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INCULTURATION IN THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES: RELEVANCE TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AFRICA.

An Essay Submitted to the Mission Department in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the B. A.
Degree in Religious Studies.

**BY
PASCOAL JOHN NABUBA**

**TUTOR
MR. BENSON A. MULEMI.**



FEBRUARY 2000.

NAIROBI

2000
NAB

DEDICATION

To my parents.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned declare that this is my original work and it has not been submitted to any other college or university for an academic credit.

All the sources of information for this essay have been duly acknowledged.

Signature..........

Date.....16/02/2000.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratefulness to many people and some institutions, who and which gave me all kinds of help in order to make this present study possible.

My special acknowledgement goes to Mr. B. A. Mulemi, my former lecturer of African religious studies at Tangaza College and now a lecturer at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, for giving me tireless assistance in this study. I really lack words to express my gratitude for his dedication and above all, his friendship during the time that I was writing this paper.

To Manuel Mussirica, Morris Awity and Stephen Owino, the three friends of all seasons, I am very grateful for the spirit of friendship that characterised us. I sincerely acknowledge the encouragement they gave me especially at the times that I seemed to lose hope in life. I wish also to acknowledge the moral and material support of all my brothers in Allamano House. I wish particularly to thank my two friends of Nairobi, Florence and Carol who assisted me in typing this work. I am really touched by their spirit of sacrifice. To all these people, and many others whose names are not appearing on this page, I say thank you very much.

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INTRODUCTION.

For many years the African Independent Churches have been seen as the antagonists of the Catholic Church and indeed of all Mission Churches. The attitude of the Catholics towards their brothers and sisters of the African Independent Churches has been one of complacency if not condemnation. Of course there are some weaknesses in these African instituted churches, but this is also true for any other church. Furthermore, the shortcomings of one church should not blind us from appreciating the good that is found in it. The effort to inculturate the gospel message in the African context is above all the entry point that the Catholic Church could use to learn from the African Instituted churches.

Drawing from the process of inculturation manifested in the African Independent churches, this paper intends to show how this process is relevant to the Catholic Church in Africa. A serious undertaking of inculturation should bring down the message of the gospel to the particular context that the African men and women live in today. Inculturation will also help to reduce the influx of the Catholics to African Independent Churches and other Christian denominations. It is hypothesised here that some faithful leave the Catholic Church after realising that their affiliation to the Catholic Church does not profoundly affect and satisfy their needs in life and also, their membership does not seem significantly worthwhile to them.

Certainly, inculturation is not synonymous with disorder. Bosch is perfectly right to observe that this process does not include the philosophy of "everything goes".¹ This implies that not everything from a culture can be acceptable as positive for the evangelisation process. We think that in order for a genuine inculturation to take place, there must be a marriage between the gospel

¹ Bosch, J. D., Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Maryknoll New York, Orbis Books, 1993, p. 452.

message and African culture. In this marriage, just as in any other good marriage, dialogue, mutual understanding and enrichment are paramount and important. In other words, any initiative in the process of inculturation must bear in mind true gospel values. As Luzibetak puts it: "True contextualization seeks first and foremost the Kingdom of God".²

The preoccupation of how the Christian faith can be expressed in the image and values relevant to specific groups of people is as old as Christianity itself. We read in the book of Acts of the Apostles that it was exactly because of this enigma that the apostles had to gather in a council in the first Century, to decide whether the Gentile converts were also obliged to observe the Jewish Law. The ruling of the apostles on this matter was that Christianity could not be mistaken for Jewish tradition and customs. Therefore, the Gentiles could as well become Christians without necessarily observing the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:5-21). With this important decision in the history of the church, the apostles seemed to imply that the gentiles and indeed all people could effectively meet Christ in their own cultural contexts without being compelled to adopt cultural behaviours of other people. It is unfortunate that the implementation of the decision of the apostles in the Catholic Church here in Africa is taking the pace of a snail. In many dioceses the process of inculturation has remained at a superficial level. Some exterior creativity may be made here and there, but the essential part of this process is still far from being materialised.³

This paper is based on library research, direct non- participant observation and informal interviews. It is divided into four chapters. Chapter one deals with the evaluation of the African Independent Churches phenomenon. This will include the reasons responsible for the emergence,

² Luzbetak, L. J., The Church and Cultures: New Missiological Anthropology, New York, Orbis Books, 1989, p. 345.

³ Shorter, A., African Christian Spirituality, London, Chapman, 1978, p. 22.

growth and divisions in the African Independent churches. Chapter two spells out the approaches of the African Independent churches to the process of inculturation. Particular areas where this process has born fruits are highlighted. Chapter three highlights the importance of dialogue between the Catholic Church and African Tradition Religion. We believe this to be the point of departure towards a complete process of inculturation. Finally, in chapter four, we give a general conclusion of this paper, which followed by recommendations.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES PHENOMENON.

1.0 INTRODUCTION.

Masuku, quoting Harold Turner, defines African Independent Churches as designating those “churches which have been founded in Africa by Africans and primarily for Africans”.⁴ The novelty of the African Independent Churches is that the biblical message and Pre-Christian African religion were interwoven in such a way that something completely new came into existence. Definitely African Independent churches are Christian churches, as they believe in Christ as their universal redeemer. The term “Independent Church” is a technical word normally used by the researchers for academic purposes.⁵ But the members of these African churches no longer accept this term on the grounds that it has pejorative meaning, implying that, African Independent churches are politically-oriented churches.⁶ “African Instituted Churches” is the official name now used to designate these African churches.

1.1.1 THE REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

Daneel has pointed out that the causes of the emergence of African Independent Churches are altogether a complex issue.⁷ It is not easy for someone to point out with all certainty that this or

⁴ Masuku, T., “African Initiated Churches: Christian Partners or Antagonists”, Missionalia, August 1996, p. 443

⁵ Ibid., p. 442

⁶ Joseph Kamau Wamunyū, 43, Interviewed by Author, 10 September 1999, Nairobi.

⁷ Daneel, I., Quest for Belonging: Introduction to A Study of African Independent Church, Gweru (Zimbabwe), Mambo Press, 1980, p.11.

that is the exact cause of the rise of the African Independent Churches. This is because what one might think is a major cause could indeed confound a host of other causes. The casual factors of the emergence of African Independent churches are, therefore, as many as these churches themselves. This section presents an analysis of the views of some scholars about the factors that led to the emergence of African Independent Churches. The three reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon are taken from three authors to provide some background information on the issue.

1.1.2 Reaction to Mission

Barret in his book *Schism and Renewal in Africa* holds that, the rise of the African Independent Churches is strongly associated with the way that the mission churches carried out their ministry of evangelization on the African soil.⁸ Reflecting on their own cultural backgrounds, the agents of the Mission Churches looked at the traditions and customs of their African converts with disdain. Their negative views were accompanied by strong condemnation targeting especially the African family structure, ancestral- cult and customary marriage.⁹

The Africans, on other hand, minded to preserve their cultural heritage and refused to give in to the missionary requests to them to abjure their traditional values, beliefs, and religion in exchange with becoming "authentic Christians". In reaction to the mission churches' cultural biases, the Africans renounced their membership in the former churches and went away to found Christian churches where African traditional elements and Christian faith were interwoven together. According to Barret, this *qualitative leap* was not possible until the bible was translated into vernacular languages. Reading the bible in their own languages, the Africans finally discovered that many restrictions imposed on them by the mission churches were indeed tolerated in the bible, and

⁸ Barret, D., *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousands Contemporary Religious Movements*, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1968, p.116.

⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

inversely the areas in which the missionaries showed laxity, the bible showed no compromises. In the long run, for example, the Africans were able to find out that customary marriage institutions such as the practice of polygny and ancestor veneration that the Mission Churches attacked violently had some justifiable exemptions to accommodate them in the bible. Additionally, the Africans found it surprising that the missionaries did very little to fulfil the commandment of *Philadelphia* (brotherly love), which is the message per excellence of the bible.¹⁰ The hostile attitude of the mission churches towards the traditions of their African converts had blocked the former from communicating with the local people about the values, problems, joys, and sorrows of their lives.

1.1.3 The Quest for belonging

As far as the emergence of African Independent Churches is concerned Daneel's view is that these churches did not originate as a result of Africans' "Reaction to Missions" as Barret claimed to be the case. For Daneel, these churches represent the desire of the Africans to breed a kind of Christianity, which fits in their socio-cultural structures.¹¹ Having studied the phenomenon of independence among the Shona people, Daneel holds that, far from being movements of protest originating and growing out of the mistakes of the mission churches, indeed, African Independent Churches are institutions in their own right.¹² Although Daneel does not seem to dismiss categorically Barret's hypothesis of "Reaction to Mission", he is nonetheless very cautious to look at it as only having an indirect influence. The real factors for emergence and expansion of these churches are, therefore, to be found among the Africans themselves in association with their *quest for belonging*.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.128.

¹¹ Daneel, M. I., Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches, p.18.

¹² Ibid., p. 19.

1.1.4 The problem of evil

Shaw connected the rise of the African Independent churches with the problem of evil and the ways in which the Africans provided solutions to it. Looking at the problem in a pragmatic way, quickly, the indigenous Africans concluded that there were three faces of evil: humiliation or shame, misfortune caused by bad spirits and alienation.¹³ For each one of these three evils, the Africans perceived a specific remedy. In order to fight humiliation, an evil caused by colonial and missionary repression, the Africans separated from the white dominated missions and went to found their own churches where humiliation was substituted by true brotherly love.¹⁴

The second face of evil according to Shaw has to do with the problems that are out of the human beings' capacity. These are problems related to illnesses, infertility, pestilence, famine and sudden deaths, which are believed in the African context to be caused by bad spirits. To tackle these problems, the Africans had to reinterpret the Christian message about the Kingdom of God. They selected sites such as Nkamba in Zaire and Isaiah Shembe's Ekuphakamen in South Africa and declared them holy. In these sites, the power of the kingdom of God is believed to be capable of defeating the powers of evil against which the African sorcery and divination struggles in vain to control them. The remedy for the third face of evil, that is, alienation was met by the performance of a number of religious rituals. These rituals such as shedding of blood which is common among revivalist movements of East Africa, are meant shorten the distance between the faithful and God, the source of all blessings. In other words, these rituals were acts of spiritual zeal.

¹³ Shaw, M., The Kingdom of God in Africa: A short History of African Christianity, Wheaton (USA), Baker Books, 1996, p.240.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1.2 THE PROBLEM OF INCULTURATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

In the previous section we pointed out what anthropologists and missiologists consider to be the reasons for the emergence of the African Independent churches. We have seen how Barret has linked the phenomenon of independence with colonialism and with the mistakes committed by Mission Churches in the past. Others, like Daneel have defended the African desires to keep African traditional beliefs free from foreign influence as the major reason for independence. The problem of evil and African approach to it was another possible reason. However, looking at the emergence of the African Independent churches from a more practical angle, the problem of inadequate Inculturation in the Catholic Church and indeed in the other mainstream churches is perhaps the principal reason for both emergence and expansion of these African Instituted Churches today.

Inculturation is a theological concept denoting a process in which Christian faith and cultures are open to each other in order to receive and give what the two sides have for the growth of the local church. It is, therefore, a reciprocal process. Walliggo defines inculturation as:

“The honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by people of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into every thought-patterns of each people. It is the conviction that Christ and his Good News are even dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly ‘feel at home’ in the cultures of people”.¹⁵

The word inculturation, which is also known as incarnation and contextualisation, differs from accommodation, another missiological term used before Vatican II. While the ray of action of accommodation is limited to making external alterations effected by missionaries in order to adapt

¹⁵ Walliggo, J. et al., Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, Kampala, St. Paul Publications, 1986, p. 12.

some of the African values in the Christianity (It brings the idea of concession), inculturation instead is deep rooted in the life of the people themselves who, together with the Holy Spirit are the principal agents of the process.¹⁶ Indeed, inculturation as Pope Paul VI observed, goes beyond the “decorative way” to touch the “vital way” of living of the local people.¹⁷ The same strong appeal to genuine inculturation, has been made by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar, “The task is not just to give African Christianity an African face, but an African soul”.¹⁸

Although the Catholic Church in Africa has repeatedly claimed to be in favour of inculturation, nonetheless, it has remained rather reluctant to accept and integrate African religious elements in various areas of the church life. Instead, the Africans have been compelled to experience Christ in the ways alien to their own communities and their own cultural traditions. In most cases, African religious ethos such as faith healing, spontaneity in worship and veneration of ancestors has all been regarded as “non-Christian” practices. Naturally, this cultural marginalisation prepared a fertile ground for the rise of the African Independent Churches. In these churches, the Africans finally are able to quench the thirst for spirituality, which they do not enjoy in the Catholic Church.

As Jesus puts it in the gospel according to Luke: “No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or set it under bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light” (Lk, 11:33). The Christians in the African Independent Churches similarly feel the need to uncover and share the values of their cultural heritage as their contribution to the growth of Christianity in Africa.

¹⁶ Luzibetak, L., J., *The Church and Cultures*, p. 70.

¹⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8th December 1975, No. 20.

¹⁸ New Christian Movements in Africa and Madagascar, Meeting for African Collaboration (MAC) [*Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM)*], St Paul Publications-Africa, Nairobi, 1993, p. 29.

The reaction to mission churches that Barret talked about in reference to the emergence of the African Independent churches was indeed not initially meant to cause separation. If we really have to accept the idea of "reaction", then we have to admit that this was simply intended to put across some demands that the Africans rightly thought to be important for the inculturation of Christianity in their soil. Recognition and appreciation of the African traditional values were among the demands put forward by the Africans. It is a pity that the missionaries did not heed the legitimate cry of their converts. Otherwise, the schism could have been prevented.

A similar observation can be made in relation to Daneel's theory. Certainly the African "Quest for belonging" has something to say about the rise of African Independent Churches. However, we must be very careful not to think that the Africans were uncomfortable with a rather "sophisticated religion" brought by the missionaries and this is the reason why they ran away from the mission churches. The implication of such a view is that the Africans are conservative traditionalists who are unable to integrate in their environment new religious experiences. The very fact that the Africans accepted Christianity so easily, perhaps more easily than any other people like Asians has proven beyond any doubt that Africans are not resistant to positive change. Furthermore, nobody really doubts the flexibility of the Africans in inculturation. Therefore, African Independent Churches did not emerge because of the Africans' fear to expose their cultural heritage, but it was because of the failure of the mission churches to facilitate the inculturation process in their churches.

We agree to some extent with those who see the African Independent churches as a solution to the problem of evil. In fact, the Africans take very seriously the problem of evil. As Mbiti has observed, this problem is associated with disorder such as, illness, death, etc. and whenever it

comes to the community it always worries people.¹⁹ To get rid of evil, people appeal to God for help and this is done through prayers, sacrifices and various religious rituals.²⁰ It is understandable, therefore, mainstream churches failure to address the problem of evil may well lead the Africans to found or to join African Independent churches and Pentecostal healing type movements. Faith healing will be developed extensively in the next chapter, but it suffices now to say that the problem of evil and its cause, agents and remedies, touch the core of the Africans' religious experience. To fail to address this issue is to leave the field open to new Christian movements.

1.3 THE GROWTH OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

The African Independent Churches have increased drastically since they emerged in the nineteenth century. Almost all the researchers in this area agree that the African Independent Churches started emerging throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa around the year 1892. What seems unclear, however, is how much of this growth has taken place since then. Surprisingly, Barret estimates that the size in terms of overall membership of African Independent Churches in Africa has outgrown that of the Catholic and Protestant communities put together!²¹ Mbiti speaks of 31,000,000 as the total of members affiliated to the African Independent churches and 7,000 denominations in 43 African countries.²² Baur's figure is 13,150,000 for the total of affiliated members and 5,040 for the number of the churches all over Africa.²³ Dancel on the other hand, agrees with these ideas about the rapid growth, but not necessarily the figures. Furthermore, Dancel

¹⁹ Mbiti, J., Introduction to African Religion, 2nd ed., Nairobi, East African Educational publishers Ltd, 1991, p. 81.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Barret, D., Schism and Renewal in Africa: An analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements, p. 14

²² Mbiti, S. J., Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.16.

²³ Baur, J., 200 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History, 2nd Rev. ed., Nairobi Pauline Publications-Africa, 1998, p. 493.

is of the opinion that the growth of the African Independent churches especially in the seventies is characterised by ups and downs and this makes it difficult the task of establishing exact statistics.²⁴

We do not want to be too alarmed to think that the size of these African instituted churches is almost reaching the size of the world. Neither do we want to be pessimistic to think that one day the Catholic churches in Africa will be empty, because all its African members will become “independents”. Our point here is that, some people in our midst have sent to the Catholic Church in Africa positive signals. Surely, if this Church takes these signals seriously, there is a possibility of renewal and dynamism precisely because the message it receives from its counterpart African Independent churches is a relevant one. However, if the Catholic Church takes such signals for granted, it is likely that this particular church will be doing harm to itself. As the bishops of Africa and Madagascar have pointed out, “...the Church will be digging its own grave”.²⁵

1.4 THE TYPOLOGY OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

Mbiti distinguishes between two groups of African Independent Churches, that is, the “Moderates” and “Extremists”. All the African Independent Churches that fall in the first group more or less resemble mission churches. They both put stress on the Christian faith. The big difference that separates these two churches is that the African Independent Churches of the first type have worked out a kind of Christianity that reflects African thought and practices. Enriched by African elements, these churches are at the vanguard to meet the local needs and problems. A good example of a moderate Independent church is Shembe’s Zion Church in South Africa that practices faith healing. The practice of faith healing in the African Independent churches is in consistent with

²⁴ Daneel, M. I., Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches, p.14.

²⁵ New Christian Movements in Africa and Madagascar, p. 23.

²⁶ Mbiti S. J., Bible and Theology in African Christianity, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1986, p.16.

Jesus' healing ministry. It announces the power of God over Satan. As Sullivan pointed out, "The miraculous cures of Jesus were the sign that a kingdom of God had dawned".²⁷

While the moderate African Independent Churches always strike a balance between the gospel message and traditional cultural values, the extremist ones are characterised by a tendency to be inclined more to traditionalism than it does to the gospel message. Mbiti considers this second type as more "wrapping of identity" than being Christianity in the real sense of this word.²⁸ A good example that can be given here is the Mungiki sect based here in Kenya with its insistence on female circumcision. Despite the fact that the Agikuyu people have long renounced this particular practice on health grounds, for example, due to the fear of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The leaders of the Mungiki sect, however, still encourage female circumcision, which causes a lot of suffering among some Agikuyu families. This practice and others of the sort have made this sect to be in a constant conflict with the Kenyan law enforcing agents.

In this chapter, we have focused on the reasons for emergence of the African Independent churches, their division and typology. As we have seen lack of inculturation in the mission Churches, prompted the Africans to found their own churches, but this initiative is not without negative points. While we sincerely recognise that the African Independent Churches have developed ways and means to address the reality of African Christianity through their commitment to the process of inculturation, however, we must say that some of these churches have fallen into syncretism. It is unfortunate to observe that some of these churches are more interested in preserving local traditions than showing their Christian commitment to building up the body of Christ. Inculturation as we have seen above is characterised by receiving and giving, hence, it should be a two way-traffic.

²⁷ Sullivan, L., Healing, The Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol.6, 1987. pp. 226-234.

²⁸ Mbiti, S. J., Bible and Theology in African Christianity, p.17.

In the next chapter, we examine further the subject of inculturation by comparing inculturation attempt in the Catholic Church and the African Independent Churches. We shall examine some of the areas of the African Traditional Religion that the African Independent churches have integrated in their practice in order to address their quest to inculturate Christian faith in their environments. We shall also assess the steps that have been taken by the Catholic Church in Africa in relation to the same areas of contextualisation of Christian faith.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INCULTURATION APPROACHES IN THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Whereas inculturation of the gospel message in the African cultures has been characterised by superficiality and lack of enthusiasm in the Catholic Church, in the African Independent Churches this process is being explored to the maximum. Instead of performing some external adjustments in order to accommodate some of the African traditional elements in Christianity as it is often done in the Catholic Church here in Africa, inculturation present within the African independent churches touches the “very roots” of African cultures. It is not a matter of merely selecting from the African Traditional Religion what is more or less in line with Christian values, but these African churches go beyond this to bring to the light even those traditional elements, which in Christian church would be termed as “anti-Christian”.

Vatican II through the document on church’s missionary activity, *Ad-Gentes*, has made it clear that the church throughout the world must make an effort to reach out, to find and to put in use those “seeds of the word” present in every culture.²⁹ Naturally, this message was addressed to the Catholic Church. But ironically here in Africa, the fulfilment of this particular directive has been met effectively in the African Independent churches and not in the Catholic Church as it was intended. Although many years have passed since the Vatican II made this appeal, it seems that the

²⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on Missionary Activity of the Church’s Missionary, *Ad-Gentes*, December 1965. No.22.

Catholic Church in Africa is not yet ready to fully embrace the process of inculturation in the way that can be appreciated by its African audience.

In this chapter, we shall examine the practices of healing, worship and communion in both the African Independent Churches and the Catholic Church. By insisting on brotherly love, African Independent Churches have taken a leading role in developing a theology of the church as a family. The example of Jesus has inspired these churches to build a community with strong sense of responsibility, love and mutual care.

2.1 FAITH HEALING IN THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

Illness in most parts of Africa is regarded as a serious rupture of the relationship between the sick person and God and also between the former and the rest of members of the clan.³⁰ When one is seriously sick people believe that something unusual has happened to the relationship of the individual with God and with his fellow men and women. This means that the cause of illness in Africa goes beyond physical symptoms to include religious and socio-cultural causes. The process of healing and restoration is done by appealing to the spiritual world of God and ancestors.³¹ By means of prayers and sacrifices to God through the ancestors, the community recognises the power of God as the Supreme Being to restore the integrity of the sick members. This means that in the African context, reconciliation with God is the first step towards effective healing. It is only after turning to God that the family could search for medicine for their moribund members. Similarly, in the African societies, even medicine itself carries religious meaning, as all cures are believed to come from God. Diviners as healers in the community, have special spiritual power, which enable them to identify the cause of illness and to prescribe right medicine.³²

³⁰ Lerma, F. M., O Povo Macua e a Sua Cultura, Lisbon, Instituto de Investigacao Cientifica Tropical, 1989. p.179.

³¹ Idowu, E., African Traditional Religion: A Definition, New York, Orbis Books, 1975, p. 200.

³² Mbiti, J., Introduction to African Religion, p.155.

Faith healing in the African Independent churches reflects the traditional notions about healing described above. Healing and wholeness form a central part of many adherents of African Independent Churches. While one may detect negative approaches used by some of these African Churches, general faith healing has something very positive. It recognises the supremacy of God over the evil powers of this world. So faith healing in the African Independent Churches is not only meant for physical well being but it goes beyond this to include the aspect of salvation or liberation. Healing services done in the religious context are aimed at seeking divine intervention in various areas of human life wherein the powers of evil seem to separate human beings and nature in general from the Creator.

Another source that inspires African Independent churches to be committed to faith healing is the example of Jesus himself. The fact that Jesus healed so consistently, ministering to the total personality of all who were brought to him, have encouraged these African churches to find solutions for some sicknesses and of some social problems in faith healing. As Shorter pointed out, "The wholeness to which Jesus called the world is the pure positiveness of God, the transcendence of a human nature susceptible to pain and decay. It includes bodily health and integrity, but it also looks forward to peace and well-being".³³ Therefore, it is wrong to think that healers in the African independent churches use charms or magic and obscurantism. Healing and wholeness in these churches is in fact a Christian enterprise. In healing services the prophet-healers invoke Jesus' power over Satan and demons which are considered to be the causes of all misfortunes that enslave the people of God today.

In the Legio Maria church in Nairobi, healing services are conducted in the open air-meetings. The healing sessions start with songs inviting the Holy Spirit. After that, the prophet-

³³ Shorter, A., Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness, Geoffrey Chapman, London, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1985. p.15.

healer lays hands upon patients. The prayer, which is said in a loud voice, is directed to Jesus asking him by his power to expel all evil forces that are causing disorder in the person. After the prayer, at the beating of the drums, the prophet-healer sprinkles the patients with holy water and some of it is given to the patients to drink. After this ritual has been done, the individuals are considered healed and once again reconciled with God and with the members of their social networks. Water or oil symbolises new life and new strength. The presence of the community in the healing celebrations is a sign of mutual support and desire to see that harmony is restored to the sick person and to the entire community.

2.2 THE APPROACH TO HEALING AND HEALTH CARE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

It is true, for example, that the Catholic Church has given a huge contribution to improve the health network in Africa. Presently, there are Catholic mission hospitals in almost every town in Africa. On other hand, however, we have to admit that the Catholic approach to illness has been too scientific and impersonal. Indeed, it does very little to quench Africans' thirst for wholistic healing as it is in the approaches of the African Independent Churches.

The new understanding of healing in the Catholic Church distanced itself from the isolated ritual of extreme unction of the council of Trent.³⁴ In the Vatican II, the sacrament of healing is placed in the context of pastoral ministry to the sick.³⁵ The council urged the priests not only to administer the sacrament to the dying as it was before, but also to give it to both the chronically sick, and to those sick people who are not necessarily in the danger of death.³⁶ Besides anointing the sick with holy oil, the priests are also required to pray with the sick. This requirement includes the

³⁴ Martos, J., Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church, New York, Image books, p.392.

³⁵ Ibid.

need for sharing of the word of God with patients, giving them Holy Communion and when the need arises, assisting them with the sacrament of confession. Moreover, the new concept of healing is also associated with active participation of the lay people. The presence of people as part of the therapy management group is to show the concern of the entire community over the suffering of their member and also, the desire of the community to pray together as one family and ask God to restore the health of the sick.

What we observe now, however, is that the healing ministry in the Catholic Church still reflects the old practice of extreme unction. In most cases, the sick are anointed when they are already in their deathbeds. Prayer for the sick involving the entire community in many catholic parishes is very rare if not any. There is now a strong tendency to put all the trust in the modern medicine. As Lucas observes that the, "healing practice based on scientific discovery is the way to tackle all disorder".³⁷ The church seems to ignore the power of prayer to heal. The encounter of God as the source of strength and power to restore the integrity of one's physical, social, mental and spiritual health seems to have lost its meaning. There is instead, a lot of suspicion and mistrust around the effectiveness of integral healing.

For example, Baur reports an incident whereby in 1983, Mgr Milingo had to accept forced resignation from his archiepiscopal see of Lusaka on the grounds that his insistence on the faith healing was incompatible with the archiepiscopal office.³⁸ Another concrete example is that of Fr. Bill. Although many people find healing masses conducted by Fr. Bill very helpful and effective, there is however, a group of clergymen who seem to oppose this initiative. On 27th November 1999, Fr. Bill himself appeared on Kenya Television Network, one of the leading Televisions stations

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lucas, F., Christian Healing: What Can We Believe? London, LYNX Communication, 1997, p. 40.

³⁸ Baur, J., 200 Years of Christianity in Africa, p. 43.

in Kenya to say that there was no wrong doing in his charismatic approach to healing because this was the way that Jesus and the early church followed. According him, along the history of the church, however, this practice was discarded along the history of the church. Further, Fr. Bill emphasised saying that it is time now to go back to the roots and revive charismatic healing.

In fact, in the Mission on which Jesus sent his disciples during his lifetime, he instructed them to announce the kingdom of God and heal the sick. This was the pattern he himself followed (Matt. 4: 23; 9: 35; 10:8). In the early church therefore, spiritual healing was very common. The apostles in the name of Jesus prayed for the sick laying hands on them (Acts 3: 6-7; 9: 32-43; 1s 5: 13-16).

Obviously, it is a big mistake for the Catholic Church in Africa to neglect spiritual healing. As Baur quoting Fr. M. Hebba writes, "The rejection of the healing ministry in the mission churches and the reduction of the healing sacrament to a sacrament of dying has been a sin against the Holy Spirit".³⁹ In Africa where people still have a deep sense of religiosity and still believe that supernatural events do occur, the church must make an effort to proclaim the word of God and to heal the sick just like Jesus did. Proclamation and healing are two ministries that go together and the church should not overemphasise one at the expense of the other. Maddocks has already observed this aspect when he wrote that the, "Church today must be rooted theologically in kingdom of God and express theology in a deep commitment to, and out going concern for the sick...."⁴⁰

The African belief systems and thought must be taken seriously in this process of inculturation. It is obvious that in the African religious worldview some issues such as, healing and wholeness; supernatural intervention, the problem of evil, its causes, agents and remedies are very

³⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁰ Maddocks, M., The Christian Healing Ministry, London, SPCK, 1981, p. 60.

crucial. Today a good number of Catholics join African Independent churches or Pentecostal independent movements because of the indifference of the church regarding the issue of faith healing. It is now common to hear people in Africa complaining that the Catholic Church is not concerned with the total wellbeing of its members. It is indeed difficult to dismiss these complaints because the reality on the ground confirms them. The questions put forward by Fr. Kizito should therefore be taken seriously. That is. "If the church will not be with us as an understanding and loving mother, to whom will we turn? To African Independent churches? To the new American sects of Bible belt? To Islam"?⁴¹ It is obvious that in this matter, simply to reproduce European or North American spirituality is no longer adequate.

2.3 WORSHIP IN THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

In African Traditional Religion, the act of worship involves communal prayers, offering of sacrifices and performance of rituals.⁴² According to Mbiti, the importance of worship among the Africans is twofold. Firstly, worship is regarded as a kind of bridge, which links the visible world of the living and invisible world of God the Spirits and ancestors. Through acts of worship, people feel that God is near and therefore, He is aware of everything that is taking place in the community. This is an occasion that people put forward their requests hoping that God will satisfy them.⁴³ Secondly, worship is also meant to bring harmony in the world of humankind. This means that, in case of a threat to life the community through acts of worshipping would ask God to protect them and to restore the order.⁴⁴

Worship in African societies is accompanied by singing, dancing and clapping of hands. This is another occasion in which the Africans gather as a family to celebrate life, in joy, sorrow or

⁴¹ Sesana, K. R., "An African Synod Without Africa" New People, no. 24 May-June 1993, p. 56.

⁴² Mbiti, J., Introduction to African Religion, 2nd edition, p. 67.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

thanksgiving. Music, singing and dancing in the African worship take the participants to experience the presence of God deep down in their hearts.⁴⁵ During the worship service, the individuals express their prayers (petitions, thanksgiving and praise) freely and each one according to their present needs.⁴⁶ Exuberant type of worships has been the landmark of the Africans. The experience of the Africa in this particular area of worship provides an illustration from which the Catholic Church in Africa may recognise the therapeutic value of many ways of worship which reach deep to the emotional levels.

The African socio-cultural backgrounds are very important if one would like to understand the worship performed in the African Independent churches. Just as in the African traditional worship, in the African Independent churches worship is performed in such a way that it reaches deep emotional levels of the participants. There is a lot of dancing, singing, swaying and clapping of hands. These are done not for fun, but our brothers and sisters of these African churches, find these elements very helpful in their quest to encounter God in prayer.

On 28th November 1999, I attended a worship service in the united Assemblies of Israel Church at the Dagoretti corner branch. The worship service began with a procession that started in the house of one of the church members. From there, people came to the church dancing and singing. This jovial mood continued in the church for about twenty minutes before the leader interrupted it, inviting the congregation to pay attention to the reading of the word of God. The reading was followed by a sermon, which lasted for thirty minutes or so. Unfortunately, I did not understand the content of the sermon as it was said in the Agikuyu language. When the sermon ended, there was a bit of dancing and singing and, later on, spontaneous prayers followed. This was perceived as

⁴⁵ Mugambi, J. and Kirima, N., The African Religion Heritage, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 132.

⁴⁶ Shorter, A., Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1975, p.109.

personal encounters with God because everyone in an audible voice presented to God his or her personal needs. Worship continued in the afternoon session.

I also visited the Nabii Christian church of Kenya at Ongata Rongai and an Akurinu church at Kawangware. In both of these churches, I discovered that the Bible is the only book used in the worship services. Those who are chosen to preach the word of God to the community are given the freedom to choose biblical texts on which their preaching will be based. The focus of the preaching is on the problems and the needs of the community and of the nation at large. The role of the preachers is to help the community to see God's presence in every trial. The intervention of God in the Old Testament in favour of the Israelites is used in the African Independent churches to encourage the faithful not to lose faith when the trials of this world come, because God will always save those who take refuge in Him.

The New Testament theme of love is another important area to which the preachers in the African Independent churches pay attention. The emphasis on love is a striking and consistent feature of these African churches. Jesus' loving attitude towards the people that he encountered is taken as an example to foster a more brotherly love among the members of the church. Taking care of the sick, the poor, widows and orphans are some of the areas where fellowship among the members is shown in deeds.

2.4 WORSHIP IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

After having described the African act of worshipping above, it now becomes easy to understand why many indigenous Africans find some difficulties to adapt to a rather formal and procedural worship of the Catholic Church. Much more inclined to spontaneity and lively types of worship, the Africans do not feel that the various forms of worship in the Catholic Church are appealing enough to their lives. In fact, the lack of warmth, creativity and fraternal spirit in the

Catholic Church's approach to worship has not been able sufficiently to arouse the African mind, heart, and raise the Africans' spirit to God. Burinyuu points out that, "Africans generally dance out their religion and certainly express drama and ritual ideas through symbolic actions rather than verbalisation".⁴⁷ However, the response of the Catholic Church to the matters concerning liturgical inculturation has been very positive one, as it is clearly expressed in the various documents of the church. For example *Sacrosactum Concilium* states that,

"Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error, she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact...."⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church in Africa has not been able to implement this good ideal in the way that is satisfactory to its local people. For example, in many dioceses, even the liturgical dances, which have nothing to do with superstition, are not allowed. There are many reasons to justify this prohibition. Some bishops simply do not allow liturgical dances in their dioceses alleging that they reflect the Pentecostal way of worship. Other reasons given by some bishops are even more interesting. For instance, His Eminence Cardinal Alexandre Dos Santos, Archbishop of Maputo, once banned liturgical dances around the altar saying that these were incompatible with the Catholic faith! Fortunately, later on the Cardinal reconsidered his position and liturgical dances continued.

The second point in this aspect of worship has to do with the ministry of preaching. If the Catholic Church really wants to make its worship relevant to the African audience, then it has to concentrate much more on the preaching the word of God. The hunger for the word of God in

⁴⁷ Berinyuu, Abraham., "Dialogue Between African Traditional Religion and the Christian Faith Via the Principle of Corporate Dialogue", *African Christian Studies*, Vol. 4(1), p. 89.

⁴⁸ Second Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosactum Concilium*, NN. 37, 40.

Africa cannot be ignored. In the African cities, it is quite common to see people converging in public places such as parks, markets and bus stations with the intention to listen to the word of God preached by the protestant preachers. We think that the time has come for the Catholic Church in Africa to come up and to satisfy spiritual needs of its faithful. Perhaps it might not be necessary to preach in the streets, but Catholic preachers must look for the best ways and best places to preach the word of God to the people. In the religious climate of Africa today emphasis on the bible is widely accepted as a test of serious Christian commitment and this is exactly what characterises African Independent Churches. Preaching the word of God in these Churches is the backbone of the worship service. The Catholic Church in Africa must be sensitive to the consequences of appearing not to give first priority to the preaching ministry.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul has clearly stated that the first and foremost test of the *leitourgos* (leader of liturgical worship) is to introduce non-Christians into the sacrifice of Jesus and to incorporate their participation (*koinonia*) in it. According to Paul, this introduction is done especially by means of preaching the word of God (Rom 15: 14-21). It should be clear that we do not mean that the sacraments are not important in the spiritual life of the Christians, but our point here is that celebration of the sacraments in the church should be carried out without neglecting preaching ministry. His Holiness Pope Paul VI similarly highlighted this aspect in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "... it is not superfluous to emphasise to importance and necessity of preaching. And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? ... 'So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ'"⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8th December 1975, No. 42.

2.5 COMMUNION IN THE AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

One of the most vital features of the African heritage is the attention put on the value of communion. Members of a determined community look at each other as brothers and sisters who came from the same source, God the father/mother. As Mugambi and Kirimi observe, "The unity of all was believed to arise from their membership in a symbolic personality. This concept of a universal brotherhood save the African people noble motives for community life".⁵⁰ The concern for one another made every member in the community or clan to feel responsible for each other and to work for the welfare of the community and of each member in particular. Magesa acknowledges this aspect and makes the following comments, "participation · sharing is a central principle or imperative for human existence in African Religion".⁵¹

The Sense of communion that one finds in the African Independent churches reflects the reality of the African societies. Members of these churches feel that they are united by a common experience. There is communion with regard to things such as medicine, the care of poor, widows and orphans and hospitality to visitors.

In the African Israel Church Nineveh here in Nairobi all members know one another by name. People refer to each other as brother so and so, or sister so and so. Definitely, this kind of treatment makes people to "feel at home". Furthermore, the disputes among the church members are solved in the community. The appeal to civil courts can only be made as last resorts with the permission of the church leaders.

Contrary to what happens in the mission churches, in the African Independent church laity finds an opportunity to develop and exercise their particular gifts in the community. Although some

⁵⁰ Mugambi, J. and Kirima, N., The African Religion Heritage, p. 66.

⁵¹ Magesa, L., African Religion: The Moral Traditional of Abundant life, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1998. p. 67.

of the African Independent churches do have ordained ministers, these, however, are not meant to overshadow the active involvement of the lay people in the life of the church. In fact, Ordained ministers and lay ministers work hand in hand in order to bring unity and harmony in the community. For instance, in the Kimbanguist Church in Congo, both clerics and lay people can exercise the gifts of prophecy and healing.⁵²

The theme of communion in the African Independent churches is also reinforced by the example of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus healing work, miracles and his concern for the most marginalised of the Jewish society, have inspired the African churches to follow the same pattern in their communities. Following this example, the African churches in the past stood firm in the fight against social injustice perpetrated by repressive colonial governments and their individual supporters. Even today they constitute a voice that speaks for the poor victims of corrupt governments. Indeed, in the African Independent churches, the Africans have found their identity. Their membership makes sense because they feel that the church community is supporting them.

2.6 COMMUNION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

In many parts of Africa participation in church life is seen as either a religious duty or as a hobby for those who like that sort of thing. It is really unfortunate that people do not see the church community as a place where they can enter into communion with one another. Similarly, in many Catholic parishes, priests seem to overshadow the presence of lay people so much so that the parish is seen to belong exclusively to priests. They have all authority, they make all decisions and they control all the members. Normally the faithful stay at the periphery of the parish affairs as if they were foreigners in their own parish. The parish is not to them “a place to feel at home”. A group of intellectuals which also includes some theologians from Eastern Africa observed this weakness and

⁵² Hastings A., The Church in Africa, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.503.

commented that, "The time when "good" laity were simply expected to pray and obey is long gone and should be forgotten. As all official church documents since Vatican II have stressed, the entire people of God ought to be fully involved in the leadership of the church: in decision making, planning and implementing the various aspects of the mission of the church".⁵³

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, His Holiness Pope John Paul II spoke of church as God's family.⁵⁴ As God's family, the pope urged the church in Africa to put more stress on the care for one another, solidarity, and warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.⁵⁵ Recognising ethnocentrism and excessive particularism that has marred the original image of church in Africa, the pope in his exhortation made a plea to the church in Africa to restore the spirit of communion and co-operation that always characterise the African people.⁵⁶

It is now six years since the pope's plea went in air. However, in many dioceses in Africa, the papal wise words are yet to be implemented. Communion and co-operation among the Christians remain a dream yet to come true. In many parishes, Priests do not even know their flock let alone visit them and get informed about their spiritual and material needs. An extreme case happened in Rwanda in 1994 during ethnic genocide. In this shameful action against humanity, some clergymen alongside other Catholics were accused of directly or indirectly taking part in the massacre!⁵⁷ The crisis of confidence between Catholic priests and their flock has been responsible for lack of true communion in the church community. In most cases church buildings seem to be a places for weekly meetings rather than homes where people care can for one another.

⁵³ Various authors, "Cast away Fear": *New People*, No. 29, March-April 1994, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* 14th September 1995, No.63.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kodi, B., "Rwanda: A Church on Trial", *The Seed*, Vol. 11 (12) December 1999, pp. 8- 10; The East African (weekly) "Church A Testimony of the Conspiracy That Led to the Killings", Nairobi, December 6-12 1999, pp.1-3.

Within the large group of laity, women are the most vulnerable group. Leadership and responsibility in the church have been men affairs. Women, who constitute a majority of the overall church members, are denied the opportunities to assume certain responsibilities in the church yet most of them have got good skills to exercise leadership. For example, in most cases if not all, the post of chairperson of the parish is only reserved for male persons. Yet in some African cultures women can hold prominent positions such as diviners, sacrificers, healers, etc.⁵⁸ Commenting on the role of women in the Legio Maria Church, Mr Oguta indicated that in the Luo society where members of this church belong, women are normally not given opportunity to be leaders be it in their households or in society in general. However, this oppressive behaviour is not tolerated in the church. Women are given the opportunity to exercise leadership hand in hand with their men counterparts. This change of heart according to my interviewer was motivated by a reflection on the dignity of women as it is clearly stated in the gospels.⁵⁹

When the bishops delegates to African Synod were leaving for Rome, a place where the proceedings of the synod took place, sister Namalambo made this compassionate appeal to her pastors, "The women, especially the poor ones, who after all are those who fill up our churches and do the hard work, must get a special consideration. This will lead to a recognition of their dignity which will further allow them to have equal duties, rights and opportunities".⁶⁰ The Catholic Church in Africa must safeguard the rights of women in the church by allowing them to participate actively hand in hand with their men counterparts in the building up God's true family characterised by strong bond of communion among its different members regardless of gender. To fail to do so is

⁵⁸ Magesa, L., "Differences that Bind the Liberation of Women in Africa", AFER, Vol. 35 no. 1, February 1993, p.50.

⁵⁹ Denis Oguta, 43, Interviewed by the Author, Kibera Nairobi, 23 December 1999.

⁶⁰ Namalambo C., "What Good News for Women?", New People, No. 29, March-April 1994, p.90.

to force the members to seek home elsewhere or to deprive the church of the contribution of its female members.

The chapter has clearly indicated that as far as inculturation is concerned, the African Independent Churches are taking a leading position. The effort of these churches in the area of inculturation is being rewarded by receiving a good number of Christians from mission churches including the Catholic Church. In the next chapter, we shall discuss religious dialogue. It seems to us that lack of meaningful dialogue between Christian faith and African cultures may be one of the main obstacles towards the Catholic commitment to inculturation. We believe that a sincere and tireless dialogue with African cultures will help the church to acquire deep and more knowledge about the African worldview. This knowledge is an essential element for the church to render a meaningful evangelisation in Africa.

CHAPTER THREE:

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND AFRICAN CULTURE.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Religious dialogue is an important element in the process of inculturation in Africa. This is an initial stage towards the desire to incarnate Christianity in the culture of the local people. The attitude of openness between the Christian faith and African culture will not only lead to mutual knowledge but above all to mutual enrichment. As Healey and Sybertz pointed out. "In active dialogue between faith and culture there is a mutual or two-way challenge and enrichment. The African culture challenges the Christian faith to be truly universal...at the same time the Christian faith and the gospel message challenge and illuminate African culture and traditions".⁶¹

The position of the Catholic Church as far as dialogue is concerned is clearly expressed in the various official documents of this church. Dialogue is regarded as "an integral element in the evangelising mission of the church"⁶², and the church's stand is to seek dialogue in all missionary situations.

3.1 THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.

The interest in dialogue among the Christians stems from the example of Jesus himself. All the four gospels give a good picture of Jesus who is open to associate with different people, even with different people even with those regarded by his fellow Jews as "sinners". While Jesus

⁶¹ Healey, J., and Sybertz D., Towards an African Narrative Theology, Nairobi, Pauline Publications-Africa, 1996 p.27.

⁶² Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation, 19 May 1991. No.9.

contemporaries Showed signs of dislike towards people of other religions and cultures, such as the Samaritans. Jesus was free from this cultural bias of his Jewish fellows. This is why he viewed all people as members of the same family no matter how different culturally or religiously they were. Of the many examples that we can give to prove Jesus' attention to religious dialogue, two from the gospel according to John are straightforward. In these two cases, Jesus used dialogue as his method per excellence to reveal his divinity and the plan of the Father in the world.

John in 4:1-42 presents Jesus in one of his missionary journeys. His friendly and sincere dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well site near Samaritan town made all the townspeople to believe in him. In this dialogue, Jesus distanced himself from religious superiority of his fellow Jews. He made it clear to his interlocutor that the Samaritan and Jewish forms of worship cannot claim to be right unless they are open to the worship God in Spirit of truth. This is the true worship and, in fact, one that God Himself wants. To worship God in Spirit of the truth means one's disposition to establish a loving relationship with God, with his/her neighbour and with one self.⁶³ Indeed, the above text suggests that doctrine and other external expressions employed in the worship services may be important but their importance is only proved when they take the worshippers to practice love.

In reaching out to encounter a Samaritan, a sinner and woman. Jesus openly challenged the narrow and the ethnocentric religious attitude of his fellow and arrogant Jews. In accepting this particular woman, as adulterous as she was and a foreigner, Jesus gave a good example on how true worship should be performed. Antagonism, cultural superiority and other behaviours of the sort were completely dismissed by Jesus as not belonging to the plan of the Father that was to be realised in him. If Jesus was asked to stay in Samaria for some days and he accepted the invitation,

⁶³ Brown, R., The Churches the Apostles Left Behind, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press, 1984, p. 109.

it is because the people in that town realised that Jesus was a really special character. indeed, a Messiah of whom their ancestors worshipped in their traditional religion. Though he was a Jew, Jesus' views towards the Samaritan people and their traditional religion did not have biases, instead, he gave new insights that would enrich it.

Earlier in John 3:1-21, the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus is recorded. The latter was a Pharisee and one of the prominent Jewish leaders. The Pharisees belonged to a special class in the Jewish society. Their claim that they were the only ones who observed the Torah made them to be respected by the ordinary Jews. They distinguished themselves from the rest of the Jewish people by following different lifestyle. Indeed, these people were a small group with a very well defined culture within a large group of the Jewish people.

Although Jesus and Nicodemus were both Jews, indeed, their encounter appeared to bring together two people of different sub-cultures. Of course, Jesus was also a "rabbi"; he knew the Law perfectly well and, in some instances, remained faithful to it. But the difference is that Jesus did not follow the Law blindly, but he sought to actualise it according to the needs of the time. In other words, Jesus showed a more open attitude to his traditional Law.

To be "born again", that is, conversion to the spirit of God which "blows where it wills", was an invitation to Nicodemus to go beyond a mere observance of his traditional Law to reach out in order to see and appreciate the presence of God in other people's life. Love, Hospitality, goodness, joy, kindness patience and other positive attitudes that characterise people in society, are all clear signs which show that the spirit of God is at work in the world and that people are really "born again".⁶⁴ If Nicodemus was most likely to come to Jesus thinking that his religion was absolute in the sense that it possessed all the truth. However, after Jesus' clarification, he certainly

⁶⁴ Brown, R. E., The Churches the Apostles Left Behind, p.98.

changed this opinion. Since his encounter with Jesus, Nicodemus is reported by the evangelist to have begun to associate with Jesus (Cf. Jn 7:50-52; 19:35).

3.2 CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS.

Since Vatican II endorsed dialogue as one of the important elements in the work of evangelisation, this theme has been repeatedly underlined in the official documents of the church. Dialogue as used here means “all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment ”.⁶⁵

With reference to Africa, dialogue is aimed at learning African cultural values, some of which are expressed in the traditional religion, in view of achieving a deeper evangelisation.⁶⁶ In their encounter with Africans the missionaries are called upon to make a conscious effort to know, love, understand and respect the African religious experiences. Such commitment will allow them to discover the work of the Holy Spirit already present in the life of the people. From that point, the next move will be to bring to the surface all genuine traditional values and put them in use. Bosch has the following wise words about this point: “...the missionary does not go out to ‘take Christ’ to other people and culture, but also allow the faith the chance to start a history of its own in each people and its experience of Christ”.⁶⁷

When Christianity reached in the African soil and the missionaries started preaching about the liberation brought by Jesus, gradually the Africans started joining the “new religion”. The example of Jesus as one who laid down his life in order to bring love, solidarity and harmony in the world attracted the African audience. They readily accepted faith in Christ because it seemed to be

⁶⁵ Dialogue and Proclamation, No.9

⁶⁶ Towards the African Synod, Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, Nairobi, St. Paul Publications-Africa, p. 70.

⁶⁷ Bosch, J. D., Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, p. 456.

consistent with the African values such as, hospitality, love and life in community. This is a good example showing that since the beginning Africa has been open to other religious experiences.

In the years that followed evangelization of Africa, quickly African Independent churches spread throughout the continent. This new reality came as result of a rather long process of acculturation between African culture and Christian faith. After having realised that their religious expectations were not met in the mission churches, the Africans did not dismiss Christianity altogether. Instead, they continued to interact with it until they got enough experience that enabled them to found Christian churches with African expression.

The attitude of the African Independent churches to integrate the Christian faith and some of the African traditional cultural elements has promoted some Catholic and protestant theologians to refuse to recognise the Christian identity of these churches. This refusal, however, is baseless because these African churches are authentically Christian in nature and as matter of fact they profess a solid faith in Christ as the universal redeemer. Moreover, these Churches accept and practice the gospel values such as love, communion, forgiveness, and respect for human dignity among others.

The African Independent Churches' commitment to Christianity can also verified by their openness to integrate religious practices of other churches in their own churches' communities. In the African Israel Nineveh Church, for instance, there is a celebration period called *wiki ya kueneza injili* (the week of spreading the Gospel). This practice consists of weeklong prayers asking God to preserve the church from all things that might compromise its task to proclaim the word of God to all nations. This happens once per year in every first week of August and it brings all the Israel Nineveh Church Christians of a zone in one outstation. This particular practice is likely to have been borrowed from the Catholic Church whereby during the month of October there is a week

called mission week that the faithful pray for all the church's missions. This example confirms the determination of the African Independent churches to remain firmly attached to Christ and to the gospel values. It also shows their openness to other churches that also profess Jesus Christ as their universal redeemer.

3.3 THE APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Although dialogue is not the same as proclamation, however, the task to communicate the gospel message, the mystery of salvation revealed by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit would not bear fruit if did not feature in the agenda of the church. As Vatican II pointed out,

“In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the gospel and gather together in one spirit all men of every nation, race and culture, the church shows itself as a sign of the Spirit of brotherhood which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it”.⁶⁸

Pope John Paul II, on other hand, has made it clear that church's commitment to dialogue it is not a favour that is doing to people of other religions, but it is something that is deep rooted in the mission of the church itself. In establishing dialogue with other faiths, the church does nothing other than to obey Spirit whose mission has universal character.

“Dialogue does not originate from tactical concern or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit that blow where he wills. Through dialogue, the church seeks to uncover the “seeds of the words”, a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. These are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind.”⁶⁹

However, despite the fact that the Catholic Church has shown a great deal of interest to follow the path of dialogue in its mission, this initiative is not being implemented fully here in Africa. In many Catholic dioceses, liturgy, customs and structures still reflect a reality, which is alien to the African people. Even his holiness pope Paul VI, who during his visit to Uganda in 1969

⁶⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, No. 92.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, No.56.

was apparently in favour of dialogue as an important stage towards inculturation. later on, however, the pope seemed to back away from his initial position.⁷⁰

The fear sustained by some people that dialogue with African culture with the subsequent integration of some of the elements of the African Traditional Religion in Christian living, would compromise the unity of the church, seems to be missing the point. By allowing diversity, that is, the many ways that lead people to God, the church will solve the problem of dissatisfaction among many faithful who have to leave the church simply because they are not happy with church's uncompromising principle of uniformity. Furthermore, religious diversity will provide the church with enormous spiritual richness coming from other religious experiences including that in the African Traditional Religion.

The Catholic approach to unity should not be one that sees other forms of religion as less orthodox than hers. There is a need for an openness to recognise the spirit of the risen lord in other religions as well. Such initiative will enhance the spirit of appreciation and, therefore, there will be a room left for other faiths to make their contribution to the Catholic faith. Berinyuu explains the theme of dialogue and unity, in the following words: "By experiencing Christ in different cultures, there is an enrichment of experience. There is also a new prospect of unity and hope. As we share and listen to other's experiences, a new growth emerges".⁷¹

African bishops themselves have shown great concern about the improper handling of the issue of dialogue in Africa. For instance, Shorter makes the following observation expressing the feeling of the bishops:

⁷⁰ Cf. Shorter, A., Toward A Theology of Inculturation, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, pp. 208- 213.

⁷¹ Berinyuu, A. A., "Dialogue between African Traditional Religion and the Christian Faith via the Principle of Corporate Dialogue", African Christian Studies, Vol. 4 (1), March 1988, p. 98.

During the 1974 synod itself, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar made a collective statement, concerning what they termed 'the task of religious acculturation'. Their intervention was prompted by the feeling that Christian life in Africa was very often lived merely at the surface, without any dialogue between the gospel and genuine values of traditional religion".⁷²

There is now in Africa an increasingly growing awareness of personal identity. The radio, newspapers, television and other means of communication tend to give news that are a kind of invitation for the local people to affirm themselves and abandon the habit of accepting everything that comes from outside. For instance, in Kenya, articles concerning religion in the newspapers often are related to African Independent Churches or Pentecostal Independent movements. Open-air healing sessions in African cities also tend to increase considerably and they are very well attended. All these are the signs of greater things to come. The Catholic Church should read these "signs of the time" and act faster to remove all the obstacles in the way towards inculturation.

Dialogue with African culture should be re-evaluated and strengthened. The Mother Church will only do a wise thing to allow her daughters and sons of Africa to participate in this very big family called Christianity on the basis of their own experience. *Nostra Aetates* has a good explanation about this specific point:

"Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good among non-Christians as well as their social and cultural values".⁷³

Generally members of African Independent Churches are good Christians. In those churches that I had an opportunity to visit, people received me well and I really felt at home. I did not find a smallest trait that would confirm the claims that there is something-Satanic going on there as many people perceive. However, I did find that bible in these churches is being interpreted literally and this is something that these churches should take into account. Perhaps inter-religious dialogue with

⁷² Shorter, A., Toward A Theology of Inculturation, p. 212.

⁷³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral constitutional of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2.

other churches can provide a help to overcome this weakness. Furthermore, in our contact with the African Independent Churches we have found out that members of these churches are Christians as they are fully committed to the Christian faith. If we have to accept conclusions reached by some people who regard the African Independent churches as “Anti-Christian movements”, then, one would expect members from these churches to be hostile to Christian faith or even to the gospel values. but this is not the case. In a good number of the African Independent churches, Jesus remains the central figure of worship and members make efforts to live according to the teachings of Jesus as they are spelt out in the gospels.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

4.1 CONCLUSION.

It is evident that Inculturation in the African Independent African churches is real and this initiative needs to be emulated. In spite of their obvious weaknesses, these African Churches have shown that it is possible for the Africans to embrace Christianity and still be able to express this faith in an African manner. While it remains true that the separation of our brothers and sisters of African Independent Churches raises a great concern for the unity of the one Church founded by Christ, it is nonetheless fair to recognise that these churches have made a meaningful contribution to the growth of African Christianity. In doing so, they have made themselves a source of inspiration for many Africans. The Catholic Church in Africa should take the example of the inculturation approaches adopted in the African Independent Churches so as to work out a kind of Christianity that will meet the challenges of evangelisation of Africa today.

Of course, inculturation has begun to take place in some Catholic Churches here in Africa. Let us consider, for example, the Church in Congo with its famous Zairian mass rite. In fact, since this rite was introduced in the liturgy, the Catholic Church in Congo seems to be doing well in terms of providing its faithful with lively liturgical celebrations. Some other exceptions can be noticed as well. However, the general overall of the present situation of the Catholic Church in Africa needs to be examined carefully and addressed as soon as possible before the church becomes culturally irrelevant to the local people.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS.

To date, the talk about inculturation in the Catholic Church is something that still belongs to intellectual domain. Very few people are aware of the church's openness to this theme. Among those who may know something about inculturation, a good number of them do not have a clear idea of what it is all about. In fact, some people think that it is only parish priest who can take the initiative in matters concerning inculturation and everybody else sits aside waiting for its consequences. The analysis in this study has revealed that ordinary members are not fully involved in different areas of the church's life. We, therefore, recommend here that through weekly meetings of small Christian communities or in other occasions, the parish priest should make people aware of their role in the process of inculturation. Such a commitment will allow the local people to bring proposals in order to strengthen liveliness in the church. Furthermore, active involvement of lay people in different areas of the church life will enhance a sense of belonging to community and, therefore, to bring about a solid communion and dispel the perception that the church is a private belonging of the priests.

Close to the theme of involvement of the local people in the different areas of the church life, there is issue of naming African churches after "foreign" saints. Basing on the analysis in this study, I would suggest that the church could look for alternative ways to maintain alive in the church the memories of certain deceased people in Africa, respected by people and already venerated as "Saints". This move will give the African people the confidence that the church is really serious in its long commitment to incarnate itself fully in the local context.

The Gospel is a unique message. It is the Good News of Jesus and as such it is not linked to any culture, but it does not spread out by itself. A human being conditioned by culture has to do this work. Therefore, there is a tendency for those who preach the Gospel to other people to personify

this message, that is, to base it on their own cultural backgrounds and experiences. This is a natural tendency and all of us can fall into this trap if some efforts are not made to combat it. Therefore, the missionaries especially those coming from outside Africa should be ready to learn about and appreciate the cultures of the people they serve. This may not be an easy task, but if there is will, there is also a possibility to excel. This long process can be done by interacting with people, attending various traditional functions such as traditional dances and funeral rituals of passage and other traditional ceremonies. A total immersion into the local culture will help the missionaries to know the meaning of the various elements of the African Traditional Religion and culture, to facilitate the spread of the gospel in the African context.

The research for this paper was carried out at a time that Kenyans were in fear following the findings of the commission of Archbishop Kirima on the [existence?] of devil worship in the country. After the report had confirmed the existence of this outrageous practice, some individuals believed to belong to mainstream churches immediately started attacking the "small churches" accusing them of being such satanic churches. Because of this atmosphere of hostility several African Independent Churches refused to receive me for interviews. I recommend here that the Catholics ought not to treat their fellow sisters and brothers of the African Independent churches with contempt because they are different from them. Indeed, most of these people share the same faith with us in Jesus Christ. In this case, abusive and contemptuous language compromise the realization of the prophecy of one Lord and one Church (Jn 17:21).

The decision reached by some Catholic churches here in Africa to sideline women from undertaking some responsibilities and ministries such as catechist, being chairpersons of parishes, ministers of the Eucharist (acolytes) in the church, is wrong and it does not do a minimum justice to them. The church in Africa must give a good example by being one of institutions respecting and

restore the image of African women disfigured by male domination. Such restoration can be done, for example, by giving women equal opportunities with their male counterparts in the church.

Given the fact that the African people have shown a great interest in the Word of God so much so that they dance over it as a sign of reverence, from time to time, the Church could organise open-air worship services. Such occasions would give the Africans enough time to quench their thirst for God and the Holy Spirit and to celebrate this encounter in the way that reaches deep down to their hearts. The twenty or twenty five minutes of homily inserted in the mass rite are not enough to meet the African need for the word of God. In the same token, Church buildings should be organised in a way that they can offer enough space for the people to move around the church freely during liturgical celebrations.

Besides utilising the bible in the sermons, the church could also provide biblical courses at all levels. Many people in Africa including some Catholics are easily lured by the so-called mobile preachers even though it is clear that the message that some of these preachers give to their audience is rather misleading and has very little to do with true gospel teachings.

Obviously, healing and wholeness constitute one of the crucial spiritual needs for Africans today. Fortunately, some people in the Catholic Church have already started to dedicate themselves to this ministry. The church should encourage more people especially those who are gifted in this area to come up and serve the community through the healing ministry. The parishes should also develop the habit of visiting the sick in hospitals and offer them prayers and consolation.

It is beyond doubt that the Spirit-Paraclete, which Jesus promised to send to the first church in order to help it to actualise his message in each period and place, is still at work (Jn 14:15-17, 25-27). Otherwise, it is impossible to think of insertion of the Church in different contexts without such help. When the first Christians started witnessing their faith in Christ the Lord, their fellow Jews

called them “superstitious” and ignorant of the “true religion”. This contempt recurred when Christianity was proclaimed for the first time in the Greek and Roman contexts. The process of insertion of Christianity is taking place in Africa today. I believe that through African Independent Churches, the Spirit-Paraclete has a lot to say to the Catholic Church in Africa. This personal and ongoing presence of Jesus Christ in the world seems to urge the Catholic Church in Africa to move faster and to insert itself in the local context. Like other Africans, I do hope that one day our church will heed the voice of Mary, the mother of our Elder Jesus and our mother, who never ceases to ask the church. “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

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