

**INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY
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**AN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE OF INITIAL
CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS ACCOMPANIMENT**

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Requirements for the Diploma in Spirituality and Religious Formation

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DEDICATION

To all African candidates to religious life and to all religious formators
who dedicate themselves in accompanying the future African
religious in their process of formation.

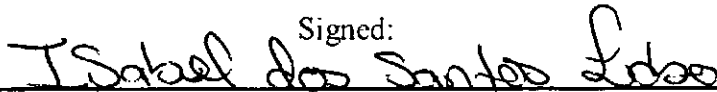
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Diploma in Spirituality and Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:



Isabel dos Santos Lobo RRMM

This Long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:

Fr. Modestus Inyait, AJ

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This study is meant to address some of the anomalies observed in the initial formation of African candidates to Christian Religious Life. I shall attempt this by comparing Agikuyu initiation process with the Christian religious initial formation. The study is based on the assumption that there are many good values within the African initiation rites that could be applied in the formation of African young candidates to Christian Religious Life.

Inculturation of Christian values within the African context implies searching for African ways of forming Africans. The current way of forming Africans has been successful as far as the adherence to religious life by Africans is concerned, but it is doubtful if it is effective and accommodative of the African culture. Do Africans feel at home right from their early stage of formation or do they perceive their formation as a foreign project? Do African formators feel free to bring in their cultural values to formation or they feel *forced* to follow the rigid European model of formation? These and other questions will constitute the core of this paper in order to seek for effective ways of forming candidates to Christian Religious Life.

Background to the study

Writing on enculturation, J. M. Waliggo quotes John Ingaards who said that “As Christ himself chose to become man in order to save humanity, Christianity has

no alternative but to do the same in every culture and time in order to continue the salvation brought by Christ”.¹ This is why religious life, formation and community in Africa have to be lived and expressed in an African way of living by Africans who embrace it. When we look into many religious communities we find conflicts resulting from cultural misunderstandings probably due to lack of knowledge of the candidates’ cultural background as well as lack of interest by members to share in other people’s cultural values. To make this more specific in my essay, I would like to share some of the experiences I had during my formation journey, which for me are in contradiction to my African upbringing as a well versed in Chwabo culture from Mozambique.

Living in different places does not necessarily mean assuming the values of that culture, although it could act as a stepping-stone. In many African cultures, particularly in my own culture, when you are talking with somebody older than you, it is considered disrespectful to look at his or her eyes or face directly. We can do so only with our age mates. As a sign of respect and an attitude of listening, the younger person has to look down.

Contrary to this, in the western culture, if you do not look at the face or eyes of the person you are talking to, you are understood to be disrespectful and disinterested. What a contradiction of cultures! The westerners interpret looking down as hiding something about your personality or unwillingness to reveal oneself. During my junior years in formation, the novice mistress advised us to look directly into her eyes during personal sessions. Even if this was against my culture, I had to

¹J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, 11-12.

do it in order to avoid misunderstandings. As time went by, I realised that these cultural differences created confusion between the Spaniard formator and myself.

Another unforgettable experience was when I was told that a candidate to religious life must be “open”. One of our fellow postulants was accused of not being open enough because she did not share about her relationships with men with her formator. Her cultural mindset did not allow the revealing of such matters, especially to someone older than her. Only one’s age mate is bound to know these secrets. The candidate was reported to the council where she had to explain the reason why she could not share with her formator². This shows again the cultural differences. For Africans, sexuality is something sacred and secret, which is not talked about openly, while in western culture you can talk about it openly even with parents. Thus in religious formation, candidates may be accused of what is not their fault, but part of their culture.

In our religious communities, we sometimes discriminate visitors. This is surely not in line with African spirit of hospitality. Talking with one of the sisters from my community, she shared that they had conflict in the community due to what to offer to certain kinds of visitors. This brought conflicts between the young religious and the superior because, while according to the young, any visitor could be given whatever was available, for the superior, the best should be reserved for the best visitors. This matter was reported to the provincial superior who is an African; she instinctively supported the young sister. This seems to be a simple thing but it is the type of thing that causes conflicts especially in multi-cultural communities.

²A Junior Sister, “Cultural Shocks in formation”, interviewed by author, 6 April 2005, Tangaza College, Nairobi.

In many African communities, the brothers and sisters of one's father or mother are also his or her fathers and mothers. And they deserve the same respect as one's real parents. In the western or European cultures, these people are not considered as fathers or mothers, but they are uncles or aunties or cousins within varying degrees. A certain brother from an international community once shared with me that one day his aunt came to visit him in his community. To his surprise, before she even tasted their food, he was told to ask her if she came to sleep there or just for a day. The brother said that he felt very embarrassed, because in his Sudanese culture such a thing never happens. A visitor, according to his culture, brings blessings to the home. So, it is unheard of to ask when they will depart; worse still to ask one's own aunt who is considered one's mother. If you ever do that, it indirectly signals the fact that you are telling him or her to go³.

These experiences are enough to convince those in charge of forming Africans that there is something wrong or lacking in our existing programmes of religious Christian formation of African candidates. That is why the Church made an urgent call for inculturation of Christianity in African. Inculturation is a Gospel imperative and it must be the focus in formation of candidates into religious life⁴.

As someone who is being prepared to accompany African candidates, I am convinced that it is important to look at our present formation programmes through an African lens in order to make it more effective, attractive and convincing so that religious life can have an African face (expression) and be lived from an African perspective.

³A Junior Brother, "Shocks in Intercultural Living", interviewed by author. 6 April 2005, Tangaza College, Nairobi.

⁴C.f. G. A. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission: Refunding Religious Life Formation*, 36.

The Agikuyu people of Kenya

The name Kikuyu comes from the word *Mukuyu* (fig tree) meaning “people of the fig tree”.⁵ It is belied that Gikuyu, the founder of the tribe, came from the hole which housed the root of the fig tree. The Gikuyu have their origin in Murang’a district in the Central Province of Kenya. Gikuyu are divided into three categories in their group: The *mbari* (the blood family), the *muhirige* (which incorporates several mbaris) and, finally the age group formed during initiation period.

It is from the age group that the Agikuyu learn how to behave in the society. These age groups help in the formation of personality, for learning the customs, beliefs, values and norms of the community⁶. In the age-group, the person is also helped to acquire the social identity and a sense of belonging to the community. In this group, individuals learn from other peoples’ experiences because nothing is hidden from anybody, they even share their secret feelings. In so doing they correct one another when necessary in an effort to mature.

The Mbari and the Muhirige systems form several families in the tribe and they are united by the age group as the whole tribe in all its activities. In the Agikuyu tribe, every year the adolescents are taken for initiation ceremonies and they enter into the age group of the district in which the person belongs. The Agikuyu are very united; they address all the tribal problems as a community.

I have chosen to study the Agikuyu because they have elaborate initiation rites, which have many formative aspects that can be applied to Christian religious formation. Agikuyu also have a lot of written literature in this subject.

⁵ J.G. GITHIGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 30.

⁶ Ibid, 33.

Methodological concerns

As I embarked on my research I asked myself, are there African cultural values that could be incorporated and become useful for Christian religious initial formation? Are there ways to make Christian religious formation effective within the African context? What are the main difficulties encountered by the young African candidates in their formation to Christian religious life? What are the problems faced by formators in the Christian initial religious formation of African candidates? Is it possible to formulate an African Christian programme for Christian religious formation? Is it possible to live African cultural values in multi-racial Christian religious communities?

Throughout the research I was searching for African (Agikuyu) indigenous cultural values, methods and institutions that could be adopted and adapted in the initial formation of young Africans into Christian religious life. Specially we sought to find out the aspects of the African human initiation that could be applicable to the Christian religious initial formation; Discover the connection between African human formation and Christian religious initial formation; Unearth some difficulties encountered by the young African candidates in their formation into Christian Religious Life; Articulate the problems experienced by formators in the Christian religious formation of African candidates; Highlight how African traditional ways of formation can be useful to religious initial formation to make it more effective and relevant to African candidates.

Much as we tried to be exhaustive, our study is limited. We collected the data from Agikuyu within Nairobi and this poses limitation to the study since there are Agikuyus in other parts of the country. This is because given the time and resources available we could not study all the Agikuyu in the whole of Kenya. For

the sake of objectivity, we included in our sample informants from another local African community, namely the Kisii of Kenya.

The data were collected both from written and non-written sources. First we reviewed the available written literature on the topic, and then we conducted interviews and discussions with various people especially religious, candidates in formation, formators and superiors of religious communities. We also talked to the Agikuyu of various age brackets. Personal reflection and personal experience as an African religious have been invaluable source for this essay.

This Essay is divided into three sections, which have been referred to as chapters. Before getting into chapters themselves; we first present the general introduction to the study. Chapter one is a discussion on the essence and dynamics of initial Christian religious formation. Chapter two deals with similarities and differences between initial Christian religious formation and indigenous African stages of human growth. This chapter will conclude with some recommendations, and the general conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER I

INITIAL CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS FORMATION

Introduction

Initial formation is the basis of all religious formation. On this depend the quality of religious life and consequently the living of it. Initial formation is a gradual process of initiation undergone by young candidates who want to join religious life.

Initial formation is a moment of discernment of one's vocation. The formators, representing the Congregation come to know the candidates, and the candidates also come to know the Congregation and its charism and mission in the Church. Formation period also gives opportunity to the candidate to know her/himself so that she/he can make wise decisions. This requires a specific accompaniment by someone who is more experienced, a formator, and community support, the family and the entire environment around.

In this chapter, we shall discuss the meaning of formation and how it is understood in the Christian tradition. We shall also reflect on the objectives of formation, the agents that facilitate this process, and the different approaches that enable this formation to take place. At the end of the chapter we shall make an

integrating reflection on the Christian religious ideas, insights and observation discussed in the chapter.

1.1 The Meaning of Christian Religious Formation

In general, formation is an ongoing process of acquiring the skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, convictions and behaviour required of a person at a given stage of human development. Formation has also been referred to as the “shaping of character or ideas in the mind of a person”.⁷ In other words, formation is the education people receive which determines the way they live in society. It is a way of moulding people in order to help them achieve or behave in an acceptable manner, and responsible for themselves, serving the larger society better. In Christian religious terms, formation has been defined as:

An on-going process by which the Holy Spirit forms the Christians through consecration to an evangelical way of life within the Church in order to work more effectively to build up the kingdom of God. Each person bears the primary responsibility for personal character and individual growth and formation, and each is also responsible for giving support to others as they seek to develop personal character and individual talents.⁸

Religious formation is a means by which young adults (candidates) are introduced into the way of living of a new culture or religious life. During this period, candidates are introduced into the charism of a given congregation in which a person desires to belong. This charism will be expressed in forms, which respond to the actual needs of the church and of the world in line with the specific mission in the Church.

⁷ M. ARINGO, “On-going Formation Process”, *Religious Formation in International Communities*, 20

⁸ C. PRZYBILLA, “Religious Formation Conference”, *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 569.

Formation is necessary to enable young persons to develop their potential, allowing them to be the way God wants them to be as mature people who will be able to embrace the gospel values in the different charisms.⁹ It means learning and assuming new values aimed at helping the candidates to be open to transformation so that they can identify themselves with the values and beliefs of their religious families. Formation also means to acquire knowledge that can lead to the better understanding of oneself and of the world.

Religious formation is “a process whereby a person in and through community assumes responsibility for personal growth in Christ, in the service to the Church and society, according to the founding experience of her/his particular congregation”.¹⁰ As a process, formation does not have an end, it continues down to the tomb. Every time a person has to prepare for something new, it is imperative that she/he has to undergo formation so that she can offer better services to others.

Religious formation is to accompany somebody in the journey of faith in order to achieve the goals and recognize one’s vocation in a particular spirit¹¹. This opens the person to be more sensitive to the inner call of living out her personal charism in the charism of a given congregation.

The process of formation is like a journey where there are moments of joy and moments of darkness. The moments of joy are when we feel that we are growing in our commitment to Christ and in the identification with the charism and we are happy with ourselves or with the call we have received. The moments of darkness are the ones when we are not clear of our motivations and many times

⁹ A Novice Mistress, “Meaning of Formation”, interviewed by author, 31 May 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi.

¹⁰ G. A. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission: Refunding Religious Formation*, 102.

¹¹ A Local Religious Superior “Meaning of Formation” Interviewed by author, 30 April 2005, Kibera Slums, Nairobi.

people can feel discouraged. But all these moments are important in the journey of formation that can help people make their choice responsibly.

1.2 The Objectives of Initial Christian Religious Formation

Every human institution has certain objectives, which each member is expected to achieve. These objectives are like guidelines that *formators* pass to the young in *formation* in communities. Religious houses of formation have also their objectives, which those in formation are expected to achieve. These objectives can be different from one stage of formation to another: from initial to on-going formation; and also from one congregation to another. However, the fundamental objective of initial religious formation remains the same that is, being a true disciple of Christ by being moulded into Christ (see Eph. 4:24).

All religious congregations aim at helping their candidates to grow and mature as human and Christian persons, so that they can be able to discern and clarify their desires of following Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsels and according to the charism of the congregations. John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* states: “the primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in following Christ, at the service of the Church’s mission”.¹² In the same line, two young religious said that the objectives of religious formation today should be one of forming people able to live religious life in the contemporary world with greater authenticity¹³.

The growth required is the integration of all the aspects that influence the daily life of a person: human, emotional, psychological, spiritual and cultural that

¹² JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 65, 67.

¹³ Two Junior Brothers, “Objectives of Initial Formation”, interviewed by author, 30 April 2005, Kibera Slums, Nairobi

will lead to an integral personal transformation.¹⁴ To achieve these objectives, the candidates need to have a minimum of human and spiritual preparation and maturity that will enable them to be open to the work of God in them, and to respond freely and responsibly to that call in giving themselves to God and to His kingdom. This freedom and responsibility will happen if each person knows and accepts him/herself and if there is an environment of trust, openness, respect and confidence. It happens where each person can be herself or himself and where there is place for mistakes and correction, for self-awareness and acceptance without making prejudgements. Judgments are often the causes of withdrawal among candidates.

When trying to analyse the reality of the young people who join religious life today, most of them are well equipped with a lot of cultural and Christian doctrinal knowledge. Only a few are not. But something common to all of them is that they lack experience of their faith and they are willing to grow into it. That is why during initial formation one of the objectives should be allowing the candidates to deepen their experiences of faith by looking at their images of God – a key to every relationship. So, there is a need to look at each person as an individual with a unique personal background. Formation should start from where each person is¹⁵ and move progressively to help them live out the values; “three essential elements of religious life: community life, prayer and service.”¹⁶

In the international and also local communities, one of the objectives of initial formation should be to form people who are able to live and work with others who are different from their cultures or languages. This is one of the issues that

¹⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata* 65(d), 67.

¹⁵ Cf. G. A. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission: Refunding Religious Formation*, 98

¹⁶ M. O'REILLY, *The Formation of a Religious in Africa Today*, 3. Cf. G. A. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission: Refunding Religious Formation*, 98

bring conflict and divisions in many of our religious communities. So, it is important that from the beginning candidates start learning, accepting and respecting others' cultures so that we can complement one another because every culture has something to offer and enrich the other. To allow this to happen, there is need for avoiding prejudices against others' cultures.

1.3 Formation as Accompaniment

As we have said previously, formation is a process of learning to know oneself, and to know the charism of the Congregation in which a person desires to join. It also involves acquiring the skills and the knowledge that will enable him/her to live religious life as a form of following Jesus Christ through the vowed life. This process is possible through a journey with someone who can help us to discern and to make the right choices in life.

Accompaniment is a journey of helping and guiding others (young candidates) to respond consciously to the call they have received from God. Accompaniment is "a key element in the formation of a religious as it is the main vehicle for helping a person through the progressive process of assessment, discernment and growth through integration."¹⁷ It is a process of helping others to 'become themselves, allowing the changes to happen in the person.'¹⁸ Therefore, it is important to have someone with whom we can talk, listen to us in the moments of doubt and light, help us to discover and clarify the direction we should take in life.¹⁹

¹⁷ T. KEARNEY, "The Need For Accompaniment in the Formation Programme for Young Men in Religious Life", *Religious Formation in International Communities*, 46.

¹⁸ Novices Director, "Formation as Accompaniment", Interviewed by author, 22 May 2005, Kibera Slums, Nairobi.

¹⁹ Cf. E. SELLNER, Mentoring: *The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship*, 19.

During all the process of formation and in particular in the initial formation, there is a need of helping young religious in discerning their vocation because sometimes there are outside interferences which if not helped, can make one fail to respond to their real call. So, a formator, as “someone a little more experienced, a person who acts as guide in regard to a new career, profession, job or developmental stage”²⁰ should walk with the young ones in their struggle through decision making.

Accompaniment is meant to increase a person’s skills and intellectual development²¹ that will enable awareness of one’s personal change and growth and recognition and acceptance of one’s giftedness, thus putting them at the service of the community. This will happen if there is trust between the formator and candidates, if the young ones have sufficient space and freedom to explore their true selves, reach a sufficient positive self-image and self-confidence. These encourage their ability to collaborate in their personal and community growth²². If there is no environment of trust and freedom, the candidates will tend to hide what they really are and pass to another stage, thus postponing the manifestation of their true selves for later stages, when it can really be too late to correct and change.

To accompany someone demands, first of all, trusting one another, being confident in the person accompanying and to grow in knowledge of one another. So when accompanying the young ones in their journey, the formator should be aware of the candidate’s background in order to avoid prejudices and misunderstanding. This will enable the formator to offer the correct help corresponding to the candidate’s needs of human and spiritual growth. In this process, formators should

²⁰ Cf. Ibid. 25.

²¹ Cf., *ibid.* 25.

²² Cf., M. ELIZABETH, “Women Religious as Mentors”, in *Human Development*, 7.

be able to see behaviour patterns in order to enlighten the candidate on personal awareness of what is happening in his/her life.

Accompaniment helps a young person to develop an initial understanding about his/her vocation, spiritual life, and possible call to religious life. It also helps one to recognize his/her abilities and potential to engage in ministry.²³ It is through the process of accompaniment that the young candidate will become aware of his/her identification with the charism and live religious life meaningfully. This will be expressed in the daily life through prayer, community life and apostolate. That is why it is important to help the candidates to reflect about their vocational identity and meaning of it in their life.

To accompany others requires “patience to wait until the person is ready to move on, to be truthful (to say things as they are), be able to challenge when necessary, to encourage and to know that the other person is still a beginner. It is important not to expect too much”²⁴, and it requires also the ability to listen. To listen the spoken and unspoken words that the candidate passes on; requires openness to share one’s experience and encourage others. Listening also requires the ability for empathy, looking at the positive side of the young ones but also correcting when there is need to do so with the aim of shaping themselves into the life they desire to live.

²³ Cf. S. W. SYNAN, “Mentoring Improves Vocation Promotion”, in *Human Development*, 28.

²⁴ A Novice Mistress. “Formation as Accompaniment”, Interviewed by author, oral, 31 May 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi

1.4 Agents of Initial Christian Religious Formation

1.4.1 The Blessed Trinity, the Only Formator

In the light of Christian faith, “the true author of formation is the Trinity: The Father moulds the young person into the image of the Son through the action of the Spirit”.²⁵ The Father is educator; the source of all knowledge, the Son is the model to be followed, and the Holy Spirit is the guide, which enables us to see with clarity our journey that makes us reflect deeply on our responses to that call and leads us to transformation of our life. The formator is only the instrument of the work of the Trinity in the candidate’s life.

1.4.2 The Family

By family we mean parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives who directly and indirectly have influence in the person’s growth. It is there that the person starts to develop her/his human and spiritual capacities. “It is the family that plays the initial role in forming women and men for religious life and for any other lifestyle”.²⁶

The formation that the young religious receives from childhood is the one that will define their character. A formator said that the family (parents) are the ones who introduce the human and Christian values to their children and when they come into religious life, we only continue from where the parents have started.²⁷ We help the person to shape those aspects which are not corresponding to the life that the person wills to embrace.

²⁵ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 35.

²⁶ L. NADEAU, “Impact of the Family on Religious Formation”, *African Ecclesial Review*, 14.

²⁷ A Novice Mistress, “The Role of the Family in Initial Formation”, Interviewed by author, 31 May 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi.

1.4.3 The Person Him/herself

“Each person bears the responsibility for her/his personal growth and formation”.²⁸ Only that person can allow God to speak to her or to him and accept to be transformed by God’s presence in his/her life. To allow this to happen, the person should be encouraged to accept to be transformed by what he/she is learning. Other people just help the person, “the great contribution in formation comes from the candidates themselves.”²⁹ In formation, if the person is not willing to be helped, it is in vain to give pieces of advice to them. The person should be open to the work of the Spirit in one’s life, and will to be transformed by it.

1.4.4 Peer Group

The peer-group can be a school that forms or malforms candidates. When we talk of initial religious formation, the candidates themselves have responsibility of helping one another in their growth. When something happens to one of them, they are the first to know and to correct one another. According to their different characters they can form and challenge one another. Candidates are the best formators of themselves, because they know each other better than the formators do, and when one of them does something wrong, they correct him/her. By the time the formator finds out, they have already tried to solve it.³⁰ This can be possible if there is trust, openness and confidence amongst the group. This also allows them to feel they are adults and that it is not necessary to take all their problems to the formators.

²⁸ C. PRZYBILLA, “Religious formation Conference”, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 569.

²⁹ An Assistant Juniors Director, “Agents of Initial Formation”, interviewed by author, 13 June 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi.

³⁰ Cf., A Junior Brother, “The Role of Peer-group in Formation”, interviewed by author, 10 June 2005, Karen, Nairobi

1.4.5 Formators

Since “formation is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitude of the Son in the hearts of young men and women”³¹, formators are the mediators of the Trinitarian work in the young people’s life. They pass on what is needed for the formation of the young ones. Formators are a kind of encouragement to the young, but these youngsters are the ones who make the choice of allowing transformation to happen in themselves. Formators do not force people, they guide the young lovingly and willingly and help them to discern whether the person is interested and appropriated to religious life or not.³² To do this, formators must be aware that the mission is not theirs. This requires that the formator is a person who trusts in God, and able to perceive His work in the life of young ones.

1.4.6 Environment

By environment we mean the internal and external influences. The society and the culture, the place where the formation is carried out, and the community at large are the environment. All these can have a positive or negative influence in the young people’s formation, depending on the level of maturity of the person.

The set up of the formation house (among poor or middle class) is by itself an agent of formation of the young religious who can be in contact with the people. This gives opportunity to the young ones to experience and put in practice what they hear theoretically, to be in touch with the reality of the people, as a way of

³¹JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata* No. 66. 68.

³²A Novice Director, “Agents of Formation”, interviewed by author, oral, 22 May, 2005, Kibera Slums, Nairobi.

challenging their own vocation, and the ability to live the charism. Otherwise they will live an imaginary religious life.

People pretend when they have no space to be themselves, when treated as children perceiving no atmosphere of freedom and trust. Thus they hide their real image in order to pass to another stage of formation and when this kind of people are professed, they can revenge and live out their true selves, thus bringing problems to community life.

Religious community is another important agent of formation of candidates. It “takes upon itself the task of bringing young candidates to maturity”.³³ To help the young persons to grow in maturity of their vocation the members of the community should live the evangelical values, have balanced lives where it is possible to reconcile stability, creativity and coherence to the charism that can motivate the young religious to identify themselves with that charism. The community, as agent of initial formation accompanies the candidate in their integral growth. Hence John Paul II says that

The community is the chief place of formation in Institutes of Consecrated Life and societies of Apostolic Life. Initiation into the hardships and joys of community life takes place in the community itself. Through the fraternal life, each one learns to live with those to whom God has put at his or her side, accepting their positive traits along with their differences. Each one learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all.³⁴

Formation depends on the quality of the community. For a community to become formative there should be harmony and unity among the members and harmony also on the objectives of formation so that they can all work towards the same goals and offer a good help to the candidates.

³³ A. CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, 44.

³⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata* No. 67.

The larger Christian community also plays an important role in the accompaniment of the candidates, since it is within the larger community that the young ones grow up. The community knows its members, even those who later on are religious candidates, just as well as the parents know them. That is why today many religious communities ask information about their candidates from the Christian communities rather than only from the parish priest.

1.5 Methods of Initial Christian Religious Formation

1.5.1 Modelling

The unique and the perfect model that is worth imitating is Jesus Christ. There are people however, who, in spite of their human weakness, give us a good example as to lead others to growth in their personality and identification with Jesus Christ. Older religious who have achieved a healthy integration in their spiritual and psychological lives are good models for the young religious. So the way the community live their consecration and the charism is fundamental to providing a good example to the young religious. In connection with the above, candidates to brotherhood believe that formators should be people of total maturity, openness, understanding and good character. They should have a heart that can transform others and, lead them to good living of religious life, the gospel values,³⁵ and consistence between what she/he teaches, and the deeds.

Writing on *The Feminine Mentor in Women's Development*, Marie Beha makes reference to Daniel Levinson's study of male human development, specifically on *The Season of a Man's Life* where he mentions the role of a mentor

³⁵ Cf. Two Junior Brothers, "Role Modelling in formation", Interviewed by author, 22 May 2005, Kibera slums, Nairobi.

in the life of the young adult male saying that “good mentor is an admixture figure of a good father and a good friend. A mentor is a transitional figure who invites and welcomes the young man into the adult world. He serves as a guide, a teacher, and sponsor. He represents skills, knowledge, virtues, accomplishment – the superior qualities the young man hopes to acquire”.³⁶ The mentor or formator is like a mirror to the young adults who seek to see in her/him the values they are trying to live. This means that formators should match their teachings to their deeds to avoid contradicting words and actions.

1.5.2 Journey

As discussed above, formation is a journey towards growth of a person in all its dimensions. It is a process of conversion to assimilate the values of consecrated life, imitating Jesus Christ the consecrated person *par excellence*. This is a sacred journey and needs to have someone guiding it towards the achievement of the goals, “towards a change of heart, a change of attitude, a change of perspective and values – in brief, a change of identity”³⁷. These changes come gradually.

The person who accompanies will need patience, compassion, perseverance and ability to perceive what the candidate needs for the journey. The one being accompanied will require a will to be accompanied, trust and confidence in the guide and the desire to go through all what is needed in order to reach the goal. A novice mistress said, “a formator is like a midwife who is there to assist when is necessary,

³⁶ M. BEHA, “The Feminine Mentor in Women’s Development” *Human Development*, 31.

³⁷ J. GIALLANZA, “Vocation Promotion and Religious Formation” *Human Development*, 31.

to make sure that the person follows the correct path, but she/he is the one making the journey".³⁸

During this journey, respect plays an important role. It enables the person to make her/his own choices whether to continue or to give up. The one accompanying will not force but suggest or advise because the objective of this journey is not to force people to do what we want them to do but empower them with freedom to continue if they so desire, or to leave if they discover that they are on a wrong way.

1.5.3 Encouragement

Encouragement is an important aspect not only in the initial formation but also in all stages of human life. It gives support and enlightens the way forward, helps to increase the person's self-esteem and to look positively at the journey ahead. To approve or congratulate people even in the smallest things they do helps them be confident in themselves. It also gives way to mutual support among people in formation and cultivation of values that are in them.

When people are in the process of discerning their life, sometimes there are doubts if they are not helped, they can lose hope in the future and despair. That is why it is important for all of us to accept our human weaknesses and be aware that,

Acknowledging weaknesses not only ratifies Christian behaviour, but also facilitates the development of a sense of trust in the hearts of those undergoing formation. They begin to realize that maturity includes encountering and accepting personal shortcomings and weaknesses. This contact with genuine humanness and humility can be a lasting source of assurance to young religious as they confront their own limitations during the years to follow³⁹.

³⁸ A Novice Mistress, "Formation as a Journey", Interviewed by author. 31 May 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi.

³⁹ J.C. FURTREL, "The Dynamics of Religious Formation", *Human Development*, 23.

If we accept that the young people can make mistakes as we do, it is a form of encouraging them to grow accepting their humanity and allowing them to learn from those mistakes. It is a form of assuring them that despite our human limitations it is possible to grow if we are ready to be helped and make personal effort towards our identification with the person of Jesus the Lord.

1.5.4 Correction

A novice, emphasising the importance of correction for growth of a person said, “a person may think that everything is going on well when in reality it is not. So it is necessary to say something to a person when she or he is wrong”.⁴⁰ When we correct somebody we condemn the behaviour and not the person. Allowing the person to talk about that behaviour (pattern) and helping him/her to own their behaviour so that they can do something for themselves in order to change, is a real act of charity.

It is not easy to correct somebody. So when doing so, the formator should find an appropriate moment in order to avoid the defensive attitude from both (formator – candidate). It requires an attitude of acceptance of the failures, humility, respect, and empathy so that the person can accept it as constructive for personal growth. A formator said that as formators, they should learn to trust and to show love so that the candidates can understand that correction is done in and for love and for the candidate's personal growth⁴¹.

⁴⁰ A Novice, “Correction as Method of Formation”, Interviewed by author, 11 June 2005, Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi.

⁴¹ ANTONIO GUIRAO, “Correction as Method of Formation”, Interviewed by author, 13 June 2005, Adams Arcade, Nairobi.

Although correction is not easy, candidates find it easier to practice it among themselves rather than when done by the formator. It is because of the age gap and the responsibility. Will it ever be an easy task? What is true, however, is that formation today should be in an atmosphere of freedom, respect and mutual responsibility.

In the initial formation, formators and other members of formation should be aware that candidates are not yet religious. What is demanded of a novice and of newly professed and a finally professed religious should be different, to avoid, for instance, a novice behaving as an aspirant or as a finally professed.

1.5.5 Collaboration

When we speak of collaboration as a method of formation, we mean that in the formation of a person, many people and circumstances take part in it. Collaboration comes from the candidate. He/she has to let him/herself be enriched by the experiences of others and by sharing experiences with others so that the growth can be for all.

Formation to religious life, and especially its initial stages, requires a great capacity for collaborative work, because not all institutes can offer a complete formation to their candidates. So by collaborating with other institutes they can cover what is missing⁴². This collaboration should also come from the person in formation by allowing the Spirit of God to work in their life, to mould and transform her/his life by emptying oneself and being open to what is *new*, in this case, learning to live the values of religious life (community life, prayer and the service to others).

⁴² Cf. A. FLANNERY, *Perfectae Caritatis* 18, Vatican Council II, 631-632.

This collaboration comes also from formators, by allowing the candidates to explore their capacity for responsibility for themselves and for others. To sum up, allow them to be adults and mature people, not always dependant on the formators. Collaboration in formation also means involving parents. In the formation of candidates, the families and the Christian community are the ones taking over the accompaniment of their children when they go for holidays. They are also co-operating with the congregation in helping their children to grow in fidelity to their vocation.

1.6 Integrating Reflection

Formation as a means of helping people to shape their lives to become mature at all levels is a process that never ends. Initial religious formation has as its aim leading people to human, emotional, spiritual, psychological maturity, and culturally harmonized so that they can be able to live religious life as self-giving to the Lord and to His Kingdom through the charism of their institute and its mission in the Church.

Human and Christian initial formation starts from the family from which the candidates come. Other aspects (psychological, spiritual, emotional including cultural) are taken into account during initial religious formation. In this formation, the Trinity is the first agent, acting through human instruments, which can be the family, the community and formator who directly or indirectly accompany the candidates in their process of growth and vocational discernment. Peers and the environment in and outside formation house have also a great impact in the formation of the future religious.

Initial religious formation is a journey of personal conversion and transformation. This can only be possible through the help of an experienced and mature person with an intimate relationship with God, person of trust, compassion and concern for others; able to discern the movements of the Spirit in others and lead them to the way God wants them. Formation will also be possible if there is collaboration between formator and candidate and if the members of the Congregation live their vocation with joy and mostly if the candidates are open and show interest in living religious life and the charism of the congregation.

In the process of helping the young people in their journey of discernment, it is important to look at the candidate's family background so that the formator can offer the help that the person needs: it will be important to explore the candidate's image of God, since it may affect the person's relationship with others.

People responsible for formation of the young religious should let them be human, allowing them to be themselves: leaving space for making mistakes and for asking forgiveness and reconciliation; space for sharing daily experiences that is support to one another; create an atmosphere where it is possible to challenge one another even a formator if it is necessary so that formation can happen in a family environment where all members feel responsible for the good and growth of all the members.

Young people today want to live a kind of religious life and formation in a family environment where people are given responsibilities that can make them feel part of that family, trusted and considered as adults. There comes the sense of encouragement as part of a person's growth and collaboration in the personal and

communal growth. This makes people become more mature, and responsible in their journey.

Formation is an ongoing process; however religious basic (or initial) formation has a specific time allocated to it (it has beginning and an end), so it has to be taken seriously if it is to have a positive impact in the life of those undergoing it. It is a journey of human and spiritual transformation. The Holy Trinity is the principal agent of formation but each individual needs to co-operate with The Trinity. Formators and other people or circumstances are only instruments to help the candidates to make their journey in the way God wants them.

CHAPTER II

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN STAGES OF INITIATION

Introduction

The growth of an individual in traditional Africa is always marked by rituals. These have teachings on how to behave in an acceptable manner in the community. One of these rites is the rite of initiation considered as a remarkable moment in the formation and growth of an individual. In this chapter, we shall carefully look at how initiation determines the life of an individual and of the community. To do this, we shall look at the meaning of initiation and rites of passage, and how they are related to one another. We shall also look at the agents, methods and significance of initiation. Then a personal reflection will follow. At the end, there will be a short conclusion.

2.1 Meaning of Initiation and Meaning of Rites of Passage

Since initiation is one of the stages of rites of passage, a rite of transition,⁴³ we would first refer to the meaning of rites of passage and then discuss the meaning of initiation. From the moment of birth up to death human growth is accompanied by continuous process of transformation and transition from one stage of life to another and this is marked by rites of passage. So, rites of passage are the bridge or

⁴³ Cf. V. A. GENNEP. *The Rites of Passage*, 11

“intermediary stage”⁴⁴ that enables a person to pass from one stage of life or growth to another.

Rites of passage, as the word itself says, are the ceremonies designed to celebrate the human growth and maturity, to celebrate the transition of an individual from childhood to adulthood and later to elderhood⁴⁵. These ceremonies are made according to the customs of each tribe. It is through these ceremonies that an individual can be integrated into a specific age group of community. As Vann Gennep says, the Totem group is such that one can only be a member of that group through the ceremonies of passage that will separate the person from the existing environment and integrate him/her into the new specific environment, Totem community⁴⁶.

“Rites of passage are important as means of training the young people in the skills of living a useful and productive life in the society”⁴⁷. Young people learn all that concerns the following stage. After undergoing these rites, the person is considered grown up. He/she sees and interprets the world around with eyes of an adult, wise, and mature person.

After looking at the meaning of rites of passage, we shall now discuss the meaning of initiation, which is not so different from the rites of passage. In societies where initiation takes place, it is understood as a sacred moment where young people, through ceremonies and education are formally introduced into the life of the community as adults in order to carry on responsibility for their family and for the

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 1

⁴⁵ Cf. MIASMU, *Initiation into Adulthood and Elderhood, African Cultural Theme*, N.12, 3.

⁴⁶ Cf. V. A. GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, 76.

⁴⁷ J. L. COX, *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, 15.

community at large. In the Agikuyu culture this introduction is accompanied by ceremonies and traditional dances that have teaching for the ones initiated⁴⁸.

Initiation “is an African schooling which imparts society’s ethics, norms, values and goals and is one of the vehicles which transmits culture from one generation to another”⁴⁹. In this way, this education starts when a person is still young and it reaches its higher level at the time of initiation that culminates with circumcision for some tribes. A Kikuyu woman said, “Initiation is circumcision. It is a jumping from childhood to adulthood”.⁵⁰ Therefore, initiation is a rite of passage.

Initiation is a way of getting knowledge and skills to live as adults and as full members of the community. During this period the initiated are taught how to behave as adults, to co-work in-group. If is a boy, it is taught how to offer protection and decision making, and if is a girl, is taught how to be a good wife⁵¹.

2.2 Relationship Between Initiation and Rites of Passage

When we look at the meaning of the rites of passage and the meaning of initiation we realize that there is a close relationship between the two. Rites of passage are ceremonies that mark a transition of an individual from one stage of human growth to another⁵². Rites of passage can be repeated in the life of an individual. They are meant to empower the person with new roles in the community.

Initiation is by itself a rite of passage. It is meant to fully introduce an individual in the life of the community and give him/her identity as man or woman.

⁴⁸An Agikuyu man, questionnaire – 27 June, 2005, Language Center, Nairobi.

⁴⁹J. G. GITHINGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 20.

⁵⁰An Agikuyu woman, questionnaire – 27 June, 2005, Language Center, Nairobi.

⁵¹A middle aged Agikuyu man, questionnaire, 20 June, 2005, Adams Arcarde, Nairobi.

⁵²Cf. MIASMU, *Initiation Into Adulthood and Elderhood, African Cultural Theme*, N.12, 13.

Initiation cannot be repeated and it is done when the person can prove able to undergo all that it demands. This rite is in some cultures like Agikuyu, marked by circumcision of both boys and girls. In other cultures for instance, the removing of some teeth signifies that the person is making a transition from childhood to adulthood. To reach the stage of initiation means that the person has previously gone through different rites of passage that, according to Leonard Van Gennep, can be subdivided in three stages, namely: separation, transition, and incorporation⁵³, in order to give entrance to the new stage of growth. All these ceremonies are meant to prepare the young ones in the manner expected by the community. There is no initiation without performing rites of passage since initiation is also rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, there is a close relationship between initiation and rite of passage.

2.3 Agents of Initiation

2.3.1 Parents

Among the Agikuyu the introduction or initiation of an individual into the family history and tradition starts when the person is still an infant. During this period up to the stage of initiation, the education of the child is the responsibility of parents especially the mother, who, through songs, asking questions to the child, teach the children the names of the ancestors including handing on of the tradition of their family or tribe⁵⁴.

The parents are the one who teach children how to behave in an acceptable manner within the community. It is the parents who determine whether the young

⁵³Cf. V.A. GENNEP, *The Rite of Passage*, 10.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. KENYATTA, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 60-61.

ones can go to the next stage or not. For instance, the girls cannot make a step ahead in their lives without the permission of their parents, the same applies to boys who cannot realize their dreams or be circumcised without the permission of their parents⁵⁵. So, there is total dependence on their parents for what concerns the transition of the young ones in life.

According to the Agikuyu, the education of the young in the family affairs however, was the responsibility not only of the parents, but also of other relatives such as the grandparents, aunties, uncles and others who are closely related to the child. They provided support in the growth and introduction of young people into the family. The grandparents are custodians of history and tradition. Through stories, songs and proverbs, they instil in their grandchildren the knowledge of the family background.

2.3.2 Community

When a boy or girl reaches the age of initiation, it is then that the community that carefully chooses people who can pass on the values and tradition of the community to those about to be initiated. These selected persons accompany the young ones in the initiation process.⁵⁶ The community not only had responsibility of choosing people, but also of accompanying young ones to full maturity as members of a particular society. They actively participate in all initiation ceremonies as a powerful encouragement to the initiated. Therefore, initiation is an act of the whole community.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 60

⁵⁶ J. MULANDI, "Religious Formation from the African Perspective", *African Ecclesial Review*, 45, 66.

2.3.3 Sponsors and Elders

The sponsors are the people responsible for taking care of the initiates during the preparation period of initiation. They provide them with all necessary knowledge for the ceremony. Among the Agikuyu, for the purpose of initiation, the elder of the homestead and his wife adopt the young ones as their children.⁵⁷ The other elders of the community perform the religious ritual by invoking communion to exist between the ancestral spirits and the community.

From the information that I have gathered from the Agikuyu people, circumcision was, and is still being performed by qualified and mature women and men, respected by society and versed in the customs and tradition of their community⁵⁸. These people were supposed to be married men and women, who know their culture, its values and traditions very well, so that they could be able to help the young in all what concerns their people, future life and duties as adults.

2.3.4 Age-Group

Age groups are formed during the initiation. These groups do not necessarily function as agents of initiation because those concerned are of the same level of *education*. Age group only functions as a group that supports and encourages one another before the decisive moment in life (initiation-circumcision). Transition to adult stage comes with more responsibilities to carry. It is through this group that the young adults will help one another to be living faithfully what they have learned during their initiation so that they can keep the tradition of their community. As Jomo Kenyatta once said, "The age-group is a powerful instrument for securing

⁵⁷ Cf. J. KENYATTA, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 76.

⁵⁸ Some Agikuyu people interviewed by the author, 26 June 2005, Language Centre, Nairobi.

conformity with tribal usage”.⁵⁹ The members of the same age group can share all secrets, and they could correct one another on all matters however sensitive. To reveal the secrets or to refuse the correction of the age group was a grave and punishable offence.

2.3.5 Environment

Environment plays an important role in the initiation of young people and in the life of those being initiated. It provides a necessary atmosphere to the initiates to concentrate on what is going to happen in their life and in the life of the community. The whole of nature around them speaks to the initiates about this important event and it makes them long for the moment. The environment itself becomes a teacher to the young because the whole atmosphere is embodied in this event of initiation ceremonies. This is why the candidates for initiation are secluded, that is, taken away from the usual environment.

2.4. Methods of Initiation

In indigenous Africa, initiation is traditionally understood as a form or context of education. The preservation of the traditions and customs of a given community depend entirely on this education. Because of that, the initiated have to take *the tribal oath* where they totally promise to change their childish behaviour and behave as responsible adults. They also promise fidelity to the customs of the tribe and never reveal its secrets to any, especially to those not yet initiated⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ J. KENYATTA, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 71.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibid*, 80.

According to Van Gennep, "initiation ceremonies are not made in the same way everywhere; they depend on the social group"⁶¹. However, there are stages in these initiation rites that are common in most communities that practice initiation.

2.4.1 Separation

The candidates for initiation are taken from their usual environment to another, especially to the bush. They leave their parent's home for months or weeks depending on the tribe. This symbolises leaving childhood behind in order to start new life as adults. Among the Totem tribe of Cameroon, those to be initiated are separated from the world of women and children and taken to a special hut, accompanied by some taboos that have teachings to the candidates, concerning their life as adults⁶². This is similar to Agikuyu people where the initiated are also separated from their parents' homes and taken to another place or hut to symbolise that when they come back home from initiation, they are already adults and full members of the community.

2.4.2 Transition

Transition is a period of education and instruction in the tribal laws and adult life. This education is directed to both boys and girls and it is made through songs, proverbs, myths, dances, which contain the teachings on adulthood. During this period the candidates for initiation are seen as knowing nothing, they are completely "*tabula rasa*", upon which the advisers and sponsors inscribed the knowledge and

⁶¹ V.A GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage*, 67.

⁶² Ibid, 75

the wisdom of the tribe in these respect which pertained to their new status”.⁶³ The candidates surrender themselves to their sponsors or advisors and accept all that they are taught. There is no freedom of dialogue between the candidates and the advisors or sponsors. Whether the individual agrees or not, he/she is expected to accept all the teachings.

2.4.3 Incorporation or Integration

After the period of instructions comes incorporation or integration in the world of the adults and the community. But before that, one was to pass through an important sacred ritual, which for the Agikuyu is circumcision in order to be considered a mature man or woman and a full member of the community⁶⁴. When one becomes a full member of the community, he/she is entrusted with responsibilities towards the family and the community. In Africa, as Githinga says, “one is circumcised, not so much because he wills to be, but in order to fulfil the requirement and become part of the community”.⁶⁵ This means that if he/she wants to be accepted by the community, they must go through the initiation practices.

2.4.4 Modelling

From the very beginning, children learn through games and observation. They learn by imitating their elders, especially, mothers for girls and fathers for boys. It helps their children to pick from them those values that they can only transmit by their daily life or behaviour.

⁶³ J. G. GITHINGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 44.

⁶⁴ A middle aged Agikuyu woman interviewed on 27 June 2005, Language Centre, Nairobi.

⁶⁵ J. G. GITHINGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 21.

2.4.5 Correction

The education of a child is a matter of the whole community, and any adult can correct the child. The child will take it positively.⁶⁶ In this correction, those in the same age group can easily correct one another in case one of them is not faithful to what they had learned. They discipline and train one another how to live in a community as mature and adult people.

2.5 Significance of Initiation

Initiation is of great importance in peoples' lives. It introduces them into the life, values, customs and beliefs of the community. It gives to the person a new identity and personality. In some communities, to ensure that the person is no longer the same, they are given new names, they are *new creatures*, with new duties and roles in their families and in the community. Because of its importance, initiation brings people together as one family. It "is sanctification of life, time and space; it is children's great anticipation and motivation factor. It is parent's rite of passage, which promotes them to mature adulthood; it externalises and ritualises the inner and outer realities of human personality and community's life cycle"⁶⁷.

Initiation is a sacred act and moment. It is the period when the young initiated are instructed and taught all what concerns their society and adult life; they are revealed the mysteries and the secrets of the community. They are also trained to be strong, courageous, enduring, persevering and obedient as a form of preparation for their adult life.⁶⁸ In summary, they are taught their social and family roles.

⁶⁶ J., MULLANDI, "Religious Formation from the African Perspective" in *African Ecclesial Review*, 56.

⁶⁷ J.G. GITHINGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 24.

⁶⁸ Cf. J. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 102.

Initiation is an important stage in the life of an individual and of the community. What happens to an individual happens to all the community, including the living, the dead and those yet to be born.⁶⁹ That is why it is carefully prepared so that it can be according to the customs of the tribe. It is through this that a person is considered an adult man or woman and it marks the growth of the community in all its aspects. Because of what it signifies in the life of an individual and community, those who are not initiated are considered to be children, they become an object of ridicule by their age mates; they have no right to marry an initiated woman, have no right to inherit property and do not participate in the community activities and decisions⁷⁰. The initiated, now man/woman, can marry, inherit property; participate in the community activities and decisions.

Initiation introduces the person into the world of adults, hence according to Agikuyu man, “those initiated, are expected to have a positive attitude towards the society, in case of failure they can be punished”.⁷¹ Agikuyu initiated girls to become responsible for taking care of the house, kitchen, and for younger brothers.⁷² For the Kisii, the initiated are expected to be “passive, respectful, defensive, peer trainers, have strong integrity, be transparent and accountable.”⁷³ So the initiated are expected to change their behaviour radically, to be role models to the young ones so that the community can count on them. Initiation makes a man/woman and it unites the community. It is a way of preserving the tribe’s traditions and identity.

⁶⁹ Cf. J.G. GITHINGA, *Initiation and Pastoral Psychology*, 24.

⁷⁰ Cf. J. KENYATTA, *Opus cit.*, 66

⁷¹ An Agikuyu man, questionnaire, 27 June, 2005, Language Centre, Nairobi.

⁷² An Agikuyu woman, questionnaire, 27 June, 2005, Language Centre, Nairobi.

⁷³ A Kisii woman, questionnaire, 28 June 2005 at Adams Arcade - Nairobi.

2.6 Integrating Reflection

In traditional Africa, the growth of an individual is marked by several rites of passage. Initiation, as rite of passage, is meant to empower people with knowledge and skills to live in their society as members of that given society. For the Agikuyu of Kenya, initiation marks the beginning of adulthood. As adults, the initiated are expected to behave as mature people worth to be trusted by the community.

In the Agikuyu tradition, initiation is a way of educating people and of preserving the culture. This education starts from the family when one is still young. In this formation, the whole community takes part, especially in the moment of initiation.

This community participation happens by choosing trusted and mature older people to guide the young ones in the initiation process and to provide a conducive atmosphere. This also happens through correction, though this is more often done among age group, and above all, by encouraging the initiated to be confident in what is to happen in their lives.

Although the community participates in the initiation ceremonies, the role of parents is important. They have to make sure that their children are well prepared for this great moment of their life. The passage of the children to the next stage of life and the realization of their dreams depend also on the parents.

In the different African communities, initiation is marked differently. Among the Agikuyu, circumcision is performed while in other cultures teeth are removed. This is meant to symbolize the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Such initiation gives them right to marry, inherit properties and participate actively in the life of the community. Submission during the ceremonies is meant to make the candidates exercise their obedience, although it does not help for responsible growth

of an individual. Initiation marks the person for life and it unites him/her with the community. Hence, initiation is never done privately (as a household business) although boys and girls are separated. There is a fixed age and it cannot be repeated. Initiation stage is time when the young are invited to personal reflection and identification with the community beliefs. It is a great event that unites the whole community as a family. For the Agikuyu culture and Africa at large, it is a blessing for the individual, the family and the community.

In conclusion we can say that initiation marks the end of childhood and beginning adulthood. It is a traditional schooling that introduces the individual to the life of the community. It changes the person's understanding of oneself and of the world around. Initiation inserts the person in the community. It is a very significant event that involves the whole community. Because of its significance, it is still practiced in many communities in Africa.

CHAPTER III

COMPARING INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURAL INITIATION WITH CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS INITIAL FORMATION

Introduction

The process of indigenous African initiation can be compared with Christian religious initial formation in many aspects. This chapter shall look at the similarities and differences between the two approaches to formation. On the similarities it shall look how this two approaches are similar in Significance, objectives, way of testing, the methods, the expectations, the time-when, and the agents of formation and initiation. After that, we will give some suggestions that may be useful for Christian religious formation. The chapter will conclude with a general conclusion.

Similarities

In terms of **significance**, African Agikuyu initiation as well as initial religious formation is the foundation of all human formation. For Agikuyu, initiation is the moment in which the young are given the basic and essential knowledge of their community and the secrets of the tribe are revealed to them. In religious formation, the candidates are also progressively introduced to all that concerns

religious life: the history, the charism of the candidates' religious community, above all the knowledge and the experience of the person of Jesus.

For **objectives**, the aim of both approaches of formation is to enable the young adults to live and to achieve the goals of the community, and acquire an identity, a self-understanding and a human and spiritual maturity. In the Agikuyu, initiation makes the person, man and woman, capable of living the values and traditions of their community, passing them to new generations. Religious formation prepares mature people to live religious life meaningfully. People, who can actualize the charism and through their life pass it to the new generations.

When it comes to ways of **testing**, in both cases there is a passage from one stage of formation to another. Thus, "the journey of formation in religious life is an extended ritual of transition".⁷⁴ To do so, the candidates must show their willingness to be accompanied or initiated to the new family (religious community). For the Agikuyu, one must acquire the requisites and prove able to face the difficulties and pain that it demands. The same for initial formation; one must acquire a certain degree of human and spiritual maturity and be proved by the community. In both cases, the candidates are given certain responsibilities as a way of testing their maturity.

In terms of **methods**, the separation, instruction and integration stages are all found in the two approaches of formation. In both, the candidates are separated from their usual family environment and secluded for a period of time in order to be instructed about the life ahead of them according to expectations of the community. It is time of personal reflection and assimilation of what they are being taught. For

⁷⁴ G. A. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission: Refunding Religious Life Formation*, 190.

the candidates for initiation it is time for personal identification with the tribe. For the candidates to religious life, it is time for discernment of one's vocation. Encouragement and correction are also found in the initiation and in the initial Christian religious formation.

As for **expectations**, after undergoing the initial formation or initiation, the candidates are expected to have grown as mature persons. For the Agikuyu, the initiated are expected to respect their parents and elders, to have grown in the understanding of the main cultural principles such as humility, and faithfulness to their community. In religious formation, one is expected not only to live the goals of the given formation but to also have grown in personal maturity, to learn to be compassionate and respectful to all members; to live his/her consecration as self-giving.

When it comes to **time-when**, for both approaches to formation, have a fixed age for initiation. Among the Agikuyu, it is done when one is mature enough to bear the pain that it demands. In religious formation it is when one can be responsible for taking decisions by oneself, and accept demands of vowed life.

On the question of **agents**, it is the community represented by the council that chooses the initiators or formators. They must have undergone initiation. In the case of religious formators, as Arbuckle Gerald says, they must "have undergone themselves the pilgrimage with Jesus the teacher and become one with him"⁷⁵, in order to be able to guide the young adults in their journey. In the Agikuyu and religious life, this formation starts from the family. The environment participates directly or indirectly in the process of initiation or formation of the young adults or

⁷⁵ Ibid, 191

religious. The age or peer-group is of relevant importance in the cultural initiation as well as in initial Christian formation.

Differences

Reflecting on the African initiation and Christian initiation, we find that there are some differences that are important to be taken in consideration. In Africa, one undergoes initiation not as personal choice but as social requirement in order to be accepted in the community. For religious life, it has to be a personal choice. One must “make a free petition”⁷⁶ in order to be accepted to start the formation process and become member of the religious community.

In the Agikuyu tradition and in Africa in general, the candidates to initiation are considered as *tabula rasa*. This does not happen in religious formation. Religious formation takes into consideration the formation that the young have received from their families. The Agikuyu initiation is more group focused rather than personal or individual focussed. Religious formation focuses also on the group but takes into consideration each person as an individual with his/her own needs to be given attention. Agikuyu initiation gives right to inherit property. For religious life it is the contrary, one renounces the right to inherit material properties. Religious only inherits the charism of the founder or foundress. In the initiation there is a physical mark. This does not happen in religious initial formation

During cultural initiation period there is no space for discussion and dialogue between the initiates and the initiator; there is space for freedom of acting as adults. In religious formation there is or should be space for dialogue where each

⁷⁶ Ibid, 124

person can express his/her feelings and thoughts so that the person can be responsible for what is said and done.

Recommendations

Not all Africans agree that all cultural rites and practices are relevant to the formation of African candidates to religious life. There are however, elements in them that can correctly fit into Christian formation programmes, for instance, parents play an important role in the initiation process of the young. So, the parents of the candidates should be involved in the initial formation to Christian religious life. They are the ones who know their children right from the conception. Hence they can be a very instrumental in identifying the gifts and weaknesses of their daughters or sons, and give correct advice or corrections. Once parents are educated in the values and requirements of Christian religious life, they can help their children especially during holidays.

We have noted that the Agikuyu have a specific age point for initiation. Christian religious initial formation should also have an age-cut off point. The important role of age group is another aspect of African initiation that deserves consideration. The peer can advice and correct themselves well because they know themselves even better than the elders or formators.

There are many aspects of African initiation that are similar to Christian religious initial formation. What we need now is to articulate these aspects and adapt them to our formation programmes for African candidates. If we can bring the two cultures together without any shocks, surely, formation will be more effective.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Our research was: *An African Indigenous Perspective of Christian Religious Accompaniment*. The objectives of this essay were to look for indigenous African, particularly Agikuyu cultural values, methods and institutions that can be relevant to Christian initial formation of African candidates to religious life. We also wanted to discover the connection between African human formation and Christian religious formation. We intended to throw light upon the difficulties encountered by African candidates in their formation into religious life and the problems experienced by their formators. Finally we wanted to highlight how African traditional ways of formation can be useful for religious initial formation to make it more effective and attractive to African candidates.

When reflecting on initial Christian religious formation, we found that the main objective of this stage of formation is to enable the candidate to grow as human in his/her process of identification with Christ and the charism of the congregation that he/she desires to join. This process will be possible with the help of a formator who can guide and challenge them as adults. Formation today should be open. It should prepare people able to live their mission and in contact with the reality.

African stages of initial formation, are, especially among the Agikuyu, well marked. Initiation is one of those stages. As stage of formation, initiation is meant to

enable the young to live meaningfully and responsibly as adults in and for the community, to identify oneself with the way of life of the community. In this formation the whole community, and environment around take part in the preparation of the future members of the community. Initiation is taken seriously by all the participants.

This essay is an attempted solution to the problems encountered in religious formation of African candidates. It is intended to provide those in formation with information to help them in the formulation of programmes for the initial Christian religious formation of young African candidates. Thus, this essay will hopefully be a valuable contribution towards the inculturation of religious life in Africa.

Comparing indigenous African cultural initiation with Christian religious initial formation, we saw that the two approaches to formation are similar in many aspects. However, there are still questions to clarify, such as: How to implement African ways of formation in Christian religious initial formation? Will all Africans accept and agree this combination of cultures or some will prefer the western model of formation, which they are used to?

These and similar questions are some of the issues that really need a further study in our search for giving our formation and religious life an African perspective.

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APPENDIX I

FIEL WORK RESUMME

1. Tangaza College, Nairobi, April 6, 2005. To interview a junior sister on cultural shocks in religious formation. She has experienced misinterpretation with her formator because of not sharing matters concerning sexuality. According to her, there is need for respect and understanding of others' culture.
2. Tangaza College, Nairobi, April 10, 2005. To interview a junior brother on his experience in intercultural living. He expressed to be very disappointed with how hospitality is interpreted in our communities. It is still a great challenge in international religious communities.
3. Missionaries Brothers of Charity (New Life Home), Kibera Slums, Nairobi, April 30, 2005. To interview a local superior on the meaning of formation. He understands formation as guiding somebody in the journey of faith, helping him/her to recognize his/her vocation in a particular institute.
4. Missionaries Brothers of Charity (New Life Home), Kibera Slums, Nairobi, April 30, 2005. To interview two junior brothers on the objectives of formation. They see that today the objectives of formation should be of forming people to live religious life with authenticity.
5. Medical Sisters of Mary (Novitiate), Nairobi, May 31, 2005. To interview a novice mistress on the meaning of formation. Formation is to help the young women and men to develop their potentialities, enabling them to live and to be the way wants them to be.
6. Missionaries Brothers of Charity (New Life Home), Kibera Slums, Nairobi, May 22, 2005. To interview a novice director on formation as accompaniment. He was very excited in sharing his experience as formator. He sees accompaniment as a journey of helping people to become themselves, in their encounter with the Lord Jesus.
7. Missionaries Sisters of Mary (Novitiate), Nairobi, May 31, 2005. To interview a novice mistress on formation as accompaniment and on the role of the family. Accompaniment is a journey that requires patience, listening, ability to encouragement and challenge when necessary. The family is the centre of building the human and Christian formation of their children.
8. Marist International Center, Karen, Nairobi, June 10, 2005. To interview a junior brother on the role of peer-group. From his experience he said that the formatees are be good formators among themselves. They know each other than the formator do making correction easier among them.

9. Missionaries Brothers of Charity (New Life Home), Kibera Slums, Nairobi, May 22, 2005. To interview a novice director on the agents of formation. Formator as agent of formation is a guide to the young in their discernment process. In this process, the environment plays its role. Formation should provide opportunity to enter in contact with the reality of the people around them.
10. Missionaries Brothers of Charity, (New Life Home), Kibera Slums, Nairobi, May 22, 2005. To interview two juniors bothers on the role modelling in formation. Formator are role model to the candidates. They should be mature persons, with good character. Through their life, lead the others to a good living of religious life.
11. Guadalupe Parish, Adams Arcade, Nairobi, June 10, 2005. To interview a novice on correction as method of formation. According her, correction is important to help the person to analyse one's behaviour and move on in a correct way.
- 12-Comboni Brothers Centre, Adams Arcade, Nairobi, June 11, 2005. To interview an assistant formator on the on the role of correction in formation. He believes that formators should learn to love and trust their formatees. Doing so, correction will have good impact in the young people. If not, later they will find the value of it.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE

I am Isabel dos Santos Lobo, a second year student of Spirituality and Religious Formation at Tangaza college-Nairobi. I am doing a research in Religious accompaniment in African Perspective with reference to the African Agikuyu people of Kenya. So I request you to help me by answering the following questions so that I may achieve my goal. I promise to treat your information confidentially. Thank you in advance.

1- What is initiation?

2- What do you teach during initiation?

3- At what age are the young ones initiated?

4- Do you put together boys and girls?

5- Who initiates the boys and the girls?

6- What is expected of those who initiate the young?

7- What attitudes, skills, values, roles, and behaviour are expected of those who have been initiated?

8- How do you test that someone has been well initiated?

9- What are the methods of initiation?

10- Are these methods the same among all the clans of Kisii?

11- How many clans of Kisii are there?

12- What is the importance (value) of initiation?

13- Is initiation done once for all or can it be repeated?

14- When is someone said to be a mature woman or man?

15- How do you compare your Kisii initiation and the Christian initiation?
