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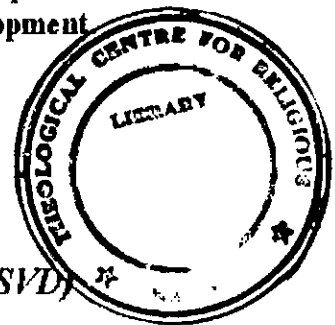
**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**(INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL MINISTRY)**

**THE PASTORAL CHALLENGE OF MEDIATORSHIP  
ACCORDING TO THE CANDOMBLE**

**An essay submitted to the Institute of Social Ministry in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the diploma in Social Development**



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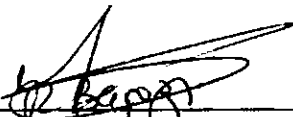
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# STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, undersigned declare that this Long Essay is my original work achieved through research, personal observation and reflections. These work has never been submitted to any University or college for any credit or approval. I, therefore acknowledge all the information entailed here and their sources.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 14/4/99

Approved by:  . (Supervisor)

Date: 14. April. 1999

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to SVD Seminarian Louis from Brazil who stayed in Kenya for two years on his pastoral experience and Justus Rotuk who had his pastoral experience in Brazil, for sacrificing their time in order to explain to me, all materials that I needed from them, in order to justify the pastoral challenge of mediatorship according to the Candomble.

Not forgetting my Tutor Miss Getrude Abuno who spared her time to guide me where necessary and whenever I needed her, she was always ready for my rescue and I also thank my provincial very Reverend Father Mc Carthy for sparing time in order to correct some of my work that were theological.

## DEDICATION

To my parents who have been always with me and have trusted in my vocation.  
This also for all my friends who have been patient with me, while I was doing  
this research.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- A.F AFRICAЕ TERRAM: Message of his holiness Paul VI to the Hierarchy and to all people of Africa for the promotion of the Religious, Civil and Social good of the continent October 29, 1967.
- A .G AD GENTES DIVINITUS: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity. (Vatican 11 ) CELAM CONSELHO EPISCOPAL LATINO-AMERICANO.
- E.N EVANGELII NUNTIANDI: Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, Evangelisation in the modern world, 1975.
- L.C LUMEN GENTIUM: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Vatican 11.
- N.A NOSTRA AETATE: Declaration of the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, Vatican 11.
- S.C SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM: The Constitution on the sacred Liturgy, Vatican 11. All quotations from Vatican 11 are taken from A, Flannery (ed.)
- VATICANO COUNCIL 11: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents Leominster, Her fords, England, 1981.

## **PREFACE**

This long essay is on the research of the Candomble, Candomble being an Afro-Brazilian cult which has African element and Catholic element found in Brazil has opened my outlook as a social minister who is likely to work among these people. I tried to use the Tangaza Methodology of See, Judge and act, to study using primary sources for the most part and secondary research.

The essay focuses on the Candomble, the Afro-Brazilian way of worship. I do stress that without progress in the situation of these people there can be no true social development. This essay recommends us and invites us to be ambassadors of change in such missions where people need challenge by appreciating first what they have or believe in order to bring transformation and growth to them. This is because they need support in their struggle to fight for equality, peace and justice. Afro-Brazilian people need to be given their rights as Africans and once as slaves. It is struggle and love that this contribution to Afro-Brazilian, development and conscientiazation will arouse positive interest and response in lectures and students at large endeavor has been made to reflect upon the pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church posed by the syncretism between the Saints (canonised by the Catholic Church) and the "Orixis" (saints of the Afro-Brazilian Community, the Candomble).

The purpose of writing this essay would aid in understanding and identification of Social problems of the Candomble people and also for further social analysis and arriving at solutions with people in the form of projects.

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## INTRODUCTION

This essay seeks to investigate one fundamental aspect of *Candomble* Religion. That is to say practices of *Candomble*. *Candomble* is a highly complex system of mediation as already mentioned. In this regard, the Orixas play a central part in the life of this Afro-Brazilian Religion. This study is to show that in spite of their changes and adaptations that *Candomble* underwent, it remains faithful to the cultural patterns of the Yoruba people.

In the third part I reflected on the challenge that *Candomble* put to any project of evangelization in Brazil. In this part I followed the methodological approach of “SEEING”, “JUDGING”, and “ACTING”<sup>1</sup>. I tried to present the challenge that religious Syncretism puts to the Christian faith. Leonardo Boff presents in his readings in favor of Syncretism, the Catholicity of Catholicism”. Four definitions of Syncretism: Syncretism as adaptation, Syncretism as addition, Syncretism as accommodation and Syncretism as mixture.<sup>1</sup> Following L. Boff’s definitions, whenever I use the word Syncretism trying to establish a positive ground and criteria for a true Syncretism, acceptable from the point of view of Christianity, I mean “Syncretism as adaptation”. A religion first is exposed to different religious expressions and then assimilates them, interprets them and remodel them according to its own identity. This is not a blind acceptance; it involves adaptation and conversion.<sup>2</sup> After this I dealt with syncretism between the Saints and the *Orixas* and in so doing I pointed out how it happened.

In the following step “seeing”, I concentrated on the pastoral challenge and critical view of Syncretism. Then “judging”, I presented the areas of similarity as well as the areas of fundamental differences between the Catholic and a the Yoruba understanding for mediatorship.<sup>3</sup> The last step acting”, as a social minister I explored the possibilities for new ways in evangelization.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Boff, *Church, Charism, and Power* (London: SCM Press, 1985) pp. 90-91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 91.

<sup>3</sup> M. Toscano, *Introducao a Sociologia Educational*, (Metropolis: Ed. Vozes, 1985), pp. 101.

This essay is restricted to the analysis of the Candomble of *Bahia*, which was brought to Brazil by the Yoruba slaves. The Yoruba the genetic name of “Nago” in Brazil. I will use the two terms (Yoruba-Nago) synonymously.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, I would like to emphasize that a project of evangelization has to be clothed with a “pedagogy of flexibility”, born of attitude of respect and wonder before the riches of Candomble. The Work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizer and ever increasing love for those whom he is evangelizing, (EN 79)’

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<sup>4</sup> M. Batista, Religiosidade do Povo no Brasil, (Unpublished notes, Pontifical Catholic University, Sao Paulo, 1972), pp. 4.

# CHAPTER ONE

## AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULT

### 1.1. Candomble definition

Candomble is one of the Afro-Brazilian cults, incorporating Catholic and African elements practiced by the Yoruba slaves. Of the African N people who reached in Brazil, the Yoruba had one of the most elaborated system. They were concentrated mainly in the city of Salvador. Due to their concentration the Yoruba were able to keep their traditions and beliefs alive in spite of all the pressures and oppositions of a hostile society which regarded African religion diabolical. There has been a homogeneous black population in Brazil According to Edison, Carneiro, the NAGOS (Yoruba) and the Geges (The tribe of the ancient kingdom Dahomey), imposed their religion upon the other African peoples.<sup>5</sup> In spite of all the diverse influences, the cult in Bahia was able to remain faithful to the cultural patterns of the Yoruba people. In other words, they did not keep strictly in all their details, the same rites and rituals of their local way of origin. There have been adaptations and reinterpretations. Nevertheless, they conserved the spirit and substance of the cults as they are in Africa..<sup>6</sup> The name *Candomble* comes from a popular dance among the slaves in the coffee farms. *Candomble* was the name given to a certain type of drum, (*Atabaque*). It is difficult to say how this name came about to designate the Nago cult. According to Edison this designation and other given to other cults reflect the assimilation of the African cults by Brazilian society. This fact, he says, "made the African cults national and not African any more" from the context of what Edison said, he meant that the Yoruba people considered their belief as important to them rather than being compelled to accept the foreign culture of belief.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E. Carneiro, Ladinos, E. Crioulos, Rio de Janeiro: ed., Civilizacao Brasileira, 1964), pp. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Conselho Episcopal latino-Americano, (Abbrevi, Celam), OS Grupos Afro-Americanos, (Sao Paulo:ed., Paulinas, 1985), pp. 222.

<sup>7</sup> Carneiro Ladinos, pp. 128.

What is Syncretism? Syncretism is where a religion is not yet developed as a fully distinct religion but is the addition or alternation of different beliefs, each part with its structures, rites and places of worship. This the simple addition of disposable elements without interrelating them. They are united only by the personal experience of the believer whose own diffuse religiosity values these religious expressions.

## **1.2. Background**

In the year 1500 the Portuguese navigator Pedro Alvarez Cabral arrived at the North East Coast of Brazil. It was the beginning of the Portuguese colonial empire. At first Portugal was more interested in riches and trade with the East, India especially than in beginning a colonial enterprises. At the very beginning the Portuguese stayed on the coast trading with the natives, not until they were driven out of the East Indies did they turn their attention to America, America however, had little to offer them.<sup>8</sup> It is vital to remember that the economic life of the colony was organized around the international markets. The colony produced what was needed in the market. If the market demanded sugar, sugar would be produced. In this way sugar plantation was the first cycle in the economic history of the colony.

This was followed by gold, coffee and so on. Sugar plantation being the first economic enterprise of the new colony, from the beginning it became clear that for a high profit large scale planting was necessary. The large landed estate was institutionalized as the best option to meet the logic and the demands of the combination of circumstances. Another aspect to be considered was the human resource, who was going to work on the sugar plantation? Portugal itself could not afford the labor necessary to meet the demands of an enterprise such as this. The solution that was found was simple, objective, programmatic and was already known by the Portuguese; slavery. First of all they tried making slaves of the Indians, as the Indians did not adapt to the work in the plantations the solutions as

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<sup>8</sup> R. Bastide, *The African Religion of Brazil*, (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 31.

to import slave labor from Africa. So in the 17<sup>th</sup> C Africans gradually came to replace the Indians on the sugar plantation.

The Portuguese brought their civilization with them along with their society. The idea was to create a new Portugal and thus perpetuate Portuguese society. But of course Brazil was not Portugal. The new born society was compelled to adapt itself to different living conditions and to the fact that Lisbon and Rome, as symbols of power, were far away. The style of property and solidarity at work, and the characteristic of the Portuguese had to change. The "Casa Grande" the big house of the landlord and his family, his slaves and his employees lived a self-sufficient life. The landlord was the absolute authority. When the African slaves arrived they had just their cultural values left. Their civilized society and freedom were left behind in Africa. As already pointed out, it is important to notice that there has never been in Brazil homogeneous black population. The slaves brought in, were from different parts, and tribes of Africa. Slavery however, instead of dividing, created a new sort of solidarity and unity. Before embarking for Brazil the slaves were baptized. Slaves coming from Angola had to be marked with a mark of the Portuguese crown as a proof of the tax paid to the royal treasure. Sometimes this mark was a baptism certificate as well. The ones who arrived without baptism had one year preparation before being baptized in which they learned few prayers.

On arriving in Brazil the slaves were sold in public markets like cattle with the seal of their new owner. No attention was paid to family or ethnic links. The first slaves were recruited to work in the sugar plantation crops. When we consider the demography of the plantations and the number of slaves involved in it, we can see that the Africans could somehow reorganize and reestablish a more restricted solidarity among themselves. In this way, traditional religious values were perpetuated. The context of exploitation and suffering of captivity assisted enormously for the transformation of Africa into a sort of myth. The myth of the lost paradise, of a secure world where all the protectors, divinities and ancestors live. This fact helped towards the faithful conservation of the traditions of the

divinities and their cults. In this way the African religion not only transmitted religious values, but values often as an existential affirmation.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. Survival of African Religion

As we have seen, for a white man a slave was a working machine. He considered the black man as a soul-less being. The masters only became more concerned about the health and well-being of their slaves, when the demand for the labor increased because of the mines and the rising price of in the market. Assimilation of white values was a natural process. White culture was in many ways desirable. Slaves wanted to be baptized in order to benefit from the privileges granted due to baptism. A pagan slave was regarded as some one inferior; he could not be accused of witchcraft, and other things. It should be assumed that white civilization was imposed by force, giving the slaves a painful feeling of alienation. White civilization was desirable as a means of social mobility and since the insurrection (rebellion) had failed, as the only way out of a intolerable situation.<sup>10</sup> When slaves became Christians they did so on a subordinate level. They were not allowed into the church with their white masters but stayed by the door, religious festivities were held separately, this religious separation forced the Negro into an awareness of his race just as it forced him to seek his own protectors<sup>11</sup> Religious leadership however, was a right (prerogative) of the white priest. It is essential to pay attention to the fact that the religious practice on the sugar plantation was based on festivities in honor of the saints of devotion of the landlord's family. I am dealing with a kind of domestic church. The catechesis of the slaves consisted of learning a few prayers by heart. In addition. I must consider the dependence of the chaplain upon the landlord, the insufficient number of priests, the lack of formation of the clergy.

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<sup>9</sup> F. Rehbein, *Candomble e Salvacao*, (Sao Paulo: ed., Loyola, 1985), p.68.

<sup>10</sup> Bastide, *Religious*, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

Nina Rodrigues refers to evangelization of the slaves as an “illusion of catechesis”.<sup>12</sup> The slaves were baptized but not evangelized. During the 18<sup>th</sup> C in the towns, religion lost its main character in order to be based on fraternities. Colored people organized fraternities modeled on those of the whites. The black fraternities” were mainly dedicated to our lady of the Rosary and to St. Benedict. The separation between the whites and the black fraternities was so radical that the groups finally known as the white church and the black church.<sup>13</sup>

According to Roger, this segregation of the two Catholicisms by color prevented the Negroes from being totally assimilated into the religion of the whites. Proletariat pursuing revolution, a movement best analyzable in Marxist terms, with the religious dimension reduced to not much more than convenient coloring. Thus a feature of African civilization entered gradually (infiltrated) the cult of black saints without the priests being aware of it.<sup>14</sup> The Jesuit catechetical method tried to respect the mentality of the black slaves. The Africans were considered to have the mental age of a child. The idea behind the Jesuit method was not to break completely with the traditional values and customs of the slaves. In this way the slaves could keep their traditions and express them in the religious festivities of the Catholic Church. It was within the fraternities that religious Syncretism took place.

In the brotherhood the slaves were able to hide and keep their beliefs, religious values, their cult and traditional practices.<sup>15</sup> According to Nina, the first phase of Syncretism was marked by a mere juxtaposition of African religion and Catholicism. The slave juxtaposed external practices, badly understood from the Catholic cult to their beliefs and religious system.<sup>16</sup> The process of Syncretism actively starts with the slaves born in Brazil, who did not receive direct education from African parents and who lost the original meaning of orixas. If for the African slave there was only juxtaposition, for his descendants there is the tendency to mix up the two

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<sup>12</sup> Batista, *Religiosidade*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Bastide, *Religions*, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> Rebhein, *Candomble*, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Batista, *Religiosidade*, p. 53.

beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it is easy to say whether there has been a real identification of doctrine and rite or a mere juxtaposition. I believe that in spite of all the influences there is no confusion between the Candomble and the Catholicism. Christianity was interpreted by the slaves according to their own conception of the sacred. The cult of the saints was accepted in as much as it was relevant to the Africans and their world view. Catholic and African rites were not mixed up. The members of Candomble, in participating in the Catholic ceremonies, transform and interpret them according to their own religion.<sup>18</sup> The fraternities played an important role in the freeing of slaves. Each slave who gained his freedom would make a donation in order to contribute to the liberation of others. They fulfilled as well, the role of arranging the burial of their members, funeral rites play an important part in the African religions. The slaves, were abandoned by their masters when they were dying. In this way African rites were performed instead of Christian ones, so enabling to survive. On analyzing the survival of the African religion in Brazil, I must mention the important role played by the magic. The white man was afraid of witchcraft, besides this fact, we are dealing with a society without doctors and in many ways hostile to the Portuguese, who were used to the temperate climate of the Mediterranean. The African however, was used to the tropics and a master of the art of curative magic. This fact contributed to the survival of African native practices. Roger says that "in the towns Africans, magic and healing practices found a strong opposition".<sup>19</sup> In conclusion I would like to stress that it was mainly in the popular cult of saints that the slave found points of contact between the Catholic cult, imposed or accepted, and their own cults.<sup>20</sup> According to Manuel Quirino, quoted by Mauro Batista, "The African brought with them their religious sects from their home land. In Brazil, they were obliged by law to adopt the Catholic religion. Grown up in the former and obliged by the latter they stayed with the two".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Rebhein, Candomble, p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> Bastide Religions, p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Batista Religiosidade, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A WORLD IN BETWEEN THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD OF CANDOMBLE

#### 2.1. The Candomble Cosmology

For the Nago people the cosmos is a complexity of forces that are in constant confrontation. The forces of nature are at the same time fount (source) of fascination and fear. The same nature offers life and death, health and illness. Life always a presence of mystery. Nature is an expression of something that transcends itself. The Nago finds himself in communion and participation with the universe. There is unity and continuity between the destiny of human kind and the destiny of the cosmos. <sup>22</sup>Human kind is always in relation with the hereafter. The nago person believes in inter communion of the two worlds, even though he recognizes the primacy of the invisible one.

One of the essential characteristic of the nago system is the belief that each spiritual element has its material representation. <sup>23</sup>Existence simultaneously happens in two levels: In the physical universe (*Aiye*) and in the world parallel to the physical one, called (*Orum*), where the divinities live and where we find the spiritual doubles of everything present in the physical universe. There is a fundamental unity of all things; behind the visible there is an invisible presence. Nevertheless all things are penetrated by a vital voice, (*axe*); without this force there is no dynamism in existence nor possibility of any realisation in life. It is believed that the *axe* dwells in the blood of the living beings. This fact help us to understand the significance of the rites and symbols that constitute an essential part of the african religious life. All sacrifices, offerings and rites of initiation imply the transmission and revitalization of the vital force, the (*axe*). <sup>24</sup> For a Nago person life is the supreme value. All the religious or the cultural manifestations of the Nago system aim to reinforce life and the vital force. The supreme ideal, is cut down by the reality of death. In this way a Nago person seeks possibility of surviving, of overcoming the reality of death through his descendants. To die without descendance is same as complete annihilation. As I've said, for the African person life is presence of

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<sup>22</sup> Rebhein, Candomble, pp. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

mystery. In all rites the mystery of life is celebrated. Human beings themselves on their own are not enough to offer protection against the numberless enemies of life. In the chaos and changes of life it is necessary to seek someone beyond and transcendent. The origin and the order of the world is due to a supreme being. There is a consensus nowadays, especially among we Africans that African religion is monotheist.<sup>25</sup> Most of the African theologians agree that African people believe in one God.<sup>26</sup> The Yoruba recognise a supreme God, *Olorum* the owner of the *orum* (The heaven above) the same applies to Baganda who recognizes God as "*Lisodene*" meaning that God is omnipresent whereby he sees everything that we cannot see ourselves. He is *olodumare* (the origin of the world, the everlasting majesty whom people can depend on) The Yoruba use the ejaculatory "*Olorum olodumare*", that means supreme being, He is the living one, the creator, the owner of life; he is unique, omnipresent, omniscient and transcendent. Because of his greatness and obvious derivations of his name, it has been suggested that this idea of God was borrowed from the muslims or Christians, but there is no evidence for this.<sup>27</sup> "*Olorum*" is the lord of all beings and all things. He possesses the three forces that make existence possible; The "*Lwa*" force of creation, the *Axe* (vital and dynamic force) and the *Aba* "power that gives meaning and direction". The supreme being has neither an organised cult, nor temples or images. He does not need sacrifices to strengthen his *Axe* because he is the source of all life. He is the just one and cannot be manipulated. The origin and subsistence of all that exists, things, humankind and intermediate divinities are attributed to him. To create is the supreme manifestation of power. Even though he is the transcendent one he is not a "*Deus otiosus*" he is interested in humankind's life and in the events of the life of the people. He is invoked in the extreme moments of life when all other possibilities have failed. This distant God mysteriously appears in the life of human beings, as for example to bring about justice. God is believed to intervene on certain occasions for the purpose of preserving justice.<sup>28</sup> The myths of creation tell us of a golden age when God used to live among humankind.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>26</sup> G. H. Muzorewa, *The Origins & Development of African Theology*, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1954), p. 34.

The separation was due to a human failure, a violation of an interdiction. I would conclude this chapter by reinforcing two main ideas that are of extreme importance to the Yoruba's cosmology as well as to Candomble religion. The first one is connected with the African world-view which understands man as communion; The African live-view. The second remark concerns the supreme being. The apparent contradiction of a distant God far away from the daily life of people without a direct cult. And his simultaneous presence in prayers, invocations and proverbs, help us to understand the Nago,s religious system, that is a system of mediation with numberless of intermediates between the supreme being and the human beings.<sup>29</sup>

## **2.2. The orixas; the importance of the heavenly pantheon**

The orixas are supernatural beings that intermediates between human kind and God. In Africa the concept of *orixas* is linked to the notion of family; the orixas is an ancestor transmitted by the male's lineage. They constitute also forces of nature and social activities. Many of them introduced new techniques on earth, and because of their greatest deeds became orixas. Together with the supreme being , *olorum*, we have the primordial (of the earliest time) divinities linked with the myths of creation. Following we have a succession of orixas, protectors of the most diversified activities and aspects of human life.

In this chapter I shall put attention to the orixas that are more important and popular to the Candombles of Bahia. Due to the situation of slavery, the orixas kept by the slaves were the orixas of war and of strong personality; fighters. The orixas protectors of agriculture, fecundity (fertility) were somehow forgotten. The religious system of mediation is similar to the African system of government so as there is only one king in the land there is only one God in the universe. Further, as the king communicates with his subjects through intermediates, so does God through the orixas.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Rebhein, Candomble, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 30

The orixas communicate to human kind by becoming incorporated through possession in a member of his descendent. Unlike the supreme being, the orixas need to revitalize their *axe*; Offerings are made in order to have the protection of the orixas, as well as to strengthen their *axe*.

1.- *Obatala*: (*oba-king + Ala-white vestment*); It is considered as the most important of the orixas. Connected with creation, son of Olorum and father of humanity, he is the arch divinity of the Yorubaland. He is widely acknowledged and has different names according to different localities, but the worship accorded him is the same in all. In Brazil he is best known by the name of Oxala.<sup>31</sup> He is considered a sculptor divinity and is notable for his purity; he lives in a whitewashed place and is robed in white. The white is the symbol of passage from death to life and of power of generation. In the Candomble of Bahia he is identified with Jesus Christ and Friday is the day consecrated to him.

2- *Xango*: xango is the orixas of the rivers, thunder and storms. He is portrayed as a fighter king and his symbol is a double hatchet similar to Zeus of great mythology. He is the symbol of the creative, dominant and civilizing capacity of human kind.<sup>32</sup> xango is identified with St. Barbara.

3- *Lansa*: In Africa she is the orixa of river Niger. She is the sister of *Xango* and one of his three wives. She is the only orixa that is not afraid of death because she defeated it. She is present in the cult of the dead.<sup>33</sup>

4- *Oxum*: is the second wife of *Xango* and is the divinity of fresh water. In Africa is called Lyami Akoko that means the supreme ancestral mother. In Brazil she became the goddess of fountains and lakes, yellow and red are her cult colors.

5- *Yemanjá* (mother whose sons are fishes); is great of popularity in Brazil. Originally, she the orixa of Egba, a Yoruba nation where the river yemanja is found. According to mythology she is the mother of all the orixas. In Brazil she became the divinity of salt waters and is presented as the personification of the sea. In Brazil yemanja has been affected by the hybrid influences of other cultures such as the Vangara and the Siren of

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<sup>31</sup> Carneiro, Ladinos, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> Rehbein, Candomble, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the Indian and Greek mythologies.<sup>34</sup> The slaves identified yemanjá with our lady of conception. Saturdays were consecrated to her, probably due to the syncretism with our lady.<sup>35</sup>

6- *Ogum*; In Africa ogum was the orixa of forge, iron, war and hunters. In Brazil he is best known as the orixa of the fighters.<sup>36</sup> He is the orixa who goes ahead opening the way to others to follow. In Candomblé when he is incorporated, he dances simulating movements of corporal fighters. His colors are blue and green.

7- *Exu*; He is neither the devil of the Christians nor the shaitan of the Muslim faith. Exu is the special intermediate between heaven and earth. Because of that nothing is done in any sacrifice without him. If a person refuses to make the offerings to the divinities he will make life uncomfortable for him. He can and does instigate men to offend the gods, thereby providing sacrifices for the angry god. This is why some people say that without him the gods would go hungry. He is the most human of the orixas and due to his trickster character he was wrongly considered by the Missionaries as the devil.<sup>37</sup> In Yorubaland he is considered as the guard of the temples, houses, towns and villages, having his temple in front of settlements. The myth tells us of his disobedience to *Olorum's* orders. He introduced the notions of will and freedom.<sup>38</sup>

8- *Ifá*; Ifá also is known among the Yoruba people by the name of *Orumila*. He is believed to be especially gifted with knowledge and wisdom. Ifá can speak for the divinities and communicate to human beings through divination. More so, he is the one who interprets the wishes of *Olorum* to human kind and who decides what sacrifice to offer on any given occasion. Divination is practiced because people are anxious to know the behest of deity and also to know the future with regard to themselves and to those close to them.

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<sup>34</sup> V.C. da Costa, *Umbanda*, 2 Vols, (Sao Paulo, Ed. Loyola, 1983), p. 188.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup> Rehbein, *Candomblé*, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Because each day has its peculiar problem, the priest of *Ifa* is called *Babalao*, that means father of mysteries, and his role is to interpret and explain the oracle, to understand *Ifa* we to take into consideration the African world-view in which not only nature but also the happenings of life are considered as carriers of divine message.<sup>39</sup> Considering the whole of Yoruba theology *Ifa* is human kind's conformity to the supreme will of *Olorum*.

### 2.3. The organization of the cult

Life is the ultimate value for the Africans. Everything that reinforces life is good and that everything that attempts against it, is considered to be evil. In this way, witchcraft is the symbol of everything that is evil, everything that acts against life. Nevertheless, beside witchcraft there are degrees of wickedness. A human person is believed to cause damage to another unconsciously. This help us to understand the fact that African society lives afraid of being reached by forces and agents of evil.<sup>40</sup>

It is against this background that we have to understand magic. Magic is employed in a practical way for good or evil, it is used as protection. The aim of the rites is related to the ideal of existence; conservation of life in all its manifestations.<sup>41</sup> One of the fundamental elements of rite is sacrifice. Blood is considered as indispensable for the performance of sacrifices because the life of the victim is contained in it.

#### 2.3.1. Death and funerary rites:

For the Nago, death is a change in the way of being, while the physical body (*Ara*) returns to its elements, the spirit (*Emi*) goes back to *Olorum* to meet its double that lives there since the moment of creation.<sup>42</sup> The funerary rites are divided into two stages. The first stage goes from death until the burial. In this stage there is the sacrifice of an animal and a sacrifice meal. In the night before the second stage a ritual ceremony is performed in which all known ancestors are invited to take part. following there is the offering of animals. he last funerary rites have a festive character.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

The funerary rites are of fundamental importance for the Nago, they are aimed to help the dead in its journey to the other life.

### 2.3.2. The sacerdotal body

Candomble possesses a kind of sacerdotal body hierarchically organized. (a) *Pai or mae de santo*: known by the names of *babalorixa*. (male) and *yalorixa* (female), they are high priests and priestess of the *Candomble Terreirm*. They are the spiritual directors of the *terreiros* and perform the role of the family's chief. o is some how a place where the distance between heaven and earth is overcome, they are places where the *orixas* manifest themselves. Due to the circumstance of slavery in a new and hostile society, the structure of the *terreiros* and cult suffered many transformations. In A Africa each *orixa* has its own sanctuary. (b) *Mae pequena* (little mother); deputy director of the Candomble; the second in authority (c) *Filhos* of *filhas de santo* (sons and daughters of a god); they are the initiated in the Candombles cult. They are divided in three categories: *Obia* (novices) *Lao* (completely initiated) and *Vandusi* (members that achieved complete freedom of cult and freedom to guide others). (d) *Alagbe*; the chief musician of Candomble (e) *Exogum*; In charge of the sacrifices. (f) *Ogans*; lay protectors of the Candomble, selected by the *orixas*, subject to a minor initiation ritual.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE PASTORAL CHALLENGE

(SEE PART)

### 3.1. Critical view of syncretism

In the articles of Divine word Missionaries, who have Missions in different parts of Brazil, and Leonardo Boff's article, "In favor of Syncretism, the Catholicity of Catholicism", one tries to find a theological basis and criteria for a true Syncretism. For the exposure of Divine Word Missionaries in Brazil, Catholicity as the synonym of universality, is only possible and attainable through the process of Syncretism from which Catholicity itself results.<sup>44</sup> In other words, pure Christianity does not exist. All religious expressions have to be mediated by a culture, a language, a given space and symbols.

I point out that all religions are to some extent a human construction. Nevertheless, religion is by no means merely a human enterprise. The substance of the Christian faith, for instance (that constitutes the theological legitimacy for religious Syncretism) is that God offers himself as human salvation and human fulfillment to all. Thus, the history of salvation is the history of God's self - communication. In this way, religion has a supernatural origin, because its initiative comes from God.<sup>45</sup> A non-Christian religion must be understood without the history of universal salvation. These religions make concrete, in their own way, God's offer of salvation.<sup>46</sup> As far as the Church is concerned, its identity is the unity of its faith in God the Father who sent his Son, with the power of the Holy spirit to save all people. It is the faith mediated through the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation.<sup>47</sup> This identity is objectified within the parameter of a given reality, time and place.

The Catholicity of the Church is the power to be incarnated, without losing its identity.<sup>48</sup> From the point of view of the Christian faith, a true Syncretism always begins with the Christian identity as its substantial nucleus. For this reason, in any Missionary

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<sup>44</sup> Boff, Church, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

activity the first step must be the reaffirmation of the Christian faith, distinguishing it from other religious expressions. The gospel is proclaimed inviting all to conversion, and once conversion has taken place, the process of Syncretism is begun.<sup>49</sup> Christian identity, in the words of Leonardo Boff, is not theory but experience, a way of life that we have to experience as Missionaries and as Social Ministers. This experience is linked to the experience of Jesus of Nazareth, because his death and resurrection comes to us through the New Testament's witnesses. In the life of this powerful Man, the apostolic faith understood that it was faced with the total and definitive self-communication of God. As God is totally present in Jesus, he is the full salvation of the individual. In effect, through his resurrection he made visible the realization of the utopia of the kingdom of God and the joyful freedom of life that called to life and not death.<sup>50</sup>

Our next step will be to analyze the process of Syncretism in Brazil by Boff's theological-methodological criteria. I shall try to show that in the context of the syncretism between Christianity and the Nago religion, the slaves and their descendants transformed and reinterpreted Christianity according to the values of their own civilization. "Christianity did not convert them; it was converted."<sup>51</sup>

### 3.2. Saints and orixas

Slavery is the hermeneutic point for any analysis of the black populations in Brazil. Slavery instituted a separation between the *casa grande* and the *senzala* (place where slaves were locked during the night) that made impossible a true integration of the Africans in Brazilian society.

From the religious point of view, throughout the period of slavery the black gods were forced to hide themselves behind the statue of the virgin or any Catholic saint.<sup>52</sup> The slaves were forbidden to practice their traditional religion and so they tried to mask their religious beliefs through a syncretism between their divinities and the Catholic saints.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>50</sup> Bastide, Religion, p. 260.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>52</sup> Rehebein, Candomble, p. 84.

As I have already mentioned, the slaves were forced to adopt the religion of their masters without a proper process of Evangelisation; the masters had no other interest in their slaves only in their work. It is important to notice that during the time of colonization Catholicism was the only religion allowed in the colony. Everybody had to be a Catholic and so, in this regard, it was necessary that the nominal or official condition of the slave was that of a baptized Catholic. It was mainly in the popular cult of saints that the slave found points of contact and similarity between the imposed religion of the white master and their own traditional cults. The African slaves became Christian in a subordinate way. There was a separation between the Catholicism of the master and that of the slave. As Roger points out, the black is never integrated directly into the society as a whole; his integration always proceeds by way of the social class system. The African was integrated with lower class masses of mixed blood, or part whites. It is not into an official Catholicism, but the superstitious Catholicism of medieval European peasants that the slaves were integrated.<sup>53</sup>

First of all the slaves saw the correspondence between the Catholic God, all powerful and transcendent, that needed a series of intermediaries to approach him, and their supreme being *Olorum*; a distant god removed from the affairs of the world and the *orixas* as intermediaries between him and the human beings. It is however, in the popular Catholicism of the Portuguese, based on the functional cult of the saints, that the similarities became more apparent in the minds of the slaves. Each saint was responsible for protecting a specific area of human activity, to cure illness and to find lost objects. Added to that, the religious life of the sugar plantation estate was organized around the devotions of the landlord's family; novenas, litanies, images of the saints and so on.

This kind of Catholicism was very similar in many aspects to the African religious life and its intermediaries, ancestors always protecting the people.<sup>54</sup> Another aspect to be considered is a specific type of Syncretism - magic, together with their religion. The Portuguese brought their sorcery or "potent prayers" of medieval Europe which guarded against various diseases and sterility in women. The "white sorcery" was considered by the Africans to be superior, because the whites were the dominators.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Celam, *Afro-Americanos*, p. 88.

<sup>54</sup> Bastide, *Religion*, p. 276.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

So, without giving up their own magic practices, the slaves added to them the European practice. Hence, whereas in religion we have the phenomenon of juxtaposition and correspondences, in magic the given phenomenon is accumulation.<sup>56</sup> By way of conclusion, I would like to stress that despite the Syncretism between the saints and the orixas the two are not confused. The African may participate in Catholic rites. When he or she does he or she transforms and interprets them to fit the values of his or her own civilization. If he / she goes to mass, the words he or she hears are not in his or her mind, addressed to the Christian God but to personal orixa.<sup>57</sup> The members of the *Candomble* recognize the difference between the saints and the *orixas* but nevertheless they justify the Syncretism, pointing out that there is just one universal religion that recognises the existence of one God who is unique and the creator; but as this God is far away from the life of people, intermediaries are necessary: angels are from the Protestants, saints for the Catholics and *Orixas* for the African people.<sup>58</sup>

### **3.3. Areas of similarity and fundamental difference: (judgement)**

#### **3.3.1. Seeds of the word**

The second Vatican council saw the necessity of opening the Church to a new “Pentecost of evangelisation” in the world.<sup>59</sup> The general attitude of the council was that of dialogue and reconciliation with regard to non-christian religions. Vatican II sees a “secret presence in God” (*AG 9*) and “a hidden seed of the word” (*NA 2*) in the true elements of these religions. In his message “*African Terrarum*” (29-10-1967), Pope Paul VI, valuing the apparently polytheist African culture, sees in the religious values of the African tradition a providential basis for the spread of the gospel message. The spiritual vision of life is constant in African tradition. Man is never conceived of as simply material, limited to an earthly life. God is conceived of as the first and the ultimate cause of all things. Another common characteristic of the African tradition pointed out by Pope Paul VI is respect for human dignity and the meaning of the family and of the community.

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<sup>56</sup> Rehebein, *Candomble*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Bastide *Religion*, p. 278

<sup>59</sup> Celam, *Afro- Americanos*, p. 92.

African solidarity is both vertical and horizontal; it recognizes life as life in common, the family is made up of both the living members and of the living dead, the ancestors. Human beings are connected with their ancestors whom they invoke and venerate. (AT 7-14) In Brazil, slavery destroyed these family links. The slaves had to recognize and to restructure their system of life. As I have pointed out, instead of dividing, slavery created a new sort of solidarity and unity. Nowadays it is in the *Terreiros* that the Afro-Brazilian population find this sense of unity and solidarity. The structure of the *Terreiros* with their *orixas* and the families of the *orixas* are the reconstruction of a lost and distant world; Africa. In spite of all the differences and changes that took place in Brazil, the chief elements of African traditional religion (the concepts of God, of ancestry, of good and evil and of humanity), must be taken into consideration in any project of Evangelisation of the Afro-Brazilian population. In this regard the concepts of ancestry and humanity are of fundamental importance. The Nago system is a system of mediation, the living constantly seek communion with the departed. They are the way to God in the same way that the living are interdependent. The salvation of the group and the salvation of the individual are intrinsically connected. The cult of the saints in the Catholic tradition (*sanctorum communio*), if well explained, can provide the Afro-Brazilian population with that link with their dead which they so much desire.

### 3.3.2. Areas of fundamental differences

In the world view of the African traditional religion the individual is not an isolated being but finds himself in a great social and cosmic solidarity. So, to say that the individual person is part of a whole where the cosmic and the communitarian world, the dead and the living, the world of things, spirits and human beings constitute unity is also to say that the life and salvation of the group is the life and salvation of the individual.

As I have said, for the Nago, life is the supreme value and all the rituals of the Nago's religion are aimed at strengthening and conserving life. The dead are linked to their descendants and true death is the extinction of the descendance or of the family. A person who leaves behind a big descendency is a resurrected person.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

The myths of creation tell of a golden age when there was no separation between heaven and earth. Separation was due to human disobedience to the will of *Olorum*. It is through ritual practices that the Nago religion tries to restore the initial state of union between heaven and earth. In this way the Nago's eschatology is simultaneously protology.<sup>61</sup>

For Christian eschatology, however, the resurrection of Christ is the beginning of a new creation (1cor. 16,42). The kingdom of God is already present among us, even though not yet in its fullness. The God of Jesus invites human kind to participate in the building up of the kingdom in history. The kingdom of God is established as an answer to God's initiative through the historical praxis, aimed at the building up of fraternal and reconciled society.<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, the Nago's system is a system of mediation. *Olorum* has created the world and after that he has charged the intermediaries with the task of looking after it. He is only invoked on rare occasions when other possibilities and intermediaries have failed. The Catholic understanding of mediatorship differs from the Nago's. According to the Catholic understanding Christ is the only and sole mediator between human kind and God.

(1Timothy; 2,5) Nevertheless, in the economy of grace in Christ, as a result of and by virtue of mediatorship, every one depends on every one else and is of significance for every one else, that every one has a task subordinate to Christ, and that the receipt of salvation also implies the receipt of the task of salvation. The redemptive grace of Christ is not merely received by man, but empowers him actively to share in Christ's redemptive action. The horizon of understanding of Christ's mediatorship is man's experienced intercommunicative existence, which is always committed to us to accept or reject freely. Man's experience as the experience of being-in reference to the absolute mystery we call God and the experience of intercommunication mutually determine each other, because the world, according to the Catholic teaching can lead to a recognition of God, is not only a world of things but the world to which self experienced man belongs; within himself and his intercommunication he recognizes God.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Bastide, Religion, p. 230.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

This world of intercommunication as history has one apogee and only one goal. Jesus Christ, who as the God given apogee of this history, is its sole and absolute mediator. Far from excluding the saving intercommunicative character of the world's salvation history, it implies it. What in Catholic terms we call the mediation of the saints is essentially nothing other than this saving intercommunication of every one with every one else. From what has been said so far, it is possible to see many difference between the Nago and Catholic understanding of mediatorship. First of all, the mediatorial role of the saints is situated in the context of their sharing in the paschal mystery. It is not the Church who "makes" the saints. The Church only recognizes and affirms, based on the witness of their lives, the signs of their effective union with God. In the Nago system, it is through the rites that the departed becomes an ancestor. This ceremony is only performed for the most important members of the community. Even though the Church only "declares" some of its members saints, at the same time it believes that a multitude of deceased, whose names only God knows (Revelation:2,17) are with him in glory. <sup>63</sup>In popular religiosity in Brazil, some saints are believed to be powerful and to perform numberless miracles. The grace of miracles, proceeds from God through the intercession of the saints; The saints do not generate miracles from their own "force" or "power" as a kind of *Axe*. Another difference is that, even though the union of the warfare's with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is in no way interrupted (*LG 49*), there is no direct communication with the dead. Only the transformation in the image of Christ and the participation in God's life give the saints their quality as mediators.

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<sup>63</sup> Batista, *Religiosidade*, p. 56.

### **3.4. Possibility of a way forward in evangelisation “ act part”**

The new era of understanding and reconciliation towards other religious expressions, whether Christian or not, inaugurated by Vatican II, brought new questions on the Church's self understanding and its mission in the world. Why announce the gospel to a people that already have a living faith? For many people today, the word evangelisation itself has a pejorative (disapproval) meaning. It brings back an image of disrespect, or even destruction of cultures, in order to impose another culture together with the Christian faith and message. The old values were suffocated and very often they were in conflict with the new truths received from Christianity. If the Church recognizes the values of the Afro-Brazilian cults, why evangelisation at all? Pope Paul VI in "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" gives an answer to this question; We wish to point out, above all today, that neither the respect and esteem for these religions (non-christian) nor the complexity of the questions raised in our invitation to the Church to withhold from these Non-Christians the proclamation of Christ. The church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ (Ephesians: 3,8), riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly (feel about, done in darkness) searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and the truth. Even in the face of natural religious expressions most worthy of esteem, the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelisation, objectively places man in relation with the plan of God, with his living presence and with his action; he thus causes an encounter with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity. Our religion, effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven. "*EN 53*" From this perspective, I would say that the project of evangelisation in Brazil, presents itself as a great challenge that will demand a deep study and appreciation of the Candomble, and of all the other Afro-Brazilian cults and their values.

Evangelisation is not proselitism, but fundamentally it is witness to the world: "To evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the holy spirit, to bear witness that in his son God loved the world, that in his incarnate word he has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life. For man the creator is not anonymous and remote power; he is the Father." *EN 26* The first step in the project of evangelisation in Brazil must be the analysis, in a deep way, of the popular religiosity, especially the current practice of the cult of saints.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SYNCRETISM BETWEEN SAINTS AND ORIXAS

#### 4.1. Expression of a religiosity not evangelised..

. As we have seen, the slaves were baptized but not evangelised. They interpreted Christianity according to their own categories. The gospel did not convert them, it was converted. A serious analysis of the syncretism that took place between the saints and the orixas puts a crucial question to the church in Brazil; The cult of the saints, as it is practiced in the popular religiosity, very often with the blessings of priests, nuns, and pastoral agents, is it still a Christian cult or is it simply the expression of a religiosity not evangelised?.

Mauro Batista points out parallel elements between the cult of the saints and that of the *orixas*. The first one refers to the established scale of gradation in the intercession of the saints; the saints (one more powerful than the others), the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. We find the same gradation in the cult of the *orixas*, expressed according to the richness of the cult. The second area of parallelism refers to the functional aspects of the saints in the popular religiosity. The saints are divided according to certain functions; to cure illness, to find the lost objects etc. The same functional aspect is found in the cult of the *orixas*. Furthermore, in popular religiosity Christ himself loses his divine character and becomes a saint, even though a more powerful one.<sup>64</sup> These insights show us that the pastoral challenge faced by the church in Brazil, is first of all to evangelize popular religiosity. The evangelisation should be centered in Jesus Christ as the unique reveler and the only mediator in the context of God's plan of salvation. Christ reveals God as Father and saves us through his own death and resurrection, forgiving our sins, giving us happiness, grace and plenitude of life.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

The saints are not an end in themselves, but their meaning is found in God through Jesus in the Holy spirit. The God revealed through , by and in Jesus invites people to build up his kingdom already present in human history. In Brazil the functional cult of the saints is closely connected with the situation of injustice and oppression. People appeal to the saints as their last recourse. This very often leads to a situation of fatalism (everything in life is seen as the will of God) and to an attitude of passivity. The God of Jesus is the God who invites people to act in history to overcome the situation of misery, oppression and to create a civilization of love.

#### **4.2. A pedagogy of flexibility.**

In ancient theology flexibility was a basic theological category. The early Church clothed itself in a courageous flexibility towards the Greek, Romans and Barbarians, accepting their language, customs, rituals and religious expressions. The same should apply to a social minister in today's world as a way of coping up with similar situations. It did not demand any more than faith in Jesus Christ. As I have already tried to show, from the Christian point of view a true syncretism is not possible without the preservation of the Christian identity. The conversion to Jesus is only possible if Christian faith has the courage to give up its own syncretism and risk a new one. This presents a crucial question to the Church in Brazil. How to syncretise in such a positive way as to become more Afro-Brazilian, while still maintaining those fundamental commitments of Catholicism; belief in the incarnation, the solidarity and interdependence of all Christians in the one mediator Jesus Christ and how to reconcile the *orixas* as the way to God with the gospel claim that Jesus is the way.<sup>65</sup>

### 4.3. Communion and participation

In the Candomble there is an intense participation of the initiated in the cult. The canticles and dances are very important aspects of any cultic celebration. It is necessary to clothe the Christian faith and liturgy with expressions, gestures, canticles, myths and dances that are adequate to the psychology of the Afro-Brazilian population.

It is necessarily a more animated and less static liturgy. The cult of the saints for instance can provide the Afro-Brazilian with that link with their dead which they so much desire. Another vital value is the communitarian and familiar structure of the *Candomble*. The African religion, in spite of all the changes and interpretations that it underwent in Brazil, still is a provisional religion (we could say even tribal). It offers life and salvation to a restricted group, to those that take refuge inside this community with its familiar structure "family of the saints - clan."<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, all members of *Candomble* experience the feeling of belonging to a big family, where the leaders are called "mother of father of the saints." There are no formalities and the bureaucracy is minimal. There is an immense solidarity among all members and the group as a whole participates in the life and problems concerning the *terreiros*. The basic Christian communities could be the way in the direction of a real inculturation of those values of communion and participation so important for the Afro-Brazilians. The pastoral document (CELAM) points out the importance of working towards the formation of natural leaders, catechists, religious and priestly vocations among the Afro-Brazilian population.

### 4.4. Fight for justice

The fight for justice is the most modern way of preaching the gospel and to witness the Christian message to the world. The Church has to raise up its voice to defend the human rights of the Afro-Brazilian people and their values and culture. An authentic evangelisation has to liberate people from sin, fatalism and misery. At the same time the Church should offer its help to promote among the people a proper education that will help them to overcome the situation of dependence and marginalisation in which they find themselves. Black men and women tell the story and make history. It is from this

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<sup>65</sup> Rehebein, *Candomble*, p. 91.

<sup>66</sup> Carneiro, p. 7

view we wish to share the feelings, thoughts, indignation, discoveries, enrichments and losses of the African people before the mission's history. This memory of suffering and resentment will accompany us through since the mission of the Christian Churches is part of the scene of terror that we have just told.

We believe in the process of historical recuperation, theological reconstruction, rereading of the bible and announcement of a God who survived, together with the people, in the process of denial and extermination of the African identity and culture. This is why we resist. Today we can proclaim it!<sup>67</sup>

#### **4.5. Denial of life (Slavery of the body, Salvation of the soul)**

Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish African slavery. Not only did slavery there last the longest, it was also the most cruel ever recorded in history. The Church as an institution consented to and legalized slavery. The mission was understood as rescuing souls, condemned to die in sin, in Africa, and save them by teaching them the gospel in the Americas. The logic in the missionary work consisted of passing from free bodies and enslaved souls in Africa to saving enslaved bodies and free souls. This logic is found in the theology of slavery, which was based on two main theological discourses: that of the theology of transmigration and the theology of retribution.

The theology of transmigration states that the Africans would need to undergo successive migrations in order to reach their souls salvation. This migration consisted of leaving Africa for America and from America to the Heavenly land. Slavery was a temporary state necessary to reach salvation. Slavery was part of God's plan to save the Africans. There were three places for them: Africa as hell, the kingdom of the body's captivity and soul; Brazil as purgatory, captivity only in body, and Heaven, where ultimate freedom is enjoyed. In the theology of retribution, we find the discourse of patience and submission as form similar to the sufferings of Christ and achieving happiness in another life. What the person must do is to draw great comfort from these examples: suffer patiently the consequences of your status;; praise God for the moderation of the captivity to which you are brought, and above all take advantage of it to exchange it for freedom and happiness in another life which will not pass like this one

but is eternal. Mission therefore, is part of the colonial design. In the same ship come the colonizers and the missionaries to “save” subjection and enslaving.

#### **4.6. Denial of identity and of the black god**

The denial of the Black people’s own identity and religious experience was a form of domination within the slavery project, and has its consequences even today, in the life of the Black community. In Brazil, the soul has always been white, or should be whitened in order to be saved. This meant the denial of Black traditional religion expressions and the imposition of Christianity. The relationship with the colonizer’s religion was not permanently harmonious, as often recounted in the official history. There was conflict and resistance from the Africans, who sought in different ways to keep alive their ancestral religion. To deny the African religious practice was to deny God who joined them as a people, granted them identity, and was a source of strength in their suffering. This was truly the God of life. The God who presented Christianity to them was the justification of and connivance with slavery, suffering and death. Some did discover in the conflict of the ancestral religion with the colonizer’s religion. A new experience of faith, not excluding and not contradictory and which gave a meaning to life. Part of these elements were expressed in the so frequent religious parallelism in the experience of faith of many Africans. They are men and women who profess their faith in the God of Christianity and also assume their commitment to the African traditional religions. For others, the penetration of the colonizer’s religion. Christianity, was one of the elements that contributed to a more widespread project of whitening the Black people. “The African, in his desire to become white, desires no more, no less than his own extinction”. For many, assuming the white religion meant social upgrade and the forgetting of their own roots as a Black people. All this was camouflaged in the discourse of equality that we find in many Christian communities. And last, there were those who fought for survival of the religious inheritance of the god of their ancestors. They suffered persecution by the churches; their “temples” were invaded and destroyed by the police and followers of Christianity. Their life was a witness to faith and total surrender to the god of their fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

#### **4.7. Denial which continues today**

In Santa Maria, a town in the state of Rio do sul, Brazil, in September 1992, the Christian communities met for the VIII Inter-Ecclesiastical Meeting of the Base Christian Communities (CEBs). The topic that brought them together for five days was evangelisation and oppressed cultures. On Thursday, 10 September, they were together in the large hall and the Bishop of the Diocese, who had received them, introduced the religious leaders who were to take part in the meeting.

For the first time in history, representatives of the indigenous groups in the process of preparing the meeting. After the Bishops and Pastors were introduced, a group of delegates spoke up requesting that the leaders of the other religions who were present also be introduced, Incessantly they would repeat: "Pai de Santo, Mae de Santo" (Priests and priestesses of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomble). The Church, once again, was not able to listen to the people's clamour. Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians were again excluded. In the official areas of their gatherings and meetings there is no place for these groups. One of the Bishops at the gathering commented that "we could not encourage Syncretism". A historical, symbolic moment when an embrace from the church there represented would have been sufficient as an expression of its deep desire to be converted from so many errors and injustices historically committed to Amerindians and Afro-Brazilians.

#### **4.8. Mission: affirmation of life**

The work done by the Afro-Brazilian organizations in the past 20 years has contributed towards the discovery of the dignity and value of the people and the affirmation of their dignity. They are groups from different segments of civil society that have now taken up the challenge to rebuild the Afro-Brazilian history.

They demonstrate against racism in an organized way, and seek spaces in society's structure of power to fight for the Afro-Brazilian community's rights to be respected. This challenge has also reached the Churches. Groups of Christians and Afro-Christians, from different denominations, meet to study how racism in society is reflected in the structures, theologies and ecclesiastic practices. An outstanding example of the

different areas of study are “the groups of Black theology.” The recovery of its historical memory, of faith in the liberating God who makes history with the African people and a collective theological reflection, fruit of the life of the community, are some of the requirements for a Black theology in Brazil. In recovering the memory, we find two experiences that lead us to claim that the Afro-Brazilian people have a mission. We refer to the experience of the *Quilombos* and *Terreiros*. These are two experiences, two realities that tell of a different way of becoming compromised with social , political and economic participation and freedom of the African people. The second, a religious community, but within the Afro-Brazilian view of the world, integrates with the other dimensions of life.

The *Quilombo* was an organization of Black slaves who fled from the farms and formed free communities. They went to the far away mountains and mountain ranges, difficult to reach. The *Quilombos* formed productive units that were self-sustaining. The dream and commitment to free other slaves was constant. They would organize groups to invade farms and help others escape. There was great resistance and violence against the *Quilombos* by the state owners and civil and religious authorities. The Church at that time refused to give them any religious succor. The inhabitants would first have to repent of their rebelliousness and return to their *Quilombo* owners. In the report on the *Quilombos* we find the presence of non-Negroes there, other poor people who needed a piece of land and sought to earn a worthy life.

The *Terreiros* are religious communities, the meeting place for families. They convey and safeguard their ancestor’s religious experiences. There the Negroes race was respected. Candomble is an Afro-Brazilian religious expression of major importance in Brazil’s history. The daily life is present in verses, song and prayer. Nature, with its herbs, stones and water, brings health, enlivens the body, renews the forces. Women, men and nature are together in the fight for survival, defending and protecting their life. The elderly are expressions of the care and constant presence of God, who keeps us from losing our historical memory and accompanies us with his protection and wisdom. Secrets, verbal transmission of knowledge, listen a lot and speak little, learn by doing, teach with your hands, were historical forms of resistance that safeguard the inheritance received.

In both *Quilombos* and *Terreiros*, mission, although not called this, consists of the fight for freedom; the right to live and to take care of concrete daily life; revival and affirmation of the collective identity of the Afro-Brazilian people. Both these experiences have presented historically and now present an opening for the non-Afro-Brazilians and a political-religious project, which neither excludes nor converts. They are goals open to dialogue and the enrichment from that which is different.

#### **4.9. Mission and the Afro-Brazilian people; from memory to challenge.**

The time in which we are now living is marked by in-depth transitions in the different areas and dimensions of life. It is a privilege and also a responsibility to be able to participate, albeit in a limited fashion, in finding new ways. In this spirit, rather than giving conclusions, we wish to present some topics that develop this study; an invitation to continue the discussion. God is here! God preceded in every and any evangelizing activity. God's revelation in Jesus Christ was in a concrete culture. The God of Christianity is the incarnate God. God expresses himself in the different cultures. In many of our churches, mission was marked by a Christocentrism that justified invasion, death, human sacrifice in the name of the faith in God. Thinking of the mission from the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit and from a Christology centered on those crucified on earth, enables us to be able to talk more openly about other religious expressions.

In Christianity, The Western mentality of exclusion and opposition still prevails. Religious belonging is thought of more as a political party. Belonging to one, to me means being against another. In some popular religious expressions we find the principle of co-existence, co-relationships, co-habitation of different divinities. Religion is much better when it is like families where different relationships intermingle. Acknowledging the liberating presence of God in the different religious expressions must be accompanied by the acknowledgment of the differences present in each of them. Such differences in daily life are called respect and dialogue, not competition. In this sense, In Brazil and all Latin America and the Caribbean, the

Christian God is invited to sit at the table to talk with other gods on an equal basis.

An enormous challenge for Christian mission is to bring the different groups and Latin America and Caribbean cultures together and proclaim the imminence and transcendence of a God who is able to overcome the final word of the systems of human domination; proclaim the dignity of the person, especially those who have their lives most massacred by this system of death, in Latin America and the Caribbean, that is to say, Afro-Brazilian, Amerindians, Women, children and the elderly. Mission consists of protecting the life of the poor, not letting them be killed, saving the ancestral cultures for their intrinsic value and because they may have doors that mean possible ways out for major problems facing humanity. The mission is found in the proclamation of the fundamental equality of every human being and his or her right to live a full, abundant life, not a miserable survival that awaits tomorrow's death.

#### **4.10. RECOMENDATIONS**

We should learn some lessons from the history and the reality of the relationship of Christian mission and the African people in Brazil, those who say they are bringing us to God are not always bearers of good news for the African people. We cannot continue believing in a God who demands the denial of identity, roots, African culture and denies the ancestral experience of our ancestors' God. The good news announced by Jesus Christ, and which is assumed by the Church as its mission, reaches all human creatures. The most suffering and discriminated groups, very often from sufferings imposed by the same Church through a mistaken understanding of its role and mission, are places privileged by God's manifestation. In the experience of the Afro-Brazilian community, it is interesting to note that, despite its marginalisation, there is a feeling of respect and value towards the Church, principally by the elderly. These groups denounce the sins committed by the churches and through their story we can conclude what evangelization/mission should not be.

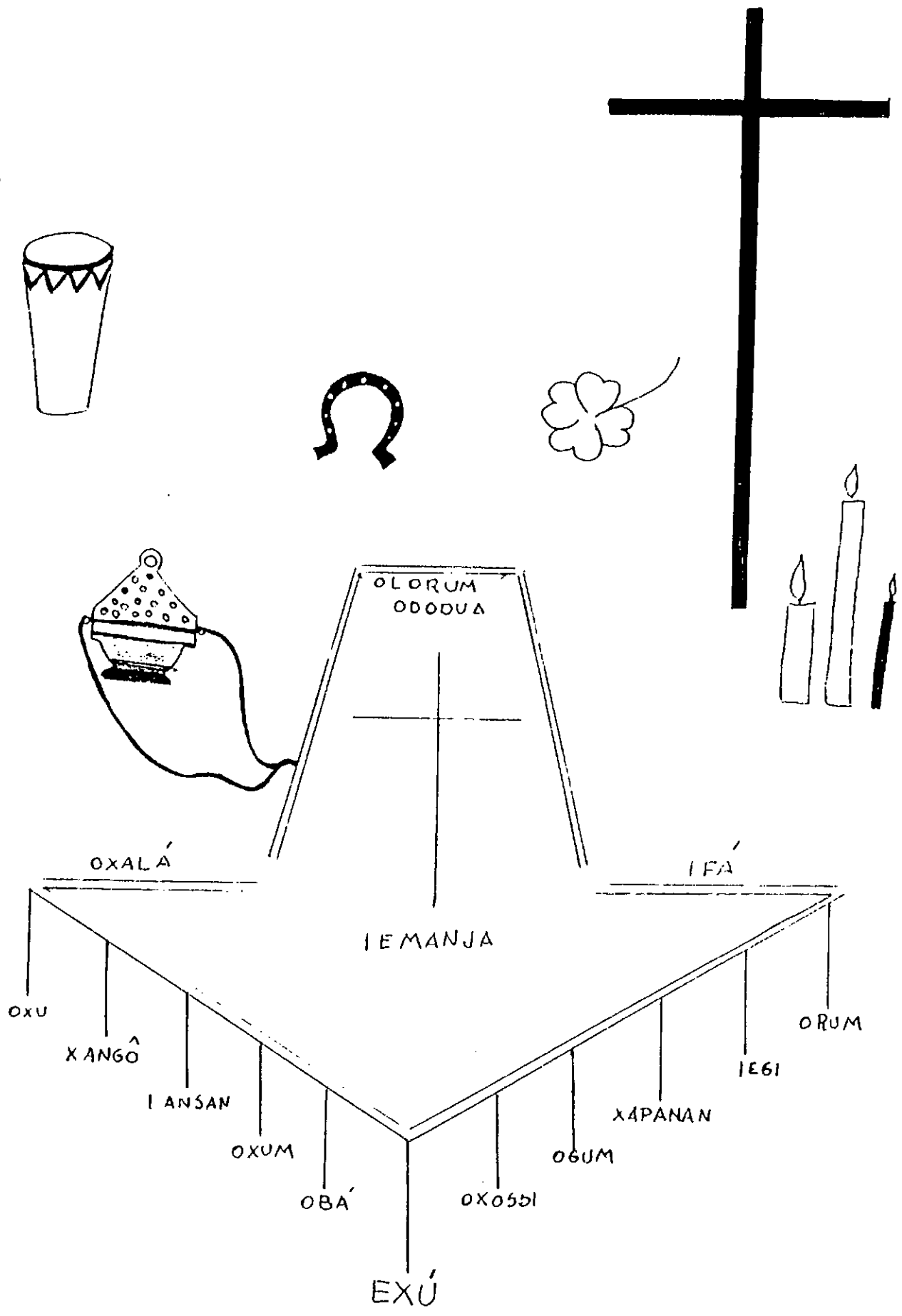
## CONCLUSION

This long essay tried to reflect upon the syncretism between the saints and the orixas and the pastoral challenge that it presents to the Catholic church in Brazil. For a better understanding of the syncretism between the saints and orixas, I tried to present a panoramic view of its historical roots. The Afro-Brazilian syncretism is the fruit of the circumstances of captivity . Deficiencies in the process of evangelisation and catechesis, the imperfections of the Portuguese, Catholicism itself and the hostility of a society that led the slaves to take refuge and security in their own practices. The syncretism between the saints and the orixas leads to a profound questioning of the popular cult of the saints in Brazil. Is it still a Christian cult ? We see that in 1988 Brazil celebrated the centenary of the abolition of slavery. The Afro-Brazilian population still continue to be at the bottom of the Brazilian society; The *Senzalas* were replaced by the *Favelas* (slums). A project of evangelisation to us social ministers must defend the human rights of people, to promote their values and to contribute to their education and also by our innovations. I would like to end up with the words of the Brazilian poet, Jorge Amodeu, in the program "BRAZIL BRAZIL" presented by BBC television; " from the very start we Brazilians have been a mixture of races. The black man has saved us from melancholy (deep sadness) . The Portuguese are more conscious of death than life. They are sad. The Indians are also not a cheerful people. The black Africans however, are a vivacious (attractive personality ) sun loving people They brought us an immense vitality which overcame sadness and melancholy. They have given us a great capacity to endure poverty, illness, social injustices and the wide gulf between the rich and the poor. This makes us a people that can go out to the streets and dance."

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Pictures above shows the instruments used by Afro- Brazilian cult while praying and the names inclusive are the orixas who are like saints in the catholic church.