

**Towards a Theology of Inculturation and Transformation: Theological
Reflections on the Practice of Initiation Rites in Masasi District in Tanzania.**

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ABSTRACT

Towards a Theology of Inculturation and Transformation: Theological Reflections on the Practice of Initiation Rites in Masasi District in Tanzania.

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The aim of my research project is to give a theological reflection on the practice of initiation rites within Masasi district, in south-east Tanzania. While initiation remains a very significant tradition among the Yao, Makonde and Makua tribes in Masasi, the ancestral cult and the content of sex related education in these rites have presented challenges to the Christian communities. Some Christians do not feel comfortable with the inclusion of the ancestor cult since this does not immediately seem to agree with Christian doctrine. There is also a general acknowledgment that the rites could be partly responsible for the premature involvement in sexual activity by young people. In the past theological attempts were made to Christianise Masasi initiation rites with the hope of addressing these two issues highlighted above. This approach had its difficulties and limitations since not all communities in Masasi villages are Christian and since religious diversity has to be respected. Furthermore, in areas where Christianisation has been put into effect, not much change has been recorded with regards to the two main problems noted above. Christianisation simply touched on the form but did not influence the content of rites. Other theologies, especially in missionary circles, viewed initiation as an antithesis of Christianity, a view which undoubtedly discouraged constructive Christian dialogue with the practice. African theologians on the other hand seem not to have produced much systematised treatments on the subject of rites which otherwise would have been useful materials to various African Christian communities. As a result of these and other inadequacies we have a problem as far as what should be done to have the Christian faith inform the processes within the rites of passage. What kind of theology will respect the culture and yet uphold teachings of the biblical tradition in addressing cultural initiation? In this project I am proposing a theology of 'inculturation and transformation' to address the impasse described above. Inculturation "describes the process of integration of the faith and life of the church in a given culture" (Pobee 1992:35). The aim of inculturation is to express the Christian faith in a culturally relevant manner so as to transform the culture. Initiation rites will be made to engage with the Christian theology in such a way that the precepts of biblical theology will be applied to rites with a view to moulding those aspects of rites that are not consistent with the teachings of the Bible. The good elements already found in these rites will be maintained. The goal of inculturation is not to destroy the rites but to present the rites "in a far more perfect way on an essentially different and infinitely higher level" (Nyamiti 1971:6). Through inculturation the underlying cultural worldview behind rites is taken into account. Inculturation-transformation theology aims at addressing the inner levels of culture. For this to happen the Gospel has to go *in-culture* and mould it from within.

September 2009

DECLARATION

I declare that *Towards a Theology of Inculturation and Transformation: Theological Reflections on the Practice of Initiation Rites in Masasi District in Tanzania* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Mavuto Jambulosi

September 2009

Signed.....



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This research project seeks to discuss how the theology of “inculturation and transformation” can be used to engage rites of passage as they are practiced in Masasi district in Tanzania. The discussion focuses on two key aspects within initiation rites namely, ancestor veneration and moral education given to adolescents. In focusing on these aspects the thesis attempts to suggest ways through which Christian engagement can be used to assess, mould and transform cultural initiation rites among the Makua, Yao and Makonde tribes resident in Masasi district.

1.2 Background

The Christian communities in Masasi have for some time tried to find amicable ways of resolving the moral and theological challenges encountered between cultural initiation rites and teachings of the Christian faith. While cultural rites and the teachings of the biblical tradition do not necessarily exclude each other, they do not seem to agree on the subject of ancestor veneration and the untimely sexual instruction¹ disbursed to initiates. A good number of pastors within the Masasi district have had to and are still having to deal with questions of guidance raised by their pastorate in this regard.

The main challenge being raised has to do with whether there can be drafted a way through which ancestor veneration and sex education can be addressed without compromising the essence of the practice of cultural initiation. With Christianity’s prohibition on ancestor worship² (Deuteronomy 18:11; Isaiah 8:19)

¹ It needs to be noted from the onset that sex education in and of itself is not viewed in this thesis as a negative moral aspect theologically. The focus of this thesis is on the timing and content of sex education given to adolescents. This is the aspect which presents concerns to the Christian community. Initiation within some people groups within Masasi has tended to be driven toward sexual orientation as is noted in the research by the Ministry of Education in Tanzania, see Jansen (2004), see also Ikamba and Ouedraogo (2003).

² Most African theologians have presented the notion that ancestors are not worshipped but venerated or respected. It is argued that Africans worship God but commune with their ancestors

and the unequivocal insistence on sexual purity, the Christian community in Masasi finds itself in a dilemma as to how they can maintain a peaceful equilibrium between their faith and their cultural practice of initiation. This dilemma is characteristic of the tension that occurs each time the Christian faith encounters any culture. As Stephen Kaplan (1986:166) puts it, one of the many issues facing the African Christian today is, “the problem of defining the precise relationship between Christianity and African culture.” It is important to give theological guidance to people in Masasi so that they do not view the Christian faith as an antithesis of this important cultural practice.

Various forms of theological adaptation were used in the past to deal with the African culture of which tribal initiation rites are a part. As Kaplan (1986:167) points out, “the process of relating Christianity to an African setting has assumed diverse forms and has been guided by a variety of *principles and motives*.”³ Either the Christian faith had to be adapted to the local culture or the culture, in this case local rites to Christian teachings. It was not always clear however, which of these two entities was to have the upper hand in the adaptation process. As such this created conflict as foreign propagators of the Christian faith and the adherents of the African culture did not seem to operate from the same principles and motives when it came to Christianity and culture. J.N.K. Mugambi (2002:69) notes that the entrance of Christianity into the interior of East Africa was characterised by tension. He says:

On the one hand, the missionaries felt committed to spread the Christian faith as they understood it without dilution, even if it meant the African converts would have to abandon their own cultural and religious heritage. On the other hand, African Christians, while accepting the Christian faith, could not and did not detach themselves entirely from their cultural and religious background.

While African converts were interested in their new found religion in Christ, they were not so keen on dropping religious practices that had defined their identity for

out of respect as this marks their identity, see Fashole Luke (1974), Kahakwa (2007), Mugambi (2002), and Bediako (1995).

³ My emphasis

a long time. Even if there were cultural areas needing to be addressed through the lenses of the Christian faith, it was largely the transformative methods used that did not sink well with the people hence the continued tension between Christianity and culture. While the meeting of the Christian faith and culture presented the inevitable clash of some ideological aspects, this tug of war was further exacerbated by the missionary methodological aspect and the Africans' continued conscious or subconscious perception of the Christian faith in relation to their past existence (Mugambi 2002:69).

The question of principles and motives behind all adaptation methods is not to be overlooked as it is these two aspects that shaped the manner in which the African culture was approached. It can be said with some certainty that though some aspects of the African culture (including initiation rites) were found to be theologically wanting in some respects when put side by side with the teachings of the Christian faith, the underlying principles and approaches to addressing them was not uniform among early missionaries in East Africa.

Kaplan (1986) discusses and illustrates six different modes of adaptation which were applied to a range of African cultural aspects by missionaries. The six categories he discusses are toleration, translation, assimilation, Christianisation, acculturation and incorporation. While Kaplan's discussion is not exhaustive and conclusive in its presentation of the historical forms of adaptation it still does give a well balanced understanding of efforts which were done in the past to address the relationship between Christianity and the African culture. His discussion also shows some of the strengths and short comings of some of the adaptation approaches used in the past.

In Kaplan's discussion there is a resemblance of more or less the points that Shorter (1973:68-73) outlines in connection with what would be termed 'insufficient forms' of adaptation. Shorter (1973:68) asserts that for adaptation to work effectively it has to be rooted in African concepts and categories of thought. Any adaptation effort that does not place importance on the culture of the people involved will not be sufficient to deal with the key issues within the culture.

According to Shorter (1973:68) some of the barriers to effective adaptation can be listed as follows; mere ratification of the culture, ambivalently approaching the culture for fear of contamination, forcible take over bid of communities, imitation of well established traditional practices, positive tolerance and failure to implement adaptation forms for fear that the forms will not last long (1973:71-73).

This list of insufficient forms of adaptation could be longer but it still is particularly enlightening because it goes beyond merely identifying theological methods to investigating the underlying motives and reasons behind the methods used. It shows that while there was no uniformity in every adaptation scenario carried out by missionaries, there were also some other driving factors which influenced the adaptation formula they used. For some it was the preservation of Christianity as it was understood in foreign backgrounds while for others it was an integrated approach of Christianisation and acculturation. Kaplan suggests that there was a certain measure of acculturation which was used by some missionaries in relating with the African culture. He describes acculturation⁴ as “the attempts by Western missionaries to preserve features of traditional culture which they felt to be valuable and compatible with the development of Christian spirituality” (Kaplan 1986:178).

In this use of the term acculturation, it is the African culture which was taken to shed some light on missiological endeavours. Since African social institutions were viewed more positively under acculturation than under other adaptation methods, they were able to challenge the misplaced conception that missions were to play a civilising role in evangelism (1986:178). Kaplan further notes that acculturation worked within traditional institutions so as to preserve elements of the African culture. Citing the example of rites he asserts that through acculturation, the rites were not circumvented and undermined but were valued as

⁴ Acculturation as “an encounter between cultures”(Shorter 1988:6) could be understood to work in two ways. Kaplan uses it to describe the use of local culture to inform the proper presentation of the Gospel. The second way is the use of a foreign culture in transporting the Gospel into other cultures.

an important institution in African culture (1986:178). Thus acculturation put importance on the inherent value of the traditional social system.

This point by Kaplan is discussed here because it dovetails with the thought that is articulated by Frieder Ludwig in his book, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of Changing Relationships*. In this book Ludwig gives a brief discussion of mission work in East Africa and discusses methods that were used by two key missionaries, one of whom operated in Masasi district. With regards to the use of African traditional systems in missions Ludwig says:

Many Protestant missions considered the ethnic order to be a defence against the disintegrating forces of civilisation and endeavoured to integrate Christianity into the traditional order of particular ethnic societies (1999:24).

Some missions, while propagating the Gospel, also engaged in the efforts to preserve the African traditional culture against the tidal forces of civilisation which had come under the banner of Christianity thereby getting communicated as part of the *kerygma*. Bruno Gutmann⁵ is well known for his efforts to preserve the culture of the Chagga people among whom he worked. His mission work aimed at preserving the values of the Chagga culture by gently integrating the message of the Bible into the traditional values of that culture, (Ludwig 1999:25). This philosophy is also partly the reason behind the use of Christianisation by Bishop Vincent Lucas of Masasi who is well known for attempting to Christianise traditional rites of passage (Kaplan 1986:174). Ludwig (1999:24) and Anne Marie Stoner-Eby (2008:171-172) show that the efforts of Bishop Vincent Lucas were also directed toward preserving the cultural practices of the people of Masasi in a Christianised form. So what we have with this school of thought is an approach that on one hand sought to preserve the cultural systems in place through acculturation, and on the other hand also administered Christianisation of certain aspects of culture. Again the underlying motive here determined the two pronged principle of addressing Christianity and culture in an integrated form.

⁵ Ludwig points out that Bruno Guttmann was active from 1903-1920 and again from 1925-1939 in Lutheran Missions in Central Kilimanjaro Region (1999:24).

While some positive strides might have been made through these adaptation methods, there continued to be challenges resulting from the key issues which have always been a matter of great concern within rites. To some degree, the acculturation which was intended to preserve the traditional culture might have fostered ideas of culturalism making it difficult to bring appropriate changes on culture. As a result those issues which the missionaries sought to address continue to resurface and pose challenges to Christian communities. This is to say the superstitious aspects of initiation, if one may cautiously refer to them as such, are still prevalent. The same applies to the problems raised by moral education which are still persisting. This suggests that there is need to go beyond adaptation methods to theological approaches that are more involved with culture in both a preservatory and transformatory manner.

1.3 Statement of the problem

In dealing with initiation rites we are faced with a problem as to *how we can effectively engage with initiation in order to address the problems of ancestor veneration and untimely sex education (a moral issue)*. The position articulated in this thesis is that in order to deal effectively with initiation in Masasi, there is need for an integrative theological approach. According to Okure (1990:58) there are two realities that need to be united and culturally enriched. “These two realities are our Christian faith – the *Good News* of Jesus Christ, and our African reality of peoples in their different cultures.” We have the Gospel which needs to enter into a culture and affect the people involved. In order for the gospel to affect the people of any culture well it has to be well understood by those people. It has to be articulated in their own idiom. For effective inculturation to occur the gospel has to be ‘housed or tabernacled’ (Pobee 1992:39) in the local culture in such a way that it becomes part of that culture. Inculturation is not merely finding suitable African expression of the Christian faith but it is looking at the culture as a fertile ground upon which the Gospel is planted for mutual enrichment between these two entities (Okure 1990:59). We are thus given a challenge to have our cultures play an integral part in formulating African Christian faith. There is no

better place to start apart from expressing the Gospel in cultural terms of the people. This is the theological notion contained in the term ‘inculturation.’⁶

Inculturation has a twofold purpose of creating an African contextual understanding of the Christian faith on the one hand and enriching the culture by assuming a transformative role on the other. This means that by placing the Gospel into a culture, the Christian message should be expected to assume transformative function within that culture. The transformative aspect of this theological approach uses teachings of the Christian faith to influence the rites through dialoguing with the African cultural worldview which is inherently religious. The Christian faith engages with this religious worldview so that as the worldview gets transformed, society will also manifest outward results of the inner transformation (Mugambi 1989a:107; 1989b:120). In carrying out effective theological education in any community one has to start with the inner environment (Pobee 1992:129). This will in turn affect the outward forms.

With this understanding of ‘inculturation and transformation’ the research problem of this thesis could be framed as follows: *Given the adequacy of a methodological framework for Christian engagement in African culture (and rites) defined by the concepts of ‘inculturation’ and ‘transformation’, how should Christian engagement in initiation rites in the Masasi district be assessed?*

1.4 Research hypothesis

In applying a synthesis of ‘inculturation and transformation’ on initiation rites in Masasi some principles through which the Christian theological engagement could be assessed can be outlined in the following manner: *Firstly the theological engagement should be assessed by analysing the depth of dialogical exchange between Christian faith and cultural elements. For inculturation and transformation to succeed there has to be an in-depth dialogical interaction between the Christian faith and the local cultural elements (rites). This*

⁶ Inculturation can be defined as “the movement which aims at making Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people’s religion and a way of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening” (John Mary Waliggo 1986:13). More in-depth definition of inculturation will follow in chapter three.

engagement should be done at the deeper levels of the local primal worldview to discover in an untainted form the underlying ideologies, core values and belief systems inherent therein and how these systems shape the practice of initiation. Such ritual elements as ancestor worship will need to be investigated from the perspective of the cultural adherents and the meaning/value they carry to the believer assessed. *Secondly this engagement should be assessed by looking at how it appreciates and makes use of the positive aspects of a local culture. A well informed Christian engagement will lead to the discovery of positive moral and spiritual values within initiation rites.* These will become the values that will need to not only be retained but elevated to even higher levels of utility within the perspective of the Christian faith. *Thirdly, Christian engagement can also be assessed by looking at how Christian theology tries to bridge the gap between Christianity and culture with regards to those cultural elements that are not in agreement with teachings of the Christian faith.* In carrying out effective inculturation and transformation those cultural elements that are deemed negative, will, upon closer *investigation be seen to address some kind of need or aspiration in the lives of the people.* This means that further investigation should be done to establish they type of needs these negative aspects seek to address. This suggests a comparative study of local needs or aspirations and their Christian analogies (Nyamiti 1971:6). The comparative analysis should lead to the eventual use of these negative elements as *apologetic departure points for introducing an appropriate Christian belief or concept* back into the local worldview behind initiation rites.

Thus through a synthesis of ‘inculturation and transformation’ rites of passage can be moulded by transforming the worldview of people in the areas of ancestor veneration and in the areas of the role and timing of sex education to initiates.

1.5 Aims

The aim of this study is to find African theological ways of dealing with some ritual aspects involved in the practice of initiation in Masasi district. The major focus will be on how African Christian theology, in this case a theology of “inculturation and transformation,” can effectively engage with the rites with the

view to effecting a positive change that will both be theologically and culturally sound.

1.6 Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- a) Identify the role that the ancestral cult plays in local initiation rites.
- b) Examine the content of moral education given in initiation rites.
- c) Determine the effectiveness of inculturation and transformation theology in engaging with initiation rites
- d) Suggest the role of the ancestral cult in African Christian theology.
- e) Suggest a transformed outlook on moral education in initiation.

1.7 Methodology

This study is a critical systematic analysis of African theology on the basis of a decisive cultural element, namely, initiation rites. The research framework in this thesis will fall within the evangelical biblical tradition.

Concerning the rites, I will include a survey on literature covering the subject of rites in Africa with special relevance to southeast Tanzania. I will include interviews which I have carried out with several respondents from the main tribes within Masasi district. These interviews and literature on rites provide relevant cultural background information upon which a meaningful theological analysis will be carried out. Information coming out of the literature survey and the interviews is found in chapter two. It is through this phenomenological description of rites that the place, importance and role of ancestor veneration and moral education can be clearly seen. When we look at the overall practice of initiation in Masasi it is important to see the value placed on these two aspects before critically analysing them theologically.

With regards to the theological assessment of these rites in relation to the Christian faith, I will be using the following methodology: I will carry out a critical comparative analysis of African theological expositions in the area of

inculturation and transformation. The theological material will provide the theoretical framework which will engage with the rites with the view to transforming them. Theological approaches from key African theologians will be utilized namely, Charles Nyamiti, John Pobee, Kwame Bediako Aylward Shorter, J.N.K. Mugambi and Klaus Nurnberger. I will not do an exhaustive analysis of their theologies but will take some aspects of their methodologies and use them as tools of theological reflection upon the practice of initiation. The theological approaches of these scholars treat both the African cultural milieu and the Gospel seriously as sources of effective African Christian theology. Thus when combined these approaches present a good possibility of assessing as well as giving suggestions regarding the current practice of initiation in Masasi.

1.7.1 Data collection

In gathering information I used a qualitative data collection method through the use of primary and secondary sources. I also carried out informal semi-structured interviews of selected respondents from about six villages. This was mostly through oral testimonies obtained through face to face interviews. Questions were asked with the aim to probe, clarify and verify the nature of the practice of local initiation rites. Information obtained through these interviews was recorded on paper and later analysed and synthesised for composition of a phenomenological case study given in chapter two.

1.7.2 Selection of participants

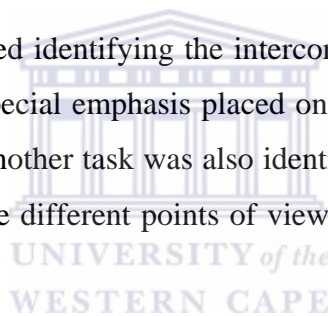
Participants in the interviews were made up of different age groups so as to gather a balanced understanding of local initiation. Age groups that were interviewed ranged from 20 to over 65 years old. These interviews were mostly carried out with males due to difficulty associated with obtaining such information from women. Information from women was gathered through second parties. Respondents were from the Yao, Makonde and largely Makua people. Ritual practitioners were also interviewed with the understanding that they offer first hand information on the religious and spiritual aspect of initiation.

Since this thesis is mainly a critical theological analysis literature on African theological scholars was sought for the main theological construction of this thesis. This literature offers contextual theology which is in tune with cultural elements of most African communities. Two groups of literature include those which describe the phenomena of initiation in Africa and those which provide African contextual theologies, in particular, inculturation.

1.7.3 Data analysis

Analysis of information gathered was done by reading through the collected data several times to determine different types of theological approaches and determine which area the theology in this thesis falls. This was also done to determine how and where the inculturation and transformation theology fares on the theological scale.

The analysis also included identifying the interconnectedness of constituent parts in initiation rites with special emphasis placed on the role of ancestor veneration and moral education. Another task was also identifying key issues in the practice of rites and analysing the different points of view on the subject before applying theological scrutiny.



1.7.4 Validity

The investigations in this research have confirmed that there are elements in initiation that are at variance with traditional evangelical doctrines. African theological expositions on ancestor veneration are representative of different perspectives on the subject thereby giving a balanced discussion on the matter. With regards to moral/sexual education and the ages involved, the Masasi phenomenon cannot be taken as representative of all African rites of passage although a few other African communities bear some resemblances to this group. However a good percentage of the findings seem to support the hypothesis while at the same time giving indicators of other areas for further discussion.

1.8 Significance of study

The practice of initiation rites occupies a very important place in Masasi communities regardless of tribe or religion. It plays a pivotal role in the life of the initiate in that it signifies (among other things) a graduation from childhood to adulthood. Since an uninitiated person is considered a child, “he is not given full responsibility at home and in the community” (John Mbiti 1991:99). This makes it an imperative for every young person in the community to undergo this rite in order to acquire adulthood, respect and the prospect of marriage within the community.

Having its roots in the African worldview, the practice of initiation rites includes a number of African traditional beliefs and values which inevitably include ancestral veneration and invocation. Since the emphasis is on becoming an adult, initiation also involves instruction on a wide range of moral issues which include sex related instruction as part of the endeavour aimed at moulding the initiate.

These two issues as noted above, ancestor veneration and the content of sex education have become a cause of serious concern and division in Masasi Christian communities.

It needs to be noted at this stage that a good percentage of the moral lessons in initiation are very good and quite welcome within the Masasi initiation rites. However, it is the sex related content that has raised problems among many cultural adherents. Initiation is a very important and on-going cultural phenomenon which is not to be ignored by the church hence the call for effective theological dialogue. Thus the main motivation in this study is to find ways of helping this Christian population in Masasi by propounding a theology that attempts to address the reality between the cultural initiation rites and the teachings of the Christian faith.

1.9 Limitations of the study

Some of the challenges faced in this research include scarcity of theological and historical material dealing directly with initiation rites in Masasi. Some problems

were also encountered in gathering data for the case study. Most Christians seemed reluctant to divulge information on moral education and traditional religious aspect lest they be mistaken for living a double standard Christian life. Going deep to the real meaning of initiation aspects was not easy since people are warned against divulging information taught during initiation. It was not immediately easy to obtain much information on girls' initiation. Some of these challenges were overcome through a lot of informal interviews aimed at comparing and verifying information on rites. In other cases second parties had to be used to access information from female respondents. Internet surfing also brought to light information that proved helpful to understanding Masasi rites.

1.10 Conclusion

Initiation rites are an important aspect of the people group resident in Masasi district. Two issues within these rites have raised concern in the Christian communities within this district. Ancestor invocation which is a key stage in all initiation has presented considerable theological challenges to these communities. Secondly the type of sex education given to adolescent initiates has also been a cause of great concern. Past adaptive methods have not brought lasting change on these issues hence the need to come up with a new theological method which will address the rites effectively. Thus the theology of inculturation and transformation is being presented in this thesis as a possible method to address the two issues in Masasi initiation rites.

1.11 Composition of chapters and outline

This study will have five chapters. The layout of chapters will be as follows:

Chapter One:

This is an introductory chapter which discusses the background information on initiation rites.

Chapter Two:

This chapter gives an empirical case study of Masasi initiation rites. Since the main aim is to give a theological reflection on initiation, this chapter will give phenomenological description which will act as background cultural information upon which theological reflection will be made in the subsequent chapters. While

a general phenomenology will be given, more light will be shed on those initiation aspects that render theological scrutiny necessary. In this process, areas of conflict between the rites and the Christian faith will be highlighted. The same chapter will also include an analysis of past Christianisation forms.

Chapter Three:

This chapter will expound a theology of inculturation and transformation. In doing this, the manner in which this theology operates will be outlined in detail. This chapter will also show where the theology of inculturation fits in the broader theological spectrum of African Christian theology. Theological ideas from Shorter, Pobee, Magesa, Bediako and Nyamiti will play a significant role in shaping the theology of inculturation and transformation.

Chapter Four

This chapter discusses the implications of the theology of inculturation and transformation on the two key issues raised in this thesis, namely; ancestor veneration and issues pertaining to moral instruction in initiation. However, more space will be devoted to the subject of ancestor veneration. Four views on ancestor veneration will be used for purposes of critical analysis and reflection with the view to postulating a transformed perspective of this cultural practice. In addition to theologians mentioned in chapter three, Nurnberger will also be consulted in this chapter for the contribution he makes in offering his view on ancestral role in theology.

Chapter five:

This chapter will give brief concluding remarks and recommendations on how the initiation rites could assume a new theological outlook under inculturation and transformation.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review and Case Study of Masasi Initiation Rites

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give a phenomenological case study of local initiation rites of passage in Masasi district. This chapter serves as a case study in its own right. Apart from showing what really happens in initiation, a good amount of the information included here provides the ground for familiarity and appreciation of this local rite. This phenomenology helps to bring out that which is deemed problematic within initiation.

This case study focuses on the role of the ancestral cult as well as the moral aspect of sex education in initiation. While not every aspect of this phenomenology will necessarily be subjected to theological analysis, a relatively detailed description has been given so as to show the proper context of the place, significance and role of ancestor veneration and moral education in the process of initiation. A detailed phenomenology helps us to grasp the broader setting and interconnection of elements involved in the rite and how significant these elements are to each other and to adherents. Since the research is based on local a situation, the study also becomes of empirical interest on this particular rite.

The information given through this description will lay the ground upon which the discussion of the theology of inculturation and transformation will be based. Of great importance will be the highlighting of key elements within rites central to the theological problem of this thesis namely the role of religion and morality. The stages and ritual terms discussed in this chapter will be useful in the discussion to be carried out in chapter four.

2.2 Cultural initiation

Due to scarcity of literature dealing with critical and systematic theological assessment of rites, I have used a twofold literary approach. On the one hand I

have consulted general literature that gives phenomenological descriptions of initiation rites in Africa and on the other hand I have consulted African theological expositions which I will then use in conjunction with the former descriptive works. Scholars such as John Mbiti, Laurent Magesa and Aylward Shorter have helpful material for laying out relevant background information on African rites of passage. Though these scholars do not necessarily engage in theological critiquing of initiation, they present significant rationale for the practice of African rites of passage. Their description of rites is consistent with the practice of initiation in Masasi.

In his book, *Introduction to African Religion*, Mbiti discusses the meaning, the physical processes involved in and the importance of African initiation to the individual and to the community at large. He also shows that initiation partakes of a religious nature as God and ancestors are beseeched before, during and after the rites. In his book *African Religions and Philosophy* he touches on the subject of initiation and puberty rites. In doing so he not only briefly discusses the meaning and importance of initiation but he also includes a number of examples of how initiation is practiced in some African contexts. He surveys the initiation process among the Akamba, Maasai, Nandi and the puberty rites among the Ndebele.

Laurent Magesa in, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, discusses the meaning and importance of the five stages involved in the initiation process. While making reference to Arnold van Gennep's work on rites of passage Magesa makes a strong corrective point by showing that initiation does not only refer to physical maturity as is widely and wrongly held but initiation also plays a sociological and spiritual function. Like Mbiti, Magesa shows the centrality of religion in the processes of initiation and how through initiation the initiate is connected to the invisible world of the ancestors.

Aylward Shorter, in *African Culture and the Christian Church*, approaches initiation from a socio-anthropological perspective. His main emphasis is to discuss different types of rites one of which is initiation into adulthood. He lays a

good theoretical basis for critically understanding the different types of rites that occur in Africa. Of importance is his key to differentiating between a religious rite and a secular rite. Shorter highlights that, (1973:123), rituals can be categorised according to how they make an appeal to spiritual beings or ultimate reality. Those rituals which make a direct appeal to a spiritual or ultimate being are termed religious while those which do not are classified as secular. This helps us in determining how the Masasi rites can be classified and critiqued. As will be discussed below it will be clear that initiation rites as practiced in Masasi tend more toward the religious side though they also include some secular elements.

Since the above authors do not focus on the interplay between rites and Christian faith their expositions do not give critical theological ways of either Christianising rites or making the Gospel relevant to rites. Their intention was to describe rites as they occur on the African soil rather than prescribe how the rites ought to engage with the Gospel. As such their contributions will be most helpful in laying down a sound understanding for building a systematic theological assessment of rites since these descriptions contain a lot of elements that relate very well to Masasi initiation rites.

The phenomenological information coming from Mbiti, Magesa, Shorter and interviews carried out in Masasi will be followed by theological extrapolations based on some key African theological scholars. These scholars have not necessarily written on the subject of rites, nevertheless their theologies will be most helpful in creating a viable theological standpoint to be used on rites. The theologies of Pobee, Nyamiti, Bediako, Magesa, Mugambi, Nurnberger and Shorter have been selected as primary sources of theological reflection as they contain material that is useful for an effective inculturation of the Gospel as well as possible transformation of rites. These theologians have also emphasised a balanced view of primal worldviews and Christian theology in carrying out theological works in Africa. They have articulated the importance of the biblical tradition while at the same time calling for the importance of the African culture and primal religions in all African theological endeavours. Their approach is not

comparative or mere adaptation of corresponding aspects between culture and theology. If Christian theology is going to have an effective influence on the African mind, then according to the deductions from the theological works of these theologians, it is of vital importance to take into account aspects that make up the African worldview and value systems and address theology through these aspects. Ideas from these scholars will be discussed in the third chapter of this thesis so a review of their works will be carried out then.

It is worthwhile at this juncture to give a brief definition of rites so as to understand the significance they carry in African contexts. Mbiti (1991:99) defines initiation as “a public recognition that the individual is now passing from childhood to adulthood. The cutting of his flesh is a symbol of getting rid of the period of childhood, and getting ready for the period of adulthood.’ Initiation is expressed by three phases of ritual: rite of separation (from the previous state); liminal (or threshold/transition) and rite of incorporation (into a new state), (Shorter 1973:123; Verry 1973:141). Each stage of initiation has social and religious significance to the initiate and the community at large. A brief survey of these ritual stages would be most helpful to lay the basis to understanding the Masasi initiation processes.

According to Shorter (1973:123) the most significant preliminary step before the rite of separation can take place is divination. This divination mostly involves imploring the ancestors through cultic leadership of traditional chiefs, spiritists or mediums. Having settled all that is required by the invisible world the initiates are taken into seclusion where they undergo circumcision and instruction for a period of time. The separation stage aims to show the initiate that “without membership in the community a person is nothing” (Magesa 1997:96). Mbiti (1969:121) shows that this time is “a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world...” This is a time which is meant to instil values of cooperation and the wisdom of the community and wisdom of ancestors into the initiate (Magesa 1997:97). From the writings of Magesa and Mbiti it is clear that initiation has a lot to do with the departed relatives of the initiates. Even the

circumcision which is administered is looked at as symbolically uniting the initiate with the ancestors and the land through the shedding of the blood of the initiate (Mbiti 1991:98). Initiation “joins the living with the departed, the visible and the invisible” (1991:99). It is after one has gone through this experience that he or she is able to make religious rituals. This is because one will have graduated from his youth and entered officially into the responsibility filled arena of adulthood.

The transitional stage involves a lot of teaching aimed at transforming the initiate into a full blown adult and seals him to his people and his people to him, (Mbiti 1991:101). This stage is very critical in that it “marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated” (Mbiti 1969:122). Magesa discusses five areas of ethical concern during the transition period. Instruction is offered in the area of religion, the mystery of life and death, domestic social virtues, sex and sexuality and forms of self identity (Magesa 1997:97; Shorter 1987:5-6). Of these five areas two are most emphasised. The most central theme is that of life which is dependent on God as its source and on the human ancestors as guardians. This is coupled with emphasis on instruction on sexuality (1997:97-98). Instruction on sexuality is quite exhaustive and the question of sexual responsibility is also taught (1997:98). This is done to prepare the young people for what is soon to come as they will be officially allowed to get married and bear children (Mbiti 1991:99; Magesa 1997:103).

The integration or incorporation stage which “forms the last stage of the formal initiation process, implies a rebirth, a resurrection. It is meant to signify and effect the initiates’ physical and moral maturity, that they have been approved by the ancestors of the clan and ethnic group” (Magesa 1997:102). Integration also means that the initiates are now qualified to get married and have children.

A certain newness characterises their lives and they can start playing new roles in the community. During integration (Mbiti 1991:102), “the entire people are brought together: the departed, the living and those yet to be born, because now

the gate for marriage and family life is opened for the initiates.” More could be said about the integration period but it has been omitted since much of the detail does not have any direct bearing on the theological problem of this thesis. Having laid this background information, I will now turn to the phenomenology of Masasi initiation rites.

2.3 Masasi initiation rites

The following section gives a description of the initiation rites in Masasi⁷. Most of the information given pertains to boys’ initiation but some information on girls is also included with a view to highlighting key issues of moral education and religion in both cases. The boys’ initiation is given more space because its phenomenology depicts more instances of involvement of ancestors and spiritual worldview which are the main issues of contention in this thesis.

2.3.1 Preparation for rites

Initiation in Masasi is observed either in June and December⁸ or both following the announcement⁹ by the leader of clan chiefs in the village mentioning that the village will observe *jando* and *unyago*¹⁰ in that particular year. Upon deciding that they want to initiate their child, parents inform their respective clan chief known as *mwenye*. He in turn holds meetings with other clan chiefs in the village to compile the list of all would-be initiates in the village. The presiding head chief will then set out an official date for initiation as he is the one with authority to do so. This will be followed by a meeting between the chiefs and a few village elders to discuss the issues involved in the whole process of the initiation. One of the key issues deliberated on is identifying the traditional circumcision practitioner

⁷ For a more detailed phenomenology of initiation rites among the southeastern tribes of Tanzania see J.A.R. Wembah-Rashid (1975).

⁸ These dates coincide with the holiday period of the Tanzanian school calendar. This allows school pupils who are initiation candidates to have time to attend the rites and heal before school resumes.

⁹ Traditionally it is the head of clan chiefs in each respective village who calls for the rite but currently the government, on a district, ward and village level also interferes with this as a way of dealing with problems relating to health and food security. Stoner-Eby points out that the village committee headed by a chairman has control of initiation. (2008:192).

¹⁰ *Jando* is a term applied on male initiation while *unyago* is normally used on females. It appears that *unyago* can be used generally to refer to initiation.

(*ngariba*)¹¹ who will carry out the surgical procedure and the main instructor (*nakanga*) whose main task will be to teach and care for the initiates. In most cases the chiefs, *mwenyes*, simply pick a *ngariba* of their choice and present him to the village. Since girls in Masasi do not undergo any physical operation during initiation, the parents simply elect and endorse the main matron or instructor (*nakanga*) and her helpers (*walombwe*). This sets the stage for building the structure which will be used at the initiation camp.

The building process of the *Jando*¹² partakes of a religious nature. A number of men including relatives of the initiates go to a distant place in the bush under the leadership of a *mwenye*, a *ngariba* or both. These leaders are supposed to be experts who have special knowledge in protective medicine and who have spiritual powers to ward off witchcraft (Wembah-Rashid 1975:88). Upon arrival at the site either the *mwenye* or *ngariba* will ritualistically map out the building plan of the structure to be erected. He will then cut the first log from a tree and place this log as the main pillar into a hole located in the centre point of the structure to be built. Before he places the log into the hole however, he puts some traditional medicine into the central hole and then later on the door post holes of the structure to be erected. The medicine may consist of an egg, needles, small well sharpened sticks, ash, pounded bark pieces and some ritual powder.¹³ As he puts the medicine in the hole he offers prayers and enchantments to ancestors. These enchantments are directed against any form of witchcraft or evil which may be planned against the inhabitants of the *jando* structure. This whole process is known in Swahili as *kusindika jando*, meaning to lay the spiritual ground work/protection for the initiation camp. According to Wembah-Rashid (1975:88), “The importance of the protective medicine must be seen in the light of the fact that clan enemies delighted in sabotaging other clan’s rites.” This means if a witch dares to pass through the *jando* structure at any time before or during initiation he

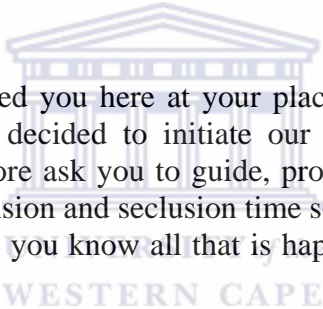
¹¹ The selection of the *ngariba* is not only based on surgical skills but spiritual powers to combat witches who endanger the lives of initiates.

¹² This is a grass thatched structure in which boys or girls stay during the seclusion period. It is also the name from which the initiation rite derives its name.

¹³ One interviewee noted that in some extreme cases a *mwenye* may even perform these protective rituals while naked in the presence of men who would have gone with him to build the *jando*.

or she will lose his or her life. One respondent remarked that killing an initiate while in the camp signifies great victory for the witch hence the need for religious protective measures during the building stage to proactively combat witches. The completion of the structure signals the commencement of the rites.

A day before circumcision, parents of the initiate go to appease the spirits of their dead relatives by sweeping and cleaning around the graves of the departed relatives. This agrees with Shorter's assertion that the first step in initiation is divination (1973:123). After cleaning around the graves, the family members will kneel around the grave(s) of *mwenyes* and engage in spiritual invocation. Each family member takes his turn starting with the youngest climaxing with clan chief. Sebastian Mualia noted that as they pray to the dead relative they will say such words as:



We have approached you here at your place of sleep/rest to inform you that we have decided to initiate our children, (mentioned by name). We therefore ask you to guide, protect, and look after them during the circumcision and seclusion time so that nothing bad befalls them. We are sure you know all that is happening down here so we need your help.

If the family graves are located very far from the residence of the family the *mwenye* leads the clan members by going to a religious shrine known as the *msolo* – this is a tree set aside for religious purposes of invoking and imploring ancestral spirits. At this shrine several libations are done including sprinkling of some sacred ritual powder¹⁴ (*mbepesi*) around the *msolo*. All these acts are done with the main purpose of ensuring spiritual and physical protection for the initiates during the circumcision and the whole process of initiation. This is also an endeavour to ascertain a safe stay and return of the initiates from the initiation camp. After these religious acts are done all the initiates have all their heads shaved leaving them bald. Having completed this exercise the initiates are then taken to their respective *mwenye* and the *apwiya mwene*.¹⁵ At this stage the

¹⁴ This powder is made out of traditionally grounded sorghum.

¹⁵ This is normally an elected woman within the clan who is responsible for assisting the *mwenye* in his duties. She also keeps the ritual powder and other medicines for ritual purposes. Among the

mwenye and the *apwiya mwene*, while positioned at the entrance of the house, will again invoke spirits of the dead saying prayers like:

Please God: please ancestors (*mashoka*)
Wherever you are sleeping
Please convene a meeting
Pray to God on our behalf so that our initiation may go well.

The *apwiya mwene* starts with beseeching the dead while slowly and systematically pouring *mbepesi* powder on the ground forming a small lump of powder in the form of a conical hill close to the door post. Afterward the *mwenye* follows suit adding more powder on the lump as he enchants. The small lump is then properly covered until the following day. If by the next morning the lump remains intact in a pyramid-like shape without disintegrating, it would be taken as a sign that the spirits have heard the prayers and guaranteed protection (Wembah-Rashid 1975:89). If the lump disintegrates the rite may be called off or postponed as that would have signified ancestral disapproval. Eustace Amidu, an elderly man in his late sixties, equated this phenomenon to Gideon's request in Judges 6:36-40. Following the enchantments the *mwenye* will then smear powder either on the left wrist or forehead of each initiate whether boy or girl. This powder is also known in Makua language as "*uvenda mashoka*" which translates 'to implore the dead or ancestral spirits.' According to Wembah-Rashid (1975:92), this ritual was "a pre-purification of the initiates. It was an appeal to God and the spirits to make the initiates evil-free, as clean as the flour..." The people believe that this will act as further protection for the initiates. While the powder is symbolic of protection without which one is vulnerable to misfortunes, the actual protection is guaranteed by the departed whose graves will have been swept earlier and who also take cognisance of the powder as a point of contact between them and the initiate. The departed are believed to be closer to God hence they can better beseech God for the security of all initiates.

Makonde this woman is known as the *likolo* and her responsibilities are to prepare various traditionally protective medicines for initiates and drummers at initiation ceremonies. The *likolo* also has a deputy whose duties are to safely keep the medicines from witches who may want to get it and use it in evil witchcraft purposes (Mbonde 1993:15).

2.3.2 Seclusion stage

When male initiates leave the village for the seclusion camp where they will immediately undergo circumcision, their mothers all congregate at one specified location in the village where they will sit quietly and sombrely with bare breasts. This partial nudity is meant to be a sign of gloom and sullenness, also a sign of solidarity with the pain the children are going to face during circumcision.¹⁶ It is meant to signify gloom just in case some mishap befalls their young boys during the surgical process of circumcision. It is believed that in some cases, especially in the past, some practitioners (*ngariba*) made surgical mistakes¹⁷ that led to either permanent physical deformity of one's sexual organ or death.¹⁸ In some cases witchcraft from either rival *ngaribas*, or other witches in the area and intrusion of wild animals also posed a big threat to initiates' life hence the need to sit in a sullen and almost mournful state awaiting news from the initiation camp. For parents this is a time of a pleasing sadness in that on one hand they are happy that their child is now becoming a full adult and member of the community and yet on the other hand they are not sure if all will go well with the *ngariba*'s skills. This also explains why ancestors are very much entreated before the whole process begins. According to Mr Eustace Amidu, the practice of partial nudity is slowly losing momentum and he thinks it will fade away with time

Upon successful completion of the circumcision a report is quickly dispatched to each mother whereupon the solemn mothers cover their breasts and engage in singing, dancing and ululating. It needs to be noted that when girls go for *unyago* camp, there is no sullenness associated with their departure since there is no

¹⁶ Wembah Rashid points out that in the past, women did not officially know what took place during actual circumcision. They were only aware that some kind of surgical operation was being carried out on the male organ and that whatever process took place, it was a dangerous manly adventure and until they were assured of the safety of their children by the return of the *walombwe* from the *jando*, they remained sad, suspicious and heartbroken (1975:96).

¹⁷ In a recent initiation rite in the village of Chivirikiti (June 2008), the village leadership opted to employ the services of a traditional practitioner (*ngariba*). It is reported that he did not have appropriate equipment and anaesthetics and he also was not endowed with much skill and dexterity. Consequentially he failed to administer successful circumcision leaving a few boys poorly circumcised. This resulted in the village leaders seeking the services of qualified medical personnel who administered the surgery for a second time successfully.

¹⁸ One death was reported in the initiation rite which took place in June 2008 in Mkarango village in Masasi district. It is not immediately clear whether the death was associated with improper initiation as this could not be verified. Some suggested that the death was due to malaria.

physical surgery done on them hence no fear of losing life. However the girls still undergo a processes involving ancestral invocation as this ensures protection in their camp. From this time on the initiates will remain in seclusion for about a month while they receive instruction in a number of areas. Their family members continue with their normal day to day activities as they wait and prepare for the day of integration.

Religious practices involving ancestors also take first priority just before circumcision takes place. Upon arriving at the initiation camp, the clan chiefs and the *ngariba* leave all the initiates at a considerable distance and go on to inspect the *jando* site just in case rival witches laid their own traps on the site. On one occasion, the late *ngariba* Ngunda of Mraushi village detected a trap that was laid at his *jando* site in Chikoweti village the night before circumcision. Upon identifying the trap, he ritualistically administered counter measures that saw the culprit (one of the clan chiefs) falling ill gradually leading to death. Ngunda was well known and respected for his spiritual powers in protecting initiates. He was a *ngariba* for over 10 years.

The *ngariba* and chiefs also locate an exact circumcision spot and further ritualistically prepare the place. They will then pour more *mbepesi* powder on the very spot that the *ngariba* will be administering the circumcision. The process of smearing the powder is simultaneously accompanied by some prayers. The *mwenye* and *ngariba* both take turns to pray to God through the mediation of the village ancestral spirits. According to *ngariba* Nasoro whom I interviewed, such a prayer as the following one will be uttered in Makua language:

Chonte apwiya Nluku	Please God
Hiano nihoa uvendani	We have come to ask
Yo wiriha ikomela irere	That the rite may be successful
Aneshe miano achulinyu	I am your cousin (mentions name)
Nchinana kiholia	I have inherited your name
Kinera mwavirenyu mule	I am doing what you were doing
Wa miano pimiraka mmo mmo	I am following your very footsteps
Wo chichamo kinouvendani	Therefore I am beseeching you
Ikomela mwetitherata	That the initiation may go well
Mwakiwaka chomo, miano va	If you have heard me, I will now keep
kihomala	quiet.

This is also the time when religious leaders present, either Christians or Muslims, are given turns to offer their prayers for the smooth operation of circumcision (*tohara*). The initiation attendants¹⁹ (*walombwe*) will then call the initiates one at a time and arrange them in a line. The first one in line is given the name *nashirongora* (the one who leads the way) and in most cases he comes from the clan of the head chief.

2.3.3 Transition stage

Much of the time during the withdrawal period is used for moral impartation on initiates. This includes a lot of secret instruction through the *nakanga* and his assistants, the *walombwe*. This time is considered a symbolic time of having died and living in the spirit world (Mbiti 1969:121). The teachings carried out at the *jando* are done verbally, symbolically, through songs, action riddles, stories, dance and even instructive silence (Magesa 1997:103). Edmund Juma said some of the teachings are known as *Kungwe*. These teachings contain both meaningful and meaningless entertainment songs which initiates are to use to express certain messages. Although some of these songs are quite effective in teaching certain moral values and expressing the seriousness of some issues one intends others to know the songs also contain some obscene elements.

The *Ikano* (prohibitions/warnings) are the main teachings at the *jando*. They contain warnings and exhortations about future life. Some of the teachings aim at instructing the initiates on how to live good manners, have respect for one's parents and other people. Initiates are taught how to be self reliant and courageous and are also enlightened on some community taboos and omens.

Sex education takes a good amount of time during the instruction time. Mbonde (1993:17) asserts that initiates "are taught concerning adult life, they are taught many secrets that elderly people think kids do not know especially those things pertaining to the relationship between a man and a woman." There seems to be a difference however between how teachings were carried out in the past and how they are being done nowadays. According to Mr Eustace Amidu from Tukaewote

¹⁹ There is an attendant for every initiate. The attendant is chosen by the respective family of each initiate. The attendant/*mlombwe* is also a close friend of the family.

village, in the past *ikano* and *kungwe* teachings were given to those who were past the puberty stage. However, he pointed out that the use of vulgar language was mostly used through the *kungwe* even in the old days prompting the Anglican UMCA mission to ban some of the unfitting *kungwe* songs. He went on to mention that in a situation where the *jando* had a mixed range of age groups, the instructors separated them into two groups. Those initiates who were about 16 years and older received adult related instruction while those who were younger simply received teachings in good manners. He noted that in the past, though the instructors allowed the initiates to try out having an intimate relation upon successful initiation, they emphasised the importance of marriage, child bearing and responsibility.

This is slightly different from the way initiation is being done today. According to Edmund Juma from Chikoweti village and Sebastian Mualia of Muungano village in Masasi, irregardless of age the initiate is told that he is now grown up. Juma and Mualia both pointed out that in their initiation camp all the young men were told by the *walombwe* to engage in an intimate relationship upon returning to the village. Juma noted that since girls had also received the same encouragement in their camp a good number of his kin group found it fairly easy to accomplish this commission. Mualia, who was initiated at age 11 in 1969, remembers his *mlombwe* following up on him to check whether he had carried out this task upon returning to the village.

According to J.P. Mbonde (1993:14) during the seclusion time, “unlike boys, girls do not have any surgical operation done on their bodies but they stay for several days receiving instruction from an experienced woman.” They are taught many good things through riddles and songs. They are taught about the future and how best they can prepare for it. Most lessons take place at night. Juma pointed out that young girls undergo sex education known in Makua as *ndindi*²⁰. These instructions are aimed at instructing the girls on how to use their waists to please the future husband during times of intimacy. Without going into much detail,

²⁰ Mualia noted that *ndindi* is a peculiar drum beat which is played to which the initiation girls wiggle their waists rhythmically in simulation of a sexual scenario.

Yohana B. Abdallah notes that girls danced to a song/drum known in Yao as *chamba* which focuses on using the waist (Abdallah 1991:22). Mualia equated this drum to the *ndindi* used by the Makua. However Raynald Aflons Mrope and Daniel Alfons Mrope (2001-2002:12) reject the assertion that the rite is being used to teach young men and women sexual activities. They insist that “*unyago* teaches about adult life with the good purpose of prohibiting promiscuous acts before marriage.” They go on to argue that since in the past under the leadership of chief Hatia wa Tatu, a girl received a death penalty for contracting pregnancy before marriage, this is proof that the *unyago* aimed at teaching girls to keep their virginity (Mrope and Mrope 2002:12).

It cannot be denied that the Masasi *jando* has had good intentions of enculturating young people into socially responsible young adults. Some of the elderly people who were interviewed namely Mr Eustace Amidu from Tukaewote village and Mr Habil Limbende from Nanyindwa village (both are well advanced in age) noted that in the past the *jando* produced initiates who were praiseworthy due to their respectful habits. They blamed the current scenario saying that most of the good things which need to be taught in the *jando* are not being emphasised as before. They also lamented that the *jando* today is being carried out on very young people who are mentally immature to appreciate the information they are given. Asked whether virginity is a closely guarded issue among the tribes inhabiting Masasi, they both categorically stated that there is no emphasis on virginity. Eustace Amidu noted however that there is a prohibitive emphasis on sex before initiation. Thus information coming out of the interviews reveals that contrary to Mrope and Mrope’s assertions there is a general lack of emphasis on virginity among inhabitants of Masasi. An interview with a prominent *ngariba* from Masasi, Mr Nasoro also brought to light that there is no stress laid on virginity, rather there is a prohibition on sexual engagement either before initiation or with an uninitiated person. He pointed out that there is truth in the assertion that most instructors put a lot of emphasis on issues of intimacy. This is also ascertained in the research carried out by Tanzanian Ministry of Education and Culture in Masasi and Kisarawe in 2001. The report notes that among the people who were interviewed:

Some respondents said that the initiation [*unjago, unyago*] rite is too much centred around sex and that girls are encouraged to have sexual relationships as soon as possible after the *unyago*. Adolescent girls in Kisarawe said that when a girl goes through *unyago*, it is as if she has been given the ticket to go around with men because the initiation teacher tells the girl that she should not be stupid and depend on only one man. She should have at least three stoves “so that she does not have to have beans everyday”. This was also said in Masasi by female artists and they expressed that they do not like that the girls are taught “*mambo ya malaya*” (prostitution behaviours).²¹

This same thought is contained in Magesa’s discussion (2004:59) on sexual ethics in a Tanzanian setting. He remarks that some of the respondents he interviewed among the Zaramo and Ndengereko tribes pointed out that “a girl is taught during initiation not to count on only one man for her security in life. A girl is told...to have three cooking stones (*mafiga matatu*)”. Therefore it can be said that the assertions by Mrope and Mrope may be in reference to something that took place in the distant past and are not representative of the current scenario in respect to Masasi and the surrounding areas.

This discussion has been stressed here so that it is made clear that there is a moral problem to be addressed within Masasi initiation. This is not to undermine the morality of the inhabitants of Masasi in any manner but to basically show that since the *jando* seems to be in danger of losing its intended enculturation thrust; it has developed loopholes through which seeds of moral decadence have begun to take root. As such rites present a moral issue to the people in Masasi which cannot go unnoticed by the Christian community.

2.3.4 Incorporation stage

Upon completion of all initiation procedures the young men and women return to their village on a set date to integrate with the rest of the community. From this time onward they are looked upon as responsible members of the society. Their names are also prefixed with titles of respect to show that they have attained adulthood. The return of the initiates occasions a lot of singing, dancing and beer

²¹ Also see Ikamba and Ouedraogo (2003)

drinking. Mbiti (1991:101) says that the incorporation stage is a deeply religious step and as such it is accompanied by sacrifices and prayers to God asking for blessings on the initiates. He goes on to say that in other places the spirits are invited to be present to witness the occasion. Celebrations take place throughout the night and in the morning the initiates are given gifts by the people who would have been invited to grace the occasion.

2.3.5 Analysis of Masasi initiation

This fairly detailed empirical study has been done with the express purpose of presenting a coherent description of the different constituent parts of the rite. This discussion has attempted to show the place that the ancestral cult holds in relation to other constituent parts of initiation. In order to carry out a contextually relevant critique of the subject of ancestor veneration it is important that this subject is viewed in connection with the significance it holds in relation to other parts of the initiation process. Reflecting on ancestor veneration and moral education as isolated entities without showing their setting and place within the whole initiation ensemble may probably lead to a disjointed theological engagement. Since the goal in this thesis is to transform the whole rite, such a detailed case study of local initiation is necessary and important for informed theological dialogue. The phenomenology has shown the reasons and values behind why people do what they do. These beliefs and practices set the stage for departure points in the theology espoused in this thesis. Two key concepts central to this thesis can be noted from the foregoing phenomenology.

Firstly I have tried to show through Mbiti, Shorter, Magesa and the interviews that initiation rites as practiced in Masasi can rightly be termed religious. It needs to be stressed here that initiation, insofar as it involves ancestor veneration and worship of any spiritual being or God (Shorter 1973:123; Mbiti 1991:101; Magesa 1997:97) is to be treated as a religious and theological entity. Such divination activities as the sweeping of graves, the use of *mbepesi* powder at the *msolo* shrine and smearing of the sacred ritual powder onto initiates' wrists or foreheads, the religious acts associated with the building of the *jando* site and rituals before circumcision all constitute a strong religious and theological orientation. These

acts unequivocally render the initiation rites religious. In this religious approach, ancestors seem to take centre stage. It is thus apparent that ancestors play a pivotal role in the life of the community and that of the initiate. It can be said that without the involvement of ancestors initiation would not be complete hence the need to invoke the spirits at different stages before, during and after the initiation process (Mbiti 1991:101).

The reason why the religious-theological nature of the rites is being emphasised here is because it is the current source of much debate within the Christian community. The key question is, since initiation partakes of a religious nature, which religion should take precedence over the other in initiation rites? Do the religions exclude each other completely or is an amalgamation of religious approaches appropriate?

The issue concerning involvement of ancestors in *jando* and *unyago* has arisen from a theological perspective; as such it needs a theological solution. This is to say since we have the religious rites on one hand and the Christian faith on the other; a certain need for dialogue presents itself. Issues concerning ancestors, prayers at graveyards, use of powder, *kusindika jando* and other divination acts are to be treated as a cause of great theological concern and dialogue.

The second issue coming out of Masasi rites regards the subject of morality. Some *ndindi* and *ikano* teachings and the subsequent involvement into sexual activity by adolescents have come under heavy criticism by a good number of people within the district. While it is true that initiation rites are meant to teach good virtues such as respect, courage, responsibility and many others it is a confirmed matter that the young initiates are instructed, trained and secretly commissioned to participate in sexual activity. One prominent pastor from the Yao tribe, Mr. Godfrey Machinga, taught a group of Christian men and women at a Christian family life seminar in Masasi that *jando* and *unyago* contribute a

certain percentage to broken marriages, immorality and unwanted pregnancies.²² He asserted that this is due to the information given to initiates at the camp whereupon on returning home initiates feel the urge to experiment with what they would have been taught. Mr Machinga went on to urge the Christian community to avoid teaching adult information to young initiates and reserve that type of information for people in the marital or premarital stage.

Having laid this phenomenology, the key issue is on how the rites could be made to coexist with teachings of the Christian faith. The question which arises concerns how far one needs to go with integrating faith and culture without contravening one's doctrine in the Christian faith and undermining one's culture at the same time. According to Stephen Munga (1998:112), when Christianity comes into the African culture it interacts with the positive and negative aspects of the African worldview. On one hand it will relate quite well with the positive practices in the culture but on the other hand it will come into friction with some of the cultural aspects that may not or will not agree with the values upheld in Christian theology. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to briefly look at some of the efforts that were done to adapt rites to the Christian faith.

2.4 Christianisation of rites

The term Christianisation is used here to refer to the processes of making African cultural items fit into established Christian doctrinal positions in order to give the cultural items a Christian outlook. The aim is to make cultural practices agreeable to Christian teachings. Christianisation was employed by missionaries in cases where they sought to create Christian versions of traditional African rituals (Kaplan 1986:174). This approach "involved the adaptation of a traditional African ritual so that it became of value to the development of a Christian life in a Christian community" (Kaplan 1986:174).

²² The same thought was given by Magesa's respondents who blamed the moral decline on cultural practices which did not seem to lay much emphasis on fidelity, (2004:59).

2.4.1 Christianisation efforts by missionaries

Bishop Lucas of Masasi “considered the process of modernisation and detribalisation of African society to be dangerous” (Ludwig 1999:25). Thus in an endeavour to both protect the cultural practice as well as to address some of the unchristian aspects of the rites instead of either condemning or ignoring this social institution Lucas tried to ‘Christianise it’ (Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed 2000:870). The process of Christianisation involved a prohibition of certain practices deemed unacceptable. For instance, Ludwig (1999:25) points out that in 1913 Lucas “forbade Christians to take part in initiation festivals because he considered some practices as being ‘unacceptable’ but introduced a Christian ritual instead.” The process also included a replacement of some of the ‘unacceptable practices with some Christian symbols, (Sundkler and Steed 2000:870). In some cases the Bishop also had to approve the dances which were done the night before the circumcision ritual (Sundkler and Steed 2000:870). According to Stoner-Eby (2008:179), Bishop Lucas’ adaptation endeavours were built much on the ‘first rules’ regarding initiation which were written down in 1909 at a conference of the clergy held in Masasi under Bishop Weston. Stoner-Eby goes on to mention that the rules were continually used to modify initiation “while providing more specific guidelines and increasing clergy control” (2008:179). So the Christianisation process in Masasi made use of clerical rules and guidelines handed down to the catechumen for implementation.

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) also applied this approach in a number of communities in East Africa such as among the Wagogo and the Kaguru tribes to mention a few. According to Beidelman (1982:127), the evangelism strategy that was employed by the CMS among the Kaguru seemed to be that of changing the native man by Christianising his cultural practices. While the CMS did not seem to exhibit a theologically rigorous and systematic method to address the Kaguru cultural practices, Beidelman shows that “*the mission provided ways*²³ in which the Kaguru could direct their traditional beliefs and customs” (1982:127). In some instances they sought “parallels to things they knew from home or from the

²³ Emphasis is mine. This is to highlight that the options came from missionaries and not from a dialogical process.

Bible” (1982:144). Beidelman attributes the approach used by CMS to the negative view that the mission held about the Kaguru. He notes that the missionaries “entertained a contemptuous view of most of the Kaguru life, though they made little effort to learn what that life might be” (1982:127), and they “considered Kaguru customs and beliefs the antithesis of Christianity” (1982:133). This inevitably had a negative impact on how the CMS approached the Kaguru culture.

Though Christianisation was the goal, it was no longer done as an organised theological endeavour but an outward modification of the Kaguru culture based on a European version of Christianity, involving “a wide range of European behaviour, from dress and etiquette to monogamy” (1982:133). Concerning the practice of rites, the mission sought to Christianise circumcision by “replacing the bawdy songs and explicit sexual instructions which are at the heart of such ceremonies with prayers and hymns” (1982:144). With such a view, the outward form of initiation was given a Christian flavour. Beidelman notes however that the approach used by CMS did not bring much change. Though they sought to incorporate Christian teachings in the practice of initiation they failed in all attempts to modify the ceremony, (1982:144). It can be asserted from the Beidelman’s discussion that the CMS’s approach of imposing moral, spiritual and cultural values on Kaguru did not meet with much success and adherence because the strategy was merely an imposition of a foreign worldview on the Kaguru people. The principle used was not that of dialogical adaptation of the Christian faith.

While the Christianisation done among the Kaguru, as articulated by Beidelman may not seem like a success story, Kaplan insists that the Masasi and Wagogo experiences were good pointers of Christianisation of African ritual aspects. He asserts that “the Masasi experiment clearly illustrates the complexity involved in and the success possible from such ventures” (1982:175). Stoner-Eby also agrees that the Masasi experiment was a success story. She however attributes much of the success to the efforts made by the African clergy prior to the arrival of Bishop Lucas (2008:179-182).

It is important to highlight that though the use of Christianisation registered considerable success in Masasi and other places, Kaplan admits that the process of Christianisation was characterised by a certain level of ambivalence in the adaptation of initiation rites. This is so because “advocates of the Christianisation of such rites were not wholehearted supporters of traditional practices” (1982:175). Thus with such an approach the tendency was to view the cultural practices negatively from the onset. Cultural rites were looked at as impure items which needed purification and cleansing by applying regulative measures to which rites were to measure up. This approach becomes ineffective as it seeks to impose changes on the form without touching the inner worldview behind the rites. Kaplan says that “purely legislative measures or laying down injunctions by people outside the tribe is of little or no value” (1982:175). Since the focus of Christianisation is to give initiation rites a Christian character and this mostly through imposition of an outside doctrine, it does not work well as the best approach to address the subject at hand. It tends to ignore the worldview and the underlying traditional value system of the people it wishes to address. Moreover changes brought about by legislative injunctions do not seem to bear much fruit and adherence on cultural participants as they are mere adaptations which do not appeal to the inner spiritual and emotional faculties of the people concerned.

Efforts by Bishop Lucas need to be applauded since he presents a balanced view of what needs to be done in the African theological enterprise. Lucas’ efforts to address ancestor invocation as well as the obscene and immoral character of the rites (Shorter 1973:73) are to be commended for that is in line with traditional biblical teaching. His model however is not without its problems. Shorter (1973:73), while commenting on the weaknesses of Christianisation of the boys’ initiation as practiced in Masasi and Nachingwea (a district close to Masasi), says that “in African eyes, this impoverished the symbolism of the ceremony and weakened its relevance to social life in the area.” He (1973:73) goes on to mention that the creation of Christian initiation camps produced “a series of

*jandos*²⁴ – Anglican, Catholic and pagan – over which the missionaries never really gained control.”

It is important to point out at this stage that while Christianisation might have worked to bring about certain outward conformations of the rites to the Christian faith, it might not have been effective in completely changing the mindset of the people as the issue of rites continues to cause problems even in Christian circles today. This is not to demean the work of Lucas but judging from the current scenario it can be argued, contrary to Stoner-Eby who holds that the Christianised initiation continues to this day (2008:192), that Christianisation as an adaptation model may not stand the test of time as it mostly touches on the outward forms of initiation.

A good number of elderly people who were interviewed noted that it was difficult to come up with a Christian initiation rite let alone a Christian initiation camp since much of these initiations rested in the hands of the local village leadership and clan chiefs. Stoner-Eby (2008:192) points out that “clerical control of initiation did not survive Tanzanian independence” since the local village government system which was instituted at the time took control of initiation preparations. Though Stoner-Eby insists that Christian initiation is still taking place under Christian village leaders this cannot be guaranteed. Currently those churches which have managed to hold a separate *jando* from the village *jando* have only managed to do so with much protest and contempt from village committees.²⁵ Those churches which have continued to observe *jando* under the local village leadership have had to overlook issues considered as syncretistic in other Christian circles. It can be concluded therefore that Christianisation may not be a very effective tool to administer long lasting changes on rites or any cultural aspects. This means something more may be called for in terms of bringing long lasting adaptive results.

²⁴ Seclusion camps where boys are kept during initiation period.

²⁵ Members of one evangelical congregation in Chivirikiti village had to undergo hours of debate with the local village authorities when they expressed reservations in participating in the regular village *jando* in June 2008. A similar occurrence took place in Msakala village and a fairly young congregation in Nanyindwa village.

Other recent missionary Christianisation approaches used the correlation of the practice of initiation with the doctrine of confirmation. The understanding in this practice is that since the church as a society has its initiation rites, such as baptism, confirmation, marriage etc, these can be tallied with similar rites in the larger cultural society and parallels drawn for purposes of integration. Such a rite as initiation is adapted to confirmation so that at the time of a teenager's cultural initiation, he can also go through church confirmation.

Fr. Girard Kohler in his article 'Confirmation as Initiation: Experiment in Initiation Adaptation' writes about the possibility of confirmation as initiation. He relates the experiment he undertook in South Meru Mission in Arusha, Tanzania in which he combined initiation and confirmation. He points out that the main issue in this approach is to look "at one's experience of religion and journey of faith from the vantage point of life-situation and parallels" (Kohler, n.d.:166). He goes further to emphasise that "the local church of any society, which has in its tradition rituals of initiation, can fruitfully look at these cultural and historical phenomena for some appropriate ways both of catechizing a sacrament of initiation and of celebrating meaningful liturgy of that sacrament." Drawing some of his thoughts from Charles Nyamiti²⁶, Kohler proposes what he believes to be a paradigm for the Christian sacrament of confirmation.

He sees the need to put age stipulations to initiation so that they coincide with the time of initiation of any individual. Be that as it may, Kohler's ideas are discussed here to show just one way in which recent missionaries sought to Christianise cultural initiation by correlating African practices with established Christian doctrines. It may be appropriate at this stage to have a brief review of Nyamiti's model for Christianising initiation rites.

2.4.2 Nyamiti's Christianisation of method

Charles Nyamiti has drafted a model that could be used to Christianise initiation rites. In this method, "the initiation sacraments are made to penetrate into tribal

²⁶ Charles Nyamiti 'African Rites of Initiation' SERVICE no. 3, 1979, pp 4-13.

initiation ritual as a whole, in such a way that the latter becomes, as it were, transformed into initiation sacraments” (1971:19). This approach also entails that during the transformation stages initiation rites will also lose their ‘fundamental meanings (i.e. tribal and pubertal).’ Nyamiti also notes that while the two types of initiation bear some resemblances with each other, they also are fundamentally different such that “a transition from one type to the other implies an immense hiatus” (1971:19-20). While this may be true, Nyamiti’s focus is on the resemblances since it is through these that cultural initiation rites are viewed as preparatory for initiation sacraments. So Nyamiti uses the analogies between the two entities “as channels through which the Christian mysteries will penetrate the tribal rites” (1971:20). In this way the central meaning of the tribal initiation rites are transmuted into the initiation sacraments.

In this process, it is envisaged that on the one hand the initiation sacraments will be presented as much as possible in a culturally relevant manner while particular tribal elements will face adaptability to the sacramental status based on its compatibility with the Christian mysteries. It appears Nyamiti here also takes time to look at the different parts that make up the rites so that each element is admitted into the sacramental system in accordance with how it stands in relation to the precepts of the Christian mysteries. Nyamiti is clear that the tribal elements will be subordinated to the Christian rites but if there happens to be tribal elements that do not necessarily bear resemblance to the Christian sacraments of initiation such elements should not be excluded even though they do not need modification. Instead these can still be engrafted so long as they do not obliterate the Christian message. According to Nyamiti this will leave us with a Christianised initiation rite and an Africanised sacrament.

While the ideas presented by Nyamiti, can most probably work well within the Roman Catholic system or any other mainline church that has similar structures, care still needs to be taken so that people are onboard as to the theological underpinnings of such integration or transformation. Mere integration with an existing Christian practice cannot be taken for granted that it will produce the desired results as the original content of the traditional practice might still be at

work in people's minds. In Masasi for instance, some church circles intertwine the tribal rites with Christian aspects such as prayers, worship etc., but the problems which have been raised in this thesis still persist up to the present day.

Nyamiti's effort in Christianising the initiation rites in the manner described above represents efforts which most theologians and clergy are occupied with in real pastoral settings. So while he is helpful in shedding light on the fact that there are indeed elements in tribal initiation that are still a cause of great concern in African Christian communities it may be suggested at this stage that effective transformation of rites needs to go beyond Christianisation by integration. What I mean is, when the focus of Christianisation is put on integrating the rite into a Christian sacrament, say in this case, confirmation, much effort may be put on drawing correlations between the cultural practice and Christian doctrine rather than doing actual inculturation with the rite. Inculturation suggests that the rite is taken as it is without an *a priori* integrative modification framework. The problem is that dialogue within such a framework would already be predetermined as the tribal rite would need to agree with an already existing sacrament which might not have been aimed at the same end as tribal rites. It needs to be understood that these two rites have different aims and approaches. According to Mugambi (1989b:99) cultural initiation came at inevitable stage in one's social development, while in Christianity initiation mostly depended on one's understanding of prescribed doctrines and his/her catechist/priest's opinion of his/her doctrinal apprehension. The former came with physical maturity and aimed at marriage while the latter depended on apprehension and recitation of doctrines stated in the catechism.

As such it may be best to treat each rite differently so that each one retains its inherent meanings, purposes and processes. If there is need for integration then the Christianisation activity should take precedence before integration. What I mean is this, if we are going to use Nyamiti's procedure of transformation by integration, as one might call it, the theology in this thesis stipulates that both separate items are to individually undergo separate inculturative-transformative

processes before they are united. This means that tribal rites will need to be transformed into a fully fledged acceptable rite on their own right before they can be made to integrate with existing sacramentals. This approach ensures that the rites will be transformed for what they are envisaged to be and not for conformity to a distinct entity. Treating cultural initiation rites this way will help evade the temptation to subsume them into already established confirmation sacraments.

This calls for an overhaul of the rite which makes it possible to intentionally deal with key problematic areas such as moral education and in particular sex related material taught within rites. These are otherwise subjects that fall outside the scope of the regular Christian confirmation sacrament. As such in trying to deal with direct issues such as improper education to initiates, there needs to be developed a system which aims at the specific issues facing the initiates so that the curriculum of the pedagogy bears directly on the people and the issues intended. If this is not done, some key objectives of Christianising initiation may be missed. Part of the purposes of incarnating the Word in a society is that it dialogues with problematic elements of the culture and administers possible change. As such, a relevant, well inculturated, biblically based curriculum of initiation rites should produce a reasonably transformed African Christian outlook of the rites.

2.4.3 Christianisation efforts by Ngaing laity

Elsewhere one method which was used to Christianise rites was through legitimising the cultural practices by correlating them with what would be regarded as their biblical parallels. The legitimisation approach was used by the Ngaing people group of the Rai Coast in the northeast of Papua New Guinea.²⁷ This approach did not necessarily arise from missionary circles. Its main aim was to preserve culture. This arose out of a quest by the Ngaing people who sought to put their practice on par with their understanding of the biblical tradition.

²⁷ For more details see Wolfgang Kemf (1994)

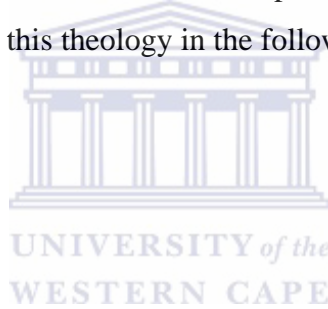
According to Wolfgang Kempf (1994:113) the Ngaing men held that their secret initiation practices were compatible with the Christian faith which they received through missionaries. As a result the Ngaing used the Bible as “an important source of legitimisation of their ritual activities” (1994:113). With this approach Kempf notes (1994:113-114) that they equate the stages in Jesus’ life with the stages followed in their initiation process. For instance, they interpret the crucifixion of Jesus as his ritual circumcision. Pilate’s cross examination of Jesus is taken as the equivalent of the confession conducted before circumcision by the Ngaing. The three days after Jesus’ death are interpreted as his three weeks of seclusion while the resurrection is identified with the public presentation of the initiates at the close of the Ngaing circumcision. It is clear from the foregoing that when the term legitimisation is used it mostly rubber stamps a cultural practice by using Scriptural parallels or proof texts. This is mostly done by cultural adherents who feel their culture does not need to be changed since they take it to be in line with the biblical tradition.

While one may argue with the hermeneutics employed in this theology, it can still be asserted that the Ngaing people attempted an effort to Christianise their rites. They tried to address the reality between rites and the Christian faith by identifying theological correlations between the two entities. It needs to be noted however that the approach used by the Ngaing men as discussed by Kempf does not lead to a real engagement as it neither expresses the Christian faith culturally nor does it make the rites conform to the Christian faith in any way. Scriptural texts are in this case interpreted out of context so as to give the rites a biblical approval. Not much interactive dialogue takes place between the two realities. As such legitimisation does not seem to present a good model to address the rites in Masasi.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to give some background information on the general practice of initiation within African settings. Three key stages of initiation were noted namely; the seclusion, transition and incorporation stages. Central to

the practice of rites is the religious aspect which in most cases involves ancestor veneration. This information is congruent with the practice of rites in Masasi which, through the phenomenology given, can rightly be classified as religious in nature. Establishing that the Masasi rites are religious in nature sets the stage for employing a critical theological analysis of these rites. The case study has also brought to light the problem inherent within moral education. Some of the *ndindi*, *kungwe* and *ikano* teachings contain untimely sex education which motivates initiates to engage in sexual activity at a young age. Regardless of the Christianisation efforts that were carried out on rites, those aspects which were considered problematic in the past still persist up to the present. There is still a great degree of ancestral invocation and questionable moral instruction in Masasi initiation. This leaves us with the need for a different theological approach which will engage initiation rites on a more in-depth, interactive and transformative manner. We now turn to this theology in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 3

Inculturation – Transformation Theology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theology of inculturation and transformation. This is the theological method that will be applied to initiation rites with the hope of creating a Christian version of rites that is also consistent with the cultural values. Before delving into an in-depth discussion of this theology it is necessary to look at where this theology falls in the general spectrum of African theological schools of thought. This helps to give the theological framework through which rites will be critiqued.

3.2 Approaches to religion and culture in African theology

African theological expositions regarding religion and culture fall mostly within three theological approaches. Bediako (2000:54) has classified these theological approaches as, the continuity approach, the discontinuity approach and the translation approach. These approaches are based on how they interpret the role of primal religions in the formation of African Christian theology. To Bediako the question of a new theological method springs from the desire to assert African self identity by deliberating on “how, and how far, the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ in African religious consciousness could become integrated into a unified vision of what it meant to be African *and* Christian” (2000:53). In this endeavour, the African Christian theologian found himself having to play a central role in the deliberations as to how this integration should work out and as Bediako puts it, this dialogical process “was bound to become personal and so infinitely more intense” (2000:53). Due to the differences of opinion and theological persuasions among African theologians, their theological methodologies could be grouped largely in one of the three attitudes above. It is the view of this thesis that any of these approaches can then be applied to the practice of initiation rites to determine its African Christian outlook. Though the three approaches are not water tight they nevertheless represent the inclination of a particular theologian or theology. In establishing the research design and framework of this thesis it is worthwhile to

briefly survey these approaches. They give the appropriate background for an understanding of where a theology of inculturation and transformation will fall on the continuum between continuity, translation and discontinuity. The success of this theology will rest on how well it will engage with the primal world and cultural aspects therein.

3.2.1 The continuity method – (Indigenisation)

The continuity school of thought focuses on the preservation of the African culture against any form of impediments which might otherwise mar the identity of the African culture or religion. Bediako (2000:54) notes that there are proponents of a radical and a less radical view of continuity. Bolaji Idowu (cited in Bediako 2000:54) has been portrayed as the pace-setter of the radical approach. This approach calls for the African church to develop its own theology shaped by the African culture and religious heritage. It also calls for the revitalisation of African primal religions and give them a place of prominence since they inform African Christianity, (Bediako 2000:54).

There is, in this approach, a high inclination toward assimilation of or cohabitation of all aspects of African traditional religion with Christian theology so as to end up with what T. S. Maluleke has termed, ‘African Religion’ (2004:190). This perspective seems to disregard issues of syncretism since it does not see the practice of Christianity “in terms of conflict between Africinity and Christianity” (2004:190). By syncretism here I refer to the non-critical mixing of cultural practices with Christian practices without paying attention to conflicting elements. Shorter describes syncretism as a situation in which “an illegitimate symbiosis occurs that is harmful to authentic Christian meaning” (1988:12). It appears that under the continuity approach syncretism becomes a form of contextualization since it incorporates without conflict every aspect of the African culture and religion (Shoko 2006:349-367).²⁸ The African religio-cultural setting

²⁸ Shoko discusses the healing ministry of a Roman Catholic priest in Zimbabwe whose healing methodology comprised of Christian prayers and cultural traditional healing means. The Priest’s mixing of Christian prayers and traditional healing means attracted a lot of criticism from some of his fellow clergymen and superiors. I have used Shoko here to illustrate how the continuity approach is being used in practical religious settings today.

is considered good as it stands and thus does not need much transformation from outside religions though it can integrate with such religions. This integration includes both African religious and cultural aspects being brought into the Christian faith to express a “coherent African religion” (Maluleke 2004:188). With this approach Christian theology does not come to mould or influence the African culture but comes to peacefully coexist with African traditional religions and culture in a non-transformational manner. This is based upon the understanding that since there is value in both religions there is need for a non-transformational dialogue between them.

While there is no big departure from the radical approach, the less radical approach of continuity emphasises that the cultural context should determine how Christian theology should be expressed in ways that are comfortable and appealing to the African. Theologians in this approach do not get involved in ‘how the Gospel should transform culture’ but, as in Mulago’s case, (cited in Bediako 2000:54), he retained “a firm conviction regarding the relevance of the Christian message for Africa but insisted that the process of forging the new integration cannot be solid and viable except as it remains faithful to ancestral traditions.

The message which comes out clearly in this approach is the call for adapting the Christian faith to African expression hence the focus on outward adjustments of religion. This approach leaves the practice of theological inculturation at the mercy of one’s hermeneutical persuasion in determining that which is to be deemed as theologically sound. There is a divergence of ideas with regards to some practices which some theologians accept as ethically sound while others condemn as highly inconsistent with Christian values/theology. Bediako (2000:54-55) points out one key problem with this view. He notes that since this view maintains that the Christianity which was transmitted into Africa is too foreign and that Christianity has brought little newness to African religions, this puts us in the “danger of leading Christian reflection into an impasse.” He further elaborates on this point by saying, “if the Christian Gospel brought little that was

new to Africa in religious terms, then in what lay the value and rationale for the quest for a specifically Christian theological thought in Africa?" (2000:55).

Another problem has to do with the whole idea of continuity from primal religions to the Christian faith. In his book *Theology and Identity: the impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and in modern Africa* (1992), Bediako discusses Bolaji Idowu's concept of the continuity of God in the African experience. It is apparent in this discussion that the continuity approach does not adequately explain how the divinities in some West African religions can be incorporated into the Christian faith. While Idowu has tried to offer a reasonable continuity explanation²⁹ surrounding the multiplicity of divinities and the belief in one supreme God, the fact still remains that there exists no strong continuity or point of contact with the Christian faith in this regard. I have used this argument to show that when one embarks on a typically continuity path there are bound to be doctrinal barriers on the way which may make it difficult to connect Christian faith and culture constructively.

3.2.2 The discontinuity method – Biblicist

Proponents of the discontinuity view espouse a theology of radical Biblicism (Bediako 2000:55). The focal point of this theological attitude is the conservative preservation of the biblical doctrine as the main source of Christian theology. The African culture seems not to have much place in this approach as it is somehow understood to be at variance with the Scriptures. Byang Kato (cited in Bediako 2000; 1992) is well known for holding such a radical evangelical view. In this view Kato strongly holds that, "a practice which does not agree with what the Bible teaches must be dropped. The concept which fits Biblical tradition may be employed for the use of Christianity" (Bediako 1992:412). On one hand Bediako (2000:54) commends Kato for insisting on "the centrality of the Bible for theological enterprise in Africa..," and on the other, Bediako criticises Kato for "his outright rejection of the understanding of theology as a synthesis of 'old' and

²⁹ Idowu maintains that, within the Yoruba tradition, while there exists several divinities, all these are the manifestation of one and same divine being Orisa who was once a unity but apparently became several divinities. See, (Idowu 1962)

'new' in a quest for a unified framework for dealing with culturally rooted questions, [this] meant that Kato's perspective could not provide a sufficient foundation for the tradition of creative theological engagement that the African context seemed to be requiring." However, there are other evangelicals who, while remaining true to the centrality of the Bible have sought better ways through which the Christian Gospel can interact with the African culture, (Bediako 2000:54).

It can be safely asserted here that while the discontinuity approach has high respect for the centrality of the Bible in doing Christian theology, it lacks a balanced and objective view on how to deal with the inevitable reality of culture and traditional religion which act as vital secondary sources of African Christian theology. It fails to identify the importance of the two realities, namely the Christian faith and the indigenous culture which Teresa Okure says must "be united and mutually enriched" (Okure 1990:58). In the article entitled 'Inculturation: biblical/theological bases' (1990), Okure argues that it cannot be denied that the Christian faith as it was brought to Africa by European and American missionaries was culturally conditioned since missionaries, as human beings, are culturally conditioned. The Gospel which was transmitted to Africa by these missionaries inevitably bore signs of this cultural conditioning. "Once this fact is acknowledged, the question then becomes, not whether culture plays an integral part in the formulation of our Christian faith; but which culture should serve as the medium for this faith for us" (1990:59). This is a very important issue which the discontinuity proponents fail to see. Dialogue with culture is inevitable for any successful theological enterprise. This does not mean that the Gospel values will be compromised. Thus the discontinuity approach is not sufficient for the aims of this thesis since it does not take too seriously the importance and relevance of culture in African theology. Christianity cannot exist in any given culture in a disembodied state. It relies on the cultural and primal background of any culture so as to be grasped by the people involved. As long as the biblicist approach continues to see the primal aspect as evil it threatens to obliterate the otherwise positive contribution of the primal aspect.

3.2.3 The translation method

According to Bediako(2000:53), the translation approach is based on the vital understanding that:

Christianity, as a religious faith is not intrinsically foreign to Africa. It has deep roots in the long histories of the people of the continent whilst it has proved to be capable of apprehension by Africans in *African* terms...the Christian faith is capable of 'translation' into African terms without injury to its essential content.

Bediako also points out that the largest portion of literature on African Christian theology lies under this approach. This is a middle ground between the continuity and discontinuity. The translation approach acknowledges that on one hand there is the Christian faith which needs to be expressed in African terms and on the other the African culture which needs to submit to the judgment of the Bible. In this approach there is a "relative assertion that Christianity is superior while African religions and cultures are inferior" (Munga 1998:125). There is also a general acknowledgment of the Bible and the primal religions as basic sources of Christian theology. The authority of the Bible is upheld while admitting at the same time that the Bible is culturally conditioned.

The theologian needs to differentiate the culturally conditioned elements from the non-negotiable aspects of the Gospel. The translation approach emphasises dialogue between the Christian faith and the cultural setting with the view to making Christianity at home within the local situation. Christianity is thought of as having already been present in the African local situation, the only important issue is to utilise the vernacular and the local idioms and concepts to make the local people respond positively to the Gospel in their own terms. For proper African theology to take place the methodological starting point is to influence the African worldview, then move on to outward forms. Pobee (1992:129) refers to this as the internal environment comprised of values and standards which "turn out to be the cement of society and language...[and] indices of the self-identity of the society and the individual..." This approach does not seek to sacrifice the African culture for Christian theology but seeks to continue with the positive cultural aspects while at the same time transforming the negative.

It needs to be pointed out however that though the translation approach appeals to many African theologians this does not entail sameness of theological thought. The approach still exhibits diversity and divergences mainly due to different hermeneutical approaches. As such it is one's hermeneutical approach which determines how he or she will approach culture and in this case the practice of initiation rites. Be that as it may. It is the position of this thesis that a theology under the translation approach will effectively address the subject of initiation in Masasi.

3.3 A shift in theological emphasis

In order to address initiation rites effectively there is need for a translation approach that will emphasise theologising on African cultural beliefs and values and relating these to the Christian faith. This will represent a shift of emphasis from the usual approach which had been characterised by critiquing of foreign paradigms of theology which were applied on African contexts.

From the discussion of the three theological approaches above one can observe that in both the continuity and translation approach it can be established that African identity was at the core of Christian theological emphasis. This quest for identity was done on the basis of addressing imbalances that occurred during the colonial period. As a result African theologians have exhibited an unswerving interest and insistence on removing foreign cultural traits on the Christian faith with the hope of Africanising Christianity. This can be seen through various theological endeavours aimed at such an end. Terms such as Africanisation, African Personality, accommodation, inculturation, incarnation, indigenisation, , negritude, incarnation³⁰ and many others all aimed at creating awareness toward African Christianity. These theologies tend to be reactions either to the theological school of thought employed by missionaries or to faulty evangelism methods employed during the colonial era. Thus theologians sought to address the theological anomalies which occurred during the colonial period during which African cultural values were undermined. Emmanuel Martey (1993:13) points out

³⁰ See Pobee's discussion of the weaknesses of these terms, (1992:25-29), see also Schineller 1990; Muzorewa 1985 and Bevans 1992.

that, “evidence shows how strongly Africans resisted the attempts of both the colonial administrator and the missionary to dehumanize and obliterate their cultural identity.” Because of this perspective terms employed by this school of thought seem to have political overtones.

Kwesi Dickson (1984:117) highlights that in the quest for indigenisation of the Christian faith the argument was that “the Western cultural elements should give way to elements of the African culture thereby placing the gospel message in a relevant setting.” African Christianity has been seen to bear a lot of resemblance to Western Christianity and this has entailed a partially Western expression of Christianity in African churches.

African Christians have found themselves having to live in a dualistic cultural milieu when it comes to church life. On the one hand they adhere to the European Christian traditions handed down to them either through missionaries or through their church denominational structures. On the other hand Africans also have to try and live out their Christianity in the context of their culture. Shorter (1988:12) implies that though this phenomenon has not been appreciated by most, it was nevertheless inevitable as the Gospel could only be brought through acculturation as it used the vehicle of a Western culture for its expression. Shorter points out that since the Christian faith cannot exist without a cultural form it follows that when it enters into a new culture, there is a sense in which one culture has to be used to transport the Gospel into a new one (Shorter 1988:12) Since much of the missionary efforts historically were carried out by Western missionaries, it follows that their cultural conditioning affected the delivery of the Gospel to Africans.

There is therefore need to reinterpret the same Gospel in ways directly appealing to the African cultural context. This will need to take shape through continued dialogue as these distinct cultures share the Christian faith. Apparently, however, the Gospel and cultural context have not escaped the continual intercultural conflict that has resulted because of their differing worldviews. Needless to say,

the influence of Western theology and culture has been quite obvious in African Christianity and theology. As a result African theologians have voiced the need to do away with this Western cultural taste in order to create room for a typically African expression. One of the key issues in the call for an African Christian expression is the assumption that there is, within the Gospel, an unchanging, translatable and transferable core which can be implemented into different cultures and yet be able to maintain its distinctiveness and efficacy, (Dickson 1994:118).

This is a question tackled by Dickson when he asks if indeed there is such a core of the Gospel which is not culturally coloured. In his discussion, Dickson (1994:118) notes that the phrase ‘core of the Gospel’ has been used by several African theologians to express the thought of the permanent aspect over against the incidental. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ is here taken to be the permanent while the missionary’s cultural baggage which does not affect salvation is taken to be the incidental. Dickson however highlights two weaknesses which he sees in this rendering. He argues that if the ‘core of the Gospel’ is used to refer to the salvation of God in Christ Jesus then the term is inadequate. He explains that since we cannot presume to know fully what God will do in every situation in delivering salvation it follows that we are incapable of fully comprehending the core (1994:118).

Dickson however prefers Kraft’s³¹ characterisation of this idea of the ‘core.’ According to Dickson (1994:118), Kraft “writes of the ‘changeless, absolute truth that remains in the mind of God. ‘That divine truth’ is beyond our reach in any total sense..., even though God has seen fit to reveal an adequate amount of insight into it via the Spirit-led perceptions of that truth recorded by the authors of Holy Scripture.” Thus Dickson discards the idea of there being a core of the Gospel which does not bear any colouring of any culture. Such a gospel, according to Dickson, would be an illusion. He therefore insists that all the theological expressions received through the missionary undoubtedly had

³¹ Charles, H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1979), 294.

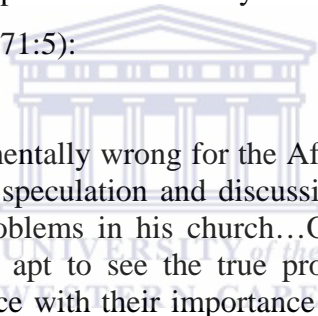
foreignness since “the missionary’s belief in Christ receives a distinctive colouring through the traditions of confession, Church and forms of worship in which he has been brought up”³² (Dickson 1994:118-119). Such a scenario necessitates the need to weed out the cultural aspects engrained within the missionary’s Gospel so that an appropriate local expression may be presented. To Dickson, while it is important to “identify the cultural elements or incidentals from the West that came with Christianity” this endeavour should not be looked at as an end in itself. “The indigenisation or Africanisation policy that proceeds solely along these lines to the exclusion of all other possible approaches assumes, quite wrongly, that there can be a proclamation of the Gospel that does not have a cultural particularity” (1994:119).

While it cannot be denied that African Christianity has foreign connotations, it still needs to be well admitted that there is something of the Gospel that makes it translatable into other cultures. Whether one calls it the core or the divine changeless truth is not the issue. It is this very same aspect that makes the Gospel relevant in any culture it enters. Yes it can be expounded further in culturally relevant terms but it still retains the attribute of permanency for it is this attribute that makes the Gospel permeate all cultures successfully. Salvation in Jesus Christ is permanent and central to all genuine Christian theology but when one starts to talk about how to live out this salvation on a daily basis and how one can culturally expound this salvation then here we get into matters of cultural relativity and colouring.

It cannot be denied that the Gospel came with Western cultural overtones and thought categories but it still remains true that there is the changeless divine truth which is the epicentre of all Christian life in all cultures. As such, the key issue should not only be a weeding out of Western embellishments or merely rethinking theology within an African perception but the endeavour should extend further to deal with the reality of African belief systems and morality.

³² W. Anderson, *Law and Gospel* (Guildford, Lutterworth, 1961), 14.

The question is, will African theology aim only at defining Christian theology in African terms or will it also direct its efforts at the belief and moral issues raised by the vast African cultures? If the efforts towards Africanisation of Christianity are going to last, these efforts ought to take cognisance of the day to day life of the African church. In order for the theological expositions to be relevant to real African life they have to address the moral, spiritual and theological questions encountered in the culture. This can be seen well in Nyamiti's theology which calls on the need to consider pastoral settings in theologising. Patrick Wachege (2006:154), shows that Nyamiti's theology emphasises the "relevance of the specific theology for human welfare/ultimate end thus implying drawing out the consequential pastoral implications." Commenting on Nyamiti's pastoral approach, Munga (1992:136-137) points out that pastoral concern should direct the theologian to the real problems of society and how to address those problems. According to Nyamiti (1971:5):



It would be fundamentally wrong for the African theologian to waste his energy in vain speculation and discussions while neglecting the real and urgent problems in his church...Only the pastoral-minded theologian is most apt to see the true problems and to spend his efforts in accordance with their importance and urgency...a pastoral minded theologian will naturally adapt theology to his people in such a way that they may not only easily understand Christian doctrine, but also be impelled to live the divine mysteries. Hence, for him there will be no separation between theology and spirituality

From the foregoing it can be asserted that for an African theology under the translation approach to make strong and lasting inroads into the African culture there is need for a major shift in the theological emphasis. In the new emphasis more focus will be placed on dialoguing with real life elements within the culture rather than focusing on what went wrong in the past. Africans are seeking biblical/theological perspectives and guidance on important cultural issues they hold on to dearly. They are looking for something more than just an outward African expression of Christianity, i.e. something that touches their realm of value system and meaning. They are looking for something that answers their questions and responds satisfactorily to their spiritual and physical concerns. This means for African theology to be relevant it has no option but to touch on the real life

situations of the Africans. Thus to limit ourselves to merely dealing with foreign aspects in Christian theology may not do us much good as we would have embarked on a reactive path of theology rather than mapping the way forward for the African churches.

What can be seen to be coming out of the theological moods exhibited by African theologians is that they have put much focus on either moving away from Western theological patterns in the hope that they will end up with an African theology. They have also tried to establish thought categories through which African theology can be pursued. It can be noted that in the process of trying to make a case for a genuine African theology, theologians have allowed the Western thought to set the theological agenda and course to be taken. From readings in several African theological extrapolations it can be said that African theologians have been on the defensive as they vigorously try to replace Western theological categories in our current theology.

Furthermore the tendency has been more political in nature than pastoral. This is not to say that there is not any work on practical African life, rather the work on practical life has been highly subdued by the reactive theology aimed at correcting the foreignness inherited through missionary endeavours and historical church traditions. Thus it is the view of this thesis that there is need for a shift in theological emphasis on the part of theologians so that in their theologising they do not neglect individual practices in the very African culture they are endeavouring to defend. Rather than being merely apologetic, African Christian theologies should be transposed to deal with the everyday life of the African. It should provide biblically and culturally relevant guidelines to real life issues as experienced by the African. It is the aim of this thesis to propose a progressive theology that can be effective in addressing the African culture and religious milieu. It is therefore necessary at this point to turn to the discussion to the main theology of this thesis, namely; inculturation and transformation theology.

The theology will be discussed in two parts; the first part will focus on the subject of inculturation, its theological implications and *modus operandi* while the second part will discuss the transformation theology and the *modus operandi* of both inculturation and transformation.

3.4 Inculturation

Inculturation is a theological neologism derived from the academic fields of sociology and anthropology (Aylward Shorter 1988:10; Emmanuel Martey 1993:67). It is derived from the sociological word ‘enculturation’ which “refers to the cultural learning process by which a person is inserted into his or her culture” (Shorter 1988:5). The term inculturation was introduced around 1962 by Professor Joseph Masson of the Gregorian University in Rome. Though it was not used much in the 1960s, it gained Catholic and Protestant endorsement at the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians (EATWOT II)³³ conducted in Accra in 1977. It was later given popularity by a Jesuit Superior General, Father Pedro Arrupe in 1978. By the end of the 1970s the term had gained currency especially in Roman Catholic circles (Martey 1993:67). Arrupe defines inculturation as:

The incarnation of the Christian life and the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression 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 it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’ (Shorter 1988:11).

According to Shorter, inculturation does not only focus on the first inception of the Christian faith into a culture but rather it is an ongoing dialogue between faith and culture. It involves a dynamic relationship between the Christian faith and cultures into which the faith enters (1988:6, 11).

³³ Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Martey notes that this was a unique conference in that for the first time it brought together Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians in an African context. It also brought Francophone and Anglophone theologians together for the first time. Inculturation emerged as a new concept of theological unity (1993:67).

Inculturation theology is built on the theology and doctrine of incarnation. In 1974 at a Synod of Bishops in Rome, African Catholic theologians proposed the theology of incarnation as the best term for theological interaction of the African situation. The main reason for preferring this term was because it involved “immersing Christianity in African culture [so that] just as Jesus became man, so must Christianity become African” (Martey 1993:66). This term was however dismissed by Pope Paul VI who held that it would be “dangerous to speak of diversified theologies according to continents and cultures.” He maintained that “the content of the faith is either Catholic or it is not” (Martey 1993:66). Having failed to enact a theology of incarnation due to papal disapproval Catholic theologians sought new and better theology together with their Protestant counterparts who had also been dissatisfied with the use of the term indigenization which they saw as an imposition from the West (Martey 1993:66). Thus with the meeting held in Ghana in 1977 the term inculturation was adopted with the incarnation paradigm playing an essential role in defining and determining the content and focus of the former.

Martey remarks that even though the term inculturation was considered by some to be ugly and unromantic, it nevertheless was adopted by most Africans both Catholic and Protestant on the basis of the reading of incarnation into it (1993:68). With such an understanding, inculturation came to be seen as what Peter Sarpong refers to as an “embracing the whole of Christian life and thinking, not just the “question of liturgical adaptation or innovation, much less of the use of drums and materials” (cited in Martey 1993)). Justin Ukpong (cited in Martey 1993)) has given a good analysis of the processes involved in inculturation. He says:

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 the process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in Scriptures and tradition are critically examined for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression. Thus there is 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 African cultural expression.

Martey (1993:68) concludes that “by the mid- 1980s the term inculturation was accepted by Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT) as a theological concept in Africa and is used generically to embrace what is both known as incarnation in Roman Catholic circles and indigenization in Protestant circles.” It is acceptable both to African Catholics and Protestants.

3.4.1 Skenosis theology

This may be a good juncture to introduce and define John Pobee’s *Skenosis* theology which for the purposes of this thesis, will be used together with inculturation to project a transformative aspect of inculturation to the African cultural items. While John Pobee is not a proponent of inculturation theology, he shares insights that are akin to this theology. His insights are helpful in further expanding the thought carried out in inculturation.

Pobee’s *skenosis* theology is derived from the Greek term *skenóo* which translates, “to pitch a tent, to create a dwelling place, an abode, a lodging” (Pobee 1992:39; John 1:14). From this he coined the term *skenosis* and defines it as “the tabernacling of the soul of the eternal and non-negotiable Gospel of Christ, in this case in the African context which also is taken seriously” (1992:39). Pobee notes (1992:39) that *skenosis* “does not lose sight of the eternal Gospel which is to be translated.” Secondly it also takes the African culture seriously since it emphasises theological expression “in a real and specific cultural control” (1992:39). Transitoriness is another merit of *skenosis* in that it seeks to address a specific group and time while at the same time safeguarding the Gospel. Thus it can be concluded that *skenosis* is not only derived from a word which is truly biblical but it also helps us to “translate the eternal non-negotiable Word of God into a real African context” (1992:40).

It can be said that the difference between Pobee’s *skenosis* theology and the theology of inculturation is merely a terminological one. Pobee dismisses the use

of the term inculturation precisely because the term, being a modified form of enculturation, has sociological and anthropological connotations, and as such, can keep us very close to the anthropological realm and somewhat distant from the theological one. He says “because enculturation is an established term in cultural anthropology, it is undesirable to use it in any variant as a technical term in another context because it only creates confusion about terminology.” He also argues that the use of the term tends to “set the pace for the theological usage” which will be misleading for theological endeavours (1992:35). It is, however, the view of this thesis that there really is not much difference between *skenosis* and inculturation irregardless of the anthropological overtones contained in the latter. These terms aim to address the same scenario, i.e. the African culture. In fact it can be argued that even though inculturation is not a perfect term to use, its sociological orientations can equip us with appropriate navigational tools in trying to deal meaningfully with African cultural and religious realities. It provides the opportunity for a holistic approach to effective Christian theology in that it combines two related academic fields dealing with the society. As such, in this thesis, for purposes of clarity and avoidance of confusion, aspects of *skenosis* theology will be used as a variation of or an expanded view of inculturation.

Having looked at a brief history of inculturation, its definitions and variation as seen in *skenosis*, it is appropriate at this stage to look at its *modus operandi*. It needs to be noted beforehand that this theology is a practical theology which aims at affecting the day to day lives of African Christians. Inculturation theology can be classified under the social and biblical school of Charles Nyamiti and his three classifications³⁴ of theological schools. According to Nyamiti (1971:1), such an approach is “distinguished by a pragmatic and biblical approach. Being relatively strong in ethnological and social questions it seems to attach little importance to speculation.” By virtue of entering into the culture, inculturation theology ceases to be an armchair theology but one which is engaged with cultural context. Martey (1993:69) notes that of the four bases of African theology, namely,

³⁴ Charles Nyamiti (1971:1) distinguishes between three types of theological approaches used by African theologians. He identifies them as the speculative school, the social and Biblical school and the reactionary school.

culture, poverty, gender and race, inculturation “stresses African religio-cultural realities.” As such inculturation does not focus on the politics of liberation or feminism but rather it looks at culturally and biblically oriented issues, which, in our case makes it an appropriate theology to deal with cultural items such as initiation. Culture is the main playing field of this theology as is hinted by its etymology.

Three things need to be kept well in mind when talking of the operation of a theology of inculturation. We have the culture, the Christian faith and the manner or method of dialoguing between faith and culture. The cultural item in question needs to be well grasped so that the underlying worldview or ideology is not overlooked. The essence of the Christian faith to be inculturated needs to be kept in check lest it gets confused with the alien cultural traits during the acculturation phase. In other words, the seed of faith, the unchanging salvation message needs to be at the forefront of true inculturation. Lastly the manner in which the message will be fused into the culture also needs to be clear lest it be applied on a superficial level. It is therefore important to look at what culture consists of so as to have a pictorial idea of how the Christian faith should interact with the culture.

3.4.2 The cultural aspect in inculturation

From a sociological perspective, Tylor says culture includes “knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other habits and capabilities acquired by members of society” (Cited in Donald A Hobbs and Stuart J Blank 1985:83). Shorter defines culture as “a transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change, and it belongs to the concept of humanness itself” (Shorter 1988:5).

Culture is a key vehicle of Christian theology so much so that if one is going to relevantly address the African in his situation it is very important to survey and grasp the different components or levels of culture. A good grasp of these levels will help in laying the foundation for the *modus operandi* of inculturation theology. These levels are crucial to the success of a theology of inculturation

since their use determines the efficacy of the assimilation of the Christian faith into a culture.

Donald A Hobbs and Stuart J, Blank identify three components of culture which are, ideology, technology and organization (1985:87). They point out that the ideological component consists of ideas, beliefs, and values within a society. Scientific facts, myths, legends, superstitions and religious beliefs are also found at this level. “All cherished values that touch on definitions of worth, beauty, and achievement are part of an ideology” (1985:87-88). Hobbs and Blank also point out that, it is on the basis of an ideology that a society can justify their actions including why they adopt particular social, moral, economic and even political interests. The second component, technology, consists of all material items that a society utilizes. This may also refer to “nonmaterial assets such as skills, crafts, and arts that enable people to produce material goods” (1985:88). The third component of social organisation basically refers to a network of rules, roles and relationships that create patterned and regulated social order” (1985:88).

In his discussion on the levels of culture, Shorter discusses four levels as they were presented by Bishop Donald Jacobs who coined a scheme of four concentric circles of culture. In Jacob’s postulation, the two outer circles relate to two related scenarios in the societal pragmatic sphere namely, the industrial technical and domestic technical, (Shorter 1988:35-36). These two levels are congruent to Hobbs and Blank’s technical component. Jacob’s third level is that of values. Shorter points out that it is on cultural values that people base their choices and priorities when they are confronted with alternatives (1988:36). While Hobbs and Blank treat values under the general idea of ideology, Shorter’s discussion of Jacob’s scheme shows that values “stem from a deeper underlying cultural value” (1988:36). The most inner circle thus refers to the fourth level of worldview.

In Jacob’s scheme a society’s worldview extends beyond their experience, outlook and understanding of the world. There is included in this, a religious experience which is looked at as “the encounter with the ultimate reality, the intuition of a

truth or power that transcends the evidence of one's senses" (Shorter 1988:36). This is an area where people draw meanings for the things they do. This area basically controls how and why people do what they do as seen in Hobbs and Blank's discussion. According to this view, religion is at the root of culture.

Shorter suggests that while Jacob's view of the levels of culture shows that culture is rich and diverse "it can only be a thumbnail sketch of the complex reality of culture" (1988:36). He however admits that this classification of culture helps to bring out that there is a hierarchy of importance among cultural levels. He goes on to assert that Jacob:

Proposes a view that a religious understanding of reality is at the heart of culture. As one descends more and more deeply to the innermost levels of the cultural personality, one encounters more and more resistance to change...It now becomes clear why evangelization constitutes a fundamental challenge to culture (1988:36).

Mugambi (1989b:120) echoes a similar thought by pointing out that religion serves as a custodian of the society's worldview. This explains why change at an inner cultural level is difficult because one will be dealing with an area which is so conservative than all the other levels. Mugambi (1989b:120) maintains that "at the levels of social structures, basic values and basic world-views the problem is more critical. Every society will resist change at these levels."

While many different views can be suggested with regard to the levels of culture, the two models discussed here suffice to point out that there is an area within culture which is most influential in determining and controlling the social, moral, spiritual and physical life of any society. In order to make sense to a society one has to enter deep into their ideological sphere in which the worldview and social values are found and try to address issues in a manner consistent with the belief system contained therein. The outer levels of society, though important can only be products of deeper inward convictions and thus to address the outer levels will not bring much meaningful cooperation between the Gospel and the society. So an effective inculturation needs to take serious cognisance of this ideological realm as this is the only fertile soil upon which the seed of incarnation will grow.

Failure to inculcate the Gospel in the deeper levels of culture will result in Christians who operate on two conflicting wave lengths. Laurent Magesa (2004:78) identifies these two sides as the unconscious, instinctive behaviour on one hand and the conscious cognitive performance on the other. He states that there are things upon which people respond instinctively or naturally and there are also things to which people feel compelled to act in accordance with official rules. This represents the clash of faith orientation within the African mind as Christianity is taken as an ineffective entity when it comes to issues of spiritual vulnerability and finitude in the African life. If Christianity does not become part of the instinctive level of people. It will be unconsciously relegated to the realm of mere official rules which do not touch the inner faculties of people. Magesa (2004:53-54) uses an example of a devout Catholic man who resorted to ancestor veneration to appease his deceased wife who was said to be unhappy with the new wife whom the living husband had married. Apparently, to free himself from continued spiritual haunting by his late wife he carried out traditional ritualistic sacrifice to appease her and basically ask her to endorse the new wife who had taken her place. He made a ritualistic procedure to assure his late wife that the new wife he had married would be good to the children. John Mbiti shares the same thought when he pointed out that “the majority of our people with little or no formal education still hold to their traditional corpus of beliefs and practices...in times of crisis...people revert to them in secret” (1969:ix). One could offer a small observation here that this reverting to old beliefs and practices is not limited to the less or non-educated persons only. Even some highly educated Africans still operate on this intuitive level. In fact, Pobee (1992:65-66), relates an incident in which an educated clerk who also happened to be a devout Roman Catholic resorted to “traditional explanation of the evil eye” when he sought the source of his sprained ankle. This is a pointer that there is an inner level of belief that both educated and non educated Africans share irregardless of social status or cultural development.

Having looked at the foundational information instrumental to the success of inculturation we will turn now to the subject matter and operation of inculturation.

3.4.3 The subject matter of inculturation

There is no precision among theologians as to the exact content of the subject matter of inculturation. Though the term Gospel may be used by all theologians it is not very easy to pinpoint what the core of that Gospel is. Earlier in 3.3 we looked at Kwesi Dickson's query at using the phrase, 'core of the Gospel' to designate the permanent aspects of the Gospel. He highlighted (1994:118) that it was a simplistic term which presupposes that mankind knows how God would bring salvation in every cultural situation. He opted instead for a characterisation that shows the divine truth to be eternal, immutable and beyond our reach in any total sense.

As discussed by Shorter (1988:76), some theologians have used Justin Martyr's concept of the Spermatic Logos to refer to the pre-existent presence of Christ in all cultures before the incarnation event as well as the entrance of Christ into cultures through incarnation. In this sense Christ becomes the subject matter of inculturation as he is looked at as entering the human scene from above, being enculturated in the Jewish culture and the Greco-Roman cultures and lastly using these cultures to spread his message. So the Logos could be looked at here as being both Jesus himself and his teaching.

John Pobee refers to the subject matter in question as "the soul of the eternal non-negotiable Gospel of Christ" (1992:39). In his discussion he argues that it is not immediately easy to come up with "the pure and unadulterated 'Gospel of Jesus Christ,' if any such thing ever existed" (1992:51). He raises the same argument as the one discussed earlier by Dickson in which Dickson noted that in separating the permanent from the incidental there can never be a "'core of the Gospel' which does not receive a colouring from a missionary's life and thought" (1984:118). Pobee expands on this thought and asserts that "it is impossible to clearly separate the negotiable from the non-negotiable because pure revelation, otherwise called non-negotiable, is and can only be, presented in cultural relativity" (1992:51). Pobee goes on to borrow from the Roman Catholic position so as to draw his position on the matter. He makes use of the terminology used by Pope John XXIII

who in the opening of the Second Vatican Council differentiated between the substance of the doctrine of faith (*depositum fidei*) and the manner in which this deposit of faith is presented. From this and other sources, Pobee concludes that “God’s self-revelation in Jesus is the unchanging Good News. It is the *depositum fidei*” which is contained in the Bible and church tradition (1992:51-52). In his quest for a new reformation which will usher in *skenosis*, Pobee sees Christ as the centre of the Gospel. He stresses that a new reformation of the African church, as carried out through *skenosis* will only be carried out “by returning to the Gospel of Christ through recontextualised Scripture and Tradition” (1992:56). While the idea of *depositum fidei* is helpful in delineating the crucial, non negotiable aspect of the Christian faith as contained in the Bible, the idea of using traditions to the same end may be questionable as they bear more cultural baggage of the historical churches. Dickson registers concern with such an approach that seeks to re-interpret traditions defined and stated in the West. He observes that if such a procedure were to be followed it would itself be self limiting as the rethinking of Christian belief would have been done “along the lines of areas thought defined in the Western context” (1994:119).



In my view from the foregoing discussion it can be maintained that giving a specific term or name to the core of the Gospel is not immediately possible. Given the cultural ensemble through which the Gospel is presented one cannot be presumptuous as to state categorically what the core or unclothed essence really is. It can however be concluded that certain facets or deposits of the core, though in cultural clothing, can be identified and expressed in a new cultural form to convey their essential meaning to that culture. Certain doctrinal positions key to Christianity act as pointers toward building the permanent message of the Christian faith to be translated into all cultures. The key is the person of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, death and resurrection. These events constitute the very basis of the Christian message or *kerygma* and as such they become the starting point of all Christian theology.

Thus it can be concluded here that the subject matter of inculturation is the biblically consistent presentation of God’s love and salvific work through the

incarnated and later glorified person of Jesus Christ his Son (Matthew 1:21). This salvation is appropriated by faith in Christ and is followed by a life of responsibility and accountability (Matthew 3:8). For purposes of this thesis, the term Gospel or the Christian faith/message is used to refer to this redemptive work of Jesus Christ and all the implications that come with it to the believer. If one were to borrow Pobee's words, this is the *depositum fidei* which is non-negotiable, eternal and unchanging. It enters in every culture and is expressible in appropriate culture clothing but still maintains the same efficacy. This is the subject matter of inculturation. It is this message and all its implications that need to be placed or housed within cultures.

3.4.4 Modus operandi of inculturation

Having looked at the subject matter of inculturation, namely precepts of the Christian faith, we will now turn to the method through which inculturation unfolds into a culture. Inculturation takes the existential contexts seriously as it tries to talk to the African in his or her situation. The first way in which inculturation operates is through the transferring of the Christian faith into a given culture through an incarnational model aimed at Africanising Christianity (Bediako 1995:177). Secondly it evangelises the culture integrating it into the eternal Christian heritage (Bediako 1995:177). This second mode is expanded in this thesis to project the theology of transformation. It will be discussed separately below under rubric 3.5.

We will now turn to Catholic theologians' use of the term incarnation and to Pobee's thought of tabernacling the Gospel contained in his *Skenosis* to discuss the translation of the Gospel into culture. The entrance of the Gospel into culture should be understood as being incarnational, following the example of Christ's self emptying model popularly known in theological terms as *kenosis*, (Philippians 2:7). It thus becomes the mode of entrance of the Word of God or the Christian faith into different cultural systems in such a way that it becomes part of those cultures. Teresa Okure (1990:57) notes that inculturation should not be wrongly misconstrued for a theology that primarily seeks to find "suitable

symbols or rituals from a given culture to express the Christian faith especially in worship and catechesis.” Cultural expression is obviously desirable but it is not the sole goal of all inculturation theology. She stresses that “genuine inculturation should be based upon the mystery of the Incarnation, seen not only as a mystery and as an event in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but as a process to be carried out in history till the end time” (Okure 1990:57).

With this understanding it can be noted that incarnation presupposes the merging of two entities which are different from each other; the divine reality and the human reality (1990:57). In this union none of the two realities obliterates the other but they form one organic unity. This is what has been hinted at in the definitions, especially the one espoused by Ukpong (cited in Martey 1993) in which he highlighted that inculturation is the process in which there is interpenetration of both the Christian life and the cultural setting. Rather than merely finding suitable cultural expressions, “inculturation has to do with the incarnational union between Christ and the peoples of a given culture.” The question is not whether we have right forms of expression but:

Whether or not any of us wants Christ to assume his or her own culture, so as to become substantially part of it, to enrich and be enriched by it, and transform it from within, so that it can become the Yoruba, the Kikuyu, the Zulu or any other Christianised culture. Put this way, the answer is yes, since our culture cannot be saved, if it is not assumed by Christ (Okure 1990:59).

The theology of incarnation helps to bring out vividly the idea of the translatability of the Christian faith into any culture. So we are saying that in inculturation, the first step is to get the Gospel right into the culture so as to become part of it. It is not the missionary’s culture which is translated rather, the Gospel, like a seed, is planted into the culture and germinates within the culture and as it grows people within that culture define it as they see it through their own thought categories and cultural expressions. The end result is much more than just contextual expression of the Gospel. The cultural expression becomes, as Okure puts it, “only a fruit of inculturation” (1990:59).

If we look at the implications of the term *kenosis* it will be realised that the term does not refer to the taking up of a body or a dwelling but it refers strictly to an *emptying* of something. Taking up another form of existence is entirely another matter. In other words it was not enough for Jesus to give up heavenly majesty, he instead had to proceed to put on a human form. If the incarnation mode is going to work effectively in inculturation then, it has to go beyond the idea of emptying to the idea of encamping within the culture.

With this *kenosis* thought in mind Shorter (1988:81-88) warns seriously of the three major inadequacies associated with the analogy of incarnation if it is not expanded by other modifications. He points out that if the term is limited to the enculturation of Jesus on earth then when applied to evangelism it will give the impression that “this is equated only with the first insertion of the Gospel into a culture. The understanding of inculturation as an ongoing dialogue between Gospel and culture is more or less overlooked” (1988:81). Shorter cites that the only way to remove this weakness is by enlarging the term’s notion to include the whole Christian mystery. This is because some theologians have taken the term incarnation to represent the whole mystery of Christ which the incarnation inaugurated.

The second inadequacy has to do with the manner in which the analogy, being a Christology from above, encourages a one way view of inculturation. Since it is impossible to comprehend the pre-existent form of the Logos it follows that the human mind may be tempted to picture the Logos “in terms of a disembodied essence being injected into a concrete human culture” (1988:82). This understanding will be counter productive as it takes us back to the idea of a non culturally tinged core of the Gospel or ‘world of essences’ as Shorter puts it (1988:82). If the Christian faith – Christ himself is transmitted from one culture to another it follows that this transmission of the Gospel requires a cultural conveyor belt. As such, incarnation, in an inculturation sense, needs to be viewed, not only from above but as a continuing part of culture. “Once inaugurated, the

incarnation continues upon earth to recruit culture from culture through the ordinary processes of history and human communication” (Shorter 1988:82).

The third inadequacy arises from much emphasis being put on the enculturation of Jesus and how he assumed a specific culture. Shorter warns that this “may encourage people to succumb to the temptation of culturalism” (1988:82). When this happens religion is radically transformed by culture, in which case culture triumphs over religion (1988:42). This temptation arises as people put much focus on reforming the Christian message to suit the culture and in the process miss to reflect on the transformative element of the Gospel in the culture. This is why an expanded view of the operative mode of incarnation is needed if it will work as an effective ingredient of inculturation. In order for this expanded view to work, two elements need to be included namely; the concept of permanency and the transformative implication of realised inculturation. The first element will be discussed here while the second, transformation, will be treated separately as a topic on its own.

3.4.5 Expansion of the idea of permanency in inculturation

For the analogy of incarnation to work properly in inculturation theology, it needs to carry with it the concept of permanency. By permanency here is meant, the continual abiding activity of Jesus the Christ in a culture as opposed to a short term contact and departure implied in one time incarnation. This is where Pobee’s *skenosis* theology plays an effective role. While the Greek term *kenos* used in Philippians 2:7 refers to the *emptying* of something, the term *skene* or *skenoo*, refers to taking up an abode, living or encamping. This can be seen in John 1:14 where the term *skenoo* is used to show that Jesus “tabernacled³⁵/made his dwelling” among us.

³⁵ *The Zondervan Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (1975) translate the term *eskenosen* as ‘tabernacled’ while the Kurt Aland et al..(1966) translate it as ‘lived.’ The main reason for highlighting this terminology here is to show that *skenosis* is key to real incarnation. Incarnation becomes real not only because of the emptying but because of the ‘living among.’ See also Verbrugge (2000).

With this in mind it may be asserted that in order for *kenosis* to be complete it has to go together with *skenosis*. Incarnation achieves its full meaning when there is both an emptying and an encamping/dwelling. When Pobee brings up the idea of encamping, dwelling or housing the eternal soul of the Gospel into the culture, he is referring to such an idea of the permanent presence of the Christian faith into a culture. This concept remedies the flaw borne in the one time incarnation protested by Shorter. Through *skenosis*, the Christian faith/message is incarnated permanently into the culture.

A key feature to the successful operation of inculturation is the permanent encampment of the Gospel in any culture it enters. When the Gospel is made to reside permanently it interacts with and permeates those levels of the culture that play a definitive role in the whole life of a society. As discussed earlier, the strategic place to achieve this end would be the inner level of culture in which is contained the worldview, ideology and value system of the people. This is the heart of culture which dictates why people do and what they do. All other levels of culture obtain their commands from this level. All new outside information is judged through the lenses of this inner level of meaning and cognisance. For the Christian message to be looked at as part of the culture and not be superficially adopted as an outsider it needs to plant itself deep within this level. Unless Christianity permeates culture to this inner level it will never be seen as part of the people. The faith needs to enter into culture and sustain itself through the culture if it is to last. It has to intertwine itself with inner thought categories of a culture so that it is understood as one with the culture. The Gospel interacts with the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and any other habits contained within a given culture. According to Shorter (1988:12) “this is a phenomenon that transcends mere acculturation. It is the stage when a human culture is enlivened by the Gospel from within, a stage which presupposes a measure of reformulation or, more accurately re-interpretation.”

This goes beyond merely correlating aspects of Christianity and any particular culture for this would be merely adaptation and accommodation. “Inculturation is

not an effort to merely find ‘correspondence’ between African and Christian religiosity. It is a much more radical process than simply replacing African religious practices with Christian ones” (Magesa 2004:144). Rather, the beliefs and doctrines of Christianity must themselves form a cultural system and able to affect the intangible level of culture which consists of meanings and conceptions (Shorter1988:40). Thus Inculturation takes the indigenous culture seriously by discovering the authentic human values inherent in it which are compatible with the Christian values or those which can be developed as ‘seeds of the Gospel’ (1973:69). Inculturation involves “a deep experience in the life of the individual and the community that occurs when there is a constant search for identification between Gospel and culture and when there is mutual correction and adjustment between them” (Magesa 2004:145). So, if inculturation and *skenosis* are applied properly to any situation they would entail an effective emptying of the Gospel into a context. The element of permanency implies that the Christian faith will not be suspended in certain cultural practices as being irrelevant as it would have become “customary – part of a people’s custom” (Shorter1988:62). The faith will participate continually in addressing the cultural items within a society.

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The process of inculturation involves acculturation. According to Shorter before inculturation takes place there occurs an acculturation between the Christianised culture of the missionary and the hitherto un-christianised culture to which he or she comes (Shorter 1988:12). Shorter goes on to mention that:

There has to be an acculturation stage in which Christianity (in a previous cultural form) seeks expression through the elements proper to the new culture. It follows that Christian evangelisation can only take place through the ordinary human process of acculturation, and that the message of the Gospel passes from culture to culture and from history to history.

The main issue during the acculturation stage of will be the dynamic and continuous work of making the Gospel dwell permanently and relevantly in a given cultural scenario so that it is readily understood by the people. Laurent Magesa (2004:150) recognises that in the early stages of missionary proclamation of the Gospel, the missionary can be expected to operate like a Judaizer with

regards to harbouring a certain cultural possessiveness of the Gospel. This can be taken to be the same as Shorter's (1988:12) acculturation stage in which the missionary will rely on his culture to transport the Gospel into another culture. This is inevitable. Magesa goes on however to point out that "what goes against the spirit of the Gospel is not this initial attitude but rather the inability of the missionary to recognise the translatability of the Gospel or remove obstacles from the process" (2004:150). When this happens the Gospel will dialogue with all important aspects of the culture so as for the faith to be rooted within the culture. "Meanings and motivations are transformed from a Christianised culture to a culture in course of being Christianised and vice versa" (Shorter1988:62).

In its pragmatic focus, inculturation does not operate by merely giving a set of rules and regulations onto cultural adherents, but as Shorter (1988:11) points out, just as culture is a developing process, there must therefore be a continuous dialoguing between faith and culture. The idea of dialogue removes the notion of precision and finality to the theological enterprise; rather it encourages improvement, progressiveness and sometimes even a revision of past affirmations. Shorter (1988:12) acknowledges that there are times when dialogue may have to be re-started. As long as faith is present to a culture dialogue must take place. It is a process that never comes to an end. For all this to happen the *skenotic* idea of permanent residence must be maintained in inculturation. This very approach entails that the practice of local initiation rites, as one key custom in a given culture will indeed continually interact with the doctrinal teachings of the Christian faith, thereby producing a culturally and theologically acceptable synthesis.

3.5 Transformation

Transformation theology can be looked at as a corollary of the theology of inculturation or the second logical step in inculturation. The term transformation has been used a lot in the definition of the term inculturation and it is looked at as part of the inculturative process and not necessarily a theological process within

itself. A brief review of some of the definitions and operations of inculturation would be in order so as to glance at the use and importance of transformation.

It can be said that the reason for inculturating the Gospel is so that it transforms the cultures. Magesa (2004:138) looks at inculturation as a key to transformation. He points out that “It is generally acknowledged today that while the proclamation of the Gospel must transform cultures, it cannot do so satisfactorily unless it is ‘at home’ with them ‘taking’ them on board’ as it were and becoming part of them”(2004:138). He views transformation as a necessary consequence of inculturation. He (2004:146) points out that when radical inculturation is employed, it will involve two axes; *understanding and transformation*. The former takes place only through linguistic forms and worldview of the people encountering the Gospel while the latter, transformation, is a consequence of the former and it comes through the power of God as it changes minds, hearts and behaviours.

The notion of transformation is also included in Pedro Arrupe’s definition which we looked at earlier in 3.4. In his definition Arrupe says inculturation is an incarnation of the Christian faith and message in such a way that it “becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, *transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’*”³⁶ (Shorter 1988:11). Shorter’s (1988:61) perspective on inculturation suggests that through evangelism, “the one who is evangelised is enabled to have a *transforming encounter*”³⁷ with the crucified and risen Lord.” Ukpong reasons that as Christ assumes a particular culture and becomes part of it, the result is transformation of the culture from within (cited in Martey 1993). David Bosch, commenting on Arrupe’s definition emphasises that the focus of inculturation is on “the ‘new creation’ on the transformation of the old, on the plant which, having flowered from its seed, is at the same time something fundamentally new when compared with that seed.”³⁸ This encounter is what gives birth to the imaginative and creative act that we call

³⁶ Emphasis is mine

³⁷ Emphasis is mine

³⁸ Bosch dismisses the approach that takes the idea of faith as ‘kernel’ and culture as the ‘husk,’ instead he adopts a metaphor of the flowering of a seed implanted into the soil of a particular culture” (1991:454).

the act of faith” (Shorter1988:61). This view is born out of the understanding that the aim of preaching the Gospel is to administer change in the lives of people. Whenever the Gospel comes into contact with sinners, it changes their lives. Shorter (1988:83-84) argues in his inculturation that the same applies to those aspects of culture which may to some degree be rendered sinful or rather contrary to the principles of sound doctrine. Just as a converted person needs to be transformed when he/she comes into contact with the Gospel so does his/her culture as well (Romans 12:2).

As to how this transformation takes place, Shorter (1988:61) argues that the tenets of the Gospel, as noted earlier, “radically affect the profoundest level of culture – that of meaning, they initiate a chain reaction, a kind of ‘nuclear fission’ which disturbs the patterns of meaning that are already there and creates new patterns out of symbolic ‘particles’ old and new.” In this process, the Gospel invites people to reappraise their cultures in the light of the new values. As this happens evangelised cultures go through *metanoia* or conversion at the profoundest level (1988:84). Charles Nyamiti (1971:19-21) discusses transformation as a necessary aspect in the comparative step of his African theological method. Arguing for a Roman Catholic position Nyamiti poses an important question; is it not possible to transform the ‘theology’ of the African religions into Catholic theology? Using tribal initiation rites as his case study for transformation, Nyamiti suggests that ‘theologies’ of the African religions:

need to be penetrated and transformed by the Christian teaching in such a way that they would be transmuted into Christian theology...the object of transformation would not be the individual religious beliefs, but the ensemble of the African ‘theologies’ taken as coherent wholes organically rooted in their religious and cultural milieu (1971:19).

It can thus be concluded from the above definitions and explanations of inculturation that it entails transformation. In other words, once one embarks on the path of inculturation, transformation of culture would be inevitable. Transformation is an integral part of African theological endeavours without which the theological enterprise is not complete. Having operated on the most

inner levels of cognisance, inculturation should transform the thought and behaviour pattern of a society.

From the foregoing, it is the aim of this thesis to expand and develop the transformation thought borne within the theology of inculturation. This is also in line with the thought proposed by Shorter when he mentioned that incarnation on its own, without an expanded form, may not fit the bill in effectively addressing any cultural elements with which it comes into contact. The transformative aspect of inculturation should be emphasised and brought out clearly and objectively so that the concept of change does not remain a silent by-product but an intended end. In other words, by developing this theology we are saying transformation becomes something that a theological enterprise works toward rather than just a result of other theological endeavours. It should not operate behind the screens but be seen as an active ingredient of the theological process.

The main thought maintained in transformation is that, as Christ comes to change people, he also touches on their culture and administers necessary changes in line with his teaching. In fact the thought of changing people entails changing their culture as well. One cannot transform people within a society without at the same time transforming their culture or vice versa, the two are inseparable. According to Shorter (1988:62) the image of Christ is present in the social life of peoples' behaviour. Bosch (1991:454) concurs with this thought when he points out that the coordination of Gospel and culture should be structured christologically. Bosch (1991:454) suggests that when Christ is planted within a culture, faith should be given the chance "to start a history of its own in each people and its experience of Christ." When the Gospel is translated into a culture, it should assume a transformative role. Thus from a theological viewpoint transformation, as used theologically in this thesis, may be looked at as the positive change that is administered to people, cultures or societies as a result of interaction with the Gospel message. It is an agent of positive cultural change or purification of culture (Pobee1992:47). It is not a replacement of cultural elements but a renewal and improvement of the same.

The transformative focus of inculturation is that the “Gospel as proclaimed in the particular circumstances forces the culture to re-discover itself in its values, languages, symbols, and metaphors and to *compare and weigh them against it* (Magesa 2004:154). So as the Gospel interacts with culture, there appears a constellation of meanings but also a weighing, judging and scrutinizing of cultural elements. In other words, images from the Gospel are mixed with images from within the culture so as to bring about a unified, organic expression of both theological and cultural kinds. Shorter says, “through evangelisation, these images are brought into contact with an existing framework of meaning in the culture being evangelised. The latter thus acquires new or surplus meaning (Shorter 1988:62).

So while transformation is a necessary component of inculturation, it needs to be magnified more than it is now so that its complimentary role vis-à-vis inculturation is not lost into oblivion. Transformation keeps inculturation in check so that, as Shorter warned, culturalism does not end up being the theological product of the inculturative endeavour. Inculturation should not be left to produce transformation automatically. Transformation is not done for the sake of merely changing things but it is done on the call of sound Christian doctrine. It is an inevitable route in every instance in which the Gospel meets culture. The key issue is not to replace primal aspects with categories of another culture for this will not constitute theological transformation. For real transformation to take place it has to be theologically based and yet maintain a local cultural flavour of the new outlook. With this we now turn to the *modus operandi* of inculturation – transformation theology.

3.6 Operation of inculturation-transformation theology

Transformation, as a theology, operates together with its inculturation counterpart. As the message of the Christian faith is continually setting its roots within a given culture, it will do two things. First, it will assume appropriate cultural language and clothing, (i.e., inculturation) at the inner cognisant level of culture so that it is not only identified with the value system of the people involved but becomes their instructive religion from which they draw spiritual and moral guidance. It sets

itself at the religious epicentre of the culture. It is from this level that it will be in a position to make constructive contribution to the worldview contained at this level. According to Mugambi (1989b:122), efforts toward social transformation require that we “take into account all presuppositions, customs, traditions, beliefs and practices which are taken for granted and are accepted by the majority of the people in the society.” Interaction with influential areas of culture will produce positive results. Nurnberger (2007:97) points out that when the Gospel enters into a cultural situation, “it does not enter into a vacuum, but enters into an existing structure of assumptions, values and norms and transforms it from within.”

Secondly, building on a successful inculturation a transformative dialogue begins to take place between the precepts of Christian doctrine and primal religious beliefs. The same thought is put differently by Bosch (1991:454) who says that inculturation has a double movement which consist of the inculturation of Christianity and the Christianisation of culture. Understanding of the Christian message is prerequisite to effective inculturation. Inculturation ensures that people have a good grasp of the Christian faith so that on one axis they *understand* the message and on the other they get *transformed* (Magesa 2004:146). In other words the faith has to be planted before it can influence its surroundings. Bosch further highlights that the two principles at work in inculturation involve:

On the one hand there is the ‘indigenizing’ principle, which affirms that the gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is at home with the gospel. But then there is the pilgrim’ principle, which warns us that the gospel will put us out of step with society – for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system (1991:454).

As the Gospel message sets itself into any culture there are bound to be changes that will challenge the status quo. Some of these changes may be unwelcome, hence the ‘painful absorption of the word of Christ’ which Bosch has hinted at. This painful absorption is transformation at work. According to Nurnberger (2007:97), “God finds people where they are and leads them in the direction of where he wants them to be.” Our major concern at this stage is with the exact

process that takes places during this transformational dialogue. It is not enough to merely suggest that the Gospel should dialogue with and be absorbed into culture. The question is how should this happen?

3.7 Central presuppositions in inculturation and transformation

Certain presuppositions have to be put in place for the transformative project to have sound theological results. Here we are referring to two important elements which are the subject matter and the operation field of inculturation-transformation.

3.7.1 The biblical presupposition

In his discussion on religion and cultural change, Shorter maintains that there is need for religion, as a transformative agent, to maintain its essential identity as it enters culture (1988:42). He insists that in the dialogue and transformation process, Christ's figure remains dominant (1988:62). This same thought is echoed by Pobee (1992:22), who in his *skenosis* theology maintains that in order for us to properly enculturate Christianity into Africa:

We should take serious notice of the new local circumstances and be adventurous enough to make experiments to see whether we can vary things in the new conditions through knowledge of thought trends of the people. *This pre-supposes a knowledge of what is non-negotiable and³⁹ what is negotiable.* In other words, a *sound theological knowledge is essential...*"

This suggests that the Bible must be maintained as the primary transformative agent in all inculturation endeavours. This does not suggest that one will ignore the Judeo, Greco-Roman cultural matrix in the Bible or the cultural colouring that came through missionary endeavours (Mugambi 1989a:124). Precisely we are referring to those transcultural aspects of the Gospel that make it translatable into all cultures. According to Magesa "the translatability of the Bible means its transculturality" (2004:148). These transcultural precepts have to be maintained regardless of whether they compliment or contradict our cultural norms. Nyamiti emphasises that there is within the biblical revelation the kernel of Christian

³⁹ My emphasis

teaching which is an essential and a universal element. Though this kernel is conveyed through cultural expressions, it nevertheless goes beyond culture. “It is the kernel that, while remaining entirely unchanged, has to penetrate the African religions and Christianise them” (1971:22). In his *skenosis* theology, Pobee advocates for a certain level of reformation of African theology and he asserts that the definition of reformation:

Implied that there is a kernel which is to be given a new form which has transitory validity, an eternal truth which is non negotiable but can have a contingent mode of thought or perspective. A reformation seeks to go back to the non-negotiable kernel or truth which cannot be surrendered without the faith losing its character as Christianity or its *raison d’etre*. (1992:47).

In his discussion of the non-negotiable kernel of the Gospel, Pobee (1992:56) arrives at the position that while foreign cultural traits are inevitable we still can use the *depositum fidei* in the Bible as the basis for cultural transformation and purification. What this suggests is that African theologians need to have settled their convictions as to the place, and work of the Bible in shaping African theology. “The church is a bearer of the Gospel. It thereby exercises a purifying function towards culture” (Pobee 1992:57) In this thesis, the presupposition is taken that the Bible is the starting point which, after having been planted within the deeper levels of culture, further dialogues with the culture to produce renewed, purified and transformed cultural perspectives. In order for this to happen, the Bible has to be applied onto individual cultural items as will be shown below.

Bosch (1991:427) has very helpful insights in the area of theological contextualisation and transformation. He points out that in constructing a local theology there is need for an experiential theology in which there is an ongoing dialogue between text and context. He is very clear however to point out how this dialogue should operate. He mentions that the dialogue should not lead to “an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies. This danger – the danger of *relativism* – is present...” In other words, if construction of local theologies does not take cognisance of the transformative aspect of the teachings of God’s special revelation, then we might

end up in a situation where culturalism becomes the norm. Bosch looks at the interaction of text and context and points out how the two need to relate. It is important in transformation to take cognisance of this dialogue. While citing Kung Bosch says, “it is the gospel which is the *norma normans*, the ‘norming norm.’ Our reading of the context is also a norm, but in a derived sense; it is the *norma normata*, the ‘normed norm’” (1991:430). Bosch insists that to hold such a view does not mean that we disregard the contribution of the context in the reading of the Gospel. He maintains that since the Gospel can only be read in the perspective of a certain context so as to make sense to people within that context, it follows that to posit the Gospel as “criterion means that it may, and often does, critique the context and our reading of it” (1991:430).

Bosch further discusses the interaction between the Gospel and culture from the perspective of theory and praxis. He argues that regardless of how important context/culture may be taken, “it is not to be taken as the sole and basic authority for theological reflection” (1991:431). He insists that there cannot be praxis without theory. Theory is critical for offering the appropriate control for praxis. In other words there is need for critical theology which is based on context/culture and also controls the very context. It acts as a theological reference point for culture. Basing his arguments on Stackhouse, Bosch emphasises that since all praxis is dependent on “a quite specific, highly schematized and synthetic, social and historical dogma” the call is to come up with a *theoria* which is sufficiently true and one which is implementable (1991:431). So according to Bosch, while there are suspicions and diversions as to whether there is a doctrinally orthodox position or *depositum fidei* this does not suggest that we do not seek one since “where some such agreed-upon faith tradition is completely absent, contextualization just spawns new sects of fideist politics and renders theological discourse utterly useless” (1991:431). The same thought is echoed by Nyamiti who insists that African expositions on morality and theology need to have the Bible as the primary basis rather than taking “African ethical and social laws or customs as the principal foundation of theological adaptation” (1971:14-15). From this discussion it can be concluded that a presupposition of the primacy of the

Bible as the main judge of context is paramount in inculturative – transformational theology.

3.7.2 The primal presupposition

The second presupposition concerns the primal aspect and its role as a vital secondary source in the formulation of African theology. The question raised here is; how should the African traditional cultures operate during inculturation and transformation? While it has been asserted in the above presupposition that the Bible operates as the primary source in theology, the question still needs to be asked as to whether the Gospel should impose its teachings onto culture while the culture simply sits at the receiving end? How should the synthesis of the Christianity and culture work out? What aspects of the culture need to be incorporated into this synthesis? It is very important in the inculturative-transformation process that the manner of this relationship is clearly defined since doing so helps to guard against particularism on either side of these two entities. The main issue here has to do with the degree to which the primal values should be included in theology.

Referring to the African religious values, Bishop T. Tshibangu suggests that “the question facing theologians is whether these values are to be maintained and revitalised as they now stand, or whether they are to be given a new form or even rectified” (1983:77). This discussion basically goes back to what has earlier been stated with regards to the three approaches to African theology, namely; the continuity, discontinuity and translation approaches. The emphasis here is that within the translation spectrum within which my theological reflection falls, it still remains important to determine what role primal religions will play. Such an *a priori* is needed so that in the process of reflecting on cultural items, due action will be applied to both Christian and cultural elements.

While there is a relative consensus as to the importance of primal religions in the ongoing expositions on African theology there exist variations of how the information from these religions should be used. Mbiti distinguishes between

several approaches. One view holds that “African religiosity is demonic and should not be allowed to enter the life of individual Christians or the church” (Mbiti 1986:57). This obviously falls under the discontinuity group. Those on the extreme end of the continuum strongly “wish to revive and retain African religion in place of any religion (1986:57). Those who are rather apologetical “regard African religion as having prepared the ground for the ready and rapid acceptance of the Christian faith.” (1986:57). Mbiti (1986:57) states another group here which is relevant to inculturation - transformation. He asserts: “the majority are those who have to deal with the issue at its practical and pastoral levels in which many Christians live with the realities of both the Christian faith and their traditional religiosity.” Because of this pastoral thrust the theology of inculturation and translation, while it falls within the translation approach, tends to be inclined toward discontinuity on some issues.

Bearing in mind that the African situation is the ground into which Christianity will be planted and the ground upon which Christianity needs to be developed, it is essential to have a fair understanding of how its aspects ought to be used in the presentation, propagation and practice of Christian theology. The role of the African culture is determined by “those aspects of African life and thought which, coming from the past, remain part of a living tradition” (Dickson 1984:130).

In the inculturation-transformation theology emphasis is put on approaching African primal religions as vital sources of theology. This is borne from the understanding that since the African situation is the breeding ground for inculturative-transformational theology it should offer the building blocks for effective local theology. Christianity cannot be deeply understood by African Christians if it does not take serious cognisance of African realities. This does not imply that there should be hasty inclusion of these realities into Christian doctrines. Were this to be done, it would lead to highly unsound theologies which would be out of line with the biblical tradition.

The issue at stake here is to employ African primal categories in such a manner that they serve as some forms of thesauruses and reference points for clarifying concepts of faith within the biblical tradition. This is even more important if we take into account the fact that Christianity, as Pobee puts it, is an alloy of other cultures. It is a “composite of the teaching of Jesus, Semitic culture, Greco-Roman culture and European culture” (Pobee 1979:56). As such there are important terms or concepts within it which the majority of people will not be able to connect with from face value. The concept of the *logos* in John 1:1, for instance is not readily understandable to an ordinary person who does not have the slightest appreciation of Greek philosophy. Even though ordinary people may be seen to grasp that the *logos* concept refers to the Christ it still remains true that the appeal which it makes to them is different from that which it makes to the Greeks. The impact is different due to different cultural backgrounds.

As a result primal aspects should be used to give readily sound, understandable and appealing meanings to Christian concepts that are otherwise not readily clear to the general mindset. I am not referring here to the rewriting of theology/doctrine but I am trying to point out that, rather than hastily adopting primal aspects simply because we need an African flavoured theology, we should use the primal scenario in a sound way to further people’s understanding of God’s Word. The primal aspect has a role to help portray key transformational principles of the Word of God. Since the presentation of the Gospel irreducibly involves culture, it becomes apparent that the African culture takes the role of vouchsafing Christian principles to the African mind. This requires us to recognise African primal religions as a contributing source of theology. The only way theologians can do meaningful African Christian theology is “when account is taken of the African religio-cultural situation as one of the source materials of theologising” (Dickson 1984:124).

To recognise the primal aspect as a source is to try and draw aspects from within the culture and use them as tools to further enrich not only the expression of Christian theology but its identification with the lives of the people involved.

African theology is meant to “involve a sustained articulation of faith which would bear the marks of an original African experience” (Dickson 1984:120). The use of the primal situation as a source does not take place merely for the purposes of mixing Christian and cultural elements as has been assumed by many people. Theologians should not do African theology just for the sake of amalgamating Christian and traditional beliefs. The important thing is to “arrive at a distinctive meditation upon faith in Christ that does justice to the life circumstances of the African” (Dickson 1984:122). African traditional religions reveal the aspirations of people within African cultures. As such care should be taken to discover what those aspirations are and utilise them in the formulation of the relevant theology.

In her paper, “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” Mercy Amba Oduyoye emphasises the inevitability of interaction between the Christian faith and the African culture. Oduyoye seems to hold a view that seeks to preserve cultural tenets. She makes a very important observation in the manner that Christian theology should use cultural phenomena in theologising. She highlights that since religion plays an important part in the inner levels of African culture, when there are cultural changes that come as a result of technological advancement, the religious belief area still remains active. Oduyoye maintains that “African beliefs and practices have provided, and continue to provide, Africa with a philosophical fountainhead for the individual’s life and for the ordering of society” (1983:115). As a result Oduyoye calls for the utilisation of the African religious beliefs so as to “ensure that the African spirit revolutionizes Christianity to the benefit of all who adhere to it” (Oduyoye 1983:116).

3.7.2.1 The primal worldview

In considering the role of African primal religions in theology it is of paramount importance to pay serious attention to the nature of the primal world view. According to Mugambi (1989a:126) for any meaningful conversion to take place “there has to be a strong link between Christianity and the worldview of the African.” He points out that complete conversion should affect the basic

worldview, value system social structure and practices (1989b:127). This means by affecting the inner levels of culture the outward social systems will also be transformed. With regards to how the worldview might be used, Bediako also has a discussion which may prove profitable here. He (1995:93-95) has an insightful discussion on the use of the primal factor in the process of shaping African theology. He assesses Harold Turner's⁴⁰ six feature analysis of the nature of the primal worldview. According to Turner, the primal worldview:

1. Has a sense of kinship with nature.
2. Has a deep sense of the finitude, weakness, sinfulness and impurity of mankind and that mankind stands in need of outside help to him.
3. Man lives in a personalised universe in which man "lives with an awareness of the presence of transcendent powers which however are ambivalent."
4. There is a partnership between man and the benevolent spirit world.
5. There is a sense of the afterlife which manifests itself in the belief of living dead or ancestors.
6. Upholds a unity between the spiritual and the physical.

This characterisation helps to grasp the assertion that primal religious worldview is "decidedly this worldly" and it "encompasses God and man in an abiding relationship" (Bediako 1995:101). This worldview is tailor-made to address the earthly needs of the people while also putting importance on issues pertaining to their spiritual existence. This characterisation describes the manner in which the African relates to the different facets of culture that concern his/her life. These features need to be regarded closely during inculturation and transformation. This is because (Bediako1995:95) there are things in the primal worldview which are useful and applicable to the Christian tradition. Such things can be used as tools of educational importance to enhance Christian teachings through the primal language and symbols. This is because there exists an affinity between the two religious aspects. Because of this affinity, Bediako (1995:95) quotes Turner as saying, "it is the people of the primal religions who have made the greatest response to the Christian faith." Evangelism becomes relatively easier because of the closeness of association that connects the two realities.

⁴⁰ Bediako's discussion is based on Harold Turner's article, "The primal religions of the world and their study," in Victor Hayes (Ed). *Australian Essays in World Religions*, Bedford Park: Australian Association for World Religions, 1977.

Bediako stresses that while it is important to take note and make use of the affinities between the Christian tradition and the primal aspect, efforts should go beyond identifying the Christian affinities in the primal worldview. He says there ought to be a far reaching significance for our understanding of the nature of the Christian faith (Bediako 1995:96). There is need to go beyond minimal ‘paradigm shift’ by further pursuing the matter by asking “how the primal imagination might bring its own peculiar gifts to the shaping of Christian affirmation” (1995:96). Rather than merely establishing similarities and affinities it is of vital importance in African theology to go deeper into the African worldview to use the aspects with the religious worldview to transmit the teachings of the Christian faith. If theology focuses on similarities and parallels only, it will not achieve much theological quality as it would be comprised of mere correspondences.

Bediako (1995:97) goes on to use the example of the idea of Transcendence of God to argue for the point that Christian theology should go beyond merely using the African idea of God without taking into consideration what he refers to as the unresolved multiplicity. Bediako states, “by stressing the centrality and uniqueness of God in African tradition, African theology has, however, left the wider spirit world of African primal religions – divinities, ancestors, natural forces – unaccounted for” (1995:97). He holds that African theology has only dealt with part of the problem and has left the unity and multiplicity of the Transcendent. In this, Bediako stresses that African Christian theology should extend much further than the concept of God to other constituent parts of the primal world. In order to properly understand the extent of Bediako’s (1995:99) thought it is necessary to analyse the following assertion of his:

African theology, by establishing its link with its African world items of the One Supreme, Ultimate God of Africa, has answered to only one part of the total spiritual universe of African primal religions. What goes on in actual daily religious life and practice – in the company of divinities, ubiquitous spirits, ancestors – has been left virtually untouched. Thus whilst affirmation of continuity has been made on the properly religious grounds of the ‘unity’ of God and is supported by evidence of African religious thought, African theology

has failed to wrestle adequately with the ‘multiplicity’ of Transcendent and has undercut the contribution which it can make towards a fresh Christian account of the Transcendent, drawing on its background in the primal imagination of African primal religious.

While our discussion does not really centre on the idea of God, the subject is used here to point out an important principle of exhaustive analysis and utility of the primal religious contribution that Bediako is making. While it is not immediately clear how the belief in other spirits are to be used in the construction of theology, the point is clear that no part of the primal religious aspect is to be ignored in formulating a relevant African Christian theology. Ignoring any primal aspect, in favour of those which are already congruent with established systematic theology, will not cause the former to fade into oblivion nor will it shape itself up to theologically acceptable forms. In fact it can be asserted that one of the main reasons why most Africans revert back to practices which may be rendered unorthodox is because such things would not have been properly dealt with on a theological note. This results in the scenario that Magesa has highlighted when he postulated the dualistic oscillation between the intuitive and cognitive mode of operation in which most Africans find themselves (2004:77).

This is not to say here that the elements discussed by Bediako should be uncritically integrated into Christian theology but such elements should be used as theological departure points and not mere affinities. Such ideas will be weighed as to the reason why they are practiced and appropriate transformative measures taken in accordance with the respective doctrine or hermeneutics of the church involved.

3.7.3 Juxtaposition of biblical and cultural elements

Following the two presuppositions, namely the biblical and the primal aspect, the next process in inculturation transformation involves a juxtaposition exercise in which items from the primal aspect are put together with those from the biblical tradition. This will be carried out with the idea of preparing the ground for apologetic dialogue of these elements. In doing African theology African religions have to be taken seriously as the main area of dialogue. “Through this

method it is possible to confront the African religions with Christianity, determine the theological status of the former and find out from them the elements capable of being adopted into Christian theology” (Nyamiti 1971:18).

In his discussion of the comparative approach to African theology Nyamiti (1971:15-25), makes an important observation with regards to the use of primal religions and cultural moral aspects in developing African Christian theology. He (1971:21) groups the teachings into three categories. The first group is that of African teachings which bear similarity to Christian teachings. Such teachings may have been borrowed from Christianity and made to fit into the African primal situation. The second group consists of ‘natural religious beliefs which bear analogies to the Christian mysteries.’ The last group is made up of teachings which can be classified as being erroneous, superstitious and immoral.

When the comparative rod is applied to these groups Nyamiti (1971:21) holds that the first group should naturally get adopted into Christian categories. It is important however not to be haphazard in the approach as the Christian meanings might have been lost due to adaptation and assumed unorthodox meanings under the new contexts into which they had been adopted. The hermeneutics of the Nging people mentioned in 2.4.3 rings a bell here. They adapted Christian concepts and elements for cultural purposes and ended up with unorthodox conclusions suited for their cultural practices. As for the second group Nyamiti (1971:21) states that they “have to be Christianised by being given a Christian dimension corresponding to their analogy with the Christian mysteries and to the relation which they bear to the core or central element in the African religion.” As for the third group, it is clear that they have to be rejected. Nyamiti warns however that “care has to be taken not to reject them too hastily: a superstitious or immoral element may sometimes be bound up with an element valuable for Christianisation” (1971:21). With this he advises that theologians exercise caution to draw the good from the evil. Since, according to Nyamiti, Christianity surpasses any other religion, in the making up of African theology it “would be insufficient and even wrong to limit oneself to the Christianisation of the African religious and moral doctrines...one should compare the resulting theology to the

entire Christian doctrine and see whether there are Christian truths missing from it” (1971:22).

With this I now turn to the specific inculturation-transformational steps I am proposing to use in the juxtaposition stage.

3.7.4 Steps in juxtaposition

First and foremost we have the empirical step. During this stage a specific cultural item within the cultural worldview should be selected for theological reflection, i.e. initiation rites. Once the cultural subject has been identified the next thing would be to establish the constituent parts that make up the entire practice. This means at this stage a complete, unbiased phenomenological study of the item should be carried out.

This type of study is done with the view to understanding the interconnectedness of aspects in initiation as a whole. According to Cullen Young (1935:211), in dealing with African rites we do not have independent and separable aspects “that we may select this and reject that...but we are faced with a picture of what a certain body of belief means to an African as acted out in educational and instructional form.” Relevant analysis of selected constituent parts needs to be done in view of how they relate to the rest of the elements involved in initiation. According to Ephigenia W. Gachiri (2000:119), such a study should be done thoroughly and with respect. This suggests that the theologian should respectfully narrate or outline the cultural aspects of the item without employing his subjective religious/theological bias. He should try to present the rite as the adherents of the practice would do it. At this stage one should focus on accurately describing phenomena as much as possible. The constituent parts are to be studied closely as these are the building blocks of any particular cultural rite.

The second step is the stage of critical enquiry. The theologian is to carry out an in-depth analysis of the constituent parts of initiation including their roles, ritual chronology, importance and meaning. This means the theologian should go deeper than the phenomenological level to the inner realm of worldview, ideology and

values. At this stage the theologian should endeavour to ascertain the reasons as to why certain things are done within this cultural practice. What are the underlying values, beliefs, reasons and purposes for doing this? Such a question can be employed to the whole rite in general but should mostly extend to the constituent parts since it is these distinct elements that carry inward meaning surrounding the rite. According to Gachiri (2000:119) carrying out such a step will enable the theologian to “find out the values that lie hidden deep within the whole process...” of initiation.

If we analyse the underlying reasons behind the Masasi phenomenon involving bare breast (described in 2.3.2) a few observations would be made. This phenomenon is symbolic of the pleasant sorrow and concern that mothers have for their children undergoing circumcision. Sitting with bare breasts gives the mothers the feeling of connection and identification with what their sons are going through. Furthermore it demonstrates that the children are in the process of growing up and ready to officially assume personal responsibility. This could also be a symbolic form of supplication in that, since they cannot be present to see their sons being circumcised the best thing the mothers can do is wish and hope that everything goes well. If any transformative action were to be applied onto this phenomenon, it would be of great importance to take serious cognisance of these key reasons and values. The same could be taken as a departure point for introducing new or modified symbolism if necessary. Any new symbolism to be suggested should bear these concerns in mind.

According to Gachiri (2000:119) “...each practice within a culture has advantages that justify it even if these values may not appear valid to those outside the given culture.” As such the main idea being emphasised at this stage is to go beyond the mere practice of a cultural item and employ investigative questions that try to establish the meanings given to the processes that make up the rite. It is necessary to grasp the ideology, philosophy or understanding that lies beneath the practice of any action. The theologian should seek to find out what the major concern is within the action. In other words, what is being addressed? What are the

motivating factors behind the practice? “What deep human need is satisfied by keeping this custom” (Gachiri 2000:120). Is there anything that is being avoided/feared or anything that is being sought? What is the nature of the value behind the practice? Is the major concern a spiritual or psychological one? In some instances some actions are done for spiritual reasons while in other cases some practices are done for social, moral and even physical reasons. I remember an occasion in which a young lady lost her son, who was at a very young age. Apparently this was the second time she lost a baby at a very young age. I noticed that as people were leaving the cemetery upon completion of all burial procedures, a few ladies remained behind at the grave together with the bereaved mother. One of the elderly ladies led the bereaved mother into performing a ritual. In this ritual the young lady was ordered to slowly move her deceased baby’s clothing across the grave while uttering some enchantments. Enquiry led me into learning that this process aimed at putting an end to the young lady’s misfortune of losing babies at a very young age. Spreading the late baby’s clothes over the grave meant she would be symbolically retaining the lost life within those clothes so that she would continue to have other babies in replacement of the lost one.



This was the reason and belief behind the action and its motive was preservation of life and continued ability for child bearing. Thus an action in itself would be neutral but it is the belief placed on it that gives it a whole different meaning. This means in the juxtaposition stage it is important to bring out the untainted meaning of any cultural practice as this sets the stage for meaningful transformative dialogue. Establishing the cultural meaning is essential in an apologetic process because new Christian meanings can only make sense if they are given in terms of the meanings contained in the primal religions (Bediako 2000:43).

This stage of critical enquiry, if done well, should lead to the establishment of ideological links between the findings in the cultural rite and the elements of the Christian faith. The needs and aspirations unearthed in this in-depth analysis will

act as suggestive stepping stones⁴¹ to the possible answers that Christian teachings might suggest to the needs detected in culture. This is to say the inner existential issues brought out from the cultural worldview should be used in establishing juxtaposition links with the Christian faith. The main question to be asked here becomes “in what way does the gospel respond to this human need?” (Gachiri 2000:120).⁴² This is when the theologian needs to explore possible solutions by searching several biblical texts through which the cultural needs may be addressed. This is the most critical stage in the dialogical process. This will need to go beyond simply amalgamating existent Christian doctrines with elements in the rites. The goal is to touch on those inner belief aspects that will be used to fulfil those needs that people are trying to address through unchristian religious exercises in initiation. An example would be in order; the religious aspect at the building of the *jando* structure (described in 2.3.1) is based on the belief that such a religious act would ensure physical protection against witches and any other forces of darkness. If we take this constituent part for critical consideration, it would be established that the underlying ideological link here lies in the genuine need/quest for the physical security of initiates given the tireless activities of witches. While the quest for physical protection and preservation of life is quite agreeable, the method sought to address this need is not. This leads to the question as to how Christianity answers to such a need and how much more effective the Christian solution is as compared to the one from the primal perspective. Therefore, the critical enquiry should be two pronged. On one axis it should seek to discover the inner determining factors within initiation and on the other it should seek to establish how the Christian faith answers to such factors in a better way.

⁴¹ ‘Stepping stones’ here is metaphorically used to refer to corresponding ideas or practices in African traditional religions which make it easier to understand new or analogous Christian teachings. These correlations make it easier to move from African traditional religions to Christian beliefs by sharing that Christian theology makes sense as a better or higher fulfillment of the practice contained in African traditional religions. I have adapted this thought from Nyamiti’s intrinsic use of African cultural themes as points of departure or basic orientation in expounding Christian teaching, (1975:20-30) as well as his apologetic approach in doing African theology (1971:6-8).

⁴² See also Gachiri (2006).

The third step which is closely linked to the foregoing is the stage of apologetic juxtaposition. This is when the inculturated Word of God gets into interactive action with cultural elements. Having done the appropriate in-depth analysis and having asked investigative questions the logical procedure is to deliberately commence the transformative dialogue between the Christian faith and culture. The aim is not to give the old practice a new Christian name for this would be mere amalgamation and superficial Christianisation. The aim is to carefully engage the identified inner needs by establishing their strengths and weaknesses and persuasively arguing for corresponding Christian ones. Bediako (2000:41) puts it so well when he highlights that “our task in Christian theology is to demonstrate how Scriptural witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, illuminated by the Holy Spirit is clue to the yearnings and quests in the religious lives of people.”

Apologetics has two sides to it. According to Nyamiti (1971:6) we have the negative aspect which focuses on “pointing out the insufficiency and defects of non-Christian religions and philosophies” then we have the positive side “which shows that Christianity answers to, and surpasses, human needs and aspirations.” The question is how do we deal with the negative aspects and transform them from an ideological level? Nyamiti (1971:6) argues that by careful apologetics we can weed out the negative aspects and present them at a higher level in their Christianised form. He points out however that care should be taken so that the apologetic arguments used in pointing out the negative aspects of primal religions come directly from the entire sources of Christian revelation and not from culturally determined church manuals and dogmas such as church manuals, decrees, catechisms and so on.

Apart from pointing out the deficiencies in African religions, “the negative aspect of the apologetical method should be complemented by the positive aspect.” This positive aspect can be carried out by employing a comparative study of the primal religions. In this comparative aspect of apologetics Nyamiti’s aim is to carefully compare the African and Christian themes so as to draw out any parallelisms and differences between them. Nyamiti’s hope is that “in all probability one would

notice from these similarities and divergences that the African themes or values exist in Christianity but in a far more perfect way and in an essentially different and infinitely higher level” (Nyamiti1971:6). Apologetics can be used to make a strong case for both Christianity and African religion. The aim is not to destroy the cultural elements but to reshape them or expand them to a higher level of utility within an African Christian perspective.

Another way of using apologetics in African theology is to treat African themes as subjects for theological development. In order to do this “one may either take a particular African subject as a starting point for theological enquiry or treat it at a particular angle or perspective from which the entire theology may be expounded” (1971:7). This thesis seeks to treat the subject of initiation rites as an item for theological reflection.

Nyamiti’s apologetic approach needs to be taken seriously. Apologetics, important as it is has not been given much attention in African theological works yet it can play a vital role in positively influencing and enhancing African Christianity. African apologetics has the African traditional religion and culture as its major playing field. A theologian basically tries to help the African adopt the right ways of worship and the right ways of approaching God who is already assumed to exist in most African cultures. African apologetics seeks to dialogue with the religiously oriented cultural worldview so as to present Christian doctrine positively to the African Christian. Due to its fundamentally religious nature, the primal imagination can be used to restore to theology the aspect of religious living (Bediako1995:105). This can be achieved through the apologetic use of the primal aspects.

One could not agree more with Nyamiti when he concludes that “the subject of apologetics needs radical transformation and adaptation to the African needs and mentality” (1971:7). Thus to use African apologetics to make a case for both culture and Christianity is key in the dialogical process of transforming cultural elements deeply set in the worldview. One of the many reasons for adopting positive apologetics during juxtaposition is that:

not only would the accent in theology be determined by the African mentality through the choice of theological themes more directly corresponding to the apologetical needs of the African, but also the arguments employed would partly be determined by the African way of thinking. All this would lead to the employment of new categories in theology, and to a new way of theological presentation (1971:7).

Apologetics plays a vital role in transforming culture. It is the right apparatus to persuade people to adopt new perspectives on some of their cultural practices.

3.7.5 The primal aspect as an expressive tool in apologetics

Three practical considerations could be made from the apologetical method of using primal aspects. To start with, apologetics can use the primal source as an expressive tool for Christian theology. Some of the thoughts related to this have been touched on above (3.7.2) in my discussion on the primal source as a key source in theology. However this discussion of the primal aspect has been put here because of its role in the apologetic juxtaposition. The primal reality provides Christian theology with the appropriate local language tool which is necessary for relevant theological expression. This language tool operates on two levels; the popular level and the systematic one.

These two aspects are discussed by Shorter in his book *Christianity and the African Imagination: After the African Synod, Resources for Inculturation*. In this book Shorter discusses the role that imagination and language play in shaping African Christianity. He starts off by pointing out that “the strongest conviction of faith takes on an imaginative and therefore a cultural form” (Shorter 1996:16). As a living tradition, culture encompasses the whole of human life and can therefore not be limited to just the past or to an elite group of people. “Culture constitutes a system of images and meanings, and consequently it operates primarily at the imaginative level. The language of revelation and of religious faith operates also at this level” (1996:16). Borrowing from John Henry Newman’s⁴³ distinction between first and second order language, Shorter explains that “first order language refers to the language of faith, of imagination, of

⁴³ Shorter notes that the late John Coulson traced the genesis of Newman’s idea of imagination and language in *Religion and Imagination*, Oxford, 1981

worship and experience, while second order language refers to the language of belief, of profession and explanation” (1996:17). I have equated these two levels of language by Shorter to the popular and systematic designations respectively.

The popular level or the first order language refers to the regular religious language ordinarily used by people. It comprises of “the first order of expression, employing imaginative features, symbolism, story, poetry and song. Its verbal didactic forms are based on symbolism, as are its non-verbal forms of expression: ritual, dance, [and] rhythmical music,...” (1996:21). Most notable at this popular level is the metaphorical use of common language to describe sound theological concepts. They have such a cultural thrust that makes them impact people’s inner cognitive capacities. Some of the praise terms used in Christian teachings are terms borrowed from common usage. When these are used either in evangelism or church discourses they make quite an appeal to listeners and may even influence change of behaviour due to the inherent efficacy of meaning and symbolism they convey to listeners. This is to suggest that in order for theology to be meaningful to adherents, it has to appeal to their existential needs. If it starts its operations on abstract levels only it will fail to achieve the desired end as it would not connect with the people involved. People cannot be changed by information they can neither grasp nor relate to. In order for theology to make sense to African people, it has to take its cue from the realm of existential cultural reality.

An important key to transformation is the ability for people within a given culture to respond to the Gospel in their own cultural terms and not in foreign terms (Bediako 1995:174). The question is; how much response does the Christian message bring out in the people? The degree to which people respond positively to the message depends on the depth of inculturation of the Gospel and how successfully the primal aspects are used in this endeavour. Engaging the primal spiritual expressive tool becomes indispensable. According to Robertson Smith (cited in Fashole-Luke 1974:209) “a new scheme of faith can find a hearing only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that exist...” This suggests that there is need to take into consideration “the traditional forms in which all

religious feeling is embodied” and speaking the language which the people in the given culture can understand.

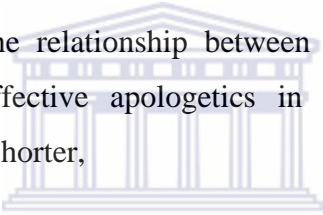
Stressing the importance of primal language in Christian theology, Bediako (1995:175) asserts that “it is through the vernacular that the living forces of the primal imagination are perpetuated and carried forward into Christian usage.” The vernacular is key to accessing local navigational concepts leading to primal spirituality. Upon comprehending the primal spiritual reality it will become important to link this spiritual flavour to the Christian message. When this is done carefully a transformation from a typical primal practice to an African Christian practice should occur.

The second level of expression is the systematic use which mostly focuses on articulating theology and dogmas in concrete African terms. It is characterised by a lot of rigor. This in some way corresponds to the formulations of systematic theology as generally held Christian theology. Here it needs to be noted that Christianity does not necessarily bring all new terms to African theology but rather, utilises concepts and terms already present within African language to convey the biblical doctrine. Terms referring to God (Bediako 1995:97), the spirit, the idea of holiness and others are mostly already present in the primal religions and have to be adapted from the primal usage, sanctified or modified then used as solid terms in Christian theology. Modification of these terms is essential as Nurnberger points out that failure to modify and clean these terms may land us in the otherworldly of idolatry (Nurnberger 2007:47). In fact it is these terms that assist an African identify with the Christian message. Without employing African religious terms for theology, the Christian message would have been impossible to grasp. Primal religious terms play a vital role in assisting a cultural conveyance of the Christian message.

According to Shorter (1996:17) it is wrong to assume that theological explanation precedes the assent of faith. People do not grasp the Christian faith through abstract formulations of theology only. Religious convictions come out of a confrontation with reality. Shorter argues that “the assent of faith...is primarily

an act of the imagination, and the metaphysical forms of theological explanation are inferences from the primary symbols of revelation which make revealed truth imaginatively credible” (1996:17). While it remains important to make theological inferences in constructing systematic theologies, these inferences must remain close to the originating symbols and primary meanings. Mere high level abstraction of theological language is not helpful and can actually be blamed for the manner in which most Africans oscillate between the Christian faith and traditional religions. Metaphysical theology on its own does not appeal to them. It is “clearly one of the reasons for the divorce between the Gospel and culture” (Shorter1996:20). People find it easier to respond to things that appeal to the primary instances of their experience and if religious language does not operate this way then adhesion to that particular religion will be unfruitful.

Taking cognisance of the relationship between the first and second order of language is vital to effective apologetics in inculturation - transformation theology. According to Shorter,



Theology belongs to the second order of language which favours rational, conceptual and explanatory forms. While first order language can exist independently of second order, it can be clarified and reinforced by it. Second-order language, however, is completely dependent on the first order, drawing its metaphysical inferences from primary forms of the first order and making rational paraphrases of these primary forms (1996:18).

This observation by Shorter clarifies the apologetic intention articulated above. In trying to transform aspects of the African culture, we need to dialogue first with it at a popular level by employing the language, symbolism and imagination at this level to make sense to the people involved. It is only through the use of such expressive tools at this level that we can better articulate an African systematic theology which will be in touch with the people. Accordingly, “the truth and usefulness of such theology depends on the validity of the inferences it draws from the primary forms of faith and on the successful re-translation of its conclusions back into primary forms”: (1996:18).

A second practical consideration in the apologetic use of the primal aspect is by employing an inculturative interaction between Gospel and culture. This is borne out of the understanding that both culture and Gospel contain some divine aspects. Basing his argument on Acts 14:17, Bediako (1995:226) looks at evangelism as a divine initiative in which Christ is to be understood as having already been present in the African cultures. It is Christ who called his messengers to come and proclaim the Gospel rather than them bringing Christ to African people. If Christ was already within the local cultures this means 'he has not left himself without a testimony' (Acts 14:17). We can therefore expect to see some early deposits of the Gospel within the primal situation that point to Christ. This is the reason why some aspects of primal religions can be used easily as stepping stones to a better understanding of Christian teachings. When the Gospel comes into contact with the culture it brings out in the open the divine realities that were hidden within the culture. It goes beyond translation of terms in the Christian message into identification with the higher and more accurate spiritual reality for which these primal aspects were forerunners.

Primal apologetics is not limited to mere translation or expressive use of local language and art but to a realisation of Christianity as an intended core of people's worldview and life as a whole. As such inculturation consists in an ongoing process of identification, correlation and integration as the theologian takes into account the divinely inspired values inherent within African religious consciousness. Magesa (2004:143) suggests that there ought to be room for the transformation of either of the two entities so as to come up with something that would help Africans draw closer to God. This means the inculturation process should not be done with rigidity rather, it should be done with a certain degree of apologetical openness as this would give room for the adjustments to both theological expression and cultural moulding. He asserts,

All values must always be left open to development with changing circumstances. This is so as to understand what they mean and what purpose they have for human life. The only goal of the gospel-culture encounter is to help the African people and the African church to come ever closer to God. More concretely, the goal is to

help all African Christians and, indeed, all African peoples, to lead an integrated spirituality (2004:143)

For Magesa, inculturation is the encounter between the Word in the Gospel and the Word in culture. God is taken to be already present in the values and history of culture and when the Gospel comes into a cultural setting it interacts with this already present Word. The two will, “bond together, transforming and fulfilling each other in the process. And in the same life of the process, people’s perceptions and self-understanding on the one hand, and of God in their midst on the other, are changed” (2004:143). Magesa thus looks at the culture as possessing something that can only be fully realised when the Gospel encounters culture through the ongoing process of inculturation. “The encounter is meant to enable the gospel to claim what belongs to God in a culture, and to enable the culture in its turn to see itself in its true light as God’s Word, when indeed it is; or as an aberration from God’s word when it is that” (2004:144). The process of having the Gospel find and express itself in the culture is an apologetic one. “[I]t begins to happen when the gospel discovers itself in a culture, accepting the elements that reveal the face of God already present, and rejecting those that do not. This is inculturation” (2004: 144).

A third important practical consideration in the apologetic process is to utilise what Nyamiti refers to as the anthropocentrism of the African religions (Nyamiti 1971:21). According to Nyamiti,

African religions are centred on, and determined by human condition or the problems of human life such as birth, puberty, fecundity, health, sickness and death, etc. This means that even the belief and cult of God and other ‘spirits’ are pivoted on this core ... if this is the case, then these religions are anthropocentric. Accordingly, this anthropocentrism should be Christianised e.g. by showing how Christ (God) is the foundation, support and security of human condition in a manner which infinitely surpasses the African conceptions...

This observation is very important in African apologetics. African religion termed as ‘decidedly this worldly’ (Bediako 1995:101), takes the human situation seriously. It is not solely a transcendent religion but one that is also intertwined

with the lives of the people. In this way religion encompasses culture and operates through all cultural facets so as to address the different existential needs of people.

Due to this inherently religious nature of the African cultures the African mind is geared toward recognition of the spiritual and supernatural reality. Most Africans observe the worship of numerous gods or spirits including association with the ancestral cult. Pobee recognises that all religion is concerned with the manifestation of deity one way or the other. The main issue has to do with the correct way of having the deity reveal himself. With this Pobee affirms that “primal man experiences deity, at least so he thinks, through ‘fetishes,’ trees, animals, or even persons, dreams, and oracles...” (Pobee 1979:73). Much of the connection that people have with the spiritual realm has a lot to do with different stages and circumstances of life. It is believed that some, if not most of the problems we have in life are due to spiritual sources such as witchcraft, sorcery or any other kind of supernatural punishment. In order to keep these things at bay and live a happy life it is necessary to consult or live amicably with this unseen world. This is why we have the inclusion of ancestor veneration and the use of fetishes and so forth within the primal worldview.

Nyamiti (1971:21) takes cognisance of the underlying need that connects people with the spiritual realm. He suggests that we address this underlying need by pointing people to the right spiritual solution of their needs. He has properly highlighted that people approach the supernatural for reasons of security and support or simply appeasement lest they attract fury from the supernatural. He then advises that the solution would be to Christianise the anthropocentrism and redirect people to Christ as their source of support, security and ultimately worship.

Nyamiti is quite helpful in drawing out the apologetic use of the anthropocentric nature of primal religions. However, his principle of Christianisation needs to be expanded and given more detail so that it also takes into consideration how the

current spiritual aspects being practiced by Africans are viewed in biblical tradition. In other words while the Christian aspect is being elevated, the old aspect needs to be redefined in line with how the Scripture defines it. In this process it is quite important that people not only assume a new Christianised version of their cult while the content of the cult remains the same. Apologetics should not only aim at Christianising but should go beyond Christianisation to actually using the existent practices as links to new and intended ones.

The primal religious beliefs provide the theologian with belief and thought categories that he/she can use to introduce and argue for a new and applicable Christian concept. These categories give points of contact which will operate as spring boards toward new Christian concepts. They are the basis for either replacement or transformation of cultural elements. For example theologians could use the thought of the existence of spiritual forces to argue for the biblical perspective of the presence of the devil, evil spirits, demons and so forth. This implies that the whole constituent parts of initiation rites will have to be addressed by pointing out how these have tried to address the needs of the people, though in a misguided way and how they have become obsolete with the coming of Christ. Pobee clarifies this attempt better when he states that “now Christianity claims that the fullest revelation which makes all previous ones pale in the background is the revelation in Jesus Christ. As such there is no going back to other approaches now, even if through other faiths; some true knowledge of God has been vouchsafed” (1979:73).

The key thing in this anthropocentric theology is thus to arrive at the teaching of the prominence of the person of Jesus in African theology by also pointing out that since the fuller revelation is now here, there is no more need for seeking to experience Christ in the old primal fashion. What this will entail is that the theologian will need to help people see how Christ is the answer to their insecurities and needs rather than simply tell them to take Christ and leave the fetishes behind. The theologian needs to show how Christ assumes and fulfils in a much better way the roles previously played by the primal spiritual forces and

how these forces are no match for Jesus Christ. When this is done with much teaching it would be possible to have not only a transformed cultural ideology but a transformed cultural life as well.

According to Bediako apologetics can be used in a comparison way by showing how the Christian elements/doctrines stand in relation to those maintained in the primal worldview. The Christian faith becomes more powerful when compared to the assertions of other faiths (2000:38). The background of African traditional religions helps to show the uniqueness of the Christian faith “since affirmation of uniqueness has meaning as it relates to alternative claims.” It is against such a background that Christ’s significance is magnified. As such “the affirmation about the unique Lord Jesus Christ arises from how he is perceived in his relation to other ‘lords’” (2000:38). This suggests that in presenting an anthropocentric theology it is necessary to present how Christ supersedes beliefs that were held in the primal worldview.

The fourth step in juxtaposition is the didactic step. The aim of Christian theology is that it be put into practice by adherents hence the need to clearly articulate to the laity why certain practices are right or wrong. Of more importance is to involve the laity in discovering why, and what is wrong with some of the values they hold (Gachiri 2000:119). Shorter (1988:62) points out that the process of inculturation is not limited to individual experts on their own apart from their communities. Addressing the inner level of meanings should most definitely touch the laity so that the church can avoid what Magesa referred to as cultural ambivalence (2004:79) in which African Christians live a dualistic lifestyle between an intuitive life and a cognisant one. Since the laity is the goal of the pastoral process, more pastoral effort should be put on teaching on the inner levels of the juxtaposed aspects. Such teaching is presented with the hope that African Christians will be put in a position where they will be able to lead a Christian life that represents their cultural flavour and is also consistent with the teachings of the Bible. This will also help Christians know the reasons why they do what they

do. The biblical thinking becomes part of their worldview and their intuitive and cognisant bank.

So the key issue in the didactic stage is to simply make real sense to the adherent by showing him/her why the transformed cultural system is needed and how it works. He/she will literally need to be persuaded to accept the new scenario while at the same time assuring him/her that he/she will remain in his/her culture. Hence comparative primal apologetics is vital to transformational theology. It is a transformation by positive persuasion toward adopting a new cultural position. It is not an alienation from established cultural norms but an existential realisation that one's needs and aspirations are not only contained in Christianity but exist therein, "in a far more perfect and sublime form surpassing his wildest dreams...[furthermore] the African will find in Christianity the highest possible fulfilments of his legitimate needs and aspirations" (1971:7). This is the aim of inculturation-transformation theology.

3.8 Conclusion

To this end this chapter has attempted to argue for a shift in theological emphasis. This would be a shift from focusing on past flaws in missiological enterprises to embarking on progressive engagement with elements in African cultures.

Much space was devoted to the development of the theology of inculturation and transformation; a theology that is tailor-made for engagement with cultural practices. A theology of inculturation – transformation treats the Christian message and the culture as two vital sources for Christian theology. In order for inculturation – transformation to work effectively four steps need to be followed. These steps include, carrying out a detailed enquiry of the cultural item to be studied, doing an in-depth enquiry of the meanings contained in the primal worldview, apologetically juxtaposing the primal elements with the Christian message and teaching the inculturated material to laity. The primal worldview of most African communities has been described as being inherently religious. This helps to draw apologetic links with the Gospel. The apologetic use of the primal aspects requires that we use the vernacular in both the ordinary and systematic ways to express the Gospel in readily understandable terms. This means we also

need to link the Word from above with the Word existent in the culture which the primal world was a custodian. In this endeavour, the anthropocentric use of theology becomes very important to apologetically present Christ as the answer to the aspirations of people. In the following chapter I will apply this theological process to two aspects of initiation rites; the ancestral and moral aspects.



CHAPTER 4

Reflection of Inculturation – Transformation Theology on Ancestor Veneration and Morality in Masasi Initiation Rites

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the inculturative and transformative interplay between precepts of biblical theology and aspects of ancestor veneration and morality contained in initiation. In order to do this, a juxtaposition analysis of three theological views on ancestor theology will be separately explored with the intention of establishing a view that is consistent with my own biblical-theological stand point. The issue of morality will also be tackled from both a traditional ancestral perspective and a biblical one. The aim is to reflect on initiation in the light of Christian inculturation and transformation.

4.2 Juxtaposition of the ancestor cult and the Christian faith

Ancestors have fulfilled the role of parents when they were alive. Authorised by their own ancestors, they have kept the community together, given moral guidance, demanded respect, called people to responsibility and safeguarded the social order. All this is true for any culture in the world. In traditionalist societies this function continues, not only beyond the coming of age of their descendants, but even beyond their own deaths. Is this appropriate in terms of the biblical witness? (Klaus Nurnberger 2007:78)

The subject of the appropriateness of ancestor veneration is one that is characterised by a lot of debate and controversy among African theologians. The main question has to do with whether there should be a continuity or discontinuity of the practice in light of the Christian faith. A brief review of three scholarly positions on the subject would be very helpful in showing the possible responses to the ancestral cult. In keeping with the steps outlined in the *modus operandi* of inculturation and transformation in section 3.7.4, it is necessary to have an in-depth analysis of a constituent part of a cultural element under consideration. This in-depth analysis becomes vital in establishing departure points when juxtaposing the cultural elements and the Christian faith. Such will be the manner in which the following theological views on ancestor veneration will be used. They offer both an in-depth analysis of the ancestral cult as a constituent part of

initiation as well as possible apologetic departure points helpful in mapping out a position for the practice of rites in Masasi. They complement, theologically, the case study in chapter two.

4.2.1 A Continuity approach to the theology of ancestors

In the process of juxtaposing the Christian faith and the practice of rites, scholars in the continuity method seem to argue for the establishing corresponding aspects between ancestral practice and some biblical teachings. Others opt to redefine this cultural entity by integrating it into established church traditions. We will discuss two scholars who seem to represent these two ideas.

4.2.1.1 Kahakwa's theology of ancestors

Dr. Sylvester Kahakwa, a lecturer at the Makumira University College in Tanzania, has discussed the topic of ancestors in his article "Theology of Ancestors from African Perspective." In his discussion he endeavours to lay an expanded and elaborate African understanding of ancestral theology. He uses the Haya tribe from north-West Tanzania as his reference group in laying out his perspective of African ancestors.

He starts off by pointing out that among the Haya people when it comes to ancestors, "the emphasis is on the relationship between ancestors and God on the one hand, and between ancestors and their descendents on the other hand" (Kahakwa 2007:5). He then makes the premise that based on the continued relationship between these entities and especially that between ancestors and their descendants on earth there is need to develop a proper theological understanding of ancestors. He uses the title ancestor to demonstrate the nature and significance of this relationship. Kahakwa argues that from the terminology used by the Haya people, ancestors are shown to be active spirits rather than non-existent ones.

The spirits of the ancestors are shown to be spiritually alive even though the ancestors are physically dead. The Haya terms *Abazaire Abahumwire* (parents who are resting) are taken by Kahakwa to describe ancestors from 'a continuous

active point of view' as opposed to the mere term ancestors in that it talks of them as having departed and not deceased (2007:7). One who departs can be expected to come back any other time. Kahakwa insists that these terms imply "active, continuous communion between the departed relatives and their descendants still living on earth" (2007:9-10) Understood in this manner, the ancestors can "further be involved in the affairs of their descendants living on earth...they are still recognised as parents who continuously play earthly roles." As such Kahakwa concludes that the *Abazaire Abahumwire* concept portrays a correct African understanding of the nature and role of the ancestors" (2007:10-11).

Kahakwa (2007:12), further elaborates that *Abazaire Abahumwire* concept is not limited by gender or age, rather any departed person within the African community is regarded as an ancestor. The key issue is the role that the departed played while they were alive. While their status and position in the community before passing is considered to have some kind of importance it is continuous communion with them that matters. "Accordingly all relatives regardless of age and gender, who had gone without being adults or parents can be qualified to be an ancestor" (2007:12). As a result the Haya people talk of the *Abana Abahumwire*, (Children who are resting). Kahakwa (2007:13-14) is careful to point out though that while the concept is inclusive in nature it "does not categorize all departed relatives in one rank. Rather, they are grouped into different ranks which depend on one's moral life while on earth" especially by looking at how one's roles were beneficial to the community. Because of this immoral and evil people will not be classified under ancestors and will in most cases be referred to as having died/deceased as opposed to having departed. They basically become objects of people's disapprobation and since their memory does not engage people's positive affections, it is considered as better to delete them from the minds of the living descendants.

Having laid out this understanding, Kahakwa delves into discussing the state, roles and residence of ancestors. He asserts that the departed people still exist in a spiritual state. In these spiritual bodies, they are not only able to preserve their

personality but they are also “endowed with supernatural powers, dynamic authority, knowledge and responsibility from God, the creator who is near them” (2007:14). Furthermore, they are said to exist on a higher plane than when they were humans. This means that they are able to exercise infallible superhuman knowledge. They are able to communicate this knowledge to their descendents through dreams and visions even to the point of possessing the people and revealing secrets concerning any misfortunes that the people might be encountering (2007:15).

The roles of the ancestors consist in what is allocated for them to do by God. Kahakwa notes that since the ancestors have been given supernatural powers by God, it follows that they are able to carry out whatever task God requires of them to carry out on behalf of their descendents. “Normally they are invoked for solicitation and advice for the welfare of living relatives; hence they are regarded as God’s *Ntumwa* (agents or messengers) and therefore his friends who are closer to Him” (2007:15). As messengers they are still regarded as heads of families and founders of society. As such their roles consist of either keeping their families from danger or even inflicting punishment or misfortune if people step out of line morally. Kahakwa seems to suggest a three tier operation of the ancestors when he points out that ancestors also operate as intermediaries “between man and God and between man and divinities who can approach and ask God to bless the descendents, because they are nearer to Him” (2007:16).

Of the three residential abodes of the ancestors mentioned by Kahakwa, two are of importance to our discussion. Citing BA Pauw, Kahakwa asserts that (2007:16) “African ancestors are believed to remain closely associated with their earthly residences, particularly with their burial places.” The second place of abode is presented by Kahakwa as a permanent place of rest and allotted to souls or spirits of the departed people. He explains that “normally it is a natural shrine such as a large tree, a bush, the peak of a hill, a mountain, a cliff or a cave. It can also be a man-made shrine in the form of a small or huge house or burial place” (2007:16).

With regards to whether ancestors are worshiped or not, Kahakwa (2007:20) vehemently discards the notion that ancestors are worshipped noting that this is due to a misunderstanding of the relationship between the departed and the living. He argues that there is a difference between worshipping ancestors and respecting ancestors. He uses the term veneration on the same level as respect noting that Africans only offer worship to God and though they invoke their ancestors the language they use is not characteristic of worship. As such, he opts for the term continuous communion postulated by Rwehumbiza⁴⁴ as better terms for depicting the relationship between ancestors and their living descendents. Kahakwa's argument is that even though ancestors have been endowed with supernatural powers and capabilities, they cannot be regarded as gods who subsequently deserve worship. He insists that "although ancestors are endowed with power and knowledge by God in the visible world, and thus become superior beings in the social order, they still remain at a parental level and not beyond" (2007:21). With this Kahakwa emphasises that ancestors are respected and not worshiped. As a result, he holds that the ancestral cult should continue as part of the life of the African Christians since ancestors are also understood as ministers of God who link God and people. This means there is a continued role of ancestors in Christianity. Kahakwa (2007:21) further argues that respecting ancestors has its roots in fulfilling God's commandment of obeying and honouring parents. He says, "while ancestor veneration has religious aspects it remains an expression of social behaviour and respect to the Deity and beyond death" (2007:21).

Kahakwa's description of the Haya ancestral perspective has been included in this section for the following reasons. This description recapitulates in an analytic theological sense the core beliefs and convictions beneath the practice of ancestor veneration. The description attempts to go beyond the empirical to the underlying reasons and inner belief conceptions in the cult. In this sense it more or less corresponds to the critical enquiry stage in my juxtaposition steps. Furthermore

⁴⁴ Kahakwa uses thoughts from, Rulange Rwehumbiza, *A Comparative Study between the Development of Yahwistic Monotheism and the Concept of God Among the Bantu People of Africa South of the Sahara. A Biblical-Theological Evaluation* (Th D dissertation, Rome: Pontifical University, 1983).

this description has affinities in many areas with the ancestor cult of the people resident in Masasi. His description of the status, roles and the abode of ancestors is also akin to the Makua people's worldview who, as indicated in the phenomenology in the second chapter, invoke their departed ones through grave sweeping and use of the *msolo* shrine.

While Kahakwa's call to take the subject of ancestor veneration seriously in developing African theology is very welcome, he does not use this primal aspect to develop a firm transformational Christian theology. In his efforts to make a strong argument for continuation of the ancestral cult he makes a confusing connection between God's operations and that of the ancestors. It is not immediately clear whether ancestors take the place of angels as ministers or whether they operate as local angels for their family members. Even though Kahakwa has not used the term angel in relation to the ancestors, he nevertheless attributes to them the activities similar to those of angels as found in the biblical tradition (Hebrews 1:14). Such a theology would be hard to defend as it cannot be sustained by the precepts of the Gospel which stipulate the channels through which God is to be approached. Other passages seem to discredit the use of ancestors as links to God, (Isaiah 8:19; John 14:6).

In the biblical tradition, ancestors do not feature as possible mediators between God and man. This aspect is only present in the African primal perspective. This makes it difficult to fit Kahakwa's theology into an African theological system. His main idea is that of integrating this primal aspect with Christianity and somewhat try to forge a core existence between the two. While on one hand this might look like a workable theology, it does on the other hand pose a big threat to practical theology in that it creates room for people to oscillate between traditional religions and teachings of the Gospel. Kahakwa's use of the primal aspect should take into consideration those aspects of the culture that are not consistent with the Christian doctrine and seek to transform them rather than legitimise them with Christian language. In this regard, to say that the ancestral cult has its roots in the command to honour parents (Exodus 20:12) would be questionable as that

command was understood in the context of honouring the living when it was given.

It is my view in this thesis that when dealing with primal aspects such as ancestor veneration, it is not the whole practice that we need to adopt but the principle and value behind it that we need to adopt and address from a biblical perspective. That is what makes the practice Christian and still African at the same time. However, if one looks at Kahakwa's theology of ancestors one will see that the practice of ancestor veneration remains intact though forcibly integrated into Christian practice. While he strongly pleads for the primal continuity he does not give any interaction between the primal aspect and teachings from the biblical theology to see whether there is compatibility or not. As such the arguments presented in his paper, while they are quite helpful in a phenomenological sense they do not provide a good basis for inculturation-transformation on ancestral involvement in initiation rites.

4.2.1.2 Fashole-Luke's model of integration

In his article, 'Ancestor Veneration and the Communion of Saints' Edward W. Fashole-Luke argues for the inclusion of ancestor veneration into the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. He suggests that the church has to create "a theology of the Communion of Saints that will satisfy the passionate desire of Africans" and "can avoid the dangers of syncretism on the one hand, and the peril of a double existence on the other"(1974:210). By giving centrality to the doctrine of the Communion of Saints Fashole-Luke (1974:214) suggests this would provide a framework for incorporating ideas about ancestors in Christian theology. He admits however that there are "some aspects African ancestral beliefs which are incompatible with the Christian faith and must be rejected." His postulation of the Communion of the Saints includes the fellowship of "holy people of all ages and the whole company of heaven through participation in the holy sacraments" (1974:216). Arguing for ancestral intercession, Fashole_Luke says (1974:219) if it is acceptable to ask a living friend to pray on one's behalf "it cannot be wrong for us to request the prayers of a departed member of Christ, who is with him." He insists that intercession by such well positioned departed ones "is a legitimate

consequence of the fellowship in prayer which unites the whole body of Christ” (1974:219). This is the understanding upon which ancestral invocation is based.

Fashole-Luke concludes by asserting that the doctrine of the Communion of Saints satisfies Africans’ passionate desire to be linked with their dead in a genuine way. This doctrine (1974:220) provides for fellowship in the universal church in that it extends beyond family and tribal lines. Christians are linked with the departed through participation in the sacraments. Due to the nature of Christ’s death even non-Christians are included in this Communion. Africans are also connected with the ancestors through “reciprocal prayer: we pray for them and they pray for us” (1974:220). Thus according to Fashole-Luke it is legitimate to ask our ancestors to pray for us.

This attempt at juxtaposing ancestor veneration with the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints might work well only in church traditions that hold such a doctrine. The assertion that we could pray for our ancestors as they pray for us, apart from lacking strong biblical textual support, does not seem to enjoy widespread approval within the protestant evangelical community. While Fashole-Luke has tried to establish the origin and history of the Communion of the Saints and relating it to the ancestral cult one still enquires if the historical church traditions on their own will suffice to act as appropriate basis for approving the ancestral practice. In inculturation and transformation theology, we do not need to adopt the primal practices uncritically instead we need to draw out the underlying needs they have been trying to address. We do not engraft the primal practices onto existing church traditions, instead we should draw apologetic links that will help us propound an appropriate African Christian teaching.

4.2.2 Ancestor Christology as an apologetic departure point

Kwame Bediako also grapples with the topic of ancestors in his book, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. His discussion is helpful in that it provides one way through which the ancestral cult could be juxtaposed with the teachings of the Christian faith to postulate an ancestor Christology. Bediako

discusses the need to develop a theology of ancestors from a Christological perspective. He draws his discussion from the worldview of the Akan tribe of Ghana including the perspectives of a local tribal ritual practitioner, named King Nana Ado Dankwa III of Akuapem who also happens to be a member of the Presbyterian Church.

Bediako approaches the question of ancestor theology from the perspective of utilising the primal aspect to make the Gospel more understandable and appealing to Africans. He acknowledges that since ancestor veneration is a key aspect of the lives of most Africans, it follows that the subject be considered as being of great importance in African theology. According to Bediako, “the place and significance of ancestors in the African primal world-view actually offers opportunities for filling out some dimensions of spiritual experience and historical consciousness which are inherent in the Christian religion” (1995:212). As such he tries to find traces within the practice of ancestor veneration that would lead not only to a better understanding of Christianity but also to helping African Christians continue with their belief in Christ in a manner that is fulfilling to them. With regards to the question as to whether Africans worship their ancestors Bediako notes that putting the question in this manner casts ancestors in ‘the role of rivals of Christ.’ This is because there is an “obvious Christological dimension to any consideration of the place of ancestors in the spiritual universe of Christian consciousness” (1995:217).

Propounding an ancestor-Christology helps us to put the natural ancestors in their right perspective with Christ who is the Lord and judge of the living and the dead. Bediako suggests that the problem with mistaking ancestor veneration for ancestor worship springs from the “failure to realise that African ancestors, strictly speaking, do not become after death what they were not before death” (1995:218). This seems to be a contrast to Kahakwa’s (2007:14) assertion that ancestors attain supernatural powers and knowledge from God. In trying to put ancestors in their proper perspective, Bediako while quoting Meyer Fortes emphasises that their

relevance and significance lies in their regulative focus for the social relations and activities that persist as the deposit, so to speak, of his life and career” (1995:219).

In creating an ancestor Christology it appears from Bediako’s discussion that it is important to look at their significance and underlying reasons for the practice and draw links to the Christian understanding of the role of Christ as the ancestor and even the role of the departed within this new ancestral outlook. Since propagation of the Christian message does not start with a *tabula rasa*, it follows that “the incorporation ‘into Christian faith and practice’ of ideas derived from African ancestral cults was needed in African Christianity” (1995:223). What this suggests is that the Christian message dialogues effectively with the already established primal religion and makes use of its language, idiom, structures and systems to propagate the teachings of the new. In such a way, the primal aspect is used somewhat as a stepping stone to introduce ancestor-Christology and unlike Kahakwa the focus is not on preserving the practice but preserving the values contained in the practice by pointing people to a much fuller realisation of what the practice originally intended.

Bediako also touches on Fashole Luke’s discussion on the Communion of the Saints. Bediako identifies that Fashole-Luke’s inclusion of ancestors in this doctrine aimed at preserving the family and tribal solidarity and continuity which the ancestral cults sought to express. (cited in Bediako 1995:224). Since the ancestral cult aimed at upholding the position and influence of the ancestors on their families and tribes as family heads this cult could continue in a Christianised form under Communion of the Saints. Bediako points out that though this can be taken as a theological point of departure it does have its limitations. Rather than looking at the theology of ancestors as dealing with the fate of the departed ancestors, Bediako suggests that this theology should instead be:

The interpretation of the past in a way which shows that the present experience and knowledge of the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ have been truly anticipated and prefigured in the quests and responses to the Transcendence in former times, as these have been reflected in the lives of African people (1995:224-225).

This means focus should not be placed on the inclusion of the ancestors in the Community of the Saints as this will raise questions as to whether non Christian departed ones would be included or not. What Bediako emphasises here is that the main issue in this primal aspect is treating the theology of ancestors as a corollary of “the continuity of God in African experience” (1995:225). This is built upon the understanding that if the Christian God is the same God as the one worshipped in the primal world, then the use of ancestors to approach God needs to be understood as a preparatory testimony which God had planted in history to direct people to Himself. Referring to Acts 14:17, Bediako asserts that “if the God of African pre-Christian tradition has turned out to be the God of the Christians, then it is to be expected that He has not left Himself without testimony in the past” (1995:225).

It is interesting to note that in Bediako’s perspective, the continuity is not with the practice itself but with the African experience of God to which the ancestral cult sought to direct people. With this in mind, Bediako points out that ancestors can be looked at as ones who validated the divine initiative that was already in the local situation (1995:226). Christ was already in the local setting, and the ancestor cult was in a sense a blurred type and pointer to the presence of Christ in the community and it was only through the Gospel that the intentions of the former setting were clearly known. As such, “local ancestors who prepared the way for the coming of the Gospel emerge as fellow witnesses in the multitude” mentioned in Revelation 7:9-10. “A doctrine of the Communion of the Saints, in this sense of the cloud of witnesses, therefore becomes the outcome of the theology of ancestors” (1995:226).

To further clarify this point, Bediako maintains that the Old Testament validates the African theology of ancestors. In this sense the ancestral cults become to Africans what the Old Testament was to the Jews since “by presenting us with the history of God’s dealings in the lives of His people whose faith was not perfect, the Old Testament itself offers a paradigm by which to understand the similar journeying in our own past” (1995:226). In this regard, since Africans are now in Christ, this suggests that they are Abraham’s children by faith. Through this

Abrahamic link they have been adopted into Christ, and if we work this backward we receive what Bediako, while quoting Andrew F. Walls, refers to as an 'adoptive past' which entails that the "African participation in the Gospel establishes the relevance of the Old Testament to African tradition and opens the way for an African appropriation of the whole Scriptures" (1995:227).

In this theology, the Communion of the Saints will continue with Christ featuring as Lord among the ancestors and "the continued significance of the ancestors within the life of African Christianity comes to pass through the prism of Christology, revealing in the process, the many-sided manner in which the ancestors have been part of the story of the making of Christian Africa" (1995:228). Bediako concludes by pointing out that the encounter of the Christian religion and the African world might as well be one possible response to the question of ancestors (1995:230).

The foregoing perspective views Christ as the fulfilment of the ancestor cult. Arguing from a cultural traditional perspective an ancestral Christology has been postulated. This postulation includes the doctrine of Communion of Saints but in a rather modified sense than the one commonly held in Fashole-Luke. The problem with this postulation however is that, not all Christian traditions hold to the doctrine of Communion of the Saints. This suggests that those within such traditions would need a different postulation which can fit into their theological perspectives. Thus there is need to develop a postulation which can be transposed into different theological perspectives which in a sense will not bear the marks of a particular denominational doctrine.

4.2.3 The supremacy of Christ and the role of ancestors

In one of his later books, *Jesus and the Gospel In Africa*, Bediako presents an expanded systematic discussion of Jesus Christ and African ancestors. In this discussion he goes beyond the idea of the Communion of the Saints to discussing the implications of Christ's mediatorial roles. This juxtaposition model works well under the inculturation – transformation operation under rubric 3.7.4. It connects the central belief in the ancestral cult with its affinity in the Christian faith while using the Bible as a source of transformation to the African question

for mediation. According to Bediako, Jesus Christ has to be understood in terms of how he fulfils and replaces the religious needs and aspirations of the African people. He points out that any understanding of Christ in an African spirit-power perspective needs to faithfully reflect biblical revelation and be rooted in true Christian experience (2000:22).

The primal worldview of the African requires that Christ meets the needs within that worldview if he will be of significance to that worldview. This means that if Christ is seen to meet the African spiritual needs in a higher and better way than he can successfully replace the role that the ancestors have been occupying. This is a very important view that Bediako raises, because it touches the very heart of the matter in initiation rites and other African spiritual practices. Christ has to be relevant to people if the people are going to perceive him as assuming a higher and better role than the ancestors. Since there is an anthropocentric stress in the African religious outlook, Christ will need to be seen as operating highly satisfactorily in fulfilling the African concept of salvation as it touches the spirit-power realm, the physical and spiritual dimensions of people's lives. "And so who Jesus is in the African spiritual universe must not be separated from what he does and can do in that world. The way in which Jesus relates to the importance and function of the 'spirit fathers' or ancestors is crucial" (2000:22). This also means that Jesus has to be shown to address the fears contained in the primal worldview. Bediako points out that people need to be clear how Jesus saves them from the terrors and fears they experience in their traditional worldview, (2000:23). Thus by relating a Christian understanding to the realm of ancestors African Christians will be led into living authentic African and Christian lives.

Bediako's (2000:25-27) discussion of the mediatory role of Christ presents a further helpful apologetic departure point for insisting on the supremacy of Christ in the African approach to mediation. In the traditional view, God is seen to be very remote and transcendent only to be approached through ancestors who are believed to be closer to Him. This transcendence is bridged through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, (Hebrews 9:15). Through the pages of the book of

Hebrews, Bediako (2000:26) argues that Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection play a very important role in bringing an end to the mediation carried out through the ancestral cult. He points out that Christ as the true Elder brother of the Africans shared in the African experience in every way except sin and alienation from God. Now that Christ is in "the presence of his Father, our Father, he displaces the mediatorial function of our natural 'spirit fathers.' For these themselves need saving, having originated from among us" (2000:26). This suggests that Christ, as the family member of everyone who believes in him assumes the ancestral role in a higher and infinite way than the primal ancestors. His mediatorial function meets no match as it is an absolute one. Jesus "becomes for us the only mediator between God and ourselves (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the 'mediator of a better covenant' (Hebrews 8:6), relating our human destiny directly to God. He is truly our high priest who meets our needs to the full" (2000:26).

Bediako further emphasises that Christ's identification with humanity in order to taste death on their behalf (Hebrews 2:14-15) has opened the door for all who identify with him to be in his divine presence, (Hebrews 10:19-20). As such "this unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness" (2000:29). Bediako warns that to disregard this incomparable mediation offered by Christ in favour of "ethnic priesthoods in the name of cultural heritage, is to fail to recognise the true meaning and end of all priestly mediation, to abdicate from belonging within the one community of humanity, to clutch at the shadow and miss the substance" (2000:29).

On the function of ancestors and its parallel in Jesus, Bediako points out that since not all who die become ancestors it follows that the validity of the ancestral cult lies in the understanding that it "provides the basis for locating in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community and gives to leadership itself a sacred quality" (2000:30). With this in mind Bediako chooses to classify the ancestral cult in the category of myth with "ancestors being the product of myth-making imagination of the community" (2000:30). This does not mean that the cult becomes worthless, rather this elevates the functional value and significance of the practice. Considered as myth, it "points to the role of the cult

in ensuring social harmony, by strengthening the ties that knit together all sections and generations of the community” (2000:30). As a result the cult of ancestors plays an essential part in “ritual ceremonies that secure the conditions upon which the life and continuity of the community are believed to depend” (2000:30). If the value and function of ancestors lies in their being transcendent references for morality and social order it follows that since they do not originate from the transcendent realm:

It is the myth-making imagination of the community itself which sacralises them, conferring upon them the sacred authority that they exercise through those in the community...the potency of the cult of ancestors is not the potency of ancestors themselves; the potency of the cult is the potency of the myth (2000:30).

Another pointer to the supremacy of Jesus Christ over the ancestors lies in the fact that they do not assume a higher level of existence apart from what there were before they died. In other words, they do not cease to be humans or precisely human spirits. Bediako highlights that “ancestors, even described as ‘ancestral spirits,’ remain essentially human spirits; whatever benefit they may be said to bestow is effectively contained in the fact of their being human” (2000:31). Bediako concludes his discussion by pointing out that there are many things that Christ is that cannot be said of the ancestors. Christ does not rely on the power of any myth for his sustenance and authority. He argues that:

Since ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact, the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors (2000:31).

4.2.4 An analysis of the ancestral role in Christian theology

The preceding discussion on ancestor veneration will suffice to highlight the trend that is found among African theologians when it comes to discussing the role of ancestors in African Christianity today. A few observations can be made with regards to the discussions above. It can be noted that there are circles in African theology that still see the validity and importance of ancestors in African theology

and life. As such theologians under this persuasion call for the continuation of the practice and they try to show that continuing with the practice can still be consistent with the Christian faith. This is the reason why those who hold the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, seek to incorporate ancestor veneration into their church doctrines. This is looked at as an acceptable way of pursuing the theology of ancestors. In this endeavour they prefer using the terms such as 'respect, honour or veneration' for ancestors so as to allay any concerns that ancestors are worshiped. When such terms are used, ancestors are put in a positive light which is deemed agreeable to the Bible.

Commenting on the problems raised by the practice of ancestral libation, Pobee notes that some scholars regard it "as the traditional African counterpart of the Christian...communion of the saints. The idea is that the ancestors are not worshiped but rather venerated as elder brothers of the living" (1979:66). In the view of this thesis, the question is not whether ancestors are worshiped or not. The main issue at stake here is whether people should communicate with them at all. Should respect for the dead entail communication with them who are in the spirit realm? Nana Ado Dankwa quoted in Bediako (1995:219-223) argues that ancestor veneration or invocations do not constitute a religious activity. Kahakwa (2007:22) seems to allude to the same thought as well when he says "communication with ancestors does not replace the worship of God." He argues that "offerings and tokens are not means of worshiping ancestors rather they are means of symbolizing and expressing the descendents' reverence and love for their departed relatives" (2007:22).

If one were to look at Mbiti's (1991:60-67) description of African ways of worship one would learn that while some African languages do not have the term for worship most African worship consists not of one particular activity but of a series of acts such as prayers, sacrifices, offerings, libation, rituals and so forth. These are religious acts directed toward God or spiritual beings (Mbiti 1991:60). Whenever and wherever any one of them is carried out it constitutes an element of worship. Each time one connects with the spiritual world and communes with

entities other than those designated in the Christian faith, then his/her action becomes highly questionable. Thus to assume that one can commune with ancestors yet maintain that this communion is not religious would be an understatement. As such Pobee's position on this subject is to be preferred. He points out that though African people stress that ancestors are merely respected since they act as intermediaries between people and God:

The average supplicant is oblivious of the Supreme Being and treats the ancestors as ends in themselves. To the extent there is a danger of treating the ancestors as the Ground of Being, the proper description of God – i.e., the danger of idolatry...because for all practical purposes the ancestors are treated as ends in themselves, as the real givers of these good things of life (Pobee 1979:65-66).

In the quest to create an African theology how far are African theologians willing to align with culture at the expense of a Christ centred faith?

4.2.5 Apologetic departure points from the ancestral cult

It is the position of this thesis that the ancestral phenomenon must not be ignored as it occupies an essential part in most African cultures. The approach maintained in this thesis however is neither that of continuity of the practice, nor is it a redefinition of primal terms to Christianise the cult. The position adopted in this thesis, as a translation theology follows along the lines of Bediako's use of primal aspects in developing relevant Christian theology. It is the principle behind the primal use that is to be continuous with Christian theology. Moreover, Bediako's insistence on the supremacy of Christ and the place of the biblical tradition in determining the outcome of Christian theology should not be overlooked. The assertion that Christ surpasses the abilities of the ancestors and that his presence makes that of ancestors obsolete is also found in Pobee, Nyamiti and Nurnberger.

Pobee (1979:73) undertook an exegesis of Hebrew 1:1-2 in an endeavour to show that the ancestor religion might have worked to present something of the truth to people but it is now replaced by the full revelation which is in Jesus Christ. He interprets the Greek term *patereo* to mean more than just the patriarchs of Judaism. He suggests that while the term literally means father, it is generally

used of men of old, ancestors, (Hebrews 3:9; Matthew 23:30-32). From the term *polutropos* which translates ‘in manifold ways,’ referring to the many forms of the revelation of God, Pobee (1979:73) argues that “one supposes some of the revelation of God in traditional religions came under this...there have been many occasions on and through which God spoke to ancient men.” This communication argues Pobee needs not be understood as having been confined to people under the old covenant only. (1979:74). By ‘manifold ways’ here Pobee suggests that traditional beliefs might have been used to hint something about God, but now that Christ, His Son has come, all the other forms of revelation become obsolete.

Pobee further draws arguments from natural revelation to make the point even clearer. He argues that natural revelation “affirms that there are revelations of the deity other than the revelation in Jesus Christ. But it also insists that only the revelation through the Son is complete and definitive” (1979:74). Furthermore, we can use primal religions (natural revelation) to argue for the true knowledge of God without necessarily accepting everything contained in African or Gentile culture. In this regard Pobee analyses Paul’s ministry in Athens, Acts 17:24-31. He notes that even though Paul made use of the aspects of natural revelation contained in the Gentile culture “the numerous gods continued to have no real existence for Paul. Nor did Paul accept without modification even what was genuine natural revelation” (1979:77). From his discussion of natural revelation Pobee makes the following insightful conclusion:

While we affirm what is good in African culture, we also wish to warn against accepting everything African *en masse* and as useful in the process of adaptation. Some elements may have to be modified or even rejected. It is not our intention to argue that everything African has something to contribute to our construction of African theology. For if there is natural or general revelation, as our African traditional religion, there is also special revelation, the revelation in Jesus Christ. In that progression from natural revelation to special revelation, some elements of the old revelation may have to be discarded (1979:78).

Such a view of ancestors and the primal world is what this thesis termed apologetic use of the primal perspective. The primal world is indeed not an end in

itself but, according to Bediako's concept of the adoptive past, it becomes our Old Testament herald of the coming Christ. The complete traditional religious system does not need to be adopted as it is but its aspects need to be taken and employed in the propagation of the new. This is where Nyamiti's threefold comparative approach discussed under the juxtaposition stage in 3.7.3 could be applied. It is worthwhile to recapitulate these three apologetic points at this juncture.

Nyamiti's (1971:21) comparative approach suggests that firstly those cultural aspects that are akin to Christian teaching should be investigated carefully and their content scrutinised before they are integrated into the Christian theology. Secondly those traditional aspects that bear analogy to Christian beliefs though they are inherently non-Christian are to be Christianised and given "a Christian dimension corresponding to their analogy with the Christian mysteries and to the relation which they bear to the core or central element in the African religion." The last group is made up of teachings which can be classified as being erroneous, superstitious and immoral. To this group Nyamiti recommends that they be rejected.

In deciding how aspects of ancestor veneration could be treated in apologetic juxtaposition, those aspects that fall under the first and second groups above could be subjected to what Pobee refers to as modification. Pobee's term, 'modification' is to be preferred over the term 'Christianisation' employed by Nyamiti. While Nyamiti is not proposing a simple amalgamation of traditional and Christian practices into one, the term 'Christianisation' however, gives the impression of simple uncritical adoption and synthesis of traditional elements into Christian terms. Modification is to be preferred because it carries with it the idea of transformation that this thesis seeks to promote.

Though Pobee does not go into detail as to how the modification is to take place, it is clear that there has to be a certain form of change or transformation administered on traditional items that correspond to Christian mysteries. In this case it becomes important to look at the roles that were played by the ancestors and juxtapose them with the role that Christ plays today. This has been well

discussed under Bediako's presentation of Christ as a better mediator than the ancestors rubric under 4.2.3. So, if one were to take Nyamiti's analogous concept and apply it to the operation of the ancestors, it would be suggested that the analogous element of mediation is the key element or inner belief idea that is sought in traditional religion. Since Christ fulfils this element in a much higher and complete sense, it follows that ancestors are relieved of this responsibility and yet the core belief of mediation still persists but it is now realised in the person of Jesus Christ who rightly and perfectly assumes this role.

In order to get this point across, some even go further to name Christ as the real Ancestor. In this view Christ is seen as replacing the ancestors. However, Klaus Nurnberger (2007:100-107) calls for caution on the metaphorical use of such terms as 'ancestor' in developing relevant African Christian theology. His question has to do with whether ordinary people would understand the new theological implications of the term or whether the original meaning of the 'ancestor' will persist in their minds. Nurnberger argues that normally people keep the original meaning. It appears the original usage of the term will continue to bear marks on the future usage. As a result using the term uncritically in an unmodified manner may not get us any far from the old traditional meaning.

He suggests that the term could be used on a popular level as an expressive tool in preaching (first order use of primal aspects) but extreme care should be taken in using it systematically in Christian theology. He recognises that in enculturation, biblical authors used language and thought patterns prevalent in the religious environments around them to bring across a message. He observes that though this often led to syncretism and idolatry "the trend has been to transform them, clean out what was not compatible with exclusive loyalty to God and integrate them into their perception of God's creative and redemptive intentions" (Nurnberger 2007:106). Nurnberger further asserts that "on this basis there should be no problem with using African concepts, insights and patterns of thought in the church's message" (2007:106). So while we can use the term ancestor in preaching to talk of Christ's mediation role "metaphors taken from the environment and used for preaching and pastoral purposes should not be turned

into doctrines about the ontological nature of God” (2007:106) for fear that such speculative constructs may end up marring the communication of the Word of God.

Consequently such “metaphors may not be reified and given out as ‘eternal truths’” (2007:107) lest they misrepresent theological aspects of the faith. Nurnberger’s comments are very important in arguing for the replacement of ancestors by Jesus Christ. It is one thing to suggest on a popular level that Jesus is now our ancestor in that he offers a surpassing mediation and it is another to actually construct a theology of ancestors in which Christ is officially termed Ancestor. Such use of the metaphor may indeed land us in “otherworldly sphere of speculation” (2007:107) and create confusion. In this thesis, it is the mediation role that is seen as continuous and analogous with the biblical tradition.

Having discussed the two combined comparative approaches by Nyamiti we will now turn to the third approach in which he states that those teachings which are erroneous, superstitious and immoral need to be carefully rejected. In this section one key issue within the rites needs to be addressed. It is apparent that ancestors are not only sought for their mediatory work for their earthly descendants but also for their protective role in matters spiritual and physical. This is why they are implored by the clan chief and his clan as well as the *ngariba*/ritual practitioner who seeks protective care during his practice. According to Nurnberger (2007:47), the main motive behind approaching ritual practitioner and diviners is “not to confess one’s sins and get right with God but to obtain protection, healing, fertility and strength.” This issue has a lot to do with African finitude in regards to harmful activities emanating from the spiritual world. While this finitude does not entail that Africans live fearful lives, it simply suggests that they are “normally exceptionally alert...their alertness is a response to the dangers they see themselves confronted with” (Nurnberger 2007:37). This explains why most people try to play it safe by wearing protective charms. Pobee highlights that the African sense of finitude is highlighted more in the fear of spirit-beings, particularly witchcraft and the fear of death (1992:65).

In my interview with the circumcision ritual practitioner, *Ngariba* Nasoro, he highlighted that on one occasion when he had to work together with another group of practitioners, competition ensued between them with each side trying to out manoeuvre the other. The more powerful practitioner could cast a deadly spell and cause some evil to befall his opponent with the intention of having him give up on circumcision so that he himself would end up circumcising all the boys thereby get all the proceeds from this work. Nasoro also related how, after he had ritually prepared one *jando* site, a witch visited the place the night before circumcision to test Nasoro's protective powers. He narrated that the lady who did this was inflicted with a deadly bleeding disease the moment she tried to exit the *jando camp*. Everyone found out about this the following morning and they were thrilled that Nasoro was a powerful practitioner under whom their children would be safe. One can think of no better way to bring out this issue of finitude than the one here explained by Nasoro and the one related earlier about *ngariba* Ngunda in 2.3.2. Nasoro also narrated how in some cases witches are trapped at the entrances of the *jando* and forced to remain at the site throughout the night until the following morning to shame them.

Commenting on the idea of African finitude, Nurnberger says, "African traditionalists live in a dangerous world. Dangerous forces must be kept at bay, individuals must be protected and strengthened, the community must be stabilised" (2007:36). Pobee observes that "religious ontology and the *sensus communis* are aids to overcoming this sense of finitude" (1992:66).

Nyamiti suggests that in dealing with this sense of frailty, there is need to disregard any superstitious method aimed at maintaining stability. African Christians should realise that "Christ is the foundation, support and security of the human condition" (1971:21). Bediako (2000:22) offers a similar insight by pointing out that Jesus has to be seen as the *Christus Victor*. He argues that this perception "arises from Africans' keen awareness of forces and powers at work in the world that threaten the interests of life and harmony. Jesus is victorious over the spiritual realm, particularly over evil forces and so meets the need for a powerful protector." Moreover, Christ's protective assurance is further reinforced

by the fact that he brings near to us the God who is highly transcendent in the African primal world.

In Christ, our Saviour, we also gain access to God and the Spirit who is also referred to as our Saviour. As such Jesus “is able to do all things, to save in all situations, to protect against all enemies, and is available whenever those who believe may call upon him” (2000:22). Because of his resurrection and ascension back into heaven, a spiritual realm, Christ assumes power and Lordship over all the authorities in the spiritual realm which include gods, ancestors and any other powers. In his supremacy he sums up in himself “all their powers and cancelling any terrorising influence they might be assumed to have upon us” (2000:27). Arguing from the Gospel of John, Bediako (2000:27) further asserts that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on all who believe is also guarantee that he is Lord even over the spiritual world (John 16:7ff.). Furthermore, the sending of the Holy Spirit works as God’s immediate presence and help for the people. As a result:

Our Lord therefore, entering the region of the spirit, sends the Holy Spirit to his followers to give them understanding of the realities in the realm of spirits. The close association of the defeat and overthrow of the devil (‘ruler of the world’) with the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (John 12:31) is significant, and the thought of the ‘keeping’ and protection of his followers from ‘the evil one’ forms an important part of Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17, aptly described as his ‘high priestly’ prayer (2000:27).

Following the same line of thought Nurnberger (2007:48) argues that the only way Christ will be seen to replace the ancestors and the powers that haunt people is when he is seen to be present within the African setting. In other words, a successful ancestor theology emphasises the person, presence and work of Jesus Christ among people. There is need to go beyond talking about a dogmatic Christ to the manifestation of Christ “through the presence of those who believe in him” (Nurnberger 2007:48). In this assertion Nurnberger argues for an understanding of Christ that goes beyond merely calling him ancestor. In fact as shown above, Nurnberger does not seem to adopt a dogmatic use of the term ancestor since among many other things, he believes it puts Christ as the most proximate among

the living-dead. This being the case Christ ceases to be close to people. According to Nurnberger (2007:49):

The presence of the ancestors is made possible by the fact that they were known when alive. Their offspring have inherited a vivid impression of their personalities, their statuses and their roles. For Christ to be present, he must be known. But how could he possibly be known as intimately as the most proximate among the deceased?

If we follow Nurnberger's thought, we can arrive at a similar understanding with that of Bediako. There is no other way that Christ can be seen to be present apart from acknowledging the indwelling presence (Acts 2:38), and activity of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers (Shorter 1988:63). It is through the Holy Spirit that God/Christ is present in the lives of his people and thus assures them of his protection, (John 14:15-23). A theology that stresses the presence of Christ aims at teaching about the person of Christ and how he, as Lord of Lords, is able to deal with all powers in the heavenly realms. Such a theology will appeal to the African mind and possibly suggest transference of total allegiance to Christ as opposed to using charms and other forms of traditional protective means. When Christ is seen as being present in a community he not only becomes relevant to that community but Christianity becomes at home in it as well. "The possibility of Christian inculturation is proved by actual experience" of Christ (Shorter 1988:62) within any community.

By stressing the replacement of ancestors we need at the same time to stress the imminence of Christ. If Christ (God) remains overly transcendent then people will not see the need to depend on Christ's protective power. But if African theology takes cognisance of the anthropocentric nature and re-navigates people to the working of the Christ through the Holy Spirit then people will be aware of God's immanence to them. It can thus be concluded here that when Jesus is seen as meeting the African's needs for spiritual protection, he effectively replaces the ancestors' role in initiation. This suggests that while the *ngariba*/circumcision practitioner might be called upon to preside over the surgical aspect of the circumcision rite, he will have to be relieved of his religious duties as these will collide with the Christian doctrine. The only way he can maintain his religious

role is if his role becomes completely Christianised and he is made to pray to Christ instead of ancestors. This thesis will not give specifics of what ought to be done but the suggestion as to the role of the Holy Spirit as opposed to the other spirits human or otherwise needs to be taken seriously. The end result is that Christ replaces ancestors in initiation.

4.3 The question of morality in initiation

Ethics is the pillar of culture which is concerned with values and norms of conduct. No society can sustain itself without norms and values on the basis of which priorities are determined (Mugambi 1999:11).

Within the African traditional system, moral education is carried out throughout the enculturation process of people by their communities. This enculturation culminates in the different types of rites of passage which are more or less the official traditional institution through which instillation and awareness of specific moral responsibility and knowledge is made. In the words of Mugambi (1989b:122), the rites of passage are “an integral part of life among the African peoples; these rites are the locus within which African culture is lived, organised and understood.” They are a recognition that one has attained the appropriate mature stage in life when he or she can be expected to assume certain responsibilities corresponding to his place in the community. Because of this, the different rites of passage are “established and maintained in order to prepare, test, confirm and reinforce the positive values cherished by the community” (1989b:122). Puberty rites, in particular aim to “prepare and initiate the adolescents into responsible adulthood while marking the end of childhood” (1989b:124). As such the main intention in the practice of initiation is instilling the required positive moral and cultural attributes within the initiates so that they become responsible members of the society.

When puberty initiation rites are juxtaposed with the Christian faith in the inculturation-transformation process two key issues need to be reckoned with. Firstly, insofar as the rites aim to develop adolescents into mature, responsible and

disciplined young adults the rites already contain positive moral educational focus within them. It follows that the transformation of rites does not mean that the African heritage is evil and therefore in need of revolution. Rather what inculturation-transformation does is call people back to the values which they already hold which may be in danger of being eroded due to numerous factors. This suggests that in practice, local initiation rites need to be evaluated continually to see if they are consistent with the intention of the traditional value system.

Secondly, African morality can be looked at as having its centre in religion. According to Hannah W. Kinoti (1999:79), “African peoples have held a strong belief that spiritual powers are deeply concerned about the moral conduct of individuals and communities alike. This suggests that misconduct in the community, while it may succeed to escape the notice of the public, it does not go completely unnoticed as the “individual in traditional society was at once accountable to the supernatural realities” which include ancestral spirits (1999:79-80). Ultimately most communities hold that all morality in Africa has its basis and authority in God (Mwikamba 1999:87). In the primal presupposition God is the “author of what people ought to do” (1989b:159). Thus, it can be asserted that the African ethic is a divine command centred type of ethic. “God exists; therefore, morals exist and are to be acknowledged” (Mwikamba 1999:88).

4.3.1 Rediscovering the neglected values

I will now turn to the discussion of the first item mentioned above. In approaching the issue of moral education in African settings, Mugambi (1989b:163) is of the position that the African heritage needs to be respected as it has a lot to offer in this area. He is of the view that presenting Christianity as a superior religion over the African situation would be unsatisfactory. Instead he prefers an approach which treats the African heritage as important on its own terms. This approach surveys the use and importance of African values on African communities. It shows “how moral education has been inculcated to youth and adults in traditional African society and how moral values would help to regulate human relations in the African community” (1989b:163). In his assertions Mugambi was arguing for

the creation of a relevant Christian religious education syllabus in the Kenyan context. His thoughts are nevertheless important to the current discussion.

Inculturation theology would require that we approach the African traditional education system on its own terms and understand its underlying values before any theologising may be done onto the traditional system.

When cultural rites are approached in this way it will be discovered that the underlying values are quite good and commendable. However, since the current practice of rites seems to have developed some loopholes through which wrong moral education has permeated the rites it becomes vital that those good primal values which seem to have eroded be rediscovered and reintroduced into initiation one way or another. If people who have gone through the rites are not living according to principles that are said to be emphasised in initiation then an overhaul of initiation may be required so that initiation is brought back to what it ought to be. Furthermore, taking African initiation on its own terms does not suggest that it contains elements that are completely agreeable to doctrines of the Christian faith. To say that African traditional educational system needs to be taken on its own merits, is one thing but to say that we accept everything in primal morality uncritically simply because it is African heritage is another. While we need to have a positive view of the traditional systems we also need to evaluate them according to their effectiveness and in light of our understanding of the Christian faith.

Through the theology of inculturation and transformation initiation rites have to be taken as they are and all correspondences and differences between constituent parts of the rite and the doctrines of the Christian faith drawn out. Those aspects of the rite which are considered inherently valuable will be retained while those which are questionable will be subjected to transformational dialogue. Below is an endeavour to engage the moral aspect of initiation in Masasi in an inculturative-transformative manner.

Initiation rites in Masasi have a good educational intention behind them. Morality and social responsibility (Mugambi 1989b:163) are at the centre of the rites. It is believed that mores which are taught are so binding to initiates that taboos are put in place as regulatory sanctions (Kinoti 1999:79; (Mwikamba 1999:88) to those who may decide to violate these moral instructions. With regards to the Masasi context, the *kungwe* and *ikano* songs are some of the main instructive channels of cultural ethical values. One who has gone through initiation is expected to lead a life of responsibility and respect among people. Failure to do so would land one in the category of social misfits leading to the negative treatment of such an individual in the community. It may also entail a break-up of the symbiotic relationship between an individual and God (Mwikamba 1999:88).

Such is the case with those who engage in theft, murder, witchcraft and some other crimes of this sort. Such people attract the rougher element from the community as they are not treated with equal respect as that given to the rest of the community.

It could be noted here that ethical instruction from initiation plays a part in defining culture in this way. People refer back to their initiation education for ethical guidelines in living with others and everyone is expected to follow this oral code of conduct. Many of the initiated are very good at taking up tasks that are of a communal nature. In Masasi villages, such occasions as burials, corporate village work etc., are always attended by many willing and cooperative people such that any work that needs to be done communally is carried out by many and thus ensuring efficiency. During funerals, people in Masasi villages normally demonstrate impressive communal unity of purpose in carrying out such works as preparing the grave, and properly burying the deceased. While such positive actions could be attributed to the communal nature that is characteristic of traditional African lifestyle the contribution of initiation cannot be overlooked. It can be established that ethical instruction during initiation has had a role to play in sensitising people in a lot of communal matters hence the usefulness of the African educational approach cannot be underestimated.

There is however an area which is not being addressed satisfactorily in Masasi initiation rites, namely sex education. It needs to be clarified here that this is the key ethical area that is being raised in this thesis as being problematic. It is not the rite of passage that is ethically problematic but this aspect that has to do with sexuality and any other aspect connected with it. Untimely sex education for adolescents leads to quite a number of social problems, such as unwanted pregnancies, loss of focus on one's education and future ambition, premature marriages, multiple divorces or no respect for marriage, acquisition of HIV/AIDS – the list is long. If no stress is laid on morality a certain degree of immorality may ensue after initiation.⁴⁵ This is the case with the warriors (*murran*) among the Maasai who, after initiation are allowed to have intimate relations with young pre-pubescent unmarried girls (*entito*) (Coast 2003:7). The warriors can also share their girlfriends. All the relations held at this level are not the basis of future marriage but can be looked at as merely sexual experiment. This is based on the belief that semen is very helpful for a girl's physical development especially the semen of a *murran*. Since the "*murran* are considered the epitome of healthiness, therefore their sperm is best for pre-pubescent girls" (Coast 2003:7). Though many communities in Africa insist on virginity before marriage, this can not be said of every other tribe on the continent.

In Masasi initiation the subject of virginity is not emphasised, rather sexual performance seems to take centre stage during instruction. As a result initiates have tended to put into practice those aspects they have found to be appealing to them and unfortunately this has led to much laxity in the area of morality. Since the details of this subject have been laid out in chapter two, I will not repeat them here but I will instead discuss the implications of inculturation-transformation on the matter.

One might argue that this phenomenon has come to this stage largely due to the decline in African moral values. According to Mwikamba (1999:92) "values and morals go hand in hand." As the one declines the other also declines. This might

⁴⁵ See Ikamba and Ouedraogo (2003).

be where our answer lies. We have already noted that the realm of ideology determines why people do what they do in a society. This is the realm where values are contained. If these values are not maintained they may crumble and other factors, such as the influence of modernity, may end up becoming the norm. This means that these values ought to be revisited and reemphasised on the African mind so that they continue to have a binding effect on the issues of morality.

In order to rediscover or reinvent the moral value of self control in sex matters, initiation rites could align themselves with the biblical perspective. The transformative action on African morality would include expounding biblical principles on sexual purity and incorporating these principles into the traditional value of sexual purity. In doing this it will be noticed that some of the traditional practices are not that different from the teachings of the Christian faith. This means that if the two are incorporated the traditional rites will be moulded and presented on a more ethically sound note than it was before.

The Bible as the *norma normans* has a vital role to play in transformation. Since what we endeavour to produce is an African Christian ethic the Bible and the church become instrumental in the call for transformation. According to Mugambi (1999:18), the church has to do its best to teach an ethic that is relevant to the community it serves. The call is not to maintain status quo with regards to the morality of the world but the church is “challenged by the Gospel to transform this world towards ideals that are consistent with the promises of the Kingdom of God” (1999:18). Kinoti (1999:81) puts it so well when she notes that in addressing the chaos that has characterised African morality today:

There is hope in what the Church can do in calling Africans to maintain what is good in their culture for their moral integrity. The Church in Africa cannot shy away from the responsibility to call people to repentance to set an example in moral integrity and to teach people the message of God who understands human frailty and is willing to heal wholly.

Thus through the theology of inculturation and transformation one discovers the good things in rites with the view to moulding and perfecting them. This theology does not approach the culture as vile but approaches culture with a positive view of constructive dialogue. In this process there is no room for moral injunctions without the inculturative dialogue with the people involved as was the problem with past adaptations.

4.3.2 Religion as source of African morality

The second aspect introduced above has to do with the centeredness of African morality on religion. The religious orientation provides the basis for moral sanctions and authority. Though this authority ultimately rests in God, it is vouchsafed through the mediation of ancestors and other supernatural beings depending on the religious orientation of a particular community. Kinoti, (1999:79) in quoting Louis Leakey states that among the Gikuyu “Law and order depended more upon religious beliefs than upon the police...” and the judiciary system in the area. In most African communities, religion became the instrument through which the society maintained order and stability. Failure to act morally would result in grave consequences within the community and beyond. Unethical behaviour could result in ancestral disapproval and ultimately disapproval by God. It would also lead to the individual’s suffering or even the suffering of the community.

The religious aspect receives its vitality in that it validates the community’s quest for cultural mores. If cultural mores are seen as being derived from the transcendent spiritual realm of the ancestors then they will be observed as binding on the cultural adherents. As noted earlier in 4.2.3, this is what Bediako asserts when he points out that “the cult of ancestors provides the basis for locating in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community” (2000:30). Bediako further asserts that since the ancestor cult is deemed important for ensuring social harmony in the community:

On each occasion of heightened feeling in the community – birth, outdoor of infants, initiation into adulthood, marriage, death...the

cult of ancestors forms an essential part of the ritual ceremonies that secure the conditions upon which the life and continuity of the community are believed to depend (2000:30).

This same thought is contained in the Gogo initiation practice. According to Peter Rigby (1967:437), initiates in this tribe receive secret lessons known as *mizimu* – a Bantu term denoting ‘ancestral spirits’ or ‘spirits of the dead’. Rigby asserts that these teachings are believed to have been handed down from previous generations. Because of this they are taken to “embody one aspect of the protection and sanction given to the institutions and norms of Gogo society by the spirits” (1967:437)

A theology of inculturation and transformation recognises the value that religion through the ‘ancestral myth’ has in authenticating morality. A question can be raised however as to whether we should continue to rely on our ancestors for moral guidance and any other kind of authority. What would be a theologically sound understanding of the involvement of ancestors in our moral endeavours? Mugambi (1989b:67) says that this belief “was replaced by faith in Jesus Christ...” Nurnberger offers another point of view by saying:

It is true that the deceased should be respected. Their witness can transmit the good news to us, their good example can inspire us, their wisdom can inform us, their mistakes can warn us. We should thank God for everything he has done through our forebears. On the other hand they should not be allowed to dominate our behaviour, draw us back into their patterns of behaviour, and their frames of reference. We are adults. We are responsible for our own lives. Our ancestors should not prevent us from finding our own way into the future (Nurnberger 2007:82).

Thus given the supremacy of Christ it follows that the ancestral myth ceases to be the referral point for morality. If we grant that Christ is the sole mediator who was anticipated in all cultures, it follows that his mediatorship does not only extend to merely uniting people with God but to upholding those moral standards which God has required people to adhere to throughout the course of history. This suggests that under the Christian faith morality assumes a Christocentric nature.

According to Mugambi (1989b:163), if we are able to take the African situation for what it is, “the teachings of Jesus would be brought to bear on this self consistent system to see how the Christian message might deepen and enrich the African heritage.” In doing this Mugambi (1989b:163) proposes the theological analogy of *Encounter* in which “Jesus encounters people in their own situation” and helps them to see themselves for who they are, “then He challenges them to take a decision in relation to the life they have been leading.” Arguing from the perspective of divine command morality, Mugambi’s analogy of encounter is very useful in that it lays out the manner in which Christ’s teachings can be made to dialogue with and evaluate the moral aspects in initiation. If an honest evaluation were to occur then appropriate transformation measures would be put in place in regard to the moral instructions within initiation. In the analogy of encounter, Christ becomes the source of moral authority and reference. It is through encounter that the neglected sound moral standards are re-emphasised. Through this process even the negative cultural morals are also encountered and addressed accordingly. This is because not all aspects of culture can be taken to be good. Thus through encounter we go beyond the rediscovery of neglected mores to actually dealing with those questionable ethical norms embraced by our communities.

With regard to the subject of sexual immorality some correlations could be made from the Bible and used to help formulate or revitalise a sound cultural sexual ethic which otherwise might have been lost or was not existent at all. It can be noted that there is a general deterioration of morality in most African cultures today. In this decline communities in Masasi have not been spared. This decline has made its way into initiation. Be that as it may, when it comes to moral teaching, there is, to a good degree, communality between some African teachings and Christian morality. For example in Kenya “different ethnic groups considered sexual purity an honour of the family, virginity⁴⁶ the glory of a young woman and community and faithfulness the crown of a married woman or man to the whole clan” (Mwikambi 1999:93). The same thought is maintained in the biblical

⁴⁶ See also Mary Ntukula & Rita Liljestrom (2004).

tradition. The betrothal system of the Jews could be emulated as a biblical example of purity before marriage (Matthew 1:25). In Pauline theology there is an insistence on sexual purity, (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 5:12-20) and moral responsibility in the Christian community (Ephesians 5:22-28; Colossians 3:18-24). From a biblical perspective, all moral responsibility is to be done as obedience to God. That is why, in Pauline theology, there contains the thought that one is to do that which is right 'in the Lord'. In other areas he points out clearly that it is God's will that people avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The author of Hebrews also insists on sexual purity and connects any form of misconduct in this area with judgement from God (Hebrews 13:4). More examples could be cited but these few mentioned here serve to highlight the fact that with regards to morality the Christian faith helps to achieve the aspirations of society by either revamping or instilling those inner values that define their culture. Arguing for a Christian oriented ethos, Hagamu (cited in Magesa 2004:59) claimed that the traditional ethos "did not encourage the kind of fidelity that Christianity demands of its followers" If this is granted then it can be concluded that the teachings of the biblical tradition can play a positive role in moulding morality in initiation.

Through the theological reflection carried in this chapter, I can affirm that initiation rites are an important aspect of the Masasi community. I think the practice has a lot of good intention in it. However the focus in Masasi seemed to have shifted from emphasis in moral values to fulfilment of cultural formalities or expectations. I therefore suggest that efforts be made to navigate people back to the appropriate values intended in initiation. I have also learnt that ancestor veneration is an enduring practice among a good number of African communities. This subject of ancestral cult needs to be handled with tact since it assumes an important role in the history of many African cultures. Through apologetic juxtaposition done in this chapter, I postulate that the ancestor cult be treated in an apologetic sense to elevate the prominence of Christ. In my theology I do not espouse a continuity of ancestral cult. Rather my translation theology has some slight discontinuity overtones in this regard. More importantly the inculturation –

transformation approach, operates by following ideological principles rather than preserving traditional practices. It operates beyond giving one Christian level of faith by affecting the primal worldview through the Christian faith.

4.4 Conclusion

To this end, this chapter has reflected on Masasi initiation rites through the lenses of inculturation and transformation. In this chapter I have carried out a juxtaposition of rites by investigating the inner religious beliefs behind ancestor veneration. This investigation has brought out apologetic stepping stones for postulating a transformed perspective on the ancestral cult. Two apologetic stepping stones were brought out; the mediation principle and the reality of African finitude. While other scholars believe that there still exists a mediatorial role of ancestors as God's ministers, some have argued that with the coming of Christ, the mediation role of the ancestors ceased. It has also been shown that one of the reasons for pursuing ancestor veneration apart from their mediation role is the African sense of finitude and awareness of spiritual realities which they seek to deal with through the help of ancestors. Jesus has been shown to be supreme over ancestors thereby assuming, in a more perfect sense, the role of mediator between God and man. As *Christus Victor*, Jesus also answers to the African's sense of finitude.

In addressing the subject of morality in initiation two approaches have been used. The first approach is to determine positive values underlying the practice of initiation regardless of whether these values are practiced or not. These values will then need to be re-emphasised and incorporated with the biblical ones. The second approach has to do with establishing a Christocentric ethic in line with the fact that most African morals are based on religion. This ethic will entail expounding biblical teachings on issues of sexual morality and responsibility. If this is done properly it will be realised that the theology of inculturation and transformation will not destroy but will actually present the initiation rites at a much higher level than before.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In attempting to reflect on adolescent initiation rites on a theological level, this thesis has selected two key elements in initiation for discussion. The constituent aspects of ancestor veneration and the moral dimension of sex education have been isolated in this study because they pose relative challenge to the Christian community in Masasi. The objective in the critical theological analysis was to establish whether ancestor veneration still plays any role in initiation within the Christian perspective. As for the moral question, the main question had to do with how the Christian community could influence the teaching that is given during initiation such that it is consistent with what could be termed the Christian ethic.

Through phenomenology of initiation rites in Masasi the research established that these rites could rightly be termed religious. This designation has two connotations. Firstly it suggests that initiation rites, in their non Christian form include the participation of either local deities or more commonly ancestral spirits. Secondly the religious aspect entails that the morality espoused in initiation has its source and authority in spiritual entities which include ancestors. Though God is taken to be the ultimate authority of morality and all that goes on in initiation, it is ancestors who provide authoritative links between God and people in the community. With this religious nature embedded in the African culture, the findings of this research have established that there exists in African Christian life a dualism and continual movement between categories of contradictory values. People continually try to live out their Christian beliefs but at the same time feel they have to return to primal religious beliefs where necessary.

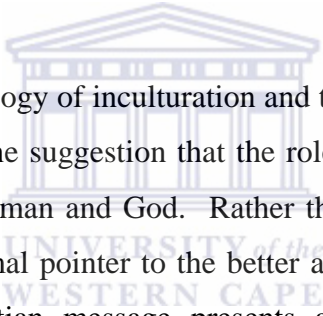
In trying to establish why, after a long time of Christian presence, some African communities still exhibit an ambivalent oscillation between Christian beliefs and traditional African beliefs, the research has concluded that the adaptation methods used in the past did not engage quite effectively with the African cultural elements. Most African scholars have noted that missionary efforts were not very

successful in dealing with the African situation because of the ambivalent manner in which they approached the African culture. Even some of the well intended Christianisation efforts by both missionaries and Africans did not seem to succeed since in the case of the former, they were impositions of their culture and in the case of the latter the focus was more on de-Westernisation of the African church. This is one explanation that can be given for the failure to administer lasting changes on the practice of initiation rites hence the need for a relevant formulation of theology in the form of an inculturation and transformation theology. Inculturation is not a mere unification of corresponding elements but an involved dialogical process with the inner levels of meaning that leads to transformation.

In inculturation-transformation theology key principles have been drawn out which can be applied on initiation rites thereby producing biblically sound and culturally relevant rites. In this theology it has been established that through the expanded incarnation concept in inculturation, the gospel will be planted within the African context in question in such a way that its message would be understood on a popular level by the people. In inculturation, the Christian message should be made to permeate the inner levels of culture in such a way that it interacts with and shapes the realm of worldview, ideology and value system which are the heart of the culture. Having penetrated this level two things should happen. Firstly, the message should assume the language and idiom that appeal to the thought patterns of the people in the culture. This makes it readily appealing to the people. Secondly, the message will be juxtaposed with existent beliefs in the worldview so as to find correlations. One should then endeavour to go beyond mere affinities to using these correlations in an apologetic sense to present the Christian perspective favourably to the people involved. This is the dialogical process that should lead to a transformed outlook of cultural elements.

When the Christian message encounters the African worldview, such issues as ancestor veneration and morality will be juxtaposed with corresponding elements in the Christian message if any. In the absence of corresponding aspects, juxtaposition should be done on the basis of the aspirations and needs that the religious primal aspect is trying to address. This suggests that answers should be

sought in the traditional teachings of the church to present a Christian perspective to a local need. Appropriate transformational measures will then be administered where necessary. The key thought in this theology is that for transformation to occur and be embraced willingly by people within any culture, it has to be communicated as part of those people's worldview. As such, primal aspects to which people revert back from time to time thereby frustrating efforts by the clergy should be addressed as apologetic gateways to their more excellent correlations in the Christian message. Those aspects which remain agreeable in initiation will need to be retained and if they share correspondences with anything in the Christian faith then the two could be carefully incorporated. Those aspects that stand at variance with teachings of the Christian faith will need to be discarded while, however, taking cognisance of the need they were trying to address.



Having engaged the theology of inculturation and transformation with the practice of rites, this has led to the suggestion that the role of ancestors no longer lies in their mediation between man and God. Rather the belief in ancestral mediation would be taken as a primal pointer to the better and supreme mediation of Jesus Christ whom the Christian message presents as the sole mediator between mankind and God. Even though this research has assumed this position it needs to be pointed out that the subject of ancestor veneration is one that attracts a lot of debate and controversy among African theologians. Some theologians still see room for the operation of ancestors in African communities and some do not. The Ancestral cult is an enduring phenomenon which is associated with the African heritage. In this regard it has a lot of differing views associated with it. Thus the position in this thesis has been established to present one perspective that could be held with a view to ancestor veneration and their involvement in people's affairs. With such a view in this thesis, it can also be asserted that ancestors cease to be the main source of authority in matters of morality. Christ's Lordship extends to all areas of peoples lives including morality. As Christ encounters each culture he speaks to it with a new moral ethic. As a result the Christian faith operates from what one could consider to be a Christian ethic. Again, while it is not immediately

easy to pin point what one could term a universal Christian ethic, one could still talk of a contextualised understanding of Christian ethics. To talk of Christian ethics does not necessarily entail a universal ethic. While different hermeneutics and contexts may produce different ethics, there are general matters to which local communities can be in agreement.

Such is the case when it comes to issues of sexual immorality. As noted in the discussion, most African communities have high moral standards in the area of sex education. In this sense there is a certain degree of agreement with teachings of the Christian faith on the subject. What could be highlighted is that there is a general decline in values held by most communities. This decline in values has affected the morality of the people. Be that as it may, there are also other cultural teachings which could be termed morally unsound by biblical standards. This means in inculturation-transformation it becomes important to help cultures not only to revisit their good but dormant moral values but also encourage them to espouse the Christian ethic. In doing so, the Christian ethic on morality will be used to enrich the cultural ethic. In the case of Masasi, this means that the Christian ethic will have to help the Masasi community rediscover, redefine and reintroduce appropriate sex education in all initiation camps.

Recommendations

Having applied this inculturation-transformation theology to Masasi initiation rites the following outcomes could be recommended. With regard to ancestor veneration, the supremacy of Christ needs to be established and pedagogically emphasised to cultural adherents. Inculturation does not work in abstraction but through involvement with the laity. Teaching of key theological issues should be done on a popular level. Having laid out a sound understanding of Christ and his role in the life of believers, the next move would be to guide the Christians in deciding how they will reshape their cultural practice while relinquishing to Christ those roles previously occupied by ancestors. They will also have to decide what to do with the religious roles of the *Ngariba* given that Jesus Christ has assured

them of protection in all circumstances of life (John 17). As for those religious items which do not have direct analogies in Christian faith scrutiny will need to be applied before conclusions are made to either discard, replace or modify them. This means for such aspects as the *mbepesi* powder and sitting with bare breast by mothers of initiates and so forth will be subject to further dialogue. This is so because apologetic and didactic aspects of inculturation and the mental assimilation leading to the building of new convictions/worldview and ultimately practice will take time.

As far as sex education and morality is concerned the didactic aspect of the inculturation process will need to be carried out on a pastoral level. This means the clergy, the traditional practitioners and instructors concerned will need, based upon their understanding of Christian morality and the ages of initiates concerned, construct a relevant curriculum. Such a curriculum, if one may call it that, will need to be based on biblical understanding regarding sexual issues and morality *per se* as hinted at in chapter four. It is when the practitioners have presented what they see to be a biblically relevant teaching for their people that the process of transformation will begin to take shape. This is assuming that the inculturation will have already been in motion as the people dialogue with the Bible on what they view as a Christian morality. A key question in this area understands that, as Jesus is supreme over the lives of people he also commands their morality.

These inculturation and transformation measures need to start operating on a popular level so that people participate in the shaping of their own practices. Care should be taken not to impose already made theological positions as these would not attract adhesion from people. If people see themselves as part of the construction process of a new rite they should be able to support the resolutions they make in this regard. Involving the laity on the transformation enterprise will prove effective as they, based upon relevant contextual Christian teaching, may be able to suggest a new transformed outlook on the constituent aspects of initiation. In this inculturation and transformation approach, the clergy assumes the role of theological/doctrinal referee.

To this end, it needs to be noted that inculturation and transformation theology while it presents an effort to dealing with dualistic superficial Christianity, it does not deliver results instantly. With regards to the element of ancestor veneration, it will only take those who have a strong cognisant faith in Jesus to easily let go of ancestors. While most people know that Jesus is the Son of God and the sole mediator between them and God they still look at ancestor veneration as an integral part of their culture and heritage. Thus for them to easily let go of ancestors will take much time and somewhat a vivid assurance that Christ indeed deals with their frailties and that dropping a religious sense of ancestors does not really mar their identity. Be that as it may, inculturation-transformation, when carefully done with sound biblical hermeneutics, it still presents us with a working tool for addressing initiation rites in Masasi with a considerable degree of success.



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