the Church to adapt the gospel message to suit her different audiences. Christianity during the first three centuries was less organized, marginalized, illegal and even persecuted. Two great events changed the fortunes of Christianity in the fourth century: the edict of Milan in 313AD signed by Emperor Constantine to make Christianity a legal religion, and in 380AD under the reign of Emperor Theodosius Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.³⁸ Christianity was absorbed by the Roman Empire and was greatly influence by its customs and traditions. To be a Christian was identical to be a Roman citizen.³⁹ From this epoch it was easy to confuse western Christianity and civilization with the gospel faith.

J. NUNES cited R. NIEBUHR to affirm that historically, Christianity assumed three positions before cultures: a) Christian rejection of cultures; b) identification between Christian faith and

³⁸ Cf. J. ANTUNES DA SILVA, *Inculturação: Desafio à Igreja de hoje*, São Paulo, Lisboa, 1994, 36.

³⁹ Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs*, 52.

cultures; c) dialogue between Christian faith and cultures.⁴⁰ While the Christian rejection of cultures did not permit evangelization of other cultures, Christian identification with Western culture created ethnocentric religion which did not recognize the value in other cultures; the Western culture became the measure for the authenticity of the Christian faith. Dialogue with other cultures became more evident after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council opened the Church to the riches of other cultures.

However, in the early centuries, some Christian thinkers such as Saint Justin martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and others used philosophical expressions and concepts already existing in Greco-Roman thoughts to explain the Christian message. For example, while Saint Justin martyr spoke of Jesus Christ as *logos spermatikos*, (the seed of the word), that already existed in non-Christian hearts; for Eusebius, non-Christian philosophies were preparations for Christ.⁴¹ The identification of Jesus with the *logos spermatikos* (which also signifies all-pervading or principle of rationality) expressed the universality of Christ since for the Greeks, universality constitute a must for any idea to have a lasting validity.⁴²

Certain Pontifical statements and directives to missionaries was a clear sign of a strong desire for Inculturated evangelization. Pope Gregory the Great in 596 sent the following words to Saint Augustine of Canterbury who was evangelizing among the Angles and Saxons in England:

“Tell Augustine that he should by no means destroy the temples of the gods but rather the idols within those temples. Let him, after he has purified them with holy water, place altars and relics of the saints in them. For if those temples are well built, they should be converted from the worship of demons to the service of the true God. Thus, seeing that their places of worship are not destroyed, the people will banish error from their hearts and come to places familiar and dear to their acknowledgement and worship of the true God.”⁴³

This is an example to show that the bearers of the gospel message need not condemn other cultures and traditions that are not contrary to the gospel. The gospel message corrects and purifies traditions that it encounters. But once these customs and traditions have been condemned

⁴⁰Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs*, 47.

⁴¹ Cf. L. J. LUZBETAK, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspective in Missiological Anthropology*, Orbis books, Maryknoll/New York, 1989, 87.

⁴² Cf. M. NEUMAN, T. P. WALTERS, *Christology: True God, True Man*, Loyola Press, Chicago, 2001, 36-37.

⁴³ P. SCHINELLER, S.J., *A handbook on Inculturation*, Paulist Press, New York, 1990, 32.

and neglected by the missionaries their hope of genuine transformation and salvation is being thwarted.

Inculturated evangelization could be seen in the evangelization method of Cyril and Methodius among the Slav people. The scriptures as well as catechetical and liturgical manuals were made accessible in the local language. Liturgy was celebrated in Slavonic, schools were established and native clergies were trained to take responsibility over Christian communities.⁴⁴ In his Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* in 1985, Pope John Paul II described the work of Cyril and Methodius as an attempt of inculturation.

“The work of evangelization which they carried out (Saints Cyril and Methodius) as pioneers in the territory inhabited by Slav peoples- contains both a model of what today is called „inculturation“ the incarnation of the Gospel message in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.”⁴⁵

Another notable example was the guiding advice of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith created in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV to missionaries bound for China in 1659:

“Do not waste your zeal or your powers of persuasion in getting these people to change their rites, customs, or ways of life, unless these be very obviously opposed to faith and morals. For what could be more ridiculous than to import France, Spain, Italy or any other part of Europe into China? What you carry with you is not a national culture but a message which does not reject or offend the sound traditions of any country, but rather wants to safeguard and foster them.”⁴⁶

Also, the 17th and 18th centuries recorded an attempt of inculturated evangelization by Roberto de Nobili and Mateo Ricci in India and China respectively⁴⁷. Even though these two and other missionaries of the time had their zeal and efforts to adapt the gospel message thwarted by Rome on suspicion of diverting from the „normal“ and approved method of evangelization at the time, their method of Inculturated evangelization was later appreciated and encouraged by the Church’s hierarchy. Even though the idea of inserting the gospel into the cultures of peoples was seen as important, in reality it was rarely practiced. Many missionaries sent to evangelize Africa see nothing good in African traditions and customs. They first sought to substitute Africans“ „salvage and devilish traditions“ with European civilization before they evangelized them and

⁴⁴ Cf. LUZBETAK, *The Church and Cultures*, 90.

⁴⁵ IOANNIS PAULI PP. II., “*Slavorum Apostoli*”, 21.

⁴⁶ P. SCHINELLER, S.J., *A handbook on Inculturation*, 36-37.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. ANTUNES DA SILVA, *Inculturação: Desafio à Igreja de hoje*, 37-38.

save their poor souls. It is unfortunate to note that, in the initial stages of evangelization in Africa, inculturation was not considered as an option by many missionaries; poor Africans had nothing to offer nor were they capable of reflecting on the mystery of the Triune God.

1.2.4 INCULTURATION DURING AND AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL: PERIOD OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN FAITH AND CULTURE

Despite several efforts to proclaim the good news to the world, the Church until the Second Vatican Council was still suspicious and reluctant to open up to non-western cultures. Other cultures were seen as enemies to conquer or at least an adversary to neutralize. The Western culture was considered as civilization *par excellence* to imitate.⁴⁸ The fraternal openness of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council to other cultures and religions was a courageous reaffirmation of the Church's commitment to her universal mission and to correct her ethnocentric attitude which has hindered an authentic Inculturated evangelization for many centuries. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council clearly states that: "She [Church] fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them."⁴⁹ As such, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council promotes and recognizes legitimate diversity in liturgical celebrations and contextual theological reflections.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council does not explicitly use the term inculturation but rather adaptation. However, pastoral and theological reflections on several expressions of Vatican II implicitly inspire the spirit of inculturation. With time, inculturation became an established word in the official Church documents and theological reflections.

There are many beautiful affirmations in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council documents especially in Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), and the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*), that encourage and foster reconciliation between

⁴⁸Cf. J. ANTUNES DA SILVA, *Inculturação: Desafio à Igreja de hoje*, 41.

⁴⁹ LG, 13.

Christian faith and culture. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes the importance of culture and calls on Christians to engage themselves actively in the modern world.

“God spoke according to the culture proper to each age... Nevertheless, the Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern... The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ.”⁵⁰

For me, the above passage is one of the richest reflections of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on Inculturated evangelization. The passage underlines the role of Christ to cultures; Christ heals and restores cultures to their original dignity. We do not need perfect cultures to proclaim Christ; rather it is Christ that makes perfect those cultures which welcome him. It is unfortunate to see in Africa many missionaries and even the indigenous priests still struggling to understand and to initiate a fruitful dialogue between the gospel message and the traditional culture. We must understand that it is Christ that perfects cultures and not the missionaries.

Conscious of the tremendous missionary work still remain to be accomplished, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council asserts that if the Church wants to fulfill its mission by bringing the mystery of salvation to all peoples, then it must implant herself among all cultures in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural situation.⁵¹

Several post Second Vatican Ecumenical Council documents and reflections continue to emphasize the urgency and the importance of the evangelization of cultures. Notable among them is Pope Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). Pope Paul VI questions the extent to which the Church can adapt herself to the historical and the local circumstances in which she exercises her mission. He entreats missionaries to be respectful, humble and simple and to identify themselves with those they proclaim the good news.⁵² In

⁵⁰ GS, 58.

⁵¹ Cf. AG, 10.

⁵² Cf. PAULUS PP. VI, “*Ecclesiam suam*”, 33.

Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI calls for an effective methodology in the evangelization process and a complete fidelity to the message of Christ. He states:

“Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it addresses, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; in other words, one sacrifices the reality and destroys the unity without which there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation.”⁵³

Pope Paul VI reminds us not to substitute the essentials in the inculturation process. Inculturation does not sacrifice the integrity of the gospel message. The gospel message and for that matter Christ does not change. Reinterpreting the words of Christ, his gestures and benevolent acts of kindness and solidarity towards the poor and the oppressed, using African symbols and languages with reference to a particular and concrete African situation, would no doubt make Christ more meaningful and acceptable among Africans.

On the permanent validity of the missionary mandate of the Church, the *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) of John Paul II states that inculturation must not be superficial decoration but must lead to the transformation of authentic cultural values through the integration with the Christian faith; such a profound process could be lengthy and difficult.⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II makes it clear that Inculturated evangelization involves all faithful and that preservation of tradition values is a sign of a mature faith. Inculturation leads to mature faith and mature faith does not destroy but safeguard cultural values and customs.⁵⁵

1.3 THE THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

In this section, I shall briefly discuss some of the popular mission models and concepts. I shall emphasize that inculturation model is a befitting approach for our pluralistic world of today. A

⁵³PAULUS PP. VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*”, 63.

⁵⁴ Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, “*Redemptoris Missio*”, 52.

⁵⁵ Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, “*Redemptoris Missio*”, 54.

brief analysis shall be made on the principles, the process and the agents of Inculturated evangelization.

1.3.1 MODELS AND CONCEPTS

Even though the subject matter of the Church's missionary activity remains unchanged, the Church and for that matter the missionaries employ different models and concepts of evangelization to make Christ more understandable and more attractive in mission territories. However, the mission models are to a greater extent shaped by the particularity of each epoch and the theological reflection on the spiritual need of the time. Below are some of the popular models and concepts of Christian evangelization over the centuries.

a) SALVATION OF SOULS (*SALUS ANIMARUM*)

Until The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council declared explicitly that true and prestigious values are found in non-Christian religions and cultures, the Church found it difficult to practically accept other religions and cultures as part and parcel of God's providence and design. The old adage, „there is not salvation outside the Church“ (*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*) of Cyprian was often quoted to support the view that those outside the Church had no means of attaining salvation. This was the idea behind the evangelization of Africa from 15th to 19th centuries.⁵⁶ What inspired missionary zeal at this epoch was pity for the poor souls of „savage Africans“. Africans were baptized in masses without any adequate catechetical preparation. There was no respect for Africans' religions and cultures; they were considered as superstitious and devilish. Unfortunately, most of the early missionaries were ignorant of the fact that the constitutive and principal cause of salvation is Christ and that he could reveal himself to Africans through their religion and culture.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. NUNES O.P., *Teologia da Missão*, Obras Missionárias Pontifícias, Lisboa, 2008, 34.

b) IMPLANTATION OF THE CHURCH (*PLANTATIO ECCLESIAE*)

The concept of the implantation of the Church appeared from the 19th to early 20th centuries.⁵⁷ This was an attempt to transplant the Church model from Europe to Africa. The organizational structure of the Church, catechism, liturgical expressions, personnel, and social works such as schools and hospitals, were all modeled after those in Europe. Despite their successes in building churches, schools and hospitals, true conversions rarely took place. The Christian faith was seen as imported religion and foreign to African worldviews. Africans were evangelized outside their culture. As such the Christian faith did not take root. The theory of implantation did not promote creativity and active participation of African in ecclesial activities. Africans were made to express their Christian faith in borrowed words and thoughts.⁵⁸

c) ADAPTATION (ADAPTATIO)

A new and better understanding of the rich African cultural values by the West and the Africans struggle for recognition prompted various attempts to adapt the practices of the Church to African's realities. The translation of the Scripture to African languages and dialects, local catechisms and attempts to Africanize the liturgy were some of the characteristics of this approach.⁵⁹ It is good to point out that, adaptation appeared in many official Church documents. Even though this approach enhanced a better appreciation of African traditions, it involved the selection of certain cultural elements for adaptation; the totality of African reality was not considered. Authentic evangelization implies not only adaptation but auto-generation.⁶⁰

d) AFRICANIZATION OR INDIGENIZATION

Africanization or Indigenization was an attempt by the African theologians to develop a „local based“ African theology. It is good to note that Africanization approach in Ghana started in a

⁵⁷Cf. J. NUNES O.P., *Teologia da Missão*, 43.

⁵⁸ Cf. N. MUSHETE, “Modernity in Africa”, in W. JENKISON, H. O’SULLIVAN, (eds.), *Trends in Mission: Toward the 3rd Millennium*, Orbis books, Maryknoll/New York, 1991, 148.

⁵⁹Cf. J. NUNES O.P., *Teologia da Missão*, 44.

⁶⁰ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, S.J., *Ecumenical Theology of World Religions*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 2003, 304.

political circle as an attempt to get Africans in key position in the civil service⁶¹. This idea was later transferred to the Church. The objective of Africanization or indigenization was to create a theology that would re-express the gospel message by using African concepts. Africanization denotes a search for authentically relevant African perspectives on the Christian faith.⁶² Some scholars present indigenization as a method of Africanization, and was a common expression especially among the Protestants theologians. However, this concept is one sided and lacks reciprocal exchange between the gospel and cultures. It also gives impression that culture is static instead of dynamic.⁶³

e) INCARNATION

Among the Catholics theologians, incarnation became the substitute term for adaptation in the 1970s. Adaptation approach which was favoured by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was concerned only with superficial and selective changes and did not embrace the totality of African reality. At the 1974 synod of Bishops in Rome, African Bishops proposed the theology of Incarnation instead of theology of Adaptation. Just as Jesus incarnated to become man, Christian faith can also incarnate to become authentically African.⁶⁴ Pope Paul VI, however, was not comfortable with the Incarnation theology and condemned as dangerous all diversified theologies. He states:

“Thus we consider necessary a word on the need of finding a better expression of faith to correspond to the racial, social and cultural milieu. This is indeed a necessary requirement of authenticity and effectiveness of evangelization; it would nevertheless be dangerous to speak of diversified theologies according to continent and cultures. The content of faith is either Catholic or it is not.”⁶⁵

It is quite difficult for me to reconcile this statement of Pope Paul VI with the spirit of openness and proximity to other cultures brought by Vatican II. If the Church really recognized the diversities of cultures, then how could Africans“ attempt to re-express the gospel message in

⁶¹ Cf. A. ROBERTS, (ed.), *The Colonial Movement in Africa: Essay on the Movement of Minds and Material- 1900-1940*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990, 75.

⁶²Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Orbis books, Maryknoll/New York, 1993, 65.

⁶³Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, S.J., *Ecumenical Theology of World Religions*, 304.

⁶⁴ Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology*, 66.

⁶⁵In: *L'Osservatore Romano* 45, 7 November 1974, 9.

their own culture be termed as dangerous? Perhaps, this was a caution for African theologians not to deviate from the essentials of the faith in their search for specificity. We must make it clear that, African theologians never intended to change the content of the faith. Just as the gospel message was reinterpreted during the Christianization of Europe to render it more meaningful to Europeans, Africans also merit reinterpretation of the gospel message to make it more authentic to Africans.

1.3.2 INCULTURATION AND ITS ASSOCIATED TERMINOLOGIES (ENCULTURATION, ACCULTURATION)

With the African Bishops not comfortable with theology of Adaptation and Vatican's questionable attitude against the proposed theology of Incarnation, the concept of Inculturation which denotes the dialogue between the gospel message and cultures with the objective of mutual enrichment and growth was accepted by both African bishops and Vatican. The term Inculturation gained popularity some few years after Vatican II. According to E. Martey, the term was first employed by J. Masson in 1962 but was given much publicity by the Jesuit Superior General, Pedro Arrupe in 1978.⁶⁶ The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council did not explicitly use the term Inculturation but the used of certain phrases like "economy of incarnation" (AG. 22) implicitly suggested Inculturation process. The term inculturation found way into the official Magisterium of the Church in John Paul II address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1979, to describe the cultural insertion of the divine revelation.⁶⁷

Inculturation has been given various meanings since its usage is not yet standardized through frequent and repeated used.⁶⁸ J. Ukpong beautifully described the Inculturation process as follows:

"In this approach, the theologian's task consists in re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In this process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in

⁶⁶ Cf. E. MARTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 67.

⁶⁷ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, *The Christian Theology of Inculturation*, 4.

⁶⁸ Cf. A. R. CROLLIUS, S.J., "What is so New about Inculturation?", In: *Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures* V, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 1991, 1.

Scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African cultural expressions. Thus, there integration of faith and culture, and from it is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach therefore, African theology means Christian faith attaining cultural expression.”⁶⁹

This description basically underlines what is expected of the inculturation process. It involves a healthy confrontation between the whole Christian message (both the Scriptures and Christian Tradition) and African cultures, leading to a new theological understanding of the Christian mystery.

The widely quoted definition of Pedro Arrupe clearly reflects on inculturation as an incarnation process that brings transformation and renewed Christian experience. He defined inculturation as:

“Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expressions through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a “new creation.”⁷⁰

Another captivating description of Inculturation was given by A. R. Crollius:

“the inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of the local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.”⁷¹

We can see from this description that Inculturation is not a “loss or win” affair. It purifies and restores the culture from unhealthy and frustrating practices. Through the insertion of the gospel message into cultures, the gospel frees the cultures from those ideologies and practices that hold them captive and thus preventing their members from realizing their full humanity. Authentic Inculturation opens up the way for Africans to participate fully in the activities of the church and in the mystical body of Christ. “Inculturation cannot be artificially induced, but occurs naturally

⁶⁹ J.S. UKPONG, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, Eldoret/Kenya, Gaba Publications, 1984, 30.

⁷⁰ P. ARRUPE, “A Letter to the whole Society of Jesus on Inculturation”, May 14, 1978; cited by M. DHAVAMONY, *The Christian Theology of Inculturation*, 3.

⁷¹ A. R. CROLLIUS, S.J., “What is so New about Inculturation?” 15-16.

when the liberating message of the gospel is joined to the liberation struggles of the local communities.”⁷²

Inculturation process is neither static nor a bunch of theories to be implemented once and for all. It is a continuous and on-going effort and must respect the signs of the time. The subject-matter of inculturation is the gospel faith or better, Jesus Christ himself. However, we must guard against the illusion that a pure Christianity must be Christianity without Western influence. There is nothing like abstract Christian faith. While it is not possible to proclaim the gospel message isolated from its original culture or the culture of which it has been express for many centuries without a substantial lost, we must be careful not to confuse the gospel message with these cultures⁷³. T. NKÉRAMIHIGO S.J. made it clear when he stated that:

“Christianity is not a universal abstraction which must be concretized in every culture; it is a specific concreteness which must be universalized by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples. Christianity is the singular specificity of the man Jesus of Nazareth who has a universal destiny by reason of his power to break all other specificities.”⁷⁴

Inculturation as a theological concept was originally derived from Social Sciences. As such, Inculturation is at times confused and used synonymously with other cultural anthropological terms such as Enculturation and Acculturation. Inculturation is a theological concept which denotes faith based process and must not be substituted by Enculturation or Acculturation even though some similarity could be noticed.

While Inculturation denotes the process of inserting the Christian faith into a given culture, Enculturation denotes conscious or unconscious conditioning in the acts of learning one’s culture. During enculturation process a person is introduced to, and learns, the practices of his or her culture.⁷⁵ In an Enculturation process the individual is inserted into his or her own culture while in Inculturation process the gospel faith is inserted into a particular culture. The process is

⁷² W. JENKISON, H. O’SULLIVAN, (eds.), *Trends in Mission*, 404.

⁷³ Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, “Catechesi Tradendae”, 53.

⁷⁴ T. NKÉRAMIHIGO, S.J., “Inculturation and the Specificity of Christian Faith”, In: *Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures V*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 1991, 25.

⁷⁵ Cf. G. A. ARBUCKLE, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Post Modern Critique*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2010, 168.

similar but the subject of insertion is different. For A. R. Crollius, the principle of analogy was applied in the transposition of anthropological Enculturation to missiological Inculturation.⁷⁶

On the other hand, Acculturation denotes the contact between two cultures and the resultant changes.⁷⁷ In this culture contact, there is exchange of cultural elements of which the weaker culture could subsequently be dominated by the stronger one. The beginning of the Inculturation process may bear the characteristics of Inculturation. Even though the gospel message transcends all cultures and thus relationship between the Church and cultures is different from the relationship between two cultures, the Church's first encounter with other cultures creates similar situations of culture contact. Thus for A. R. Crollius, anthropologically, the process of Inculturation contains the characteristic of a process of Acculturation.⁷⁸

1.3.3 THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

Inculturation is a holistic approach that seeks a complete restoration of man and his culture in Christ. Inculturation is not a personal initiative of some missionaries but it is a project of the whole Church. As such, there are fundamental principles and process to follow in the Inculturation enterprise.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II gave two basic principles that must guide the Inculturation process. These are the compatibility of the gospel message and the communion with the universal church.⁷⁹ The Inculturation process will only be successful and authentic when the agents involved remain faithful to the Christian faith. The mystery of Christ- incarnation, death and resurrection becomes a rule by which all cultures are measured. A local Church cannot in the name of Inculturation isolate herself from the universal church which is the deposit of faith. The universal Church remains a deposit from which the local Churches draw inspiration and direction. The inculturation process aims at communion in diversity and not division in diversity.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. R. CROLLIUS, S.J., What is so New about Inculturation?, 7.

⁷⁷ Cf. A. R. CROLLIUS, S.J., What is so New about Inculturation?, 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. A. R. CROLLIUS, S.J., What is so New about Inculturation?, 7.

⁷⁹ Cf. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, "Familiaris consortio", 22; also cited in RM, 52.

In his attempt to clarify the process of Inculturated evangelization, M. Azevedo distinguished four stages⁸⁰:

- i) The knowledge and identification of the culture to be evangelized

A profound knowledge of the constitutive elements of a culture is necessary for efficient evangelization of that culture. At this stage the agent tries to discover the „seed of the Word“, and the work of God in the manifestation of this culture. Cultural values which are in harmony with the gospel are discovered and implicit proclamation is done from these values. In other words, it is a stage whereby the agent interacts and learns the culture to be evangelized.

- ii) Discover in the culture what is incompatible with the gospel

The second stage involves a dialogue between the subjects of the culture and the agent of evangelization. The cultural elements incompatible with the gospel are discovered. These incompatibilities could be absolute or relative. The agent needs a careful discernment; he or she must take notice of his or her weaknesses and strengths, biases and prejudices in order to make a just judgment. In a prudent and intelligent manner, the agent must reveal to the natives those aspects that are not in conformity with the gospel. This may lead to transformation in both individual and in the community. Thus transformation will permit critical examination of cultural context, which may eventually bring about openness and conversion to Christian faith.

- iii) Explicit proclamation of the Christian message

The third stage insists on the explicit proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. The proclamation must start from the „seeds“ already existing in the cultures and by giving a primal importance to the Word of God. It also favours reflections and discussions on the indigenous theology. Cultures should neither be seen as „tabula rasa“ nor the gospel be ignored during the evaluation of the good news. The agent of this evangelization is the community of faith, the Church. As such, the Church becomes both the agent and the destiny of evangelization.

⁸⁰ Cf. M. AZEVEDO, S.J., *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e Inculturação da Fé*, Loyola, São Paulo, 1986, 302-313.

iv) The Church- part and object of proclamation

The community of faith or the Church becomes the place for the process of evangelization. The Church gives explicit witness of the good news. Despite her fragilities and shortcomings, the Church becomes a privileged place to experience Christ. The Church affirms and reorients herself within cultures and thus enriching herself with the rich values that these diversified cultures could offer. The proclamation and the living of the faith are clearly visible. In this sense, inculturated evangelization integrates the Christian faith and culture to give a unique and diversified Christian experience.

1.3.4 AGENTS OF THE INCULTURATION PROCESS

The principal agent of evangelization is the Holy Spirit. He sows the „seed“ in the heart of man and guides him to perfection. However, the role of human agents is indispensable to rekindle in man’s heart the fire which has already been lighted by Holy Spirit. The agent has the task to proclaim the good news and reconcile all peoples to Christ. But who should be the agent in the process of Inculturated evangelization? It is the task of only foreign missionaries or the indigenes, or both?

i) The foreign missionaries

Some people support the view that the agent of evangelization should be the foreign missionaries. The missionaries, mostly Europeans are believed to possess mature faith and better understanding of the doctrine of the Church.⁸¹ However, most of the foreign missionaries found it difficult to adapt to the culture and worldviews of Africans; they lacked patience and discernment to dialogue with the indigenes. At times, the western culture was confused with the Christian faith. The foreign missionaries as the sole agent of Inculturated evangelization was not the best option.

⁸¹Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs*, 85

ii) The indigenes

This position seeks to place the evangelization task in the hands of natives (both clerics and laity). The adherents saw the indigenes as better equipped to evangelize their own culture, and that they have the potentials to express and live the Gospel message in own way.⁸² However, the action of the indigenes was one sided and exclusive. Since they were immersed in their own culture, most lacked critical attitude to constructively question their culture.

iii) The foreign missionaries and the indigenes

It is insufficient to leave the task of evangelization only in the hand of foreign missionaries or the indigenes. Evangelization is a common project of the whole Church; hence every faithful especially the local community has the obligation to announce Christ to all. Since the Church is missionary by her nature, every member becomes automatically an agent of Inculturated evangelization by virtue of his or her baptism. Whether the agent is an indigene or foreign missionary, there is a need for team work and collaboration, a discerning will, humility and patience, and must be opened to respond to the needs people.

1.3.5 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

The foregoing discussion on the nature and concept of inculturation has shown that inculturation is an on-going process that aims at the total integration between cultures and the Gospel faith. The source and inspiration of inculturation is the entire mystery of Christ, his incarnation, death, and resurrection. As Jesus Christ assumed our humanity in his incarnation and redeemed it through his death and glorious resurrection, so the gospel faith must embody and penetrate cultures in order to redeem them from the shackles dehumanizing and oppressive cultural practices. However, since the drama of inculturation takes place within a culture, a profound knowledge of the culture to be evangelized is prerequisite to achieve authentic inculturation.

We can assert that inculturation is „an old wine in a new wine skin“. The object of inculturation (Jesus Christ) does not change. Through different models and concepts, the Church has always sought to proclaim Christ to the nations. What changed was the Church understanding of the

⁸²Cf. J. NUNES, O.P., *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs*, 86-87.

concept of culture, her openness to non-Christian cultures, and the appreciation of the local Church. Inculturation creates a dialogical relationship between the universal Church and local cultures. Inculturation does not impose nor select certain cultural elements for evangelization, it considers cultures in their totality; it heals, purifies and transform the whole culture. Inculturation does not destroy authentic cultural values; it helps people to appreciate and to value their culture. As such, inculturation can help Africans to rediscover their true identity and to express their Christian faith as Africans.

We can agree that through inculturation, the universal Church concretizes its capacity for unity. Inculturated evangelization is sensitive to and respects the diversity of cultures. It initiates and guides the diversified cultures to participate actively and fully in the mystical body of Christ. We can boldly affirm that inculturation is the solution to many obstacles of evangelization in our pluralistic world.

II CHAPTER

2. EWE TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW: ETHNOGRAPHY, RELIGION, ONTOLOGY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND VALUES

In the first chapter we explored the nature and concept of inculturation. We affirmed that inculturation is the process by which the gospel faith is inserted or introduced into a particular culture. As such, inculturation process necessarily demands a profound knowledge of the culture in question if successful insertion of the gospel faith and the integration of this culture into the life of the Church are to occur. It can be misleading if not dangerous to rely on the knowledge of one culture to evangelize the other. Even though African cultures have similar characteristics, there are also remarkable differences. For example, knowledge of the Akan culture of Ghana can help to understand certain aspects of Ewe culture but to evangelize Ewe people base on the knowledge of the Akan culture is insufficient. If the objective of inculturation is to transform the life of an African under the dictate of the gospel message, then the agent of evangelization has an enormous task to study the bedrocks or the foundations of culture of which he or she seeks to evangelize.

In this chapter, we shall explore the worldviews of the Ewe people. These include the history and geography, religious ontology and certain socio-cultural practices which may encourage or serve as obstacles to inculturation. It must be understood from the beginning that until the arrival of the missionaries in the 19th century, the Ewe people had no written record of their history. History was transmitted orally from generations to generations. This created inconsistencies as some of the important historical events might have been overlooked.

2.1 EWELAND: HISTORY, LOCATION, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

The oral tradition asserts that the Ewe people of Ghana arrived and settled in their present location in the 17th century via *Ile Efe* (Nigeria), *Ketu* (Benin) and *Notsie* (Togo)⁸³. The Ewe people who first settled in *Ketu* had to relocate to *Notsie* due to the threat posed by *Yoruba* (a tribe in Nigeria and Benin) expansion. In *Notsie*, they were ruled by an autocratic and cruel king called *Togbe Agokoli*. The Ewe people fled *Notsie* in groups and settled in their present locations by forming smaller autonomous states (*dukowo*).⁸⁴ Presently, the Ewe people are spread over southeastern part of Ghana, the southwestern parts of Togo and Benin and a small settlement in the southwestern Nigeria.

In relation to colonization, the Ewe people were colonized by three colonial powers, the French, the Germans and the British. However, after the First World War, the German Ewe territory was seized and shared between the British and the French. The part that came under the British jurisdiction is now part of the Republic of Ghana. The other part that was ruled by the French is now part of Togo. The Ewe people in Benin had always been under the French before the country attained independent.⁸⁵ It is important to note that even though the Ewe people are politically and administratively divided, their cultural affinity is not destroyed. The Ewe people are still conscious of their common ancestral heritage. This consciousness was made possible through a common language (slight difference can be observed in the intonation), music, and shared religious and cultural beliefs.

This study focuses on the Ewe people of southeastern Ghana within an administrative region called Volta. The name of the region was derived from River Volta, the largest river in Ghana. The Ewe people in Ghana could be divided into two main groups; the southern Ewe people commonly called Anlo, and the northern Ewe people commonly referred to as Ewe-dome. Within each of this group, there are smaller autonomous Ewe states (*dukowo*), with each state having its own traditional political structure. The Ewe people are not the only ethnic group in the

⁸³ Cf. D. E. K. AMENUMEY, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge and Krepi*, Evangelical Presbyterian Church Press, Ho-Ghana, 1986, 1-2.

⁸⁴ Cf. B. MEYER, "Christianity and the Ewe Nation: German Pietist Missionaries, Ewe converts and the Politics of Culture", *Journal of Religion in Africa* Vol. 32, 2 (2002) 170. (Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1581760>)

⁸⁵ Cf. D. E. K. AMENUMEY, *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times*, 20-23.

region but they are the majority and have a great influence on the image of the region. It is common to hear people referring to Volta Region as Eweland.

Ewe people have their own traditional political structure. Each of the Ewe states has its own Paramount Chief (*Tɔgbegã*) who is the overlord of the traditional area. The Paramount Chief sees to the governance and welfare of the entire state. Aside the Paramount Chief, we have Chiefs in towns and village who serve as sub-chiefs to the Paramount Chief. Chiefs are both the political and religious leaders of the people. They settle disputes and pronounce judgments when necessary. Chiefs are enstooled from specific traditional families. As such wealth and money cannot buy chieftaincy. However, like any human society, wealthy people who are not royals can influence to a greater extent the political decision of a given village or traditional area.

Economically, most of the Ewe people (a part from those doing „white coloured jobs“) are either fisherman or farmers. Most of the southern Ewe people are located along the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean. The soil is mainly sea sand and does not support viable crop farming. The only viable economic options are fishing and salt industry.⁸⁶The rest of the Ewe people who live in the interior of the region are located either in the savanna or in the rain forest. The climate and vegetation are good for food crops such as maize, banana, plantain, cassava, yam, palm trees, legumes and tropical fruits. Certain areas also support the growth of cash crops such as cocoa and coffee. Those who live along the Volta Lake also engage in fishing.

With the above introduction on the geography, history, political and economic backgrounds of the Ewe people, we shall proceed to explore the religious ontological views of the Ewe people.

2.2 RELIGIOUS ONTOLOGICAL VIEWS

Africans like any other human race are religious beings. They had their own way of perceiving and communicating with the divine before the advent of Christianity. African culture is embedded in religion in such a way that it is difficult if not impossible to dissociate African socio-cultural life from religion. It is difficult to distinguish between the profane and the sacred.

⁸⁶ Cf. G. K. NUKUNYA, „The Land and the People“, in: F. AGBODEKA (ed.), *A Hand Book of Eweland*, Vol. 1, Woeli Publishing Services, Accra-Ghana, 1997, 10.

In the words of J. S. Mbiti, “Africans are notoriously religious”⁸⁷ in such a way that religion permeates all the essential elements of the life of Africans. J. S. Mbiti describes an African in relation to his religion as follows:

“Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament...To be without religion amount to self-excommunication from the entire life of the society and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.”⁸⁸

The above quotation of Mbiti may be seen as passionate if not exaggeration of how an African practices his or her religion. But I must confess that it reflects the reality and how many African cultures especially the Ewe people perceive and practice their traditional religion.

Unlike the other „civilized religions“ which have their messages or revelations documented, the African religions have no written scriptures nor do Africans believe that their religion was founded like others. For Africans, their religions are written in their hearts, and transmitted and expressed through proverbs, songs, prayers, myths etc. Lack of written documents makes it difficult to research into African traditional religion. However, to deny the existence of religion in African before the advent of Arabs and Christian missionaries due to lack of revealed written text is unfortunate. Some people think that Africans are primitive and do not have the capacity to reflect on the concept of God; they only practice black magic. The notorious and derogating statement of Emil Ludwig many years ago still rings in the ears of many, “how can the untutored African conceive God?... Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing.”⁸⁹ Perhaps we may pardon Emil Ludwig for his ignorance but what about many missionaries who did not and are still not recognizing the existence of traditional religion in Africa? Nothing good is found in African cultures, the cultures are fetish and devilish. It is unfortunate to meet people who still think and believe that Africans only came to the knowledge of God with the coming of the Arabs and European missionaries.

Another debate is whether Africans have the concept of Supreme God. While some think that the primitiveness of African religions does not permit the perception of the Supreme Being and that

⁸⁷J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy (2nd Ed.)*, Heinemann Publications, Oxford, 1990, 1.

⁸⁸J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

⁸⁹Cited by K. A. DICKSON, P. ELLINGWORTH, (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1969, 10.

the idea of Supreme Being was modeled after the Christian God, others affirm the concept of the Supreme Being in African religions but warn that the concept must not be compared to Christian idea of High God. A. K. Busia affirms that “the postulate of God is universal throughout Africa; it is a concept which is handed down as part of the culture.”⁹⁰ Hence, the Moslem and Christian missionaries did not introduce the idea of Supreme God to Africans; what they did introduce were their unique ways of perceiving the Deity. Africans concept and relationship to the Supreme God is different from other religions.

African scholars are divided over the idea of the Supreme Being in African religions. Okot P’Bitek thinks that, African have no concept of a Supreme God. For him, the concept of the Supreme Being was the interpretation of African deities to suit the Christian model of High God. Thus, to accept the concept of Supreme God in Africa is to cloth African deities with the attributes of the Christian God.⁹¹ Godwin Sologo on his part asserts that the concept of Supreme God held in Africa is unique and different from Christian religion. Thus, “the Christian God is at the apex of reality while the African worldview accepts hierarchy but within the one order of the universe.”⁹² It is important to affirm that Africans do not conceive the Supreme God as a metaphysical reality demanded by logical necessity. Africans’ conception of the Supreme God points to the definitive pre-eminence of God in a hierarchical universe.⁹³ A. M. Lugira describes the African hierarchical structure of beings as follows:

“Often the African concept of monotheism is one of hierarchy with the Supreme Being at its head. In this system the Supreme Being rules over a vast number of divinities who are considered to be associates of God. African understanding of the structure of the heavenly kingdom might be compared to the Christian concept of God ruling over the saints and angels.”⁹⁴

Africans live in communion with the gods and nature, and identify themselves with the world. As such, the knowledge of God is attained through the experience of the universe. In the words

⁹⁰ A. K. BUSIA, *Africa in search of Democracy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, 5.

⁹¹ Cf. O. P’BITEK, *African Religion in Western Scholarship*, East African Literature Bureau, Kampala, 1970, 67.

⁹² G. SOGOLO, *Foundations of African Philosophy*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1993, 59.

⁹³ Cf. M. V. TSANGU MAKUMBA, *Pour une Introduction à l’Africanologie*, Éditions Université, Fribourg-Suisse, 1994, 104-105.

⁹⁴ A. M. LUGIRA, *World Religions: African Traditional Religion (3rd Ed.)*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York, 1999, 38.

of K. C. Anyanwu, African learns about God not by “detaching himself but by sympathetically embracing the other, he lives in God and God lives in him.”⁹⁵

My research indicates that Ewe people have the concept of the Supreme Being but it is not the same and must not be confused or identify with the Christian notion of High God. Ewe idea of Supreme God is neither purely monotheistic nor polytheistic. It is the hierarchy of beings of which the Supreme Being who is the creator delegates his powers to lesser gods and nature spirits to assist in the governance of the universe.

In next session, I shall discuss the various categories of beings in the hierarchy and show how they relate to and influence each other, and how they relate to and influence man.

2.2.1 THE NATURE OF SUPREME DEITY: *MAWU*

The name *Mawu* in Ewe language designates the Supreme Deity. Etymologically, *Mawu* could be derived from a phrase “*Ema ye wu*”, meaning one who surpasses all, the all-powerful. Others believed that the name *Mawu* might have been derived from the combination of two particles, *ma* (implies negation) and a superlative *wu*, which means to kill. Hence joining these two particles gives *Mawu* which means, the one who does not kill. In this sense, *Mawu* is seen as merciful and the life giver.⁹⁶

C. R. Gaba research among the southern Ewe people (Anlo) suggests that *Mawu* is considered as a great power, the source of life, and all-pervasive energy which is diffused throughout the world of nature. He is also personal and a moral being.⁹⁷ Some studies on the perception of the nature of *Mawu* reveal that, *Mawu* has two components: *Mawu-Sodza* is the female component, and *Mawu-Sogbla* is the male component.⁹⁸ However, this should not be understood as a separation within the Supreme Deity. It only symbolizes the qualities of the Supreme Deity: *Mawu-Sodza* denotes feminine qualities such as harmony, peace, care, joy, benevolent and provident. *Mawu-*

⁹⁵E. A. RUCH, K. C. ANYANWU, (eds.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, Catholic Book Agency, Rome, 1981, 162.

⁹⁶ Cf. C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2: 1 (1969) 64. (Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1594902>).

⁹⁷ Cf. C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 65.

⁹⁸ Cf. N. FIAGBEDZI, *The Music of Anlo: Its Historical Background, Cultural Matrix and Style*, PhD. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977, 92.

Sogbla denotes masculine qualities such as power, strength, perseverance, protection, destruction, justice etc. It is worth noting that, the expression of one Supreme Deity in duality was not original to Ewe religious ontological thoughts. It must have been an influence from the Fon people⁹⁹ of Benin who describe their Supreme Deity, *Nana Buluku* as being male and female.

Mawu is invisible. Nobody can see or even dream of him. He makes himself known to people through the lesser deities or the ancestors. No image exists to either represent *Mawu* or do temples and shrines of *Mawu* exist. In the words of C. R. Gaba, “*Mawu* is a spirit, with human personality where personality does not involve the possession of a form.”¹⁰⁰ The existence of lesser deities does not render the Supreme Deity impotent of his powers; *Mawu* is the creator of the universe, he is the giver and sustainer of life. *Mawu* is universal and cannot be reduced or confined to a shrine or a temple.

The presence of the lesser deities and ancestors to serve as intermediaries between men and the Supreme Deity make people to question the omnipresent and the immanence of *Mawu*. It appears that *Mawu* only governs at a distance and does not personality gets involve in human affairs. As J. G. Frazer puts it:

“The existence of a Supreme Being is by no means unfamiliar to the Ewe; he has his *Mawu* often in his mouth, especially in talking with the missionary, and he willingly acknowledges that *Mawu* created him and the gods. But he can only conceive of this Supreme Being on the analogy of his own personality and not as omnipresent and so forth...”¹⁰¹

For C. R. Gaba, the Ewe people do not conceive *Mawu* only as transcendent but also omnipresent and immanent. *Mawu* is thought to be „like the wind“, invisible but present everywhere. Just as the wind cannot be seen but its action can be felt, so is *Mawu*. As the sustainer of the universe, *Mawu* is universally present but at the same time he lives far away in the sky, in his palace (*Mawufe*- God’s house). C. R. Gaba concludes that while the Supreme

⁹⁹ The Fon people of Benin are neighbours of Ewe People. They share similar beliefs and cultural practices. It is believed that Fon people might have influenced the Ewe people with their concept of the duality of the Supreme Deity.

¹⁰⁰C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 66.

¹⁰¹J. G. FRAZER, *The Golden Bough* (3rd Ed.), Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, 75.

Being as spirit, „like the wind“, demonstrates clearly the Ewe people conception of God’s immanence, his home far away in the sky accentuates God’s transcendence greatness.¹⁰²

Ewe people perception of the hierarchical structure of beings with *Mawu* at the apex might have been influenced by the hierarchical social structure that exists in the Ewe culture. Ewe people practice a monarchical system with the Paramount Chief at the apex and surrounded by the sub-chiefs and his counselors who help him in the administration of the kingdom. The Paramount Chief is rarely seen in public and he is not disturbed with petty issues which his sub-chiefs could handle. This same idea is applied in the Ewe people perception of *Mawu*. However, we must affirm that the final word and the authority belong to *Mawu* and not the divinities or ancestors.

Another important cultural element which attests to the idea of the existence of Supreme Being among the Ewe people since the time immemorial is the use of theophorous names. Theophorous names in Ewe culture reveal their understanding and unique relationship with the Supreme God – *Mawu*. The table below gives some examples of personal theophorous names:

THEOPHOROUS NAMES IN EWE	MEANING IN ENGLISH
a) Mawunyegã	God is almighty/ God is great
b) Mawuli	God is/ God exists
c) Mawunyo	God is kind/ God is good
d) Mawunya	God knows
e) Mawuena	God has given
f) Mawuko	Except God
g) Mawusi	In the God’s hands
h) Mawufemor	God’s way
i) Mawuse	God has listened

¹⁰² Cf. C. R. GABA, *The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana*, 68.

A part from the theophorous names, certain proverbs and popular saying of the Ewe people reveal their absolute reliance on *Mawu* as the ultimate source of help to the helpless, and the one who does not support evil. Examples of these sayings include:

- *Lã mato asike Mawue nyãa tagbatsutsune* – It is God who drives flies away from a tailless animal.
- *Mawu medina na dzoduameter o-* God never helps a sorcerer.

We can assert that the concept of the Supreme Deity is present in Ewe religious ontology. It must be understood and evaluated within the Ewe cultural context and must not be compare to the monotheistic High God of any other religion. We shall now have a brief discussion on the understanding and the roles of divinities (lesser gods) in Ewe religious ontology.

2.2.2 THE DIVINITIES (LESSER SPIRITS/GODS): *TRƆWO/VEDUWO*

We affirmed in the discussion on *Mawu* that he has no shrines dedicated to him or priests and priestesses to serve him. He delegates his powers to the lesser spirits/divinities to attend to the needs of men. Ewe people approach *Mawu* through the intercession of the divinities. In the words of A. M. Lugira, “it is to them (lesser gods) that they make requests concerning their needs and desires, and to them that they make offerings and sacrifices for health and happiness, successful crops, the birth of healthy children and protection from evil.”¹⁰³ On his part, J. S. Mbiti refers to divinities as the “personification of God’s activities and manifestations, of natural phenomena and objects, the so-called nature spirits, deified heroes and mythological figures.”¹⁰⁴ I shall be using lesser gods, lesser spirits, lesser deities and divinities interchangeably to mean what the Ewe people express as *trɔwo* or *veduwo*.

The question that quickly comes to mind when talking about divinities is that, if the Ewe people consider *Mawu* to be the creator, the sustainer and the giver of life, why not communicate with

¹⁰³ A. M. LUGIRA, *World Religions: African Traditional Religion (3rd Ed.)*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 74.

him directly? Why must the lesser gods serve as the intermediaries? To answer this question, the social-cultural structure of the Ewe people can still give us a clue. Thus, Mawu (the Paramount Chief) delegates his powers to the lesser gods (the sub-chiefs) who are locally connected to the people. Again, just as one cannot directly approach the Paramount Chief due to respect and reverence, so do Ewe people do not approach *Mawu* directly but through the intermediaries. K. Awoonor explains the Africans and for that matter Ewe people's relationship with the lesser gods as follows:

“By the light of his own logic, the African assigns to the creator God a certain degree of distance and inapproachability, not because he considers him unconcerned, but rather because he thinks of him in his primal ancestral role as the supreme paterfamilias who must not be bothered with the petty details of the universe. He, himself appoints, lieutenants and assistants who become overseers and guardians of various natural phenomena and faculties. These minor deities are the recipients of sacrifices and messages for the creator God. He, whom, the Ewe calls Mawu, receives no sacrifice himself; he has neither shrines nor priests”¹⁰⁵

Concerning the nature and origin of the divinities, there are two main propositions. While S. J. Mbiti maintains that divinities were created by the Supreme Being, E. B. Idowu argues that divinities were not created but brought into being.¹⁰⁶ For S. J. Mbiti,

“Divinities are on the whole thought to have been created by God, in the ontological sense of the spirit. They are associated with him, and often stand for his activities or manifestations either as personification or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature.”¹⁰⁷

The bringing of the divinities into being as advocated by Idowu is similar to the Christians perception of the divinity of Jesus Christ; Christ was not created but shares the same nature with his father. Hence it appears that E. B. Idowu applied the Christian concept of the divinity of Christ to African divinities. A critical analysis of the Ewe religious ontology shows that lesser gods do not possess the same nature nor are they equal to *Mawu*. Divinities are the creature of the Supreme Being, entrusted with special powers to serve as messengers. As creatures,

¹⁰⁵ K. AWOONOR, *The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of Sahara*, Anchor Press, New York, 1975, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. E. C. EKEKE, C. A. EKEOPARA, “God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology”, *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* (2010) 209.

¹⁰⁷ J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 75.

divinities are subordinate to the Supreme Being; they have no absolute existence, they serve as functionaries of the Supreme God.¹⁰⁸

In the Ewe religious ontology, divinities have limited jurisdiction and specific functions. They can reveal themselves to humans in dreams and through nature. Divinities are known by specific names and these names are invoked when their assistance are sought. Divinities have priests or priestesses who serve as the mouthpiece or prophets to interpret the language of the gods to the common people. Specific shrines or temples are built for divinities but at times they dwell in specific areas such as the river, trees, stones, forest, animals and other inanimate objects one can think of. The divinities could be either private or public. Thus belonging to an individual or a family or belong to the entire village or the traditional state. Some of the deities were known to have being with specific Ewe state since time immemorial while others are foreign, brought in by certain families or individuals from foreign land. The table below gives names of some common divinities among the Ewe people and their description.

NAME OF DIVINITY/LESSER GODS	DESCRIPTION
a) Xebieso/So	The god of thunder and lightening
b) Da	The god of snake/ poison
c) Anyievo	The god of rain (also the rainbow god)
d) Afa	The god of divination and foresight
e) Sakpana	The god of skin diseases
f) Legba	The god of fertility and protection

The adherents of Traditional Religion believe that the *trɔwo* are powerful and quick in responding to the needs of those who seek their help and offer the appropriate sacrifice. It is common to see the so called Christian believers running to various shrines of the deities to seek

¹⁰⁸ Cf. E. C. EKEKE and C. A. EKEOPARA, "God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology", 211.

help in moments of sickness, marriage failure, and other difficulties in life. It must be understood that the powers that the divinities possess are neutral and can be used to bring about the good or to cause harm. Thus, “even though the *trɔwo* are seen as children of *Mawu*, the fear, attention and devotion paid to them seem to suggest that the *trɔwo* are ends in themselves, and not merely a way of working toward their creator, *Mawu*.”¹⁰⁹

We can observe among the adherents of Traditional Ewe Religion that due to the fear they have for the deities, much reverence and attention are given to the deities. When the demands of the deities are not met, they could inflict punishment or even death to people. It is common to see traditional priests and priestesses capitalizing on the fear that people have for the deities to extort and explore them by making unnecessary sacrifice demands. Most native researches maintain that Ewe people do not worship *trɔwo* but venerate them as the messengers of *Mawu*. However, it is difficult for an outsider to draw a line between veneration and worship.

2.2.3 THE ANCESTORS: *TɔGBEWO*

The veneration of ancestors is a common practice among the Ewe people. The ancestors are seen as the elderly members of the clan who have died physically but continue to influence the activities of the living members of the clan through the active presence of their spirits. Ancestors could be defined as “the spirits of the socially significant deceased members of the family, lineage, clan, and tribal groupings.”¹¹⁰ N. Dzobo on his part defines an ancestor as the “one from who one is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent.”¹¹¹

It is a basic belief among the Ewe people that ancestors are still present in the family to watch over it and to protect it.¹¹² In order to express the active and indispensable roles of the ancestors in the life of most African traditional families, S. J. Mbiti refers to ancestors as the “living

¹⁰⁹ R. Y. GANUSAH, “Pouring Libation to Spirit Powers among the Ewe-Dome of Ghana: An Indigenous Religious and Biblical Perspective”, in: G. O. WEST, M. W. DUBE (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, Brill, Leiden, 2000, 279.

¹¹⁰ M. C. KITSHOFF (ed.), *African Independent Churches Today: Kaleidoscope of Afro-Christianity*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1996, 23.

¹¹¹ N. K. DZOBO, “African Ancestral cult: The Theological Appraisal”, *Reformed World* 38:6 (1985) 338.

¹¹² Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion Vol. 1*, McGraw-Hill Publishers, Accra-Ghana, 1974, 85.

dead”.¹¹³ Just as the lesser gods, the Ewe people believe that ancestors serve as a link or intermediaries between the living family members and the Supreme Deity (*Mawu*). For S. J. Mbiti, the ancestor or “the living dead are bilingual: they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until „recently“; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the ancestors are thought of as better equipped to intercede for the living because they were once humans like us; they are better acquainted with the problems and the needs of the family. In this sense, ancestors are seen as the guardian angels of the families since “they are the closest links that we have with the spirit world.”¹¹⁵

D. K. Fiawoo who has done a profound research on the ancestral cult among the Ewe people affirms that unlike divinities which may exert great influence on the whole society, the ancestral spirits are “specifically concerned with the regulation of the conduct of the lineage and its wider dimension.”¹¹⁶ Ancestor veneration is not society based but it depends on every family or clan to organize its ancestral cult. Even though celebration of an ancestral feast may attract many sympathizers on the society level, each family or clan has its own ancestors. However, the fact remains that, ancestral veneration is at the basis of both religious and social life of the Ewe people. The ancestors are supposed to guide and protect the living, to eliminate evil from the society, and to reward goodness.¹¹⁷

K. Awoonor describes the relationship between the living and the dead, and the functions of the ancestors as follows:

“Ancestors are respected because they are our predecessors, our elders, and above all they exist in the spirit state in which they know more than we do since they „can see in the dark“. The ceremonies of invocation or libation, brings the dead, the living, and the unborn together in a communion. Like the other minor deities, the ancestors can be both praised for achievement and rebuked for failure. Each family or lineage, remembers its revered ancestors and on important occasions, such as birth or funerals, offers prayers and drinks in renewal of this bond.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 82.

¹¹⁴J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 82.

¹¹⁵J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83.

¹¹⁶D. K. FIAWOO, “Characteristics features of Ewe Ancestor Worship”, in: W. H. NEWELL (ed.), *Ancestors: World Anthropology*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague, 1976, 266.

¹¹⁷Cf. D. K. FIAWOO, “Characteristics features of Ewe Ancestor Worship”, 263.

¹¹⁸K. AWOONOR, *The Breast of the Earth*, 50.

We must at this point say that death of a person and his incorporation into the world of the spirits does not automatically guarantee him the status of ancestor¹¹⁹. Just as not every faithful Catholic Christian could be declared a saint after death, so also in Ewe culture, a person to be elevated to the status of an ancestor must possess and exercise certain qualities while alive. The will-be ancestor while alive might have been a founder of a clan, a family head or a great charismatic leader who always had the welfare of the community and the family at heart. The ancestors are those who lived upright lives and were custodians and faithful adherents to the laws and the moral codes of their culture. In the words of A. Shorter, ancestors are “men of integrity and worth, successful men who sired male children to continue the lineage. The living speaks of them in vivid detail, as examples they are called upon to follow.”¹²⁰ Also, an ancestor might have married, had children (especially males), and died a natural death. A person who died at a young age or old age without marrying, or died a shameful death such as suicide, or in accidents are not qualified to be ancestors.

The Ewe people’s relationship with the ancestor is thought of as being reciprocal. The ancestors are constantly protecting and guiding the living. The living on the other hand propitiates and appeases the ancestral spirits through sacrifices and offerings in order to continue receiving the benefits of the ancestors. No annual or periodic feasts exist for ancestors. Ancestors are honoured during funeral rites, festivals and daily custom of offering drinks or leaving a morsel of food on the ground. Sometimes sacrifices are done when demanded by the ancestors. This demand is normally made known through the diviner. However, unlike the lesser deities who have priests or priestesses, ancestral rites are done by the head of the family or the oldest in the clan.¹²¹ Symbolically, the ancestral cult is represented by a stool (*Tɔgbɛzikpui*). A feast may be organized to cleanse or to feed the stool from time to time. The stool serves as a link between the living and the spirits of the ancestors.

There has been a debate on whether Africans worship ancestors or not. The correct answer to this question must take into consideration the reality of African culture. Closer analyses of most of the writers on Africans’ relationship with the ancestors affirm that ancestors are not worship but

¹¹⁹ Cf. D. K. FIAWOO, “Characteristics features of Ewe Ancestor Worship”, 267.

¹²⁰ A. SHORTER, “Conflicting attitudes to ancestor veneration in Africa”, *Africa Ecclesial Review* 11:1 (January 1, 1969) 27-37.

¹²¹ Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* Vol. 1, 92.

venerated. African pay respects to such noble and virtuous people who even though have died are still actively remembered in the clan. Just as the veneration of the saints in the Catholic Church does not limit one's adoration to the Blessed Trinity (LG 51), so also does the ancestors veneration does not substitute the place of *Mawu*. It is an error on the part of those who equate and confuse the ancestral veneration with African Traditional Religion. E. B. Idowu argues that the cult of ancestors is an affirmation of life beyond the physical death. E. B. Idowu writes:

“Certainly, the cults of ancestors do not constitute African Traditional Religion; and it is a gross error to equate them with religion. The proper meaning of the ancestral cult derives from the belief of the Africans that death does not write „finish“ to life, that the family or the community life of this earth has not only become extended into the life beyond in consequence of the „death“ of the ancestor. Thus the cults are means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who have gone to live in the spirit world of the ancestors.”¹²²

Jean-Marc Ela also criticizes those who refer to ancestors' veneration as ancestors worship. For Ela it is not even appropriate to use the term ancestral „cult“ to define the Africans' way of paying respect to their departed elderly. He argues that:

“The words do not have the sense they have for many Christians. „Cult“ or „worship“ are terms inappropriate to the African context in which man expresses in a relationship of communion his respect for the founders of the tribe. A family relationship should not be given the title cult in a strict sense of the term. When people offer beer and food to the dead, they are very well aware they are not worshipping the dead, but are reliving a form of kinship with them, by actualizing it in an existential way.”¹²³

We argue and defend that Africans do not worship their ancestors. This conclusion is only possible after a careful observation and constructive analysis of meaning behind ancestral veneration and the rites involve. While it is true that Ewe people do not equate the ancestor to *Mawu*, there is no doubt that the intensity of respect and attention giving to ancestors are seen by many especially the non-natives as ancestors worship.¹²⁴

We can deduce two fundamental beliefs that underline the Ewe concept of ancestor veneration: the belief of life after death and communion with the dead. The ancestors' veneration points to the fact that death in the material world does not put an end to life. Life does not end, it is transformed. Ancestors now in form of spirits cannot be limited by space and time. As our

¹²² E. B. IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, SCM Press, London, 1972, 186.

¹²³ J. M. ELA, “Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem”, *Concilium* 102 (1977) 34-50.

¹²⁴ Cf. E. B. IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion*, 179.

guardian angels, our protection and welfare are their priority, although not without our collaboration through prayers and sacrifices. However, Africans' intimate communion with ancestors should not mislead us to conclude that Africans are not conscious of the distinction between the dead and the living. The veneration of the ancestors helps Ewe people not to forget or at least not to psychologically disengage from those who have brought honour and respect to the family and the society as a whole. Ancestorship is an honour to those people who after living descent lives on earth are now exulted; they have acquired a fulfilled stage in life's journey and thus seen as model worthy of emulation.¹²⁵ With this brief reflection on the Africans concept of ancestors' veneration, can we affirm as African Christians that the veneration of ancestors could be a preparation towards the Catholic Church's belief in the communion of saints?

2.3.4 BELIEF IN MAGIC (*DZO/DZOKA*) AND WITCHCRAFT (*AMEDUDU*)

The Ewe people believe and accept the existence of mystical powers in both animate and inanimate objects. These mystical powers are thought to directly or indirectly influence the lives and activities of people. These powers could be manifested in the form of magic or witchcraft. For E. B. Idowu, mystical spirits in African religious ontology are considered as abstract, immaterial and incorporeal beings.¹²⁶ The mystical powers are in themselves evil. However, these forces can be manipulated to bring about good or to cause harm.

Magic (*dzo/dzoka*) could be seen as an attempt to control forces of nature through spells and enchantments.¹²⁷ Ewe people believe that whatever happens has a cause. Sicknesses, calamities, misfortunes or even death at certain circumstances such as accidents, sudden death of a young man etc have mystical or spiritual causes. The diviners or the medicine men are always consulted for cure, deliverance and protection from evil forces. It is common to see Ewe people wearing charms and amulets prepared by medicine men to protect them against evil forces. These charms and amulets are made from natural sources such as herbs, roots and backs of trees, certain special stones and animal parts. This affirms the belief among the Ewe people that natural objects

¹²⁵ Cf. G. K. TANYE, *The Church-as-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2010, 105.

¹²⁶ Cf. E. B. IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion*, 173-174.

¹²⁷ Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* Vol. 1, 81.

contain mystical powers and that their identification and manipulation can help to solve human problems. It is quite difficult to distinguish between practice of magic and traditional herbal medicine. Since sicknesses are thought to have both physical and spiritual causes, the native herbalists use both herbs and magic to cure sicknesses.

The belief in witchcraft (*amedudu*) is also a common phenomenon among the Ewe people. Witchcraft has a negative connotation; it is always thought of as destruction to life and cause of misfortune in the community. Etymologically, the Ewe name for witchcraft- *amedudu* is composed of two words; *ame* (meaning human being) and *dudu* (meaning to eat). Literally, *amedudu* means to eat human flesh. Witches are thought to spiritually eat the flesh of their victims. According to S. J. Mbiti, witches “are people with an inherent power by means of which they can abandon their bodies at night and go to meet with similar people (other witches) or to „suck“ or „eat away“ the life of their victim.”¹²⁸

Concerning the acquisition of witchcraft, it is believed that witchcraft is inherited or acquired consciously or unconsciously. A father, mother or a relative who is a witch or a wizard can pass it spiritually to his or her offspring or any member of the family who has a weak soul.¹²⁹ Sometimes people consciously seek these mystical powers in order to cause harm or to seek revenge on an evil done him. Witchcraft activity is anti-social and those accused of practicing witchcraft cannot become ancestors. Among certain Ewe groups, diviners are consulted or certain rituals are performed during funerals to find out whether the person was practicing witchcraft. The belief in witchcraft is very strong among the Ewe people. Besides the religious dimension of witchcraft, it also has social, psychological and economic dimensions which make the topic more complex to discuss.¹³⁰

¹²⁸J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 196.

¹²⁹ It is a common belief among the Ewe people that human beings can have weak or strong personality souls. Those with weak souls can easily be manipulated and thus witchcraft can easily be passed to them. Those with strong souls cannot be manipulated. Witchcraft can neither be passed to them nor can they be bewitched.

¹³⁰Cf. J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 198.

2.2.5 THE CONCEPT AND CONSTITUENT OF HUMAN BEING: *AMEGBETɔ*

It is a common assumption among the Ewe people that human being is composed of both biological and spiritual elements. Ewe people are also conscious of the fact that human being is not self-existent but a creature. Thus, it is believed that a human being (*amegbetɔ*) is created by Mawu and send to the world of the living (*xexeme*) with a specific task to accomplish. If human being is in the material world (*xexeme*) just to complete a task, then it means that the material world (*xexeme*) is not his true home; he goes back to where he comes from after the completion of the task. As C. R. Gaba affirms, “man is a trader away from home in the material world. He must return home, that is to die, when his wares are sold.”¹³¹

The Ewe word for human being is *amegbetɔ*. *Amegbetɔ* is derived from two words; *ame* (means human being/ person) and *gbetɔ* (means living/ has life). Thus *amegbetɔ* literally means a living person or a human being who has life. This notion is contrary to *amekuku* (meaning a dead person or a human being who has no life).

Ewe people believe that human being was moulded by *Mawu* out of formless matter often thought to be special clay. However, Ewe people express their ignorance when confronted with the question of the origin of this special clay that *Mawu* uses to mould man. For some, since *Mawu* is the creator of the whole universe, He is also the creator of the clay. The expression of ignorance concerning the origin of the formless primeval clay is a humble and a sincere acceptance of the limitation of human wisdom.¹³²

The Ewe ontology recognizes three components of human beings: *gbɔgbɔ* (spirit/ breath), *luvɔ* (soul), and *ɲutilã* (body/ flesh). These three components constitute a complete human being. While *ɲutilã* (body/ flesh) is material and mortal, both *gbɔgbɔ* (spirit/breath) and *luvɔ* (soul) are immaterial and immortal. *Luvɔ* is seen as the personality soul which orients and guides the destiny of man. The *gbɔgbɔ* denotes the breath or the spirit which serves as a mark of Mawu in each person¹³³. While the *luvɔ* (personality soul) gives each person a distinct character and thus explains our differences, the *gbɔgbɔ* (breath/ spirit) of *Mawu* in each of us makes us all children of *Mawu*. The third component, *ɲutilã* (body/ flesh) serves as a medium which makes our

¹³¹ C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 72.

¹³² C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 70.

¹³³ Cf. C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 68.

physical existence in the material world (*xexeme*) possible. After death these three components of man disintegrate and go back to their respective origins. C. R. Gaba puts it in this way:

“Finally when life ceases in man on earth, it is believed, that component parts of man go back to their sources of origin; the personality soul to the post-earthly spirit world and the life- soul to the Supreme Being. The physical body... decomposes into earth-clay which logically speaking is its origin.”¹³⁴

Based on these three components of human being, Ewe people believe that the journey of life also follows three stages. Human life starts at *amedzɔfe* (human origin/ place of creation) - a spiritual home where *Mawu* fashions human beings. Ewe people believe in the pre-existence of the *luvo* (soul) before the one is born into the material world. According to J. Spieth, Ewe people believe that soul comes from the “soul home *amedzɔfe*, where he „was born“ by the mother in the spiritual world, and where it led an independent existence, which bears similarity to this life. When he becomes one of us, gifted with heart and soul, he will be born into human world.¹³⁵

The second stage is when a person is born into the material world (*xexeme*) - here human beings live and fulfill their destiny or task given by *Mawu*. The third place is the eternal home (*tsiefe*) – where the spirits of the dead rest forever. The first and the second stages considered are transitory but the third stage as the name suggests (*tsiefe – tsinyefe*) means „where I remain forever“, implies a place of permanency. Life does not end in *tsiefe* but unlike the material world, it is a life in the spirit. With this brief introduction to the constituents of human beings, the next section shall discuss the concept of death and what happens after death.

2.2.6 THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH: KU AND TSIEFE

Death is an ontological and social reality that cannot escape attention and reflection. I do agree with G. C. Bond when he said that “death is an idea, a social experience, and a concrete biological reality.”¹³⁶ Once human beings are born, they are condemned to death. In other words,

¹³⁴ C. R. GABA, “The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana”, 69; cf. D. K. FIAWOO, *Characteristics features of Ewe Ancestor Worship*, 264.

¹³⁵ J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra-Ghana, 2011, 52-53. (The original “Die Ewe-Stämme: Material zurkunde des Ewe-volkes in Deutsch-Togo” was translated into English by E. F. Tsaku, M. Etorh, R. Avornyo, M. E. K. Dakubu, and was edited by K. Amoaku.)

¹³⁶ G. C. BOND, “Living with Spirits: Death and After Life in African Religions”, in: H. OBAYASHI (ed.), *Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1992, 1.

human beings cannot escape death in the material world. Death is a social reality and all human beings are conscious of it. However, it is difficult if not impossible to comprehend what is death and what lies beyond death. It is important to affirm here that Ewe people have a firm belief in life after death.

The Ewe word for death is *ku*. However, *ku* can also mean a seed. Even though death and seed are two different realities, both words could imply a dormant stage of life. In an analogy, we can say that, a seed of a plant has the capacity to germinate and grow into a tree. The seed is therefore a stage where the dynamic flow of life's energy of a plant is dormant. Not that the energy is absent but it is dormant. As a seed is buried in the soil to germinate into a new life in a form of a tree, so also after death and funeral rites, humans are transformed into a new life, a life in the spirit. Death is seen as a transitory stage or a gateway to our real home. When a person dies, a common expressing use by the Ewe people is *Eyiafe* (He or she has gone home).

Ewe people are conscious of the fact that death is not the end of life. Death initiates human beings into the life of the spirit. This does not mean that Ewe people are not afraid of death or they seek death as a means to escape the sufferings and difficulties of this material world. Ewe people frown at suicide and appreciate long life as God's blessings. As such someone who commits suicide or deliberately terminates the life of an innocent person cannot be honoured with the status of an ancestor.

In the Ewe ontology, *Mawu* is the creator of both life and death. This is not a necessary logical deduction from the fact that *Mawu* is the creator of the whole universe¹³⁷ but from the fact that material world is only transitory and death is the only means by which human beings are ushered into the spirit world. Death is not thought of as something bad but as a necessary stage of life's journey. However, a deeper reflection on the shortness of life and tragic death of certain people prompted Ewe people to also believe that death can be caused by evil spirits and wicked men.¹³⁸ It is common among the Ewe people for the family to consult the diviner (*bɔkɔ/hunɔ*) and sorcerers to find out the cause of death of their beloved son or daughter. When it comes out that the dead person has been bewitched, the accused person could be approached and summoned

¹³⁷ Cf. C. R. GABA, "The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana", 72.

¹³⁸ Cf. C. R. GABA, "The Idea of the Supreme Being among the Anlo people of Ghana", 73.

before the elders. Sometimes, this unfounded accusation could lead to division and hatred between the families involved.

Ewe people believe that the immaterial elements of humans survive the physical death of the body in the material world. When a person dies, his or her constituent elements go back to their original sources. The *ɲutilā* (body/ flesh) rots and becomes clay. The *gbɔgbɔ* (breath/ spirit) which is the life-soul goes back to *Mawu*. The *luvɔ* (personality-soul) goes to *tsiefe* (the land of the dead). *Tsiefe* is believed to be a spiritual world where the spirits of the dead remain forever. This *tsiefe* was first created by *Mawu* and it is a mirror image of the material world. R. Y. Ganusah explains *tsiefe* as follows; “The life in *tsiefe*, the place of the dead, is in a spirit form but it is lived in the exact manner in which it was lived here on earth.”¹³⁹ While *luvɔ* (personality-soul) is believed to influence the character of a person, *gbɔgbɔ* (breath/spirit) which is the life-soul does not determine the course of one’s life, but just to keep them alive. *Gbɔgbɔ* is the vital force in all humans.¹⁴⁰

The Ewe people therefore believe in the existence of pre-earthly spiritual home (*amedzɔfe*) where human souls are fashioned and lived before they are born in the material world (*xexeme*). They also believe in post-earthly home (*tsiefe*) where the spirits of the dead go to after their earthly existence. But why is it that the *luvɔ* goes to the *tsiefe* instead of where it comes from (*amedzɔfe*)? If the *luvɔ* (the personality-soul) influences the character of a person, will the person be blamed for his or her acts? It is difficult to find immediate and consistent answers to these questions. However we can agree that Ewe people have a dualistic concept of the world; material and immaterial, destructible and indestructible and that life does not end but it is transformed.

We should be careful not to compare the idea of *tsiefe* to the Christian concept of heaven. Ewe ontology neither talks explicitly of reward nor punishment after death. However, it is a common belief that when the wicked people die their spirits continue to hover around the material world to cause problems and havoc to the living. We can deduce from this notion that the wicked are not welcome in *tsiefe*. We can also affirm that *tsiefe* is not a place of confinement neither is it

¹³⁹R. Y. GANUSAH, “Pouring Libation to Spirit Powers among the Ewe-Dome of Ghana”, 279.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. B. MEYER, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, Edinburgh University Press, London, 1999, 63.

totally separated from the material world (*xexeme*), there is always a constant interaction especially with the spirit of the ancestors.

2.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND VALUES

Socio-cultural institutions and values are necessary for the identification, cohesion and the development of any society. Each society needs standard values that forms and informs its members, and institutions to control and enhance the transmission of traditional and societal values. It is good to understand that, like many other African traditional cultures, the socio-cultural institutions and values of the Ewe people are deeply influence by their religious beliefs. It is of no use to still emphasize that religion permeates every aspect of African life. It is therefore not strange to affirm that, the socio-cultural institutions and values of the Ewe people are evaluated under the lens of the traditional religion. This section of the work is an attempt to discuss the socio-cultural institutions and values such as the kinship and family life, the rites of passage, the marriage, and the *Trɔkosi* among the Anlo-Ewe people.

2.3.1 KINSHIP AND FAMILY: *FOME*

The sense of belonging to a kinship and a family is a very important element in the socio-cultural thought of the Ewe people. The society and community settlements are normally organized along the kinship groups. Kinship is not bought but it is acquired through blood. In other words, we are born into kinships or families. Children can be adopted from a different kinship and considered as part of the family but it is rare for an adopted child to inherit certain status within the family. For example, it is uncommon for an adopted child to inherit the chieftaincy of his dead adopted father. Certain positions in the family or the clan are reserved solely to the blood relatives. Similarly, a married woman is a „partial“ member of her husband kinsmen and not a complete member because she is still considered as a member of her clan and when she died, she will be buried in the land of her kinsmen and not that of the husband. Among the Ewe people, kinship is determined through patrilineal descent and not through matrilineal lineage. D. K. Fiawoo

describes that Ewe society is “patrilineal society with virilocal residence¹⁴¹”, but substantially acknowledge cognatic kinship ties. Titles and property right, though transmitted in the agnatic line do not rigidly exclude maternal kinsmen.”¹⁴²

Kinship influences and defines the identity of a person. It also defines how relationships are structured and the role each member is expected to play. Thus, we can affirm that, kinship determines relationships in the society and provides limits to these relationships. S. J. Mbiti clearly elaborates the functions of the kinship as follows:

“It is a kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community: it governs marital customs and regulations, it determines the behavior of the individual towards another. Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the „tribe“, and it is even extended to cover animals, plants and non-living objects through the „totemic“ system. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kinship system. This it is which largely governs the behavior, thinking and whole life of the individual in the society of which he is a member.”¹⁴³

The understanding of kinship ties is not limited only to the living blood relatives but it has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Horizontally, kinship fosters and enhances intimate relationship with the living kinsmen. Vertically, this relationship is extended to the departed relatives and those yet to be born.¹⁴⁴

Family (*fome*) is the basic unity within the kinship system. Family is both fundamental to the individual and the society as a whole. It is the family that initiates and inculcates an individual into the life of the society. In other words, family is the cradle and the first place of socialization of the individual. Family grants identity and can influence the role one plays in the society. G. K. Tanye underlines the importance and the irreplaceable role of the family when he writes:

“Family is the nursing ground, where people experience and gradually learn from childhood the basic tenets of life such as: love, care, connectedness, compassion, ethics, honesty, fairness, common sense, reason, peaceful conflict resolution and respect for themselves and others... The family helps the developing person to learn traditional beliefs, cultural values and general orientations in life.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Virilocal residence implies that after marriage the woman moves to live in the man’s household.

¹⁴² D. K. FIAWOO, “Characteristics features of Ewe Ancestor Worship”, 163-164.

¹⁴³ J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 102.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 102-103.

¹⁴⁵ G. K. TANYE, *The Church-as-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 16.

From the above description of the indispensable role of the family, we can anonymously agree that a crisis in the family life would undoubtedly leads to crises in an individual life and the whole socio-cultural values of the society in general. The family is a sanctuary, from which life is received, protected and shaped, and prepares individuals to live a healthy life in conformity to the codes of conduct of the society.

But how do Ewe people understand the family and what is so unique about their perception of the family? According to the description given by the United Nations, the family is

“technically defined as any combination of two or more persons who are bound together by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibility for, inter alia, the care and maintenance of group members, the addition of new members through procreation or adoption, the socialization of children and social control of its members.”¹⁴⁶

The definition above seems to be the perfect definition of family in the Western sense but fails to reflect the African reality of family life. Among the Ewe people, family is not restricted to nuclear family or parents-offspring kinship system but goes beyond to include all those who are related by a common ancestry and are held together by the sense of obligation to one another.¹⁴⁷

K. Gyekye points out the Africans’ understanding of family as follows:

“The communal values... such as solidarity, mutual helpfulness, interdependence, and concern for the well-being of every individual member of the society, find their highest and most spontaneous expression in the institution of the family... This is the reason why each individual member of the family is brought up to think of himself or herself always and primarily in relation to the group of his or her blood relation and to seek to bring honour to the group: it is the responsibility of every member of the family to seek to maintain cohesion of the family. It must be pointed out, however, that the nuclear family in African society exists within the system of the extended family.”¹⁴⁸

The uniqueness of the Ewe family does not depend only on the experience of the extended family system but the understanding of family relationship as extending both to the dead relatives and the members of the family yet to be born. I am not in any way denying the existence or the concept of nuclear family among the Ewe people nor am I arguing that extended family is exclusive to Ewe people in particular and Africa in general. The more pronounced family system among the Ewe people is the extended family. However, with the influence of the

¹⁴⁶ “National Report of Ireland, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, (January, 2000)”. As cited by G. K. TANYE, *The Church-as-Family and Ethnocentrism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. K. GYEKYE, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 75.

¹⁴⁸ K. GYEKYE, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 75.

Western culture and the high economic cost of living, most families are closing up and are opting for a more limited family system which could involve only the first and second generations.

The extended family system as practice by the Ewe people has many advantages; it creates social, religious, and economic bonds, and gives identity and mutual support to members of the kinship. However, there is a great tendency that people may focus so much on their group to the extent that there could be no rooms for others to operate. The bonds between members of the same tribe could become so tight, leading to the formation of cliques where those who do not belong are despised and discriminated against. In a culture where everybody is struggling to seek the welfare of his or her kinsmen, nepotism and ethnocentrism could be common characteristics.

2.3.2 THE RITES OF PASSAGE

Most of the African societies including the Ewe people believe that human life is a sacred journey which is lived in stages. The initiation into a new stage of life through religious ceremonies and rituals are necessary to prepare an individual both socially and spiritually for the new challenges he or she may confront. In theory the concept of rites passage is common to African cultures but the way they are celebrated varies from one culture to another. The celebrations of these rituals are guided by the customs and codes of conduct of a particular culture. For example, while Macua people of northern Mozambique have an elaborate puberty initiation rite for males and females and which could last for at least a month, the Ewe people of southern Ghana have no initiation rites for males. It only exists for female adolescents and which could last for a week.

Basically, the rites of passage separate an individual from one stage and initiate him or her into another stage. According to A. Van Gennep;

“Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man’s life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the

individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined.”¹⁴⁹

Rites of passage define the identity and status of a person within the society. For example among the Macua people of Northern Mozambique, an individual (either male or female) who has not gone through the puberty initiation rite even though he or she may be well advanced in age is still considered as a child. This person has not gone through the ritual process that would transform his status from childhood to adulthood. Rites of passage separate, transform and incorporate an individual within his or her cultural context. Thus in his analysis, A. Van Gennep identifies three essential subdivisions of rites. These includes, preliminal rites (rites of separation- prominent in funeral ceremonies), liminal rites (rites of transition- prominent in initiation ceremonies), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation- prominent in marriage ceremonies).¹⁵⁰

It is important to note that the rites of passage aim at the good of both the individual and the community. A. Oladunjoye sums up the functions and the objective of the rites of passage in the following words:

“Thus, rites of passage programme aims to achieve one or more objectives which includes activities to promote bonding, foster resilience, promote social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and moral competence, foster self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, promote belief in the future, provide recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for pro-social involvement and foster self-determination.”¹⁵¹

The rites of passage serve as social mechanism that facilitate the changing of one’s condition of status and roles without leading to violent social disruption of life in the community¹⁵². Thus, rituals and ceremonies serve as shock absorbers that control and regulate any conflict or crises that may result from the change of status and roles. For example, a young woman who is not psychologically, socially and culturally prepare for marriage can easily give up when confronted with the new roles and crises of marital life.

¹⁴⁹ A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, 11.

¹⁵¹ A. OLADUNJOYE, *Rites of Passage*, Red Lead Press, Pittsburgh, 2012, 4.

¹⁵² Cf. A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, 45.

We shall briefly discuss three basic and important rites of passage among the Ewe people. These includes, *Vihehedego* (the outdoor ceremony), *Nugbeto* or *Gbatowɔwɔ* (Puberty rites for adolescent girls), and *Kunuwɔwɔ* (funeral ceremony).

a) *Vihehedego* (Outdoor ceremony)

Birth of a new child is an important moment for the whole family. The child is seen as a gift from God and the whole family feels obliged to incorporate the child into the community and to educate the child according to the traditional customs of the society. As the name suggest, *Vihehedego* is composed of two words, *vi* (child) and *hehedego* (bring outside). Thus, *Vihehedego* is the first time the child is brought outside the room and showed to the public. It is the day the child also receives its name which gives him or her a true identity in the community.

Among the Ewe people, a new born child is kept indoors for the first seven days. At this moment the child is too fragile to confront the harsh conditions outside the room. Others consider the new born child as still in the process of becoming a complete human being. When a child dies within the first seven days of birth, no mourning or elaborate funeral rites are performed since he is not seen as a complete human being. In the morning of the eighth day, members of the family and the whole clan gather to officially welcome the baby. The child is brought from the room and its name is called out by the father of the child or the eldest in the clan and repeated by all those present. This officially integrates the child into its father's family and the community's acceptance for a collective guardianship. Prayers are offered to the gods and the ancestors, asking for good health and blessings upon the child. Another important ritual during the outdoor ceremony is that, drops of water and rum are put on the tongue of the child. Symbolically, the different tastes are meant to tell the child to distinguish between the good and the evil. There are also merrymaking, singing and dancing. Gifts are presented to the child and the mother.¹⁵³

It is important to note that in Ewe culture, names are given to a child according to the day he or she is born, the circumstances surrounding his or her birth or the ancestor whom they think has

¹⁵³Cf. S. J. SALM, T. FALOLA, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, Greenwood Press, London, 2002, 128.

partially reincarnated¹⁵⁴. The table below shows the days of the week and the supposed names for both male and female child among the Ewe people.

Name of the Day	Name for male child	Name for female child
Sunday (Kɔsiɖa)	Kɔsi	Akosua
Monday (Dzoɖa)	Kɔdzo	Adzo
Tuesday (Blaɖa)	Kɔbla	Abla
Wednesday (Kuɖa)	Kɔku	Akua
Thursday (Yaoɖa)	Yao	Yawa
Friday (Fiɖa)	Kofi	Afi
Saturday (Mimliɖa)	Kwami	Ama

b) PUBERTY INITIATION RITES: GBOTOWOWO/NUGBETO

The outdoor ceremony welcomes a child into the family, gives it a name and makes it a full member of the clan. From birth up to the adolescent age, one is still considered as a child and could not perform adult roles. Puberty initiation rite among the Ewe introduces female adolescents into adult life. The principal aims of the ceremony of puberty rite are to educate the adolescents on adult responsibilities such as sex and marital life, and to confer on them the privileges of adults¹⁵⁵. The puberty initiation rite (*gbotowowo* - among the Ewe-Dome) or (*Nugbeto*- among the Anlo-Ewe) is normally performed on girls after the first menstruation and

¹⁵⁴Ewe people believe that ancestors in *tsiefe* continue to participate in the life of the living and are even capable of being re-born as children into the family. As such after consulting the diviner to find out which ancestor has come back, his name is given to the child (cf. K. A. HIAGBE, *Reconciled to Reconcile: An African view of John Calvin's Doctrine of Salvation*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 2008, 117.) The concept of ancestors reincarnating is quite complex to understand. If the ancestors are being venerated, why should they still be conceived as coming back to be born as children? This concept is inconsistent with the Ewe concept of pre-existence of the personality souls created by Mawu before their existence in the material world. Mbiti tries to explain this phenomenon by calling it a partial reincarnation. Mbiti explains, "In some societies it is believed that some living-dead are 'reborn'. This is, however, only partial re-incarnation since not the entire person is reborn as such, but only certain of his characteristics or physical distinctions." (S. J. MBITI, *African Religion and philosophy*, 83.)

¹⁵⁵Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics in African Traditional Religion*, 52.

when the family has gathered enough money and resources to shoulder the cost of such ceremonies.

There are usually three basic stages in the rituals for the initiation rite. The participants are first separated or excluded from the public to prepare them mentally, physically and spiritually for the ritual. The second phase involves education and instructions from well experienced elderly women from the clan. The girls are educated on personal hygiene, sex and marital life, and the socio-cultural responsibilities that the community expects from them. Thirdly, they girls are welcomed and accepted into the society as adults. Libation is poured to the ancestors and the gods to grant the young adults good health, prosperity and abundant fertility in their marriage. This third phase marks a transition period in which the girls are formally recognized as adults. Meanwhile, the girls are supposed to be virgins before the puberty rites.

The puberty initiation rite, to which every girl looks forward to, prevents to a greater extent girls from indulging in sexual activities before the puberty rite. A girl found to be pregnant before the initiation rite has brought shame and disgrace to her and the whole family. The girl and her family could be fined to pay certain items like money, kegs of palm wine and goats to appease the gods and ancestors, and to cleanse the community from any eminent disaster which this disgraceful act could bring. During the celebration, gifts and money are offered to the girl by family member, friends and love ones. This could prepare the girl financially to marriage and to live independent life. We can say that, puberty initiation rite is structured to smoothly separate these girls from infancy and to introduce them into the demands of adult life. The puberty initiation rite has a positive impact on the young girls. However, due to the influence of Western culture, Christianity especially the Pentecostal and Protestant sects, and the high cost involved, most parents are no more interested in carrying out such ceremonies. The puberty initiation rite is gradually dying out in Eweland. One of the immediate repercussions of the phasing out of this rite in Eweland is the high rate of teenage pregnancy. The girls no more wait for puberty initiation rite before indulging in sex nor is teenage pregnancy still considered as a taboo.

Sex education, socio-cultural and marital responsibilities are instructed by the father and other adults such as elder brothers or uncles, though in an informal way. During the adolescent period, the male are introduce into occupations such as farming, fishing, wood work, bricks laying, thatch roofing, palm wine tapping and other ways of earning a living. Traditionally, circumcision

(*Avatsotso*) is done to male children between the ages of two or three. Unlike some African tribes that consider circumcision of adolescent males as part of initiation into adulthood, no ritual exist for circumcision among the Ewe people, nor is it considered as a mark of manhood.¹⁵⁶

c) FUNERAL RITES: KUNUWƆWƆ

Death marks the end of a person's physical presence in the material world. Death serves as a separation or a bridge into the spiritual world. As such befitting funeral rites are done to signify a person's physical separation from his or her living relatives and to formally incorporate him or her into land of the dead (*Tsiefe*), and to acknowledge his or her new status as a spirit but not completely detached from activities of the living relatives. Funeral rites do not serve only to pay our final respect to our departed brothers and sisters but they also underline the unbroken relationship between the living and the dead.

Funeral rituals and ceremonies among the Ewe people vary according to the status of the person. A child who died before the eighth day has no elaborate funeral ceremony and the parents are not supposed to cry or to wear red or black cloths which are the recognized colours for mourning. Similarly, those who died unnatural death such as drowning, death in child birth, suicide and through accidents have specific but not elaborate funeral ceremonies. It is believed that the souls (*luvwo*) of those who died unnaturally still hover in the material world to cause harm and to disturb the living since they have not had a peaceful death. Thus, specific rituals are done to calm down those souls and to orient them to the world of the dead (*Tsiefe*). Those who die unnatural death are buried in the bush. The adults who live good lives¹⁵⁷ and died of natural cause are given elaborate funeral.

The pre-burial ceremony involves the preparation of the corpse- washing and dressing. After the preparation, there is a vigil or „wake keeping“ whereby the family members and friends stay awake to mourn the dead. The body is laid in state the following morning for the family members and other sympathizers to file past the corpse and to pray for his or her safe journey

¹⁵⁶ Cf. J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 278.

¹⁵⁷ Those who thought to be witches or wizards are not given befitting funeral rites. Such people are not even buried in the common cemetery; they are buried in the forest, a place where nobody would remember them. This serves as a deterrent to the living to live good and peaceful lives.

into the land of the dead. This is done in the environment of crying, singing and dancing. During the burial ceremony, libation is poured and ancestors are called upon to welcome the soul of the dead. Since *Tsiefe* is thought to be a distant place from our world, some coins are put in the coffin with the dead so that he or she can use the money to fend for the necessities on the way, and some cloths to carry along to *Tsiefe*¹⁵⁸.

As part of the customary rites, the family of the dead person consults a diviner five days after the burial to call on his or her spirit and to find out whether he or she died peaceful or was killed by someone. The widow or the widower undergoes certain rites called *Ahowɔwɔ* (literally means „doing mourning“) which involves staying indoors for about forty days. The aim of this ritual is to separate the surviving spouse from the spirit of the dead spouse, and to enable the living spouse to remarry¹⁵⁹. The final funeral rituals, *Tsitseɲɔɲɔ* (mat-rolling) are performed from five to six months after burial to finally complete the funeral rites. In this ritual, the movable properties of the deceased such as cloths, sandals and gadgets are distributed among the relatives.¹⁶⁰

2.3.3 MARRIAGE: SRODEDE

Marriage is an important institution among the Ewe people. According to the Ewe tradition, marriage is not a private or individual affair but a social reality which unites both the man's and the woman's families together. S. J. Mbiti beautifully writes that, "Marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate."¹⁶¹ As such, when there is any problem in the marriage the two families come together to resolve it. It is also important to note that, among the Ewe people, marriage is incomplete without procreation since this serves as the only means by which human beings can preserve the chain of humanity. Hence, „unfruitful“ companionships in terms of procreation, such as lesbian or homosexual marriages are unthinkable among the Ewe people.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 306.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. B. MEYER, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, 71-72.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 307-309.

¹⁶¹ J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 130.

The search of a Marriage partner is the responsibility of the man and his family. A girl's parents are approached by the boy's family to allow the girl to marry their son after a critical investigation to check if there is no impediment to the marriage. Usually, the boy and the girl might have already discussed and agreed among themselves. A demand is made by the girl's family to symbolically signify their consent and to make the marriage union legal. This demand ranges from money, alcoholic drinks and manual labour. J. Spieth describes the marriage process among the Ewe people as follows:

“In every clan, the suitor is presented with a specific set of demands which he has to satisfy with the parents or with another authority of the girl's family. Chief among these demands in manual labour; this is followed by the payment of a definite amount of money and presents to the bride and to the family of her parents and her mother.”¹⁶²

Ewe people are exogamous and hence are prohibited to marry within one's lineage. Sometimes, marriages could be permitted of persons in the consanguinity of the third degree collateral. This marriage is called *fome srɔdɛdɛ* (family wife) with the aim of conserving the wealth of the family by not marrying women of other lineages. Now this type of marriage is not common.

The payment of the „bride wealth“ to the girl's family must not be considered as if the girl is being sold. The bride wealth only ratifies the marriage. It serves as the necessary ritualistic token payment which guarantees the stability of marriage¹⁶³ and not the property of the man. Girls are not bought or sold, and even after death they are buried among their kinsmen and not the kinsmen of the husband. In antiquity, betrothal marriages were practiced but currently they are not common.

Marriage among the Ewe can be either monogamy or polygyny. The practice of polyandry does not exist in the Ewe culture. According to J. Spieth, the more original system of marriage among the Ewe people is the monogamy. However, the most practiced system is polygyny. He gives certain reasons while Ewe men want to marry more than one wife.

“Monogamy is the most original theoretically recognized form of marriage among the Ewes. However, this theory stands opposed to the practice, chiefs and other wealthy men live polygamous lives. The circumstances that compel a man to take a second or third wife, in addition to the first, are usually traceable to the physical or psychological nature of the first wife, to peculiar conceptions about menstruation and finally to the wish to

¹⁶² J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 43-44.

¹⁶³ Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics in African Traditional Religion*, 63.

have a large number of family. What usually leads a man to take a second wife is the inability of the first wife to help her husband with the farm work due to sickness. The same thing happens, if the woman is quarrelsome, lazy or a pilferer.”¹⁶⁴

Apart from the above mentioned points of J. Spieth, we can also add some cultural practices which promote polygyny. Culturally, women are considered unclean during their menstrual period. They could not cater for the needs of their husbands or even sleep in the same room with them. A different wife is needed to substitute the other during the menstrual period. Another important factor is the inducement to have a large family since large family is associated with wealth. Children and wives help out in the farming or in fishing business to gain more income for the family. The traditional custom of inheriting children and wife from a deceased brother also leads to polygyny. Some people also argue that, marrying two or more wives prevents and reduces unfaithfulness and prostitution on the part of the man.¹⁶⁵

The Ewe traditional custom accepts and does not frown at polygyny even though there are proves which points to the fact that the original form of marriage is monogamy. For example, traditional conception of a mythical marriage between heaven (*dzifo*) and the earth (*anyigba*) denotes monogamy. Another example is a common believe that each person has a single soul-wife in the pre-existent world¹⁶⁶. Those who had perfect and smooth marriages were supposed to have met and married their soul wives. However, due to the influence of Christianity and the high cost of living, most Ewe men are now opting for monogamous marriage.

Once the bride wealth is paid and the necessary rituals performed, it is difficult to dissolve the union. In case of any problem, the two families try to solve it out. Factors such as the sterility or barrenness could lead to the marriage of the second wife and not necessary a divorce of the first wife. An impotent man could employ the services of his brother to impregnate his wife. However, a husband suspected of practicing witchcraft and sorcery or a woman who flirts around could lead to divorce.

¹⁶⁴ J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 44.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. K. AMPONSAH, *Topics in African Traditional Religion*, 63-64. See also, Cf. J. S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 139-140.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. J. SPIETH, *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, 44-45.

2.3.4 TRŌKOSI SYSTEM: SLAVES OF THE GODS

The *Trŏkosi* system is a religious-cultural phenomenon among the Anlo-Ewe people which even though has a profound religious meaning for them discriminates against poor virgin girls who are detained at the shrines of certain deities. As the name suggests, *Trŏ* means lesser god or lesser deity and *kosi* means slave. *Trŏkosi* literally means „slave of the gods“. Thus, these innocent virgin girls are subjected to servitude in the shrine to atone for the crimes they did not commit. “*Trŏkosi* is a religious practice that forces young girls into indefinite servitude to religious priests to atone for the crimes committed by family members.”¹⁶⁷

Families offer virgins as young as eight years to serve in the shrine to appease the gods for crime committed by relatives. The crimes may vary from murder to stealing vegetables and fruits. The innocent girls eventually become domestic and sexual slaves of the traditional priests. Even when released from bondage, these girls could not live a normal life, they are stigmatized and find it exceptionally difficult to reintegrate into the society. Clearly, *Trŏkosi* system infringes and violates the rights of these girls. However, the religious meaning attached to it and the fears of the punishment from the gods instill in the families by the traditional priests make the whole issue difficult and complex to tackle. The families yield to the demands of the traditional priest due to fear of deaths and disasters that could befall the family.¹⁶⁸

The *Trŏkosi* system is linked to certain deities and not all deities. It is believed that before the 18th century crimes committed against deities were settled with live stocks and other goods as reparations. There is a strong belief that crimes committed are punishable by the deities and that individual crime could bring disaster to the whole family or the village. As such, gods have to be appeased to prevent an eminent disaster. According to W. Giles and J. Hyndman, after the 18th century, the traditional priests begun to demand young virgins but the cause of the change in the object of reparation was not clear.¹⁶⁹ David Owusu-Ansah clarifies that, families begun to offer

¹⁶⁷ W. GILES, J. HYNDMAN, (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and conflict zones*, University of California Press, California, 2004, 159.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. A. PARROT, N. CUMMINGS, *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2006, 160-161.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. W. GILES, J. HYNDMAN, (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and conflict zones*, 159.

virgins because they could not afford cattle to atone the gods.¹⁷⁰ It is quite complex to trace the origin of this religious-cultural system that has made a profound mark in Anlo-Ewe culture.

The *Trɔkosi* system is a form of slavery and contradicts the Ghanaian Constitution which forbids slavery or servitude of any kind. According to the Ghana's Criminal Code, Section 314A-Prohibition of Customary Servitude:

“Whoever-

- a) Sends to or receives at any place any person; or
- b) Participates in or is concern in any ritual or customary activity in respect of any person with purpose of subjecting that person to any form of ritual or customary servitude or any form of forced labour related to a customary ritual commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not less than three years.”¹⁷¹

From 1990, the *Trɔkosi* system became a topic for national debate in Ghana. In 1998, a law was passed to officially outlaw the *Trɔkosi* system and to consider it as a form of servitude and hence punishable by law. However, the law prohibiting *Trɔkosi* has little or no practical effect. Only handful of the girls has been saved, more than ten thousand girls are still subjected to this inhuman act¹⁷². The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice in Ghana, Women Organizations and other Non-Governmental Organizations are working hard to free these girls and to reintegrate them into the society through skill training.

But why has the Ghana Government not be able to enforce the law against *Trɔkosi*? Why should the innocent girls be deprived of their rights due to a crime committed by a relative some generations ago? We must understand that, these young girls are not bought or captured forcefully. They are sent to the shrines by their own parents and families. The traditional priests developed a strategic means to instill fear on the adherents of the Traditional religion in order for them to comply with their demands of the priests. Most of the adherents of the *Trɔkosi* system believed that it is part of their culture, hence abolishing it would mean attacking and destroying their culture.¹⁷³ Others still argue that it is a form of social control of crime; the girls are trained

¹⁷⁰Cf. D. OWUSU-ANSAH, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana (4th Ed.)*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2014, 309.

¹⁷¹ Ghana's Criminal Code 1960 (Acts 29) Acts of Ghana: First Republic. Accessed, 15 November, 2015: www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=339612

¹⁷² Cf. W. GILES, J. HYNDMAN, (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and conflict zones*, 160.

¹⁷³ Cf. W. GILES, J. HYNDMAN, (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and conflict zones*, 160.

in the shrines so that they grow up to be responsible and to infect their communities with the moral training they had from the shrines.

It is quite sad to hear well educated people from Anlo-Ewe communities arguing in favour of *Trɔkosi*. It still beats my imagination why innocent girls are the ones to atone for the crimes of their relatives. Why not boys? This system tells us a lot about the image and the place of women in Anlo-Ewe community. Women are still vulnerable and dominated by men. Our religion and culture are meant to liberate us and help us to discover and live our true identity. Such customs which undermine these basic qualities are not wealth perpetuating.

2.3.5 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

The principal focus of this chapter is to introduce us into the world view of the Ewe culture. The chapter is divided into three sections: the historical and geographical backgrounds, the religious ontological views, and socio-cultural institutions and values.

The first part gives us a concise understanding of the history and the actual geographical location of the Ewe people. We affirm that even though Ewe people in Ghana are not united under one kingdom but groups of smaller states (*dukɔwo*), they are bound together by a common language, sense of common ancestral heritage, and similar socio-cultural and religious beliefs and customs.

In the second section, we assert that Ewe people believe in the Supreme God (*Mawu*), who is the creator and the sustainer of the universe. *Mawu* is experienced in the world and there is no need of metaphysical proof of his existence. This is evident in the myths, songs, proverbs and poems which praise and recount the nature and goodness of *Mawu*. But unlike the Christian concept of monotheistic High God, Ewe believe in the hierarchy of beings of which *Mawu* is at the apex and surrounded by hosts of divinities, ancestral spirits and other nature spirits. The divinities are not equal to *Mawu* but are his lieutenants and are subordinated to him. We emphasize that Ewe people do not worship divinities and ancestral spirits but venerate them. However, the veneration is done with great respect and intensity which could easily be confused with worship. Unlike the divinities, no shrines, images or priests and priestesses of *Mawu* exist. *Mawu* is thought of as

near to us „like the wind“ but also remote. This idea to some extent explains the immanence and the transcendence of *Mawu*.

We agreed in the first chapter that human being is the creator of culture. As such, the basic understanding of Ewe culture would be incomplete without analyzing how Ewe people perceive human being. For Ewe people, human being is composed of three elements; the body, the spirit and the soul. The body is material and perishable while the soul and the spirit are immaterial and indestructible. The body makes the existence in the visible world possible. The spirit gives life or vital force to the body and makes it a living thing. The soul defines the personality of an individual. After death the body perishes. The spirit which is the little piece of *Mawu* in each of us goes back to *Mawu*, while the soul which was created by *Mawu* and pre-existed before the material world goes to *Tsiefe* or the land of the dead, where the soul lives forever but continue to participate and influence the activities of the living. Thus, Ewe people believe in a kind of platonic dualism where the spiritual or invisible world is believed to be superior and more original than the material world which is only transitory. With this in mind, death is seen as an initiation into a better world, to live nearer to *Mawu* who is the source of life.

In the third section, we give a brief outlook on some of the cultural institutions and their indispensable roles in Ewe culture. The kinship and family system, rites of passage, marriage and *Trɔkosi* system are taken into consideration. The importance of kinship and family system cannot be over emphasized. Family welcomes and inculcates an individual into the life of the society. It also gives us our identity and defines our status. We conclude that while kinship and family ties are important for consolidating solidarity and mutual collaboration, it could also lead to nepotism and tribalism if not controlled.

Among the Ewe people, life is lived in stages. Each stage is marked with specific rituals and ceremonies to separate an individual from one stage and incorporate him or her into a new stage. Rites of passage such as outdoorings ceremonies, puberty initiations and funeral ceremonies all serve the purposes of separation and incorporation. Rites of passage help in the transition and smooth changing of roles and responsibilities in the society. Traditionally, marriage among the Ewe people is a covenant between a man and a woman or more women. The basic objective of marriage is procreation and communion. Marriage is the fundamental means by which life is perpetuated and a guarantee of the continuous existence of the community. As such, marriage is

celebrated as a communal event and always with religious orientation. We also affirm that the *Trɔkosi* system stands oppose to the fundamental rights of the young virgins who are been kept in the shrines to atone for the crimes committed by their relatives. Even though *Trɔkosi* system is a crime in Ghana, the Ghana Government is not able to efficiently eradicate this system. The problem of *Trɔkosi* is complex and needs a lot of dialogue with both the families and the traditional priests who still indulge in such dehumanizing act.

III CHAPTER

3. INCULTURATION: AN AFRICAN SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

We affirmed in the second chapter that, Africans had their own culture and traditional religion before the advent of Christian missionaries. For an African, religion and socio-cultural life were not separated but were like two sides of the same coin, mutually enriching and edifying each other. There was always a correspondence between traditional religious ideologies and concrete practical living. Both religion and culture played indispensable roles in constructing and defining the identity of an African. As such, any institution which seeks to influence and have a lasting impact on Africans but does not pay attention to religious and socio-cultural values is likely to build an edifice on the sand, without any strong foundation.

It is not a secret anymore to say that, African personality has been distorted by historical events such as slavery, exploitation and colonization. An African identity is suffering from anthropological crisis¹⁷⁴ which calls for urgent rehabilitation. The solution to this crisis is intimately connected to the creative search and historical rehabilitation of the disintegrated African cultures. In the words of G. McLean, there must be a “creative search backward into tradition for resources with which to respond the present problems and build towards the future.”¹⁷⁵

We cannot deny that authentic living is only possible through self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is possible through profound understanding of our culture, both past and present. In the same manner, development of authentic African Christianity is directly link to the rebirth of authentic African cultural values;¹⁷⁶ since authentic Christian faith cannot develop in a cultural vacuum. In many African cultures and especially among Ewe people, the Christian faith is still considered as alien and has not yet totally transformed the lives of the Christian faithful. As such,

¹⁷⁴ Cf. L. BOKA DI MPASI, S.J., “The Theology of African Churches”, in W. Jenkinson, H. O’Sullivan (eds.), *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll/New York, 1991, 53.

¹⁷⁵ G. MCLEAN, “Community and the Instrumentalization of Work”, in: *Philosophie Africaine: Paix-Justice-Travail*, Actes de la 10ème Semaine Philosophique de Kinshasa, 1986, 112-113.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1994, 430.

the Christian faith is exercised superficially, “deep convictions and reactions remained rooted in the traditional religion.”¹⁷⁷

Christianity in Africa is seen to be growing at unprecedented pace especially with the emergence of Independent Charismatic African Churches. However, the fundamental questions are, how authentic is Christianity in Africa? How unique is African Christianity? Even though it is impossible to measure the faith of an individual, practical faith experience or how most Africa Christians live their faith, point to the fact that they live double lives; partial fidelity to Christian God and partial allegiance to traditional religion; Church service in the morning, a visit to the ancestral shrine in the afternoon.

But what account for this double allegiance? Why is there strong desire among African Christians to revisit their traditions which they are supposed to break away with? Why is there crisis in an African Christian identity? Historically, Africans were evangelized during the period of colonization. Some early European missionaries were seen as the collaborators in the colonization enterprise. It was difficult for Africans to reconcile the gospel message of peace and love to the dehumanizing slave trade and exploitations of Africans during this period.

Another factor that might have led to crisis among African Christians is that, African religious and cultural worldviews were not considered during the evangelization process. To be a Christian implied a total break and discontinuity from traditional values. Most Africans were evangelized outside their own cultures since Christianity was built on foreign pillars. This created a dilemma of instability in an African’s heart who wanted to be a Christian as an African and not as European. From my own personal experience, my parents had wanted to baptize me with an African name Elom which means He (God) loves me. However, this name was refused by the priest and I was baptized with Vincent. Elom remains my household name while Vincent is reserved for Christian and academic documents. This created a sort of division because in the house I am called Elom while in the school I respond to Vincent.

The third factor focus on the idea that Christianity is an instrument of neo-colonialism with which the West are still using to control and manipulate Africans. Most African Churches are depended on the West both economically and ideologically. A careful analysis of Christian

¹⁷⁷ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 430.

missionary activities in Africa indicates clearly that, Africans were only at the receiving end, they were not thought of as having anything meaningful to contribute to the establishment of the Church in African. Both the structure and the organization of the Church were foreign to Africans.

African Christian identity is in crisis and the only possible way to restore and enhance authentic Christian experience is through inculturation. Inculturated evangelization does not discriminate but reconciles the authentic African values with the Christian faith to develop a Christianity that is firmly rooted on the principles of the gospel but at the same time satisfies the yearnings of the African Christians. Inculturation involves “the identity search of a people, to whom it has become clear that this identity cannot be found either in the importation of a foreign culture (acculturation) or in the restoration of its past (tribalism, nationalism).”¹⁷⁸

I disagree to the assertion that, authentic African Christian identity could be achieved by a radical split from the Western influence. An extreme attempt to strip the Christian faith of its Western influence of over twenty centuries and to present the gospel to Africans in its raw state could lead to Christianity losing its essence. Inculturation is nothing but the re-evaluation of African religious and cultural values to find in them the elements of truth which could serve as a common ground for dialogue with the Christian faith. Inculturation also calls for a deeper reflection on how to contextualize and interpret the Christian faith in Africa without losing its essential elements. Inculturation is a search for authentic African Christian identity because through it Christianity takes into consideration the reality of Africans and to create Christianity with unique African features, Christianity that Africans would call their own.

Our affirmation of Inculturation as a search for authentic Christian identity would prompt us to discuss the concrete example of the encounter between the Ewe people and the Christian missionaries. We shall also discuss some basic traditional values of Ewe people which could serve as grounds for inculturated evangelization or obstacles to it. Other topics under discussion include inculturation as self-identification, inculturation as liberation and inculturation as dialogue. Specific pastoral recommendation for inculturation among the Ewe people would also be made.

¹⁷⁸ T. NKÉRAMIHIGO, S.J., “Inculturation and the Specificity of Christian Faith”, 22.

3.1 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN EWE PEOPLE AND CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

The contemporary Christian evangelization among the Negro race of the sub-Saharan Africa commenced in the 19th century. The revival of religious and missionary activities in Europe, and the exploration and colonization of Africa were instrumental in the evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷⁹ The contemporary Christianization of the Negro race could be divided into three periods: a) the time of exploration (1800-1880), b) the time of colonization (1880-1960), and c) the period of independence of African states and attempts at indigenization of Christianity (1960 to present).¹⁸⁰ One of the most important and unique element of this stage of evangelization was the presence of the Protestant missionaries, whom according to J. Baur were far numerous than the Catholic missionaries at the end of the First World War.¹⁸¹

We must remind ourselves that, before the 19th century, many attempts were made to evangelize the natives along the coast of the present day Ghana when the Portuguese explorers first arrived in 1471. However, this and many attempts could not bear fruits due to constant misunderstanding between the natives and the Christian missionaries. The missionaries also had difficulty in acclimatizing to the tropical weather and diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Christianity failed to take root on the Ghanaian soil even as late as 1737.¹⁸²

Serious Christian evangelization activities among the Ewe people of Ghana were started by the Northern German Mission Society (*Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft*- NMG), also known as the Bremen missionaries in 1847. Aside the problems of tropical diseases and language barrier, the colonial politics also served as obstacle to efficient missionary work among the Ewe people. The Ewe territory which once belonged to Germany was taken over and divided between Britain and France after the First World War. The Bremen missionaries, all Germans were deported and were replaced by the Scottish missionaries.¹⁸³ Meanwhile, the work of the Bremen missionaries led to the establishment of the Ewe Evangelical Presbyterian Church, which later became known as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, 430.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, 103.

¹⁸¹ Cf. J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 105.

¹⁸² Cf. N. D. K. OKOLEDAH, *Problems and Prospects of the Search for a Catholic Spirituality in the Ghanaian Pastoral Ministry*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2005, 45.

¹⁸³ Cf. N. D. K. OKOLEDAH, *Problems and Prospects of the Search for a Catholic Spirituality in the Ghanaian Pastoral Ministry*, 58.

Bremen missionaries like many of the Protestant missionaries evangelized through education and the translation of the Scriptures into the local language. J. Baur describes the Bremen mission among the Ewe people as follows: “faithful to their Lutheran tradition they developed a Christianity based on the tribal language, with Ewe schools and literature, and the church community that in its structure was closely modeled in the people’s past.”¹⁸⁴ It is important to note that in schools, preferential option was given to female education in order to prepare young girls to be good Christian and responsible wives.¹⁸⁵ One of the most important achievements of the Bremen missionaries was the standardization of the Ewe language by developing it into a written language.¹⁸⁶

One of the specific characteristics of the Bremen missionaries influence over the Ewe people was their conscious effort to create Ewe nationhood (*volkwerdung unter den Ewe*).¹⁸⁷ The aim was to unite the smaller Ewe states and to awaking in them the consciousness of nationalism. However, this nationalism was based on shared history and culture and not on any political theory.¹⁸⁸ B. Meyer explains it more clearly when she says that;

“... among the Ewe, the NMG introduced the typical German, romanticist notion of nationalism beyond actual politics and confined to a belief in a shared language, culture, and history ... while striving to build (up) the Ewe nation and unite the Ewe people, the mission tried to prevent the emergence of nationalists because of their political motives.”¹⁸⁹

In other words, the project of the Ewe nationhood was introduced to destabilize individual’s affiliation and strong attachment to smaller Ewe states which could pose a danger to the colonial rule. The united Ewe nationhood had no central political government; the basis for unity was shared history and common origin.

The teaching and the preaching of the gospel in the Ewe language were inspired by other motives aside that of pastoral. The adoption of the local language for pastoral activities was a strategy to

¹⁸⁴ J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 105.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. N. D. K. OKOLEDAH, *Problems and Prospects of the Search for a Catholic Spirituality in the Ghanaian Pastoral Ministry*, 60.

¹⁸⁶ Before the arrival of the Bremen missionaries there was no written Ewe language. The various Ewe states speak different Ewe dialects. The Ewe language that was taught and spoken in mission schools was seen as the standard Ewe.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation: German Pietist Missionaries, Ewe Converts and the Politics of Culture”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32: 2 (2002) 169. (Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1581760>).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 172.

¹⁸⁹ B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 181.

confine and limit the Ewe people within their local situation. B. Meyer cited the NMG inspector, D. F. M. Zahn¹⁹⁰ in his article *Die Muttersprache in der Mission* (1895), to prove the motive behind this strategy. For B. Meyer, “Zahn argued that by keeping colonial subjects within the confines of their own nation, the emergence of nationalists questioning European colonial power could be avoided.”¹⁹¹ This concept of nationalism without any political theory as its foundation prompted B. Meyer to conclude that, strictly speaking the concept does not deserve to be called by this name.¹⁹²

Due to lack of sufficient missionaries, native assistants were trained to head schools and also to be in charge of congregations. Some were sent to study in Württemberg, Germany. Twenty native assistants were trained from 1884 to 1900 in a three year course.¹⁹³ The students were submitted to strict and harsh pietist regime. They were confined to pietist Christian rural areas and were not allowed to visit big cities. They were not given any opportunity to get acquainted with the German modern society which they think could pollute the mind of the Ewe students, and which could contradict the pietist’s model of Christian community they were propagating among the Ewe people.¹⁹⁴ The trained mission assistants played a crucial role in the organization of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church when the German missionaries were deported.

The Catholic missionaries especially the Society of the Divine World Missionary- SVD, started work among the Ewe people in the early 20th century. Like the Bremen missionaries, they also evangelized through preaching, establishment of schools and hospitals. However, unlike the Bremen missionaries, the Catholics were slow in adopting the local language for liturgical and educational activities. Whereas the Bremen missionaries constructed villages for the new converts to separate them from their „heathen brothers and sisters“, the Catholics did not employed the method of separating the converted from the unconverted but used a more horizontal strategy which enhanced rapid geographical expansion and numerical growth through massive conversion.¹⁹⁵ The two major Churches in Eweland are the Roman Catholic Church

¹⁹⁰ D. F. M. Zahn was the inspector of *Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft* from 1862-1900.

¹⁹¹ B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 175.

¹⁹² Cf. B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 181.

¹⁹³ Cf. B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 183.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. B. MEYER, “Christianity and the Ewe Nation”, 185.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. C. OMENYO, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in Mainline Churches in Ghana*, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2002, 46.

(two dioceses) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Numerous Independent African Churches and Pentecostal Churches have also sprung out recently.

Aside the Bremen missionaries who employed the Ewe language for the evangelization activities, and also as a means to purify it from its degenerated nature,¹⁹⁶ the Ewe traditional religious and cultural values were considered by the missionaries as primitive and devilish. To be a Christian was to break away from one's culture which was considered as inferior and to embrace civilization taught by the missionaries. In most cases, conversion to Christianity implied loss of cultural identity. As A. Hastings puts it, "evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness, and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home."¹⁹⁷

We cannot under estimate the fact that Christian missionaries, both Protestants and Catholics were instrumental in the development of the Ewe people. Most of the schools, colleges and hospitals located in Eweland were built by missionaries. Missionaries standardized the Ewe language by developing alphabets and reducing it into a written language. However, there were indications that, individuals" were not evangelized with their culture but were removed from their culture to be evangelized. The early missionaries did not consider the Ewe culture as a privileged place for evangelization. Most Ewe Christian converts who were not at home or satisfied with their new faith, tend to live double lives: they still consult the divinities for help in moments of crisis and make sacrifices to ancestors for long life and prosperity. Thus, for S. O. Ilesamni, the colonial Christian Church created two forms of existential absurdity; a) sense of ontological alteration and social relocation (change of social and cultural identities- change of names, new style of dressing etc.) and b) faithful copying from Western Churches (both liturgy and polity).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ For D. F. M. Zahn the „heathens“ language and culture had degenerated and were in need of reconciliation with God. (Cf. B. MEYER, "Christianity and the Ewe Nation", 174.

¹⁹⁷ A. HASTINGS, *The Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, Burns and Oates, London, 1967, 60.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. S. O. ILESAMNI, "Inculturation and Liberation: Social Ethics and the African Theology Project", *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 15 (1995) 55. (Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23559671>).

3.2 EWE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES AS SEEDS AND GROUNDS FOR CHRISTIAN EVANGELIZATION

The Ewe culture and religious traditions like any human institutions have their strength and weaknesses. Ewe culture was far from perfect before it encounter with Christianity. It was not a paradise that most of the native writers used to write about. It is an error to think that the solutions to African problems lies solely in the return to the „glorious“ past. Christian missionaries on arrival met some African cultures characterized by superstitious beliefs, witchcraft, internal slavery, tribal wars, chieftaincy disputes, mass illiteracy and many more. It was therefore not surprised that, their first reaction about Africans was negative; Africans were primitive, fetish and inferior. Their aims were to exorcise African cultures of demonic possessions, uplift them from their inferior state through Western education and civilization, and to reconcile them to God through Christianity.

Early missionaries considered the Ewe culture as not compatible with the Gospel. Aside the Bremen missionaries“ use of Ewe language, evangelization started from zero without given any native cultural foundation to it. No time was taken to carefully study the native culture to find out the possibility of finding positive religious-cultural elements which could be incorporated into Christianity to make the faith more intelligible to the natives. Ewe converts were asked to leave behind their religious traditions because they were devilish, but nothing similar was given to them to substitute what they had left behind. In this sense “(...) Africa is left in limbo. We are fast losing hold of our traditional ways of life and yet have not been able to adopt the noble aspect of modernity.”¹⁹⁹G. A. Mante, beautifully expresses the dilemma of an African Christian as follows:

“As a matter of fact, the life of many Africans is a painful dilemma as regards the observance of church and traditional norms. Their daily experience of life is most often marked by a sharp tension between their Africaness and their Christian commitments. They are often confused about when they Africans and when they are Christians. This conflicting way of life has seriously affected African attitudes toward the Christian message.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ P. K. SARPONG, “The African Synod and the Powerful Word of God”, *Studia Missionalia* 48 (1999) 352.

²⁰⁰ G. A. MANTE, “Christian and African Traditional Religious values and Priestly Formation”, *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies* 1 (1989) 55.

A Careful observation and analysis of Ewe traditional culture could reveal worth of positive values or elements of truth which could be tapped to enhance efficient integration and reception of the Gospel message. The Church's Pastoral Constitution on the Evangelization of the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* advocates for the acceptance of elements of truth in cultures when it says, "the positive values of cultures, while accepted as good in themselves, are also seen as providing some preparation for the acceptance of the message of the gospel."²⁰¹ Pope John Paul II sees the preservation of the positive elements of culture as an act of a mature faith. The church transmits to cultures "her own values, at the same time taking good elements that already existed in them and renewing them within... the safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith."²⁰²

This section would attempt to underline some wholesome elements of truth in Ewe culture, which when inculcated into the Christian faith could help to situate the gospel message in the Ewe context. There are many elements; however, we shall consider elements such as family life, the communitarian spirit, sense of sacredness of life, veneration of ancestors, and rites of passage. I shall not in any way argue that these values are perfect and therefore must replace the gospel values. Their incorporation into Christian faith needs purification and careful discernment, with the aim of perfecting them in Christ.

a) THE FAMILY LIFE

It is a waste of time to find new arguments other than the one given in chapter two to support the view that Ewe people consider family as the basic generative cell of the society. In the family, the cultural values are taught and experimented. The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa commented on the family as follows: "The family is a place which deep African value of life comes to be, is protected and nourished, a place of belonging where sharing and solidarity are at the heart of daily life and where each feels himself or herself to be truly at home."²⁰³

²⁰¹ GS, 57.

²⁰² IOANNIS PAULI PP. II, "Redemptoris Missio", 52 and 53.

²⁰³ AMECEA-Pastoral Department, (ed.), *The African Synod Comes Home: A Simplified Text*, Paulines Publication Africa, Nairobi, 1997, 20.

Given the importance and the irreplaceable role of family in Africa, the Fathers of the Special Assembly for the synod of Bishops of Africa proposed the image of the church as family of God. This image was not a substitute for other images of the church such as salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13), the bride of Christ (II Cor. 11: 1), the people of God (I P. 2:9-10) etc. but it is an image that speak directly to African heart based on African reality. The image of the Church would give new orientation for understanding the Church, not only as a bunch of unrelated people who only meet in the Church on Sundays but a new family of God, created through affinity with Jesus.

Just as in African families, the Church as the extended family of God becomes a privilege place for integration, character formation, growth and enrichment both physically and spiritually, the Church also becomes a place of “perpetuating and consolidating the life of the individual, to prepare him or her for community tasks such as marriage, family and community duties.”²⁰⁴

To maintain order and discipline within the extended African family, the family is structured hierarchically.²⁰⁵ In relation to the image of the church as extended family of God, God could be seen as a loving Father, the founder and the head of the family. Jesus could be seen as a caring elder brother who is concern with the well-being and growth of us all- his adopted brothers and sisters, and who is ever ready to orient us toward maturity and fulfillment in God the Father. Saints could be considered as our departed brothers and sister who lived upright lives and were obedient to God through the orientations and personal experience with Jesus Christ, and have now gain higher status to intercede for us. All the baptized, without consideration to race, colour or tribe are brothers and sisters through the gift of the Holy Spirit which we received during the baptism. Adherents of non-Christian confessions are not our enemies but could be seen as our remote brothers and sisters because we have a common origin; we are all creatures of God.

More specifically, if we consider the universal church as the extended family of God, then the particular churches in Africa, Asia, America and Europe could be considered as nuclear families within the universal church. As the nuclear family is unique with specific characteristics but does not detach itself from the extended family, so also the African Church can be allowed to develop

²⁰⁴ A. PHIRI, *Marriage as the Origin of Family Life: An Analysis of the Writings of English Speaking Africa after the Second Vatican Council*, Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2009, 35.

²⁰⁵ F. OBORJI, *Toward a Christian Theology of African Religion*, Gaba Publications, Nairobi, 2005, 113.

and maintain her uniqueness and specificity. The Church with the features of traditional African family would readily appeal to and manifest the concrete and authentic experiences of Africans. The Church will unite Africans from different background and tribes and also creates the space for constructive dialogue with those who do not share the same faith with us. When Ewe Christians are formed based on the concept of the Church as the family, it would reverse a common adage among the Ewe people which says that „blood is thicker than water“. Through baptism, „water becomes thicker than water“; the Ewe Christians heart would be opened to embrace the other and share not only with blood relatives but all the children of God.

b) THE COMMUNITARIAN SPIRIT

Ewe people are communitarian. Their lives are organized and oriented towards the common good and well-being of the entire community. At the centre of the community life are love, peace and solidarity. The Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* captures it clearly when it states that “the African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village.”²⁰⁶

In Ewe culture, the existence of an individual is directly link to the community. Through contact and solidarity with others in the community, the individual becomes conscious of his own being and expected responsibilities toward himself, toward others and toward God.²⁰⁷ Complete detachment from the community is seen as absurd. “Unless one shares a sense of community, one can easily turn out to be an enemy.”²⁰⁸ The African communitarian spirit stands against the individualistic and egoistic options which the contemporary civilization is proposing to the world. Africans believe in the fact that the survival and the success of the individual depends on the success of the community, and the success of the community is only possible through the individual contribution. J. S. Mbiti explains the basis of the African communitarian spirit as follows: “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am, because we are;

²⁰⁶IOANNIS PAULI PP. II., “Ecclesia in Africa”, 43.

²⁰⁷ J. S. MBITI, *African Religious Philosophy* (2nd Ed.), 106.

²⁰⁸ F. OBORJI, *Toward a Christian Theology of African Religion*, 16.

and since we are, therefore I am.”²⁰⁹ Thus, the basic affirmation of an African is not *Cogito Ergo Sum* (I think, therefore I am) but *Cognatus Ergo Sum* (I am related, therefore I am).²¹⁰

Given the Africans’ understanding of community where life is shared and promoted, many African theologians are proposing small Christian community model for the Church’s pastoral and missionary work. When the pastoral activities of the Church is organized base on African community life style, it will provide a privilege place for people to pray together, read the bible together, and witness the faith together by sharing the experience of Christ’s love, a “love which transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups.”²¹¹ In this sense, small Christian communities would create an environment where the gospel inspires and animates both social and spiritual life, and thus lead to perfection in Christ, the communitarian spirit already existing in African cultures. The adoption of the small community model by the church, would help cure Africans from ethnocentric attitudes usually develop due to strong attachment to families or tribes, and to open up to the new community of love in Christ, where the gospel responds in a concrete manner to the material and spiritual needs of Africans.²¹²

c) THE SENSE OF SACREDNESS OF LIFE

Africans in general and Ewe people in Particular believe that life comes from God and therefore it is sacred. Life is cherished, respected and loved. Violence and all forms of actions which threaten or undermine the flourishing of life are abhorred. Life is sacred because it has a sacred origin. We do not have to destroy life because it does not belong to us. As such, the highest form of evil is the direct destruction of life.²¹³ Murder, abortion, suicide and euthanasia are not encouraged. The basic responsibility of man is to guard and protect life, especially the vulnerable in the society- children, the sick and the aged. For example, among the Ewe people, pregnant women are to observe certain taboos such as no splitting of firewood, and are also subjected to certain rituals with the aim of guaranteeing life to the unborn child and the mother.

²⁰⁹J. S. MBITI, *African Religious Philosophy* (2nd Ed.), 106.

²¹⁰ J. K. ASAMOAH-GYEDU, “African”, in: E. FALHBUSCH, J. M. LOCHMAN, et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity Vol. 5*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2008, 166-167.

²¹¹IOANNIS PAULI PP. II., “Ecclesia in Africa”, 89.

²¹² P. O. GAGGAWAL, *The Drama of Inculturated Evangelization at the Centre of Christian Bantu Family in Africa: Toward a Christian Bantu Culture and Identity*, Pontificia Università Lateranense, Roma, 2005, 232.

²¹³ C. NYAMITI, “Contemporary Liberation Theologies in Africa”, *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996) 239.

It is important to note that, the Ewe people's sense of sacredness of life is not limited only to human life; it embraces the whole nature, including animals, plants, and inanimate objects. C. Nyamiti expresses this when he says, "The irresponsible exploitation of ecological environment is sinful not only because it is injurious to human well-being, but also because nature is sacred."²¹⁴ Classical examples of the sacredness of life among the Ewe people are the existence of taboos which prohibit farming on certain days of the month, felling of trees in certain forests, and bathing and washing or fishing in rivers on certain days of the week. Many religious myths are attached to these prohibitions to deter people from disobeying them. People are punished when caught breaking these taboos. The basic factors underlining these taboos are that, resting helps the body to recuperate from hard work throughout the week, not felling trees discouraged deforestation, and not fishing or washing in the river helps to purify the water body and reduce pollution. This consciousness of ecological balance corresponds clearly to the Church's call for the integrity of creation. "The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of the past, present and future humanity,"²¹⁵ unfortunately for most Christians, the call for the co-responsibility to enhance integrity of creation remains only in theory.

With the rapid destruction and depletion of the environment through deforestation, pollution, violence etc., the traditional Ewe concept of sacredness of life and integrity of creation could provide practical solutions if incorporated into the Christian faith experience. It can help African Christians to rethink about their relationship with each other and the nature, and take practical measures to protect life.

d) THE VENERATION OF ANCESTORS

We have already affirmed in the second chapter that ancestors are not worshipped but venerated. The veneration of ancestors is one of the Ewe traditional religious elements that the Ewe Christians are finding it difficult to depart with. Ancestors were men of integrity and respect. "Ancestors are the mediators of life, of blessings and virtues, all of which have their source in

²¹⁴ C. NYAMITI, "Contemporary Liberation Theologies in Africa", 256.

²¹⁵ CIC, 2415.

God. Thus, they are also the models for taking responsibility for life... the ancestor is the saint of the family, the saint of the clan.”²¹⁶ The ancestor veneration enhances communion and continuity of solidarity between the living and the dead.

Most missionaries have questioned the authenticity and the compatibility of the ancestor veneration to Christian faith. If the ancestors are seen as the intermediaries, how can we interpret St. Paul’s words to Timothy: “For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim 2:5), in an African context? When discussing the compatibility and incompatibility of ancestral veneration in Africa, what readily comes to mind is the sainthood in the Church. Are saints worshipped or venerated? Can we consider the sainthood in the Church as idolatry? If we evaluate the intensity of respect and veneration that the Catholics offer to their saints, are they different from what the Africans offer to their ancestors? Many African theologians defended the possibility of inculturating the ancestor veneration into the spirituality and liturgy of the African church. The church canonizes men and women of integrity who were faithful to Christ and so qualify to be models and intercessors for the living.²¹⁷ The saints are venerated, their feast day celebrated, and invoked upon by the faithful in moments of crises. The mediation role of the saint is secondary. Jesus Christ remains the principal and primary mediator between God and man.

A careful evaluation of sainthood reveals striking similarities with the ancestorship. Both saints and ancestors are seen as men and women of integrity who were faithful to the principles of their religious beliefs, and are now nearer to God to intercede for the living. Both concepts involve communion and a continuous link between the living and the dead. P. K. Sarpong supports the integration of ancestors into Christian worship when he says that; “when Christians call their dead saints and refer to those of pagans as ancestors, they are not expressing different ideas. Both words express ideas about people who once belong to their religious groups, are now dead, are supposed to be in position of influence over the living.”²¹⁸ Both saints and ancestors are not seen as ends in themselves nor do they possess autonomous power. However, while the saints are

²¹⁶ L. BOKA DI MPASSI, “A Theology of African Churches”, in: W. JENKINSON, H. O’SULLIVAN, (eds.), *Trends in Mission: Toward the 3rd Millennium*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll/New York, 1991, 58.

²¹⁷ CIC, 828.

²¹⁸ P. K. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects in Ghanaian Culture*, Ghana Publishing Company, Accra, 1974, 33.

universal and not limited to particular interest groups, the ancestors are restricted to their families and clans.

Based on the concept of the communion of saints, the ancestor veneration could be incorporated into the Church's liturgy after a thorough analysis and possible purification of certain elements within the ancestors' cult which contradict the gospel message. Ritual such as offering blood sacrifices to the ancestors has to be revised. Bishop D. Watio makes a valuable contribution when says that:

“I hope, then, that the church can gradually accept the possibility of acknowledging that Christians can invoke their ancestors too, just as they invoke the Christian saints: having recourse to them as mediators and intercessors with God at difficult moments, and this without fear of possible excommunication on the church's part. I have already stressed that the cult of the ancestors is not idolatry, but rather an expression of filial piety. It seems to me that if a good catechesis about the mediation of saints and ancestors were to be given to our Christians and if for its part the church could accept the need to look more seriously into the court of the ancestors in order to capture better its spirits and actual function, then Christian recourse to and invocation of ancestors would be possible, just as it is now for the Christian saints.”²¹⁹

The question that remains to be answered is that, how can ancestors be incorporated into communion of saints since they may not be sacramentally linked to the church? The Church answers this question herself when it says in the „Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions“ that,

“Other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing „ways“, comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”²²⁰

From the analysis, we can assert that, ancestor veneration is a positive element which can be included in the Church's liturgy. However, it has to be filtered under the lens of the gospel and the Church's Magisterium in order to elevate and restore it in Christ. The question about who determines who becomes an ancestor, and which criteria to be used in doing so requires serious reflections and dialogue.

²¹⁹ D. WATIO, “Le Culte des Ancestres chez le Ngemba (Quest- Cameroun) et ses Incidences”, cited by L. LADO, “The Roman Catholic Church and African Religion”, *The Way* 45:3 (July 2006), 15.

²²⁰NA, 2.

e) THE RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage are indispensable elements in the development and integration processes of Ewe people. The rites of passage function as the bed rock for socialization, formation personal and cultural identities, and determination of social and religious roles in the community.²²¹ The rites of passage- outdoorings and naming ceremonies, puberty rites, and funeral rites, while defining the identity and the role of an individual, could be seen as the processes of death and rebirth or regeneration. For example in puberty rites, the adolescent dies to childhood and through the rituals is reborn not as a child but now with a status of an adult. The irreplaceable role of rites of passage in character formation and the integration of an individual into the society could be beneficial to the evangelization of Ewe people and situate the gospel message more concretely in the life of the people. The rites of passage can serve as the base upon which the Sacraments of Christian initiation can be constructed. The Church's Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy affirms that:

“In mission lands it is found that some of the peoples already make use of the 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.”²²²

The rites of passage and Christians initiation rites are different in content and theological orientations. However, anthropologically, the two concepts manifest similar characteristics. They both express pragmatic values of death and rebirth; they both incorporate individuals into communities and forms social entities; they both serve as the basis for socio-cultural transformation.²²³ A careful analysis on the three phases the rites of passage of naming ceremony, puberty rites and marriage (the phases of separation, transition and incorporation) have their corresponding phases in Christian initiation of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist (phases of Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate- „Entrance to Catechumenate“, Catechumenate- „Election and enrolment for initiation“ and Celebration of rites of initiation)²²⁴, reveal some similarities. Outdoorings and naming ceremonies and baptism can be seen as

²²¹ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship. An African Orientation*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1997, 229.

²²² SC, 65.

²²³ Cf. C. BELL, *Ritual Perspective and Dimension*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, 89.

²²⁴ Cf. A. P. FOFIE-NIMOH, *Akan Rites of Passage and the Sacrament of Christian Initiation: A Theological Enquiry*, (unpublished Master's Thesis submitted to the Universidade Católica de Portugal, Porto), 2014, 136.

entrance rites which open the possibility of other rites; puberty rites and confirmation can be seen as the affirmation of maturity; while traditional marriage affirms the unity between families, the Eucharist draws man to intimate communion with Christ and others.²²⁵

The positive elements of rites of passage which do not contradict the faith and which harmonize with the Church's liturgy can be adapted. For example, it is common among the Ewe Christians to perform the outdoorings and naming ceremonies before taking the child to the Church for baptism. The traditional marriage rites and certain aspects of funeral rites are still being performed by Ewe Christians before their corresponding Christian equivalents. People still think of the Christian version of initiation rites as superficial and incomplete and hence need completion in traditional way. When the rites of passage are introduced into the Church, it will cure Ewe of this double standard of living. It will also refine the culture of those elements which are socially accepted (such as consultation of diviner to know which ancestor reincarnate in a child, polygyny, finding out the cause of one's death through divination, etc.)but are not in conformity with the gospel message. The cost to be incurred through double celebrations will also be reduced.

3.3 SOME POSSIBLE CHALLENGES TO INCULTURATION: CUSTOMS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

We must admit that, traditional religious-cultural values are human creations and therefore are neither perfect nor permanent. The Ewe traditional religion and culture contain certain unhealthy elements which contradict the Christian faith. The aims of cultural values are to promote life (in all dimensions- social, cultural, spiritual and economic) and to enhance intimate communion with the Supreme Being and the entire nature. If cultural values fall short of these objectives, they become obsolete, and must be abolished or purified. This section shall discuss certain Ewe cultural elements which I think contradict the gospel message and do not promote authentic union with the Supreme Being. I shall briefly discuss some unwholesome elements such as superstition (witchcraft, divination), polygyny, and Trɔkosi system.

²²⁵ Cf. A. P. FOFIE-NIMOH, *Akan Rites of Passage and the Sacrament of Christian Initiation*, 137.

a) SUPERSTITION (WITCHCRAFT, DIVINATION)

No culture exists without elements of superstition. However, certain cultural superstitions lead to abuses and diminution of life. Ewe people believe in the manipulation of nature forces to harm others. Even though the practice of witchcraft is a common phenomenon, Ewe people view it at anti-social and evil because it is a threat to health and well-being of human lives and the entire society.²²⁶ People (some Christians included) practice witchcraft and sorcery in order to cause harm to others or to protect themselves from other witches and wizards. As such, instead of seeking protection and security in Jesus Christ, most Christians seek protection before sorcerers. In other words, most Ewe people live in constant fear of the evil that could befall them and seek immediate solution by taking refuge in sorcerers. The sorcerers and diviners take advantage of this attitude to extort them of their money and other valuables.

It is a basic truth that most Africans do not believe in the normal possibility of things. Diviners are consulted to find out causes of things and the possible solution to problems. Among the Ewe, when the child is born, the diviners are consulted to find out which of the ancestor reincarnated and to know the future of the child. When one dies, the diviners are consulted to find out the causes of his or her death. Consulting of sorcerers, soothsayers, diviners, palm readers etc. contradict the Christian faith. The command of God to Israel was very explicit and still valid for the African Christians today.

“There must never be anyone among you who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire of sacrifice, who practices divination, who is soothsayer, augur or sorcerer, weaver of spells, consulter of ghosts or mediums, or necromancer. For anyone who does this is detestable to Yahweh your God; it is because of these detestable practices that Yahweh your God is driving out these nations before you... For these nations whom you are going to dispossess have listened to soothsayers and mediums, but Yahweh your God does not permit you to do this.” (Dt. 18:10-12, 14).

Beliefs in witchcraft and divination are common realities among Ewe Christians and have been resistant to the Christian faith. The agents of evangelization have a difficult task to free Ewe Christians from fear of witchcraft and to orient them towards full confidence and trust in Jesus Christ, the only protector and saviour. Seminars could be organized and catechesis developed to educate Christians to be faithful to the gospel message.

²²⁶ Cf. L. LAGERWERF, *Witchcraft Sorcery and Spirit Possession: Pastoral Responses in Africa*, Mambo Press, Gweru, 1987, 18.

b) POLYGYNY

We stated in the second chapter that polygyny is socially accepted by the Ewe people but it is not the natural form of marriage. The religious myths about marriage of the deities point to monogamy. The cause of polygyny could be socio-cultural or religious based. There is a common religious perception that a man's personal immortality is enhanced by his numerous descendants in the physical world. M. A. Oduyoye makes it clear that for Christians, "immortality, as identity with and in Jesus, an African immortality, as part of the living dead, does not need individual reproduction to become a viable concept."²²⁷ The perpetuating of polygyny is thought to be a matter of satisfaction of men's sexual desire and dominance over women. Polygyny is oppression against women and the Church has an urgent task to reorient the basic understanding of marriage and the equality of women in the marital contract. "Monotheism in marriage involves not only self-discipline but also evolution to a higher quality of relationship."²²⁸ This higher quality of relationship which is lacking in many polygynous marriages is a great cause of alarm.

The Church clearly prohibits polygamy when it defines marriage as:

"The matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of sacrament between the baptized."²²⁹

The Church recognizes marriage as a natural right with essential elements of unity and indissolubility.²³⁰ The Church's condemnation of polygyny was based on the hegemony of Genesis-driven monogamy. According to M. A. Oduyoye, "this strategy concentrated on the limitation of sexual partners and the „savage licentiousness. It singularly failed to engage the religious underlay of male desire to burst the limits of the corporeal, which has in part ensured polygyny's widespread continuance today."²³¹ Polygyny contradicts the concept of marriage in the New Testament and the teachings of the Church. Ewe Christians have to be discouraged from

²²⁷ M. A. ODUYOYE, "A Critique of Mbiti's view of Love and Marriage in Africa", in: J. K. OLUPONA, S. S. NYANG, (eds.), *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of J. S. Mbiti*, Mouton De Gruyter, Berlin, 1993, 147.

²²⁸ M. A. ODUYOYE, "A Critique of Mbiti's view of Love and Marriage in Africa", 147.

²²⁹ CDC, 1055.

²³⁰ Cf. CDC, 1056.

²³¹ M. A. ODUYOYE, "A Critique of Mbiti's view of Love and Marriage in Africa", 149.

polygyny through education, especially catechesis and during the preparation for marriage. It may be a slow process but worth trying.

c) TRŌKOSI

This topic has been treated extensively in the previous chapter. However, I will still like to affirm that Trŏkosi is an unwholesome religious element which does not promote life and hence need to be abolished. The *Trŏkosi* system by which families make amends with deities for sins committed by offering young innocent virgin girls is nothing but „religious slavery“.²³² Religion has the task to promote human dignity. In the case of Trŏkosi, when religion is being used to perpetuate inhuman acts, to abuse and to extort, it becomes obsolete and does not need to be continued.

The Church as institution and all Christians are charged with an urgent task to dialogue with those traditional priest and priestess who are still hiding behind their traditional religion to commit crime. The Christ faithful who indulge in such activities or have families sent to these shrines have to live up to their Christian expectations and to take necessary measures to liberate these girls from suffering for the crime they did not commit.

3.4. INCULTURATION AS SELF-IDENTIFICATION: A CHURCH THAT IS TRULY AFRICAN AND TRULY CHRISTIAN

We made mentioned that, despite the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa, the gospel message is yet to fully permeate the life and concrete realities of Africans. Most African Christians are confused because there is no fruitful dialogue between the Christian faith and socio-cultural and religious values. The evangelization was carried out in a cultural vacuum and hence most African Christians are finding it very difficult to integrate the Christian faith into concrete life situations. Missionaries “as agents of a political empire, representatives of

²³² Cf. P. GIFFORD, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing Economy*, Hurst & Company, London, 2004, 41.

civilization, and envoys of God”²³³, constructed an African social universe in which self-images and identities were marked by a deep sense of ambivalence.²³⁴ As such, most African Christians neither live fully as Africans nor fully as Christians. In other words, the colonial Christianity which ignored African religious-cultural values created a Church with weak foundation and this lead African to seek solace outside the Church. Given the crisis of most African Christians, inculturation which is the evangelization process that situates the gospel message as the essential sacramental reality at the heart of man and his culture,²³⁵ is the possible solution to render the gospel message reasonable and livable to Africans.

Inculturation as self-identification is the self-affirmation of distinctiveness of the African Church but without losing the essentials of the Christian faith- fidelity to Christ and communion with the Universal Church. Inculturation as self-identification is a process by which Africans identify and distinguish themselves as Africans, different from Europeans, Asians or Americans. It helps Africans to evaluate themselves, to know their qualities and weaknesses. As such, inculturation becomes a process of identity search, to help Africans rediscover who they are and to restore their distorted identity to wholeness in Christ. Through inculturation, an original African identity will be discovered, affirmed and opened up to be healed and strengthened through a fruitful dialogue with Christian faith. This search for self-identification through the process of inculturation should not be seen as an attempt to excavate or resurrect the past or develop ideology against the West. In simple terms, it is for Africans to reconstruct their authentic identity in their present crisis, to find concrete and contextual solutions to African problems and not just to import and assimilate concepts and ideologies which do not fit into African reality. The first step to authentic Christian experience is self-knowledge.

Inculturation which does not consider Africans as *tabula rasa* but equal partners in mission will promote a Church which is authentically African and truly Christian. When African culture is considered as worthy and some of its positive element incorporated into the Christian faith, the Church will exhibit distinct African features and symbols that will make African Christians feel at home. True incarnation of Christ in the life of Africans is only possible when the Christian

²³³ V. Y. MUDIMBE, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and Order of Knowledge*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988, 47.

²³⁴ Cf. R. LEMARCHAND, “Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How Illusion Became Reality”, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3: 2 (1992) 181.

²³⁵ Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, S.J., “Christian Theology of Inculturation”, *Documentalia Missionalia* 24 (1997) 89.

faith is rooted in the local culture. Thus, while “the faith transforms and purifies cultures, there is also a process by which the very faith is rethought and reinterpreted, obviously safeguarding the integrity of its truth.”²³⁶ We can understand from the above that, inculturation is nothing but the translation of the Christian faith into African categories. Inculturation does not aim at promoting African culture above the Christian faith but “to make the gospel message challenge African culture, so that through mutual exposure and dialogue between the two, Africans will be able to live out Christianity authentically within their cultural milieu.”²³⁷ Inculturated Church becomes the authentic church that Africans desired for, a Church that will offer opportunity to worship God as Africans, a Church that will offer spirituality compatible with African temperament and a Church that will lead Africans to wholeness and love in Jesus Christ.

3.4.1. INCULTURATION AS LIBERATION

The mission of Jesus Christ is to liberate and reconcile humanity to God. The mission of Jesus is not restricted to only preaching or interior conversion²³⁸ but it also manifested exteriorly. This was evident when Jesus gives instruction to his twelve disciples not only to proclaim the gospel but also to heal the sick. “And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils.” (Mt. 10:7-8). We can affirm that, the gospel does not only bring about interior peace and liberation but it is directly link to the total liberation of man. Thus, inculturated evangelization does not only liberate and transform the heart of men but the whole culture is included in this liberation process. In the words of A. PIERIS, “inculturation and liberation, rightly understood are two names of the same process.”²³⁹

Most theologians restrict inculturation to the recuperation of authentic traditional religious values, while liberation is associated with economic and political emancipation. I think that inculturation and liberation play complimentary roles. The insertion of the gospel message into cultures so as to bring about transformation necessary implies liberation from degraded and

²³⁶ F. A. MACHADO, “Mission Today: Towards Total Liberation”, *Studia Missionalia* 55 (2006) 333.

²³⁷ J. S. UKPONG, *African Theologies now: A Profile*, Gaba Publications, Kenya, 1984, 19.

²³⁸ J. M. ELA, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa”, in: R. GIBELLINI (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, Maryknoll/New York, Orbis Books, 1994, 143.

²³⁹ A. PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Inculturation*, Maryknoll/New York, Orbis Books, 1988, 1.

sinful state. Also, attempt at liberation without any anchorage in Jesus Christ will be incomplete. Inculturation and liberation are intrinsically inseparable because they have their fundamental basis in the mysteries of Incarnation, Redemption and the Pentecost.²⁴⁰ Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became flesh, is the same Jesus Christ who laid down his life to save man from his sins and liberates him from his enemies, and continues to sustain him through his Spirit.

The transformation of the cultures brought about during the process of inculturation is also a process of purification of cultures through the power of Christ. During this purification, repressive elements which hinder the realization of full humanity are discovered and corrected or removed. Inculturation becomes meaningless when it does not take place within the reality of human experience. As, “inculturation cannot occur in an oppressive and exploitative environment; it only happens in an atmosphere of freedom.”²⁴¹ S. O. Ilesamni beautifully puts it that; “if God came to us in the human presence of Jesus, then no theology can overlook the material condition of humanity and still retain its Christian identity.”²⁴² Inculturation implies liberation because through it the light and the life of the gospel illumine cultures and transform them to be worthy abodes of God’s pilgrim people.

3.4.2. INCULTURATION AS DIALOGUE

Communication is indispensable for a healthy and authentic relationship. An effective communication between two people is only possible through dialogue. Inculturated evangelization can only be achieved when it is done in the spirit of dialogue and mutual respect. The commitment in favour of inculturation requires a thorough knowledge of the culture to be evangelized. Through dialogue, the agents of inculturation understand “themselves better vis-à-vis their partners” religions, get to know others justly and fairly, dispel fears and misunderstanding, be influenced, inspired and enriched mutually.”²⁴³

²⁴⁰ C. NYAMITI, “Contemporary Liberation Theologies in the Light of the African Traditional Conception of Evil”, *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996) 261.

²⁴¹ E. MANTEY, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll/New York, 1993, 124.

²⁴² S. O. ILESAMNI, “Inculturation and Liberation: Social Ethics and the African Theology Project”, *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 15 (1995) 73. (Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23559671>).

²⁴³ F. A. MACHADO, “Mission Today: Toward Total Liberation”, 329.

It is very clear in both inculturation and inter-religious dialogue that, the essentials of the Christian faith, namely the doctrines and the position of Jesus Christ- who is God himself cannot be compromised.²⁴⁴ Both inculturation and dialogue follow similar dynamics. F. A. Machado²⁴⁵ identifies four forms of dialogue which are also true in the inculturation process. These include:

- i) Dialogue with life- it implies concern, respect, and hospitality toward other;
- ii) Dialogue of collaboration or deeds- it calls every Christian to work together with each and all for humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed towards the liberation and advancement of human kind;
- iii) Dialogue of specialists- its involves confrontation, deepening and enrichment of respective religious heritage;
- iv) Dialogue of religious experience- it implies sharing one's experience of prayer, contemplation, faith and duty, as well as one's expressions and ways of searching for the absolute.

These basic characteristics of inter-religious dialogue are also present in the inculturation process. However, while dialogue does not necessarily lead to conversion, inculturation goes beyond a mere dialogue to propose a conversion, to fortify those with weak and ambivalent faith, and rendering the Christian faith more intelligible to people by inserting the gospel into particular cultures, and integrating the positive elements of that culture into the universal Church. Thus, inculturation as dialogue gives the faithful the opportunity to find authentic mode of living and expressing the Christian faith. John Paul II stresses the need of dialogue in inculturated evangelization when he says: "the full truth of Christ can become clear in a dialogue which includes all people, cultures, and generations."²⁴⁶

Inculturation as a method of evangelization is only possible through dialogue. The agents of inculturation do not impose arbitrarily but tries to make the Christian faith accessible through openness and acceptance. L. Richard gives an excellent summary of inculturation and dialogue relationship as follows:

²⁴⁴ Cf. F. A. MACHADO, "Mission Today: Toward Total Liberation", 330.

²⁴⁵ Cf. F. A. MACHADO, "Mission Today: Toward Total Liberation", 331.

²⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, cited by F. E. GEORGE, *Inculturation and Ecclesial Communion*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome, 1990, 45.

“Authentic inculturation demands on the part of the Church willingness to dialogue with all cultures. Dialogue demands concern and hospitality toward the other, as well as respectful acceptance of the other’s identity, modes of expression and values. True dialogue does not invade, it does not manipulate, for a dialogical manipulation is a contradiction in terms. Dialogue achieves a communion of horizons which leads to mutual self-disclosure and self-understanding. The task of the Church in the coming decades is to be faithful to its mission of preaching the Christ-event in such a way as to transform and penetrate the various existing cultures but to do so in such a manner as to be opened itself for transformation. The nature of the Church is in the making.”²⁴⁷

If the universal Church really wants to obey the mandate of Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations, then inculturation through dialogue is the only option. This dialogue is continuous because culture is dynamic and the Church has to constantly find new and reliable methods in communicating and presenting Christ to people and their cultures. When the gospel faith is imposed, the people feel disrespected and unsatisfied, and are not convinced of the faith. When evangelization is done through dialogue, the people feel respected and valued, leading to the establishment of authentic and unwavering faith.

3.4.3. SOME PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE INCULTURATION AMONG THE EWE PEOPLE

Of late, there have been many conferences, articles and theories about inculturation. Unfortunately, aside few attempts at liturgical inculturation, most of the beautiful discourses on inculturation remain in theory, sealed in files and gathering dust on shelves. Inculturation is a way of life and hence needs practical action which involves the collaboration of all the members of the family of God. In this section, I shall propose some pastoral recommendations which can help the local Church to do inculturated evangelization.

1. The local Church must set up a commission (both clergy and laity) to critically study the Ewe religious-cultural values to discover wholesome elements which could be incorporated into the Christian faith and those that are not compatible with the Christian faith. From its findings, this commission could come out with practical guidelines for inculturation which could be available for all pastoral agents.

²⁴⁷ L. RICHARD, D. T. HARRINGTON, et al., *Vatican II The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future*, Paulist Press, New York, 1987, 110.

2. The local Church and agents of evangelization must recognize the identity and dignity of the traditional culture and religion in order to indulge in constructive dialogue. The recognition of shared values could be the stepping stone for dialogue. The Church must not think that it has all the answers; the local Church must learn to listen in humility and simplicity through dialogue.
3. The local Church must build Catholic Cultural Centre in the diocese. The cultural centre can provide the facilities for training and preparing the pastoral agents. It must also be equipped to serve as the initiation place for expatriates' missionaries before they engage in pastoral activities.
4. The formation of priests, religious and missionaries must embrace inculturation as a priority. Seminary curriculum must reflect the importance of inculturation. Courses such as African anthropology, African Traditional Religion and Practices, African Philosophy and Theology etc. must be taken seriously in the seminaries. Seminarians must be encouraged to take up research works base on African religious-cultural themes to expose them to the reality and richness of their culture. The on-going formation courses for priests must also focus on inculturation.
5. The local Church must organize formation programmes for the laity through seminars and specialist formation on inculturation especially for the catechists. Preparation for Christian sacraments must be a good occasion to educate the faithful on Christian principles. For example, preparation for Holy Matrimony must give adequate formation on family values, the essentials of Matrimony and the Church's stand against polygyny. The catechesis must also be reorganized from the memorizing of short questions and answers to reflect the contextual reality of the people.
6. The Catholic Church has opened many primary and secondary schools across Eweland. The Church can take advantage of the Moral and Religious Education being taught in the schools to expose the students to the need of interreligious dialogue and inculturation.

We must not forget that, these proposals have to be carried out in the spirit of dialogue, patience, prudence, humility and openness. We must also point out that, all attempts at inculturation cannot be but Christocentric. Any proposal or creativity that deviates from Christ is not worth considered.

3.5. CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

We have to appreciate in this chapter that authentic Christian identity among the Ewe people and the Africans in general cannot be achieved without inculturation. Inculturation is a prerequisite to rooting the gospel into the hearts of particular cultures so that Jesus Christ himself becomes the motivating factor that guides and orients these cultures, not from without but from within. We argued throughout that, inculturation is the efficient means to bring Christ into cultures and also to elevate these cultures to perfection in Christ through purification and transformation. This encounter creates unique Christian identity which is sustained only through continuous and permanent contact with Christ. As such, inculturation must necessarily be a continuous adventure and not just a one day event.

We also recalled the historical encounter between the Ewe people and the Christian missionaries. We must be ungrateful to paint this epoch black and not to appreciate the many material and spiritual benefits that this encounter brought to the Ewe people. However, the method of evangelization did not prepare Ewe people sufficiently to feel belong and to accept Christianity as their own. The converts were obliged to abandon their religious-cultural beliefs which were thought of as inferior and devilish. But since Ewe people and for that matter many Africans could not afford to abandon their cherished religious-cultural heritage, they developed syncretistic attitudes, „to give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar; and to give to God what belongs to God“. This dualistic attitude is still evident among Ewe Christians today. Its therefore, becomes imperative on the local Church and the agents of evangelization to carefully examine the Ewe religious-cultural beliefs and to incorporate the elements of truth that can be found in them into the Christian faith. Those elements which are not wholesome have to be purified or abolished.

We affirmed that since Africans want to worship and pray to God as Africans, and to organize the Church with structures proper to Africans, inculturation becomes a form of self-

identification. This is not to create a Church autonomous from the Universal Church but to form a Church that carries African specific characteristics; a Church that employs African symbols and languages; a Church that identifies with Africans but maintains an unwavering fidelity to Christ. We must not forget that, unity in diversity within the Universal Church is a sign of mature faith.

The gospel message, once genuinely and authentically accepted provokes transformation. Jesus comes to liberate and to restore all creation back to God. As such, when the gospel is inserted into cultures, Jesus Christ himself touches each individual in his or her concrete situation, leading not only to interior transformation but total liberation from all forms of evil, beliefs and traditions, ideologies and injustices that seek to suppress and enslave man. However, the gospel message can penetrate cultures and hearts of men effectively only through mutual dialogue and faithful witness to Christ.

I believe that, the many promises of inculturation will only be a „pie in the sky“ if the local Church keeps imitating and absolving concepts from the West, without putting into practice many concrete proposals to enhance inculturated evangelization.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, an effort has been made to review and evaluate the basic understanding and importance of inculturation to the African Church. We observed that fundamentally, the drama of inculturation is played between faith and cultures. God communicates to man using language and symbols perceptible to man. Man's response to God is shaped by his culture and the concrete situation in which he finds himself. We also realized that inculturation is founded on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As such, inculturation is essentially Christological which creates space for dialogue and beckons all people to sonship in God through Christ. In simple terms, inculturation seeks to incarnate Christ in cultures.

We made descriptive analysis of the religious-cultural beliefs of Ewe people and a brief survey of the historical encounter between them and Christian missionaries. We realized that apart from the Bremen missionaries who employed Ewe language to evangelize, the religious and cultural beliefs which form the basic identity of the people were ignored. The Ewe people were evangelized outside their culture. Most people embrace Christianity not because of a personal conviction in the God of Jesus Christ but because of the material benefits that are associated with the Christian missions. As Christians, most Ewe people still consult diviners, practice witchcraft and magic, and practice polygyny. This dualistic attitude and loss of Christian identity could be summed in a popular saying among the Ewe people; „*Mawu vide dzo vide*“. This literally means small portion of God and small portion of magic. This is a clear sign that African heart is divided and needs urgent recuperation and healing.

Thus, we affirmed that inculturation as self-identification must not be understood as a new ideological or political movement that seeks to destroy the principal doctrines of the Christian faith, introduce superstitious elements of African culture into the Church or makes Christian life easy for Africans but a call for creative reflection and proclamation of the Christian faith that make Christ speak directly to the Africans in their reality and context, symbols and language. A. R. Crollius makes an excellent summary of the purpose of inculturation when he says that:

“The purpose of inculturation is not to salvage a traditional culture, but rather to render present in the galloping process of change that affects all cultures the life of the gospel, so that each culture may become a worthy „habitat“ of God's pilgrim people- a tent

rather than a fortress- and an irradiating light that adds to the splendor of the entire cosmos.”²⁴⁸

Judging from the recent activities of inculturation among the Ewe people, significant achievement has been made in the area of liturgy. Local songs, drumming and dancing have been incorporated into the liturgy of the Church. Unfortunately, beyond liturgy, nothing has been achieved. This liturgical inculturation is limited to the walls of the Chapel and does not reflect in the day to day life of Christians. People sing, dance and sweat during Eucharistic celebration, but these joyful attitudes end when the priest says, „the Mass is ended go in the peace of Christ“. A balance inculturation must take into consideration the totality of the African religious-cultural beliefs. Positive cultural elements such as rites of passage, family life, veneration of ancestors, communitarian spirit etc must be carefully studied and incorporated into the worship of the Church. When well implemented, the lives of Ewe Christians become true extension of Christian experience. When wholly accepted, Christ would purify and restore Ewe Christian identity. We must admit with all sincerity that, effective implementation of inculturation could be a long and painful process. However, judging from the positive impact it may have on the African Christianity, it is worth trying. May Jesus Christ be our strength in our search to define and to consolidate our identity in him.

²⁴⁸ A. R. CROLLIUS, “Inculturation and the meaning of Culture”, in Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures. Editrice Pontificia Gregoriana, Roma, 1991, 54.

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