

**Tangaza College
Catholic University of Eastern African**

**LITURGICAL INCULTURATION
OF A RECONCILIATION RITE
ON ASH WEDNESDAY**

AMONG THE DAGAABA PEOPLE OF NORTH WESTERN GHANA



**ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN
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BACHELOR OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed 

Osei Charles Kingsley

Date ...5-2-02.....

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

Signed 

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Date ...5-2-02.....

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There are many ritual celebrations and beliefs in African traditions very much upheld by Africans and therefore function parallel to Christian celebrations without any explicit reference to Christianity. At the grass root level, especially in local parishes, many pastoral agents are silent or avoid encouraging or discouraging such practices. One might think that the Church is not very bothered, so far as such traditional ritual celebrations do not manifest beliefs and practices contrary to the Christian faith. Is the Church in such instances reluctant to initiate the topic of inculturation because of the fear of scandals or ritual eccentricities? Has the lack of experts in the field of inculturation hindered such a debate? Can some attempts be made as regards a meaningful celebration of such rites in our liturgies today?

Beginning with a particular rite of reconciliation (*Baghr Tampello* – the ‘sacrifice of ashes’), which is actually being celebrated within the Dagaaba tribe of North Western Ghana, I intend to present an attempt towards the inculturation of this rite from a theological and liturgical point of view. This rite stands on its own within the Dagaaba society. That is to say, in practice it is a rite that is considered applicable in all spheres of life whenever the need for reconciliation is highly felt.

Firstly, we shall take a brief look at some contemporary theological and doctrinal positions as regards Inculturation, Reconciliation and the Liturgy. Then, in our second chapter, we shall focus on the Dagaaba tribe with its socio-cultural, political and religious beliefs. Particular attention will be given to the theology and practice of reconciliation for the Dagaaba, with particular reference to ‘the sacrifice of

ashes'. This will be developed in Chapter three. Finally, through our reflection on the best means of inculturating the 'sacrifice of ashes' from a Christian point of view, we shall introduce our case study as an illustration.

The case study will involve a practical illustration of how 'the sacrifice of ashes' can be celebrated in the context of a Eucharistic celebration, preferably on Ash Wednesday. My choice of Ash Wednesday is primarily because of the significant and meaningful role that ashes play in both 'the sacrifice of ashes' and on Ash Wednesday. However, within the context of reconciliation on Ash Wednesday, I also intend to use the issue of separated couples as a sign of all who are 'separated'. This rite celebrated on Ash Wednesday could be a practical illustration of an attempt towards inculturation in view of resolving most of our marital conflicts, and also family and tribal conflicts. It could also serve as a reminder to Dagaaba Christian communities of their missionary task as agents of reconciliation in society at large.

As we proceed in our study, we shall discover the richness but at the same time the complexity and exigency involved in the process of inculturation. However, through my study, I hope to expand my knowledge of inculturation and offer my contribution in the quest for an African Inculturated Liturgy of reconciliation. To best express my convictions as regards liturgical inculturation, with the words of Annibale Bugnini, I conclude by saying:

When all peoples... offer God a worship which is a sincere and authentic expression of the Christian faith and which springs from the depths of the native strengths, only then will it be possible to say that Christ has truly encountered human beings on their earth and in their flesh and soul.¹

¹ Annibal Bugnini, The Reform of the Liturgy 1945-1975, trans. Mathew J. O'Connell (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 276.

CHAPTER I

CHURCH DOCTRINE AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DELIBERATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide us with some insights about the Church documents and current theological developments on Inculturation, Reconciliation and Liturgy. It is intended to serve as foundation and guide in our quest for an inculturated liturgical rite of reconciliation.

To start with, we shall mention some definitions provided by different authors about inculturation. Then, we shall proceed to look at the theological and biblical foundations for inculturation. Our next section will be on liturgical reforms in the light of Vatican II. And the last section will be dedicated to Reconciliation from a sacramental and ecclesiological point of view.

2. INCULTURATION

2.1 Definition

Fr Joseph Masson first coined the term inculturation in 1962.² The 32nd Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1974), through the efforts of P. Arrupe, contributed to its widespread use. It was not until 1977 that it was officially used in an ecclesial document namely, *Catechesi Tradendae*.³

There has been an evolution of terms in the Church's understanding of the encounter between faith and cultures. From various readings, one comes across terminologies such as *accommodation*, *indigenization*, *localization*, *implantation*, *acculturation*, *contextualisation*, *adaptation*, *incarnation*, etc. For instance, the conciliar documents of Vatican II refer to inculturation as *adaptation* or *incarnation*. So far, *inculturation* has been chosen as a better option among others.

The passage from *adaptation* to *inculturation* is not only a mere change of terminology, it is also a shift in the Church's understanding. It is in fact a movement towards a more profound process of inculturation. The Second Vatican Council, by focusing on human communities and their socio-cultural traditions, promotes a more positive view of cultures. It envisages a deep transformation of cultures from the point of view of what it calls, "a more profound adaptation".⁴

²Cf. Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), p. 10 as quoted from Masson, J., *L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde*, in: NRT, Vol. 84. 1962 p. 1038.

³Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae, On the Catechesis in Our Time, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1979).

⁴*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 22.

Below are some definitions worth citing among many others:

“Fr. Pedro Arrup SJ defines inculturation as:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.⁵

The Yogyakarta research seminar on inculturation describes it as follows:

Inculturation is the process by which an ecclesial community lives its Christian faith and experience within a given cultural context, in such a way that these not only find their expression in elements of the local culture, but also become a force that animates, reshapes and profoundly renews that culture, so as to create new patterns of communion and communication within that culture and beyond it.⁶

According to Fr. Shorter:

Inculturation is an inseparable aspect of evangelization. It means the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture-processes which result in the reinterpretation of both, without being unfaithful to either.⁷

In his book, “Toward a Theology of Inculturation”, Shorter identifies three stages in the process of inculturation as an ‘on-going dialogue’: 1) “The first insertion of the faith into a culture”; 2) “A dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural form” (the stage of acculturation); and 3) “The stage when a human culture is enlived by the Gospel from within, a stage which presupposes a measure of reformulation or,

⁵Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, p. 11 as quoted from Pedro Arrup SJ, ‘Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation’, in: Aixala (ed.), Vol. 3, 1978 p. 172.

⁶Cf. Anthony Francis-Vincent, Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation: Towards an Empirical-theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis, (Rome: LAS, 1997), p 45 as quoted from Roest Crollius A.A. (ed.), Inculturation New Letter, n. 1 (Rome 1983).

⁷Jim Mulroney, Report: A National Consultation on Mission. Sydney: St. Patrick’s College, 1995. p. 5.

more accurately, reinterpretation” (the real integration of the Christian experience).⁸

2.2. Biblical and Theological Foundations

In the conciliar documents, the ‘incarnation model’ coexists with the idea of ‘seeds of the Word’⁹ in reference to the beginning of the process of inculturation from a biblical and theological point of view. Vatican II declares that:

(...) If the Church is to be in a position to offer all people the mystery of salvation and life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived.¹⁰

Furthermore, the council invites all Christians to be familiar with the religious and national traditions of people so as to “uncover with gladness and respect those ‘seeds of the Word’, which lie hidden among them.”¹¹ This best summarizes the whole idea of inculturation from a biblical and theological perspective.

The ideal starting point for a more comprehensive understanding of inculturation is found in the ‘incarnation model’. Here, incarnation should be understood as the whole mystery of Christ i.e. his life, death and resurrection. It is from this perspective that we can better understand the implications of a christological conception of inculturation.

⁸Cf. Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, pp. 11-12.

⁹This is a reflection based on Justin the Martyr’s idea of ‘Logos Spermatikos’. With reference to John 1:3, Justin came up with the view that in all human cultures, there is a spark of divine revelation which he calls ‘the seeds of the Word’. The ‘seeds of the Word’ refer to the divine truths revealed in every culture due to the active presence of the Holy Spirit in all human cultures.

¹⁰*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 10.

¹¹*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 11.

Through incarnation, the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among humans (cf. John. 1: 14). In other words, the Word of God entered into dialogue with every human being and human cultures. This dialogue did not end with his death because in his 'glorified state', he continues to be active in human history. His earthly life and ministry was only but the beginning of "a dynamic process of transformation of persons, communities and the entire cosmos."¹² The whole life of Christ as a human being, from his birth to his death and resurrection, gives us a more holistic picture of inculturation (Cf. Phil. 2:6-11). On this note, speaking about inculturation is in fact speaking about Christ in his encounter with human cultures.

There is a real, causal connection between Resurrection and Evangelization. Evangelization allows all encounter with the risen Christ to be not only challenging but also transformative.¹³ However, there is true inculturation only when a human culture after it has encountered the risen Lord becomes a resurrected culture.

The African Synod of Bishops conceives a 'two-way movement' in inculturation i.e. the best cultural values to be transformed and integrated into Christianity and that of the Christian values inserted into the human culture.¹⁴ However, it also touches on two basic conditions governing a genuine inculturation. It declares all efforts towards inculturation must have the quest for compatibility with

¹²Francis-Vincent, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, p. 61.

¹³ A typical example of how Christ approached the cultures of his time is his attitude towards the Jewish Passover feast. Here, Jesus not only adapts this feast to his theological intent, but brings about a renewal of the thinking and celebration of this ancient Jewish feast by making himself the centre of focus. Most theologians often refer to this as functional substitution.

¹⁴Cf. John Paul II, *The Church in Africa: Ecclesia in Africa*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), no. 59, pp. 44-45.

the Christian message and communion with the universal Church.¹⁵ The Synod sees inculturation as a process that includes the whole of Christian life. It says:

Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelization. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life in union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit. (...) It includes theology, liturgy, the Church's life and structures.¹⁶

Last but not the least is the place of the Holy Spirit in the whole process of Inculturation. All human knowledge, expertise and reflection on inculturation, be it from a liturgical or theological viewpoint, is vain if the Spirit is not accorded his right place. For the Spirit is the main actor in the liturgy and Inculturation. It is the Spirit who knows best how to tap the beauty of each culture and transform them into a profession of faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁷

What we have at stake is not just a question of liturgical adaptation or innovation alone. It is a matter of life and faith encounter. Inculturation takes effect wherever faith 'intersects' with life. And since life is dynamic, inculturation will always be an on-going process, exploring new and better ways through which people can best express their Christian faith in a living culture.

¹⁵Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 57, p. 42.

¹⁶John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 62, p. 47.

¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 61, p. 46.

3. VATICAN II AND LITURGICAL REFORMS

The liturgy has been one of the most privileged areas for adaptation/inculturation in the Church. Although strictly speaking, Vatican II's call for reform does not explicitly talk about inculturation, it has paved the way for the adaptation of certain rites sensitive to the reality of each people and nation. The New Missal published in 1969, through the efforts of Bugnini and others, builds on this and talks more of a creative kind of adaptation.

Vatican II talks about the necessity of experimentations in the field of the adaptation of the liturgy but not without principles governing this process. In this regard, the Council has come up with some norms for adapting the liturgy.¹⁸ This is not to render the process of adaptation difficult nor is it to promote uniformity in the liturgy but to safeguard unity in diversity and to ensure a true inculturation in various cultures. The Council also states that the church respects and fosters the qualities and the talents of various races and nations. And that,

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. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its

¹⁸Cf. *Sacrocanctum Concilium*, 37- 40:

(1) The competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Article 22:2, must in this matter, carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and cultures of individual peoples might appropriately be admitted into divine worship. Adaptations, which are considered useful or necessary, should then be submitted to the Holy See for consent.

(2) To ensure that adaptations may be made with all the circumspection necessary, the Apostolic See will grant power to this same territorial ecclesiastical authority to permit and to direct, as the case requires, the necessary preliminary experiments over a determined period of time among certain groups suitable for the purpose.

(3) Because liturgical laws usually involve special difficulties with respect to adaptation, especially in mission lands, men who are experts in the matters in question must be employed to formulate them.

true and authentic spirit.¹⁹

Although it is the most privileged area for adaptation, the liturgy has been a very sensitive area for the Church. The official line of the Church has so far been gradualism. Perhaps, this may be due to the danger involved in uncontrolled experimentations, which could easily lead to liturgical abuses or ritual eccentricities. This could bring about scandals that may be very harmful to the faithful. However, could gradualism also be a manifestation of a more likely fear of diversity? Whatever be the case, all experimentations or adaptations must have the underlying quest to offer the people of God the possibility of expressing themselves from the depths of their hearts in union with the universal Church.

4. RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a mystery of God's merciful love, which associates us with the victory of Christ and renews in us the gift of his Spirit.²⁰ The celebration of reconciliation is first and foremost a response to God's call to be reconciled with him and turn away from sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19-20). It is an experience of God's forgiveness as a gratuitous gift (Cf. Lk. 15:11-32), an experience that transforms us into a 'new creation' in Christ. It is also a salvific experience because in it, 'God comes to meet humans with the salvation that he gives through Christ acting in his Church; in that same Church and through the same Christ, humans accepts God's gift of salvation.'²¹

¹⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37.

²⁰Cf. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, p. 638.

²¹Cf. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, p. 678.

The Church exercises the ministry of reconciliation assigned to her by Christ through the apostles (Cf. Mt. 16:13-20; Lk. 15:11-32), a ministry geared towards the conversion of sinners. This accounts for the ecclesial dimension of reconciliation. To stress this ecclesial dimension, in 1966, a group established to conduct some studies on the problems inherent in the sacrament of penance came out with the following points:

- Sin is by its nature an offense against God and a wound inflicted on the Church.
- Sacramental reconciliation is reconciliation with both God and the Church.
- The entire Christian Community works together for the conversion of sinners.²²

The Church recommends all faithful to confess to a priest each and every grave sin. She has therefore made provisions for the possible celebration of sacramental reconciliation in several forms and penitential celebrations. The new rite, which is a revision of the old one, presents us with three types of celebrations:

- a) Reconciliation of individual penitents,
- b) Reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution.
- c) Reconciliation of penitents with general confession and absolution.

Out of the three rites, the most traditional and still commonly practiced is the first rite. The second rite shows more the ecclesial nature of the celebration. Individual confessions are usually put in the context of a communal preparation and conclusion. The last rite makes provision for general confession and absolution but in extreme cases involving danger of death. The lawful administration of general absolution is

²²Cf. Bugnini, The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975, p. 665.

reserved to the diocesan bishop but only after consultation with members of the Episcopal conference.²³ The restrictions involved in the administration of general absolution has made this third rite practically impossible.

Finally, the new rites touch on the nature of conversion and satisfaction²⁴ and the adaptation of the various rites according to the local needs of people.²⁵ In reconciliation, *metanoia* i.e. a profound change of the whole person is required.²⁶

To conclude, reconciliation is not a “once-and-for-all event”, it is a dynamic process. The celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation must be seen as the starting point of an on-going process of conversion in the life of the faithful.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have touched on some important concepts about Inculturation, Reconciliation and the Liturgy. Although succinct, it has offered us some basic knowledge and insights, from which we can comfortably begin to build on, for an inculturated liturgical rite of reconciliation. We can now turn our attention towards the Dagaaba group as a tribal entity, our next chapter.

²³Cf. Paul VI, The Rites of the Catholic Church, (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 341-360.

²⁴Cf. Paul VI, The Rites of the Catholic Church, pp. 344-347.

For the effectiveness of reconciliation the following conditions must be fulfilled:

- a) Contrition: a real sorrow and aversion for the sin committed, and with the intention of not falling back to it again.
- b) Confession: the acknowledgement and confession of the sins committed to a priest.
- c) Act of penance (Satisfaction): the reparation for the sins committed and change of behaviour.
- d) Absolution: a priest absolves the sins committed with the proper Trinitarian formula.

²⁵Cf. Paul VI, The Rites of the Catholic Church, pp.358-360.

²⁶ The penitent is called to an inner conversion of heart and to a new life with Christ.

CHAPTER II

THE DAGAABA TRIBE

1. INTRODUCTION: NAME AND ETYMOLOGY

There are a variety of names referring to the Dagaaba group. This may be due to differences in dialect or as the result of attempts by the colonial masters to identify this tribe. Names such as *Dagara*, *Dagarti*, *Dagaati*, *Dagaare*, *Daga-Willi* and *LoDagaa*, all designate the same people without any particular reference to ethnic differentiation. In Ghana, the name commonly used to identify the Dagaaba is *Dagaati*, whilst in Burkina *Dagara* predominates.

The etymology of *Dagaaba* comes from *dao* or *deb*, meaning 'man' and *gaara*, which means 'rebel'. Consequently, *Dagaaba* is translated as 'rebellious men'.²⁷ This will be further explained in the historical section of our study, providing a more comprehensive understanding.

Due caution must be maintained in order to avoid generalizations which might exclude all differences involved in establishing the identity of this tribe. That is why a more serious study is necessary which will embrace the complexities of the composition of this tribe. In the coming sections, we shall expound our field of study considering the Dagaaba tribe from a historical, socio-political and religious point of view. Finally, we shall see how inculturation is a matter of concern for the Dagaaba.

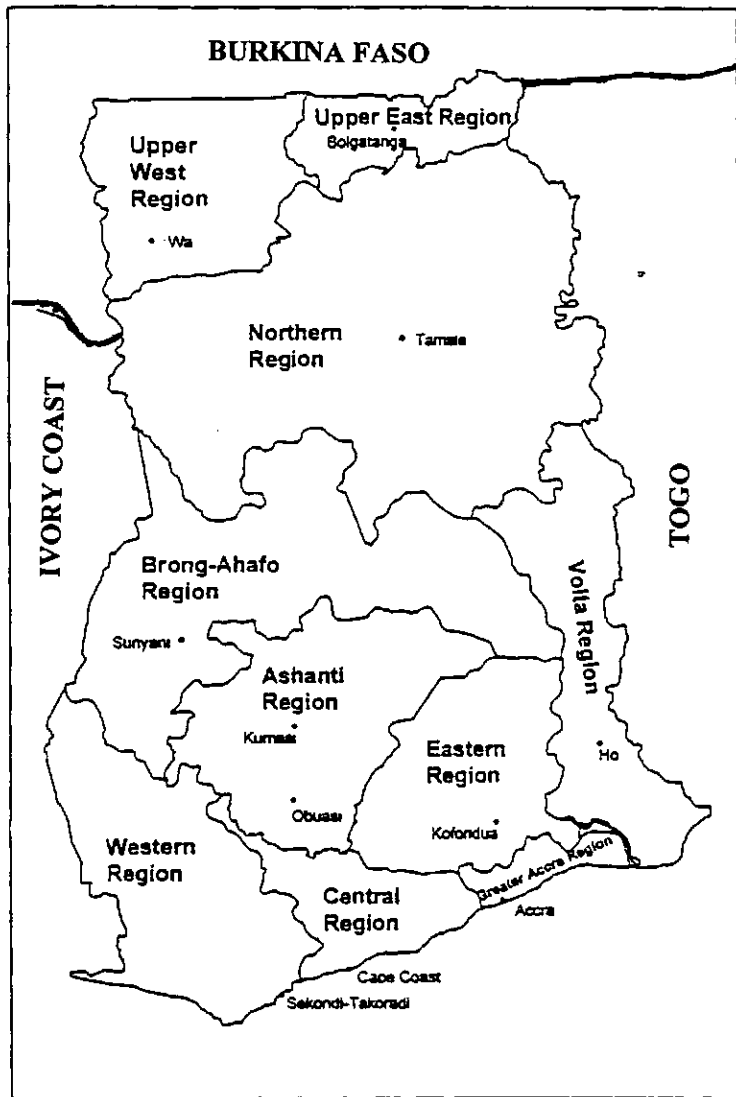
²⁷Cf. Paul Bekye, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions: With Particular Reference to the Dagaaba of West Africa, (Rome: Leberit Press, 1991), p. 106.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

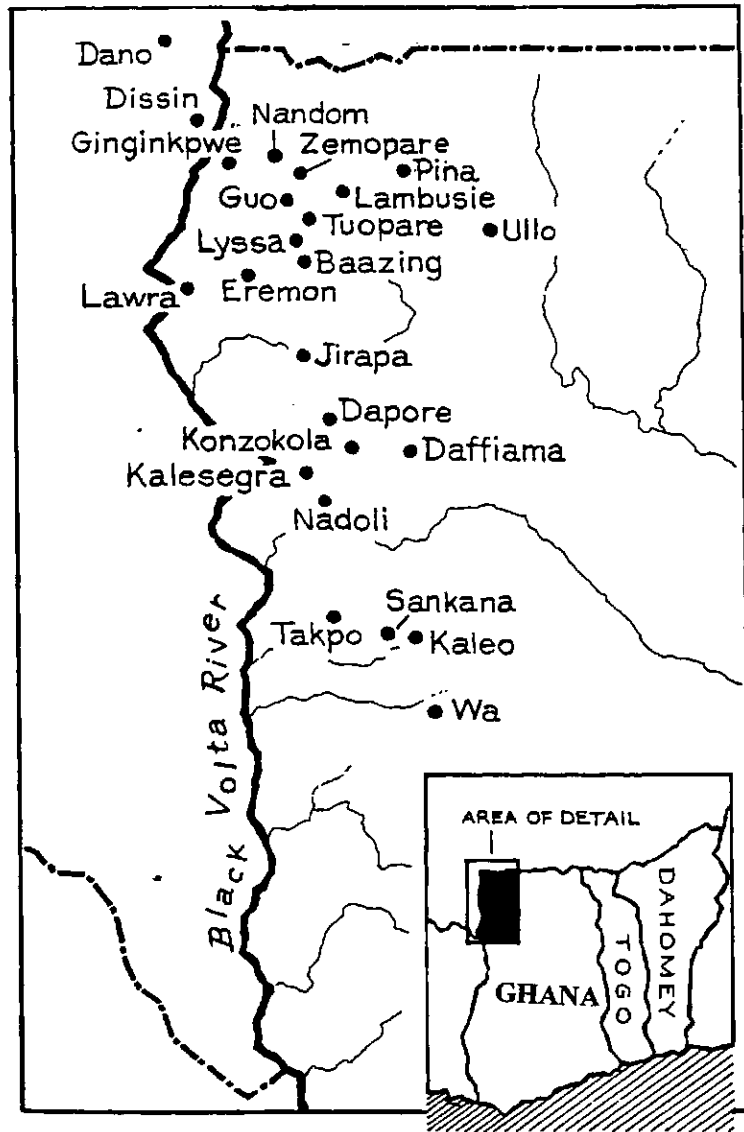
There are two dialect groups worth mentioning as far as settlement and number are concerned, the *Dagaare* in Ghana and the *Lobri* in Burkina. The Black Volta River, running in a north-south direction between Ghana and Burkina, separates the two groups.²⁸ However, settlements of the Dagaaba can also be found in Ivory Coast but not as important as those of Burkina and Ghana. In Burkina, the Dagaaba occupy the south western part and in Ivory Coast, the northeastern. The domain of the greater majority of the Dagaaba in Ghana is in the northwestern part, known as the Upper West Region.

Our main area of concern will be limited to the northwestern part of Ghana, the Upper West Region, which comprises two dominant ethnic groups namely, the Sissala and the Dagaaba. The latter account for about seventy per cent of the total population, the Sissalas about twenty and the remaining percentage covering smaller ethnic groups.

²⁸This division dates back to the colonial times when a demarcation line was established by the British and French, in the Anglo-French Convention of 14th June 1898. The British and the French established this demarcation line in order to overcome the raids of the Bantu and Samouri in the Dagaaba areas. This boundary had the Black Volta River as a point of reference to ensure effective control over the territories concerned. Consequently, the Dagaaba split into two groups with the river serving as boundary.



Administrative Towns of Ghana



Upper West Region of Ghana

3. A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

The Dagaaba are said to have inhabited the Voltaic Region, a vast expanse of land lying between the forest belt and the Upper Niger in the West of Africa. This region was initially composed of different ethnic groupings, among them was the *Mole-Dagomba* people.²⁹ The Dagaaba find their place among this group.

There are varied opinions concerning the origin of the Dagaaba. However, many ethnologists concur on the Dagomba-origin hypothesis.³⁰ According to this hypothesis, the Mossi state-forming dynasties that had conquered the Voltaic Region, subjected the locals to persecutions as a result of a land dispute. During the reign of Na Nyagse (1476-1492) this dispute got transformed into an armed conflict that saw the brutal massacre of local people and thus bringing about the breaking away of large numbers of Mole-speaking Dagomba rebels. The rebellious group is said to have occupied an area around the Black Volta, between the earlier settlers, the Lobi on the west and the Sissaala on the east. This explains why in principle the Dagaaba do not claim ownership of the land they actually occupy. It also accounts for the etymology of the name *Dagaaba* meaning 'rebellious men'.

²⁹ '*Mole-Dagomba*' is a compound expression to identify a large portion of the Voltaic people who come from the same ancestral stock

³⁰ Cf. Bekye, *Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions*, pp. 104-106.

It is however worth noting that some groups such as the small Moslem community of the town of Wa, the *Guombo*, *Isuolo* and the *Mon-yarla* do not concur with this theory. The Moslem community traces its origin to the *Mandigo* and *Hausa* traders from Mali, the *Guombo* from the *Konkomba* in northeastern Ghana, the *Isuolo* from the *Isala* of Zini east of the Dagaaba and finally the *Mon-yarla* from Kong in Gonja land, south of the Dagomba. Despite the diversity in groupings and origin, all the groups unanimously claim the expression *Dagaaba* as a common ethnic entity.

4. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Dagaaba are grouped into villages associated mainly with land cultivation and rearing of animals. Occupants of these villages range between 200 and 4, 000 inhabitants per village.

Dagaaba social organization is based on two basic principles: the *yir/yiilu* (i.e. 'father's house') and the *bello* (i.e. the name a child obtains from the mother. It could also be referred to as the 'mother's house'). Clans are formed from both principles, but the male principle is more dominant in terms of marriage/family arrangements and that is why the Dagaaba can be said to be bi-lineal. The male principle being dominant does not rule out the importance of the female principle in the Dagaaba social groupings and relationships. The tradition identifies nine major clans from the male principle: the *Bimbigle*, *Bekuone*, *Kpiele*, *Gbaane*, *Naayiile* or *Tiedeme*, *Nabegle*, *Birfuole*, *Metuole*, and *Batane*. And from the female principle are seven divisions: *Some*, *Meda*, *Somda*, *Kpoda*, *Hien*, *Kambire* and *Dabire*.

A clan, *doglu* (meaning 'to give birth') takes the same meaning as *yiilu* (from the word *yir* meaning 'house, home or family'). It simply refers to clan members as a family or to the social setting into which one is born. Strictly speaking, all who descend from a male common ancestor are said to be from the same clan (or 'father's house'). Clans/houses formed out of the female principle only serve to define the identity of a child in the field of inheritance, roles, expectations, responsibilities and rights. It is from this perspective that the Dagaaba are often referred to as patrilineal in system.

4.1 Relationships within the Dagaaba Social Structure.

There are two significant types of relationships within the Dagaaba social structure namely, clan relationships and the joking relationships. Clan relationships refer to the “social web of relationships established by paternity and filiation”³¹ whilst the joking relationships refers to the pairing of clans into joking partners.

Clan relationships are based on the ‘*dume/Kyiiru*’ (a form of prohibition or ‘food avoidance’) ³² and the ‘*yir-danu*’ (short songs of praise particular to each clan). By identifying themselves as sharing the same ‘food avoidance’/‘praise songs’, people of the same clan are in fact saying they are brothers and sisters in the real sense.

In social life, friendship is highly valued and that is why clans also are grouped into joking partnerships, *lonluore*. Joking partnerships assume a role that is much more understandable within the context of *Baghr Tampello* (‘ash-throwing’ rite of reconciliation). Joking partnership is a social mechanism for peace and reconciliation. Hence, joking partners ‘throw ashes on’ or ‘use ashes to catch’ each other’s knees to reconcile conflicting members.³³ In matters concerning conflicts, clans never take each other to court. All conflicts are settled within the context of the joking relationships.

³¹Edward Tengan, House of God: Church-As-Family from an African Perspective, (Leuven: Acco, 1997), p. 48.

³²Cf. Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara: The House and the Matriclan as axes of Dagara Social Organization. The Victors Series No. 3, (Tamale: St. Victor’s Major Seminary, 1994), p. 23. According to Edward Tengan, the ‘*dume/kyiiru*’ is the ‘non-human member’ of a given social house. The *Dume/Kyiiru* is unique to each clan. It is believed that once in the life of the clan, the *Dume*, in the form of a bird, a reptile or an animal had, intervened to save either the ancestor or even the whole clan from perdition. Consequently, in recognition of their salvific role, the clans show them respect by refusing to eat, harm or kill them. This referred to as ‘food avoidance’ or taboo against eating a clan totem.

³³Cf. Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara, p. 42.

5. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The bitter experience of the Dagaaba in their struggle against oppressive chiefs encouraged them to abandon the idea of chieftaincy as a means of organization. Chieftaincy was only a later institution imposed as a system of indirect rule by the colonial rule.

Initially, the Dagaaba tribe was content with its social structure having the clan as the focal point of all relationships. Authority was understood and exercised from this point of view. The elders of the clans were the authorities or governors of the day. They acted on behalf of the ancestors. Decisions especially, concerning land and marriage were taken only after discussion and informal consensus or upon unanimous agreement among the elders. It was more a persuasive kind of authority rather than rigid adherence.

Accompanying the elders in the exercise of authority was the *teng-gan sob*, literally meaning 'owner of the earth'. The *teng-gan sob* was the priest of a given parcel of land.³⁴ He was responsible for all matters concerning relationships between the earth and the people and all inter-personal relations for the common good. He exercised both administrative and religious authority.

Today, despite the changes initiated by the colonial rule with the introduction of the rule of chiefs, clan relationships still exist and remain a valuable asset for Dagaaba unity and solidarity.

³⁴The Dagaaba attached great importance to the land. Since they depended on agriculture as their main source of income and living, a whole set of beliefs and cultic activities developed closely associated with the earth.

6. RELIGION

The Dagaaba traditional religious beliefs revolve around the notion of *Naangmen*³⁵ (God) and other powers attributed to the different spiritual forces or nature spirits known as *tibe*. Their cultic attitude towards God and the nature spirits is considered *saakum bom*, 'a thing of the grandfathers'. In other words, it is a religious belief preserved and transmitted faithfully from one generation to the next. It is a religious system which strives to create a harmonious relationship between the supernatural and natural order, that of the living among themselves, and finally between the living and the dead. In all this, God has the final say. He is the one in charge.

6.1. Dagaaba Concept of God and their Cultic Attitude

There is no room for disbelief in God's existence as far as the Dagaaba is concerned. He is the source of all created realities, supernatural and natural. He is the one in charge of created order. He is the author of life and death, of all the good things that the Dagaaba achieve, and on whom they totally depend.

In their relationship with God the Dagaaba have to demonstrate reverence or

³⁵Cf. Bekye, *Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions*, pp. 207-211.

Regarding the etymology and meaning of *Naangmen*, Girault translates *Naa* as 'king or chief' and *ngmen*, as meaning 'Chief/King-sun' Bekye notes that this expression does not correspond with the Dagaaba religious belief about God, since the sun is the only reality that the Dagaaba do not spiritualize. This is probably due to the fact that the sun is used in the context of greetings and often translated as 'good'. For instance, *Nyi Mwina* (plural) or *Fo mwina* (singular) means 'good afternoon'. He prefers Francis Baghr's translation of *Naa* as 'rich' instead. Baghr mentions the mysteriousness and unpredictability of God as two notions corresponding very much to the Dagaaba beliefs about God. The most acceptable etymological relationship between *Naa* and *ngmen*, as suggested by Bekye, is the short form of *naa-na-i-ngmen-a* literally meaning 'Rich-one-who-is-deity' or 'Deity-who-is-rich'.

fear, submission, obedience and total self-surrender. These are attitudes, which reflect, in the Dagaaba's everyday life. The best cultic attitude towards God is good moral living and behaviour i.e. living with a sentiment of constant gratitude to God for his providential care. Curiously enough, the Dagaaba have no direct cult to God. As we shall see, all cultic life and preoccupation evolve instead around the nature spirits.

6.2. The Cult of the Spirits

Spiritual forces/nature spirits for the Dagaaba are all creatures of God and not divinities. As creatures, they have human defects and are very much situated in the realm of human affairs. "Though the immediate destination of the people's offerings and sacrifices appears to be the nature spirits, yet it is recognized that these offerings are God's prerogatives."³⁶

The nature spirit is any spiritual power or agency that has the potential of being localized in a shrine or in homes. They are mediators between humans and God. They are regarded as powers dominating the entire universe. Their presence is perceived and represented by either visible symbolic images or in the form of moldings, a heap of stones, sticks or a mound of earth.

³⁶ Bekye, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions, p. 221.

6.3. The Catholic Church and the Dagaaba

The first Catholic mission station in Ghana was in the northeast, at Navrongo in 1906, among the Kassena and Nankanna people. In 1926, this mission under the jurisdiction of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa got detached from the jurisdiction of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) with the creation of the apostolic prefecture of Navrongo.

The first attempt in 1905 at creating a mission among the Dagaaba and the Sissala was fruitless. Initially, the British administrator denied the Catholic missionaries access to this area, since he had reserved it for the Anglican Missions. It was not until 1926 that Fr. Oscar Morin, who had been appointed the ordinary of this territory, began negotiations with the colonial government in view of gaining access to the North Western part of Ghana. In 1929, the Catholic Church was finally allowed to inaugurate a mission among the Dagaaba and Sissala upon an invitation by Mr. Ayersmith, the British District Commissioner of Lawra at that time.

The first missionaries, Fr. Remigius McCoy, Fr. Arthur Paquet and Br. Basilide (all Missionaries of Africa), strove to develop close relations with the people, which included medical services. They also embarked upon a study of the customs and language of the people in view of preaching the Gospel and attracting the local people to Christianity.

Initially, the Dagaaba were very suspicious about the presence and intentions of the missionaries. This was because their approach was foreign to them, unlike that of the British colonial officers. However, gradually the local people began appreciating their efforts especially in learning the language. The decisive event that

resulted in a massive response to Christianity is what is known as the 'Rain Events'.

The 'rain events' refer to the period of drought that started in 1932. During this period sacrifices had been offered to appease the spirits but there was little effect. The minority, who had developed some close affiliations with the missionaries, was blamed for this misfortune. As time passed by, "many felt the threat of famine in the coming year was too real to let religious principle stand in the way of a possible solution".³⁷ A group of elders from Daffiama village took the courage to approach the missionaries for a possible solution to this immanent threat. The missionaries accepted and led by Fr. McCoy, the group offered prayers for rain. The result was that Daffiama village had abundant rains whilst the surrounding villages remained dry. Naturally, the surrounding villages followed the example of Daffiama and soon enjoyed the arrival of rain. Thereafter, many delegations seeking rain flooded the Mission. This marked the beginning of a mass movement towards the Christian faith.

6.3.1. Dagaaba Christianity Today

Out of the total population of about 400,000 inhabitants, it is estimated that the Catholic population is roughly 89,000, with the Dagaaba accounting for 89%.³⁸

Commentators suggest that Christianity has become part of the identity of the Dagaaba. It would be too early to judge if the disappearance of Christianity would

³⁷Remigius McCoy, Great Things Happen, (Montreal: Missionaries of Africa, 1988), p. 110.

³⁸Cf. Gregoire Eebo Kpiebaya, ed. That They May Have Life: An Account of Activities of the Church in North-West Ghana 1929-1979, (Wa: Publications and Depscom Jubilee Committee, 1979), p. 18.

imply loss of identity since Christianity is only but fifty years old. However, the prevalence of many cultural and traditional practices, which run side by side with Christianity, is an indication that the Dagaaba are far from losing their cultural identity.

Rt. Rev. Gregory E. Kpiebaya makes this remark: “Church life is still largely in the hands of catechists and the clergy. This is rather unhealthy for a Church that is fifty years old”.³⁹ According to Kpiebaya, the most significant areas of concern are on the levels of religious beliefs and practices; ethics especially in matters concerning marriage and the dignity of women; forgiveness; and finally, communal responsibility.⁴⁰

6.3.2. Attempts towards Inculturation (Examples)

There have been many significant contributions by Dagaaba scholars towards the inculturation of the Christian message in various areas of Dagaaba life. Attempts at inculturation can be summed up in three approaches. The first is research work conducted by some scholars on the traditions and cultures of the Dagaaba in view of establishing the true identity of this group. The second is purely theological reflections on various aspects of Dagaaba cultures and traditions. And finally, the third is the application of the previous, i.e. inculturation in praxis. However, the most remarkable and significant contributions are from the first two approaches. Scholars such Edward

³⁹Kpiebaya, That They May Have Life, p. 25.

⁴⁰Cf. Kpiebaya, That They May Have Life, pp. 21-25.

Tengan⁴¹, Paul Bekye⁴² and many others, through their studies have paved way for new trends in the development of the theology of inculturation in the Dagaaba world.

7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, our main objective was to expound our knowledge about the Dagaaba tribe; a knowledge, which is essential if a harmonious inculturation in this tribe, is to be envisaged. It is with this in mind that we not only touched on the cultural identity of this group but also its history, socio-politics and religion.

Inculturation is best if a throughout knowledge of culture is acquired. It is more realistic if perceived from and within a people's culture. And far enriching if the people of the culture concerned are actively engaged in this process itself. That is why the final part of this chapter was on attempts made by Dagaaba themselves as regards inculturation.

On the whole this chapter has equipped us with some adequate information about the Dagaaba. Let us now narrow down our field of study to the subject of reconciliation in the Dagaaba community in the next chapter.

⁴¹ Edward Tengan published his book, House of God: Church-as-Family. His vision is that of an inculturated ecclesiology. He basis his reflection on his own experience of family life and friendship in the Dagaaba Society and also the Dagaaba experience of the transcendent reality of the Church on the other hand. Tengan leads his readers into new insights about Dagaaba Christianity and the Church as a whole. In his vision, he envisages the transformation of the old traditional Dagaaba house/family into the new Christian house of God with the salvific role of Christ as central idea.

⁴² Cf. Bekye, Divine Revelaion and Traditional Religions. Bekye's main concern is how to bring about a Christian theological innovation that would consider the African socio-cultural situations. He focuses on the Christian revelation and the Dagaaba religious experience within the context of the salvific plan of God with Christ as center.

CHAPTER III

RECONCILIATION AMONG THE DAGAABA COMMUNITY

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the Dagaaba, a ritual is inevitable for the effectiveness of reconciliation. A ritual is important because it offers the opportunity to relieve a tension from which words can no longer release one.⁴³ In a reconciliation ritual, what the Dagaaba aims at is to come together as a community to recognize conflicts as shameful and evil. This evil is then symbolically cast out through verbal confessions and forgiveness for the restoration of 'coolness' i.e. health and balance to the individual and community. According to Malidoma Somé, when such a community comes together to engage in a ritual, it aims at the transformation and restoration of the individual and ritual. The ritual he says is an art, "an art that weaves and dances with symbols and helping to create that art rejuvenates participants."⁴⁴ However, behind the symbols is an underlying and deeply rooted theology that is understood as effective although from the externals it may appear superstitious and magical.

In this chapter we shall precisely be looking at the praxis of a particular ritual of

⁴³ Cf. Patrice Malidoma Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual and Community, (London: Thorsons, An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 1999), p. 161.

⁴⁴ Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa, p. 23

reconciliation i.e. *Baghr Tampello* – ‘the sacrifice of ashes’ in the Dagaaba community. We shall consider the dynamics of this rite of reconciliation and especially what goes on in the mind of the Dagaaba who participates in the ritual. Then from there, we shall reflect on how best Dagaaba reconciliation can be inculturated from a theological point of view.

2. DAGAABA THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION.

The Dagaaba believe that there is a close and inseparable relationship between the visible reality and the invisible⁴⁵. This relationship is so real that what ever happens in the latter brings about instability or disturbances in the former. The Dagaaba also believe that there is a physical, psychological, social and spiritual separation between the community, God and the ancestors when one misbehaves. This disrupts the original established peace and harmony that should exist between the two worlds, visible and invisible. In order to correct abuses or wrong doings, the ancestors punish the transgressors by inflicting pain on them, sending illness, troubles or even death. Reconciliation is therefore vital to maintain good relations among members and ensure the providential care of the ancestors.

When individuals offend each other there is separation. They can no longer sit together under the same tree, enter through the same door, or eat from the same pot or

⁴⁵In Dagaaba cosmology, the visible reality is the world of humans and the invisible reality refers to the world of God, the Spirits and the ‘living dead’ i.e. the human ancestors. These two realities intertwined come together to form the cosmos.

dish⁴⁶. Such a separation is considered evil because peaceful co-existence no longer exists. It is not only the individuals who suffer as a result of a broken relationship but also the community as a whole. Reconciliation is often referred to as “keeping the house clean for others”,⁴⁷ i.e. to ensure that future generations do not inherit the consequences of individual acts. Unresolved conflicts are said to be ‘contagious’. They eventually affect surviving relatives and can be passed on to future generations.

In general, reconciliation celebrations embrace all behaviours considered a serious offense to God, the ancestors and the community e.g. quarrels, immoral behaviour, abusing the name of God and of the ancestors, etc. Each time a crisis occurs, it is resolved by a ritual in the presence of everyone.⁴⁸ The element of shame is not the issue at stake. What is important is the demonstration of deep regret and humility on the part of offenders who seek reconciliation. Shame is brought about only if offenders, in their pride, refuse reconciliation. This results in self-destruction. It also means failure on the part of the community in its role as reconciler.⁴⁹

Reconciliation rituals in the Dagaaba community offer individuals the

⁴⁶Eating together is an explicit manifestation of love and unity among participants. It is a sign of friendship and of mutual acceptance. “Sitting together”, “entering through the same door” can be taken as symbols of peaceful co-existence.

⁴⁷ Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa, p. 131.

⁴⁸Cf. Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa, p. 160.

Resolving issues that arise between members is most adequately achieved through the ash ritual. Members use ashes to draw a line or make a circle to show their quest for reconciliation and this marks the beginning of the ash ritual. Somé narrates one of the ritual proceedings through which issues are resolved. He says the people in conflict walk into the ash circle and face each other, while everyone else sits outside, also facing one another. “The person who called for the ash ritual speaks his or her truth about what is hurting. The emphasis is not on blame, but on how the actions of the other have resulted in hurt and bad feeling. The other person responds, emphasizing the motive of his or her action. The people present support them by guiding them away from accusatory language, such as ‘you did this and I don’t like your guts’, and so forth. Usually a healthy imparting of one’s feeling to the other results in cathartic understanding, and the whole session ends in embrace.”

⁴⁹Cf. Somé, The Healing Wisdom of Africa, pp. 128-129.

opportunity to resolve their conflicts, to heal the wounds they have inflicted on each other, and to be re-integrated into the community. The ritual is not just a simple colourful celebration loaded with symbols and meanings. For the Dagaaba, it is meant to be a healing, transforming and rejuvenating experience for all participants.

2.1. The Praxis of Reconciliation.

For the Dagaaba, there are two levels of relationships in which reconciliation is vital. The vertical: between humans, the ancestors and God, and the horizontal: between humans and their fellow humans.

Experience has taught the Dagaaba that conflict is part of all human relationships. Conflicts are said to be evil only if the element of separation does threaten the already established equilibrium.

There are two types of reconciliation expressed in ritual action, *yir tampello* (house ashes) and *bagr tampello* ('sacrifice of ashes'). *Yir tampello* refers to the symbolic use of ash in the field of daily interpersonal relationships, whilst *bagr tampello* is the use of ashes in the context of sacrifices and rituals within the household. As regards "house ashes", individuals use ashes to draw a line between them as a sign of their need for reconciliation. This puts an end to any possibility of engaging in physical assault or from continually hurting each other.

The ash-thrower is called upon to reconcile conflicting situations that get out of hand. Here, he comes in to 'catch the knees' of those concerned. He plays a very important role in offering sacrifices of reparation in all spheres of life where distress or crisis prevails. His role takes prominence in 'the sacrifice of ashes'.

3. BAGHR TAMPELLO – ‘THE SACRIFICE OF ASHES’

3.1. *Basic Elements Used in the Ritual.*

Ashes: Ashes are used in cases of sickness, default or death, etc. The choice of ashes is very significant because in Dagaaba thinking, anything that burns and turns to ashes no longer retains the heat that it originally had during its burning process. “This process of cooling from fire-heat is an experience which for the Dagara is very symbolic and thus evocative as well as laden with religious meaning”.⁵⁰

From the Dagaaba understanding, there are cases in which the household or community is said to be ‘hot’, resulting from disharmony caused by a human fault, sickness or death. This needs the intervention of the ancestors to restore harmony and coolness in the house or community.⁵¹ Anger is also referred to as heat. The throwing of ashes as a ritual is therefore meant to appease or cool down such situations that bring ‘heat’ to individuals and their household. In the case of anger it is precisely meant to cool down the spirits of an angry person to pave a way for reconciliation. After reconciliation has been accomplished, all conflicts are said to have ‘cooled down’ i.e. resolved.

A calabash of cool water: The calabash signifies life because it is a useful instrument to wash, heal and serve food for nourishment. Water is meant for cleansing in view of washing away the evil in a particular situation. It is also used to ask for peace and protection. In the ‘sacrifice of ashes’, water is used for washing the hands

⁵⁰ Tengan, *The Social Structure of the Dagara*, p. 40.

⁵¹ Cf. Tengan, *The Social Structure of the Dagara*, p. 41.

of the entire community, for sprinkling the ancestral shrine (Alta), to ask for peace (coolness), protection and success of a reconciliation celebration.

Other materials: The traditional stool, the flywhisk (a cow's tail) and traditional stool. The stool symbolizes God's throne. The flywhisk⁵² is just a very practical instrument for chasing away all sorts of insects and flies. All sacrificial elements are placed on the skin because it represents the ancestral shrine through which the community communicates with God.

3.2. Those Involved in the Ritual.

Usually in such celebrations the people involved include the presider (principal celebrant), the head of the community, the ash-thrower who is a member of the joking clan, the offenders and the community members.

The performers of the ritual itself are the elders of the household and the ash-thrower. The ash-thrower is seen as a sympathetic friend who intervenes in times of crisis or distress to help people live through difficult moments. He "throws ashes" to cool down the "heat" of the offenders (culprit) and the offended (God and the ancestors). The ritual ash-thrower has two main functions namely in daily life and in time of serious conflict. In situations of tension, where the whole community is involved, the community itself cannot achieve reparation on its own accord. The community needs the intermediary role of an outsider who can plead on their behalf to their ancestors. This is where the ritual ash-thrower is called upon.

⁵² It is very difficult to say if it takes other meanings other than its practical use.

Last but not least is the community as a whole. The celebration is public with the community witnessing and actively participating. Meinrad Hegba notes that during such celebrations in most African societies,

The confession is public and pardon is granted by all those present, since all have been hurt and it is with all that the penitent has to be reconciled. Thus the power of absolving belongs, at one and the same time, totally to God and to the community of the living and the dead.⁵³

Based on the African traditional world-view of sin as a communal event,⁵⁴ the community plays a very important role not only during such celebrations, but also in the individual's well-being and success. And in such celebrations, the community's aim is precisely that of physical and spiritual healing of the individual and the group. All this takes place in the mysterious presence of God of the ancestors.

3.3. The Celebration itself

The celebration takes place under a big tree with all the totems⁵⁵ of the different clans hanging on it, symbolizing the original harmony and unity that God intends for the community. The offenders usually come in front to confess. The community and the person they have the problem with respond to the confession as a way of forgiveness. After this, the ash-thrower dips his palm in ashes, touches the

⁵³ Meinrad Hegba, "Reconciliation and African Culture". *AFER* 25 (1983) no. 6. p. 351.

In reference to the rite of confession and forgiveness (*Ngongo*) among the Beti of Cameroun, Hegba talks about public confessions as 'getting the evil out'. Through confession, the individual and the community undergo purification or relieve themselves from the grips of evil.

⁵⁴ Cf. Healy, Joseph and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African narrative Theology*, (New York: Orbis books, 1996), p. 117.

⁵⁵ As already mentioned in the footnotes of p. 18, the totems here refer to the representations of the *dume/kyiiru* i.e. the non-human members of a given social house.

shoulders of the confessors, and says some prayers. This is followed by a little ritual or ceremony called 'using ashes to catch the knee'⁵⁶ of the offended ancestors.

3.3.1. Structural Analysis

Structural analysis is the study of the ways in which social facts serve each other functionally and how these facts contribute to the central idea according to which people understand a cluster of facts.⁵⁷

In structural analysis, what is of prime importance is not just the description of a particular idea but how to identify the final purpose and then, how the different parts/facts relate to the central idea. It is a scientific way of penetrating the minds and psychology of a people as regards a particular idea. This helps to understand better the impact and importance of such an idea in the lives of people.

In this section, we shall first of all present a descriptive analysis of the different parts contributing to the whole idea of the 'sacrifice of ashes'. Secondly, there will be an elaboration of how the different parts of this rite relate to the final purpose, which is 'peace and harmony'. This we will do with the help of two diagrams.

⁵⁶ In Dagaaba thinking the offender catches the knee of the offended superhuman for the restoration of normal and peaceful relationships in the community. In short it is a sign of repentance and reconciliation.

⁵⁷Cf. Aylward Shorter, African Culture: An Overview, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), p. 15.

Baghr Tampello ('Sacrifice of ashes')

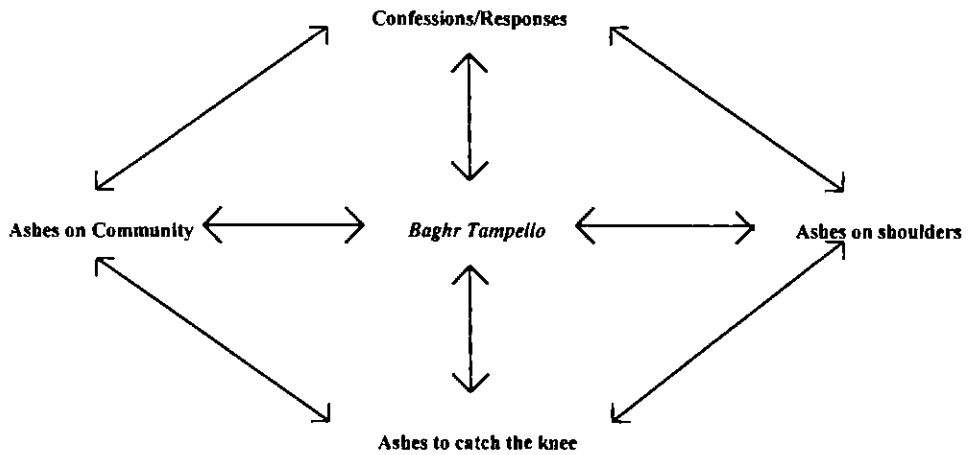


Fig. 1
(Structural Analysis of *Baghr Tampello* in the quest for peace and harmony).

Peace and Harmony

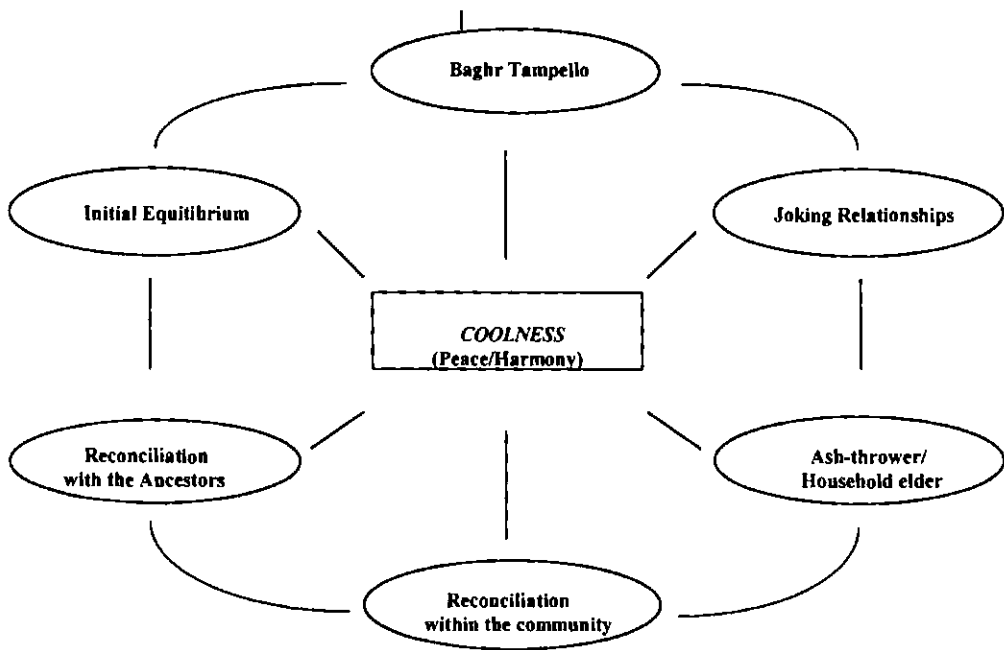


Fig. 2
(Structural Analysis based on the final purpose - Peace and Harmony in the Society).

3.3.2. The Basic Meaning and how the various Parts contribute to the Meaning

The above analysis (See fig. 1 and 2) is based on the suppositions that conflict between individuals affect the equilibrium of the whole community. According to the Dagaaba, the conflicting parties can no longer sit together with the community members until the ritual of reconciliation and cleansing are performed.

As a rite, 'the sacrifice of ashes' involves the following:

- Confessions and Responses in the presence of the Community. It calls for listening and understanding from both parties. This should bring about repentance and the willingness to forgive.
- Ashes on the shoulders of offenders: This is a symbol of reconciliation between the offenders. Here, offenders show their willingness to forgive each other and end the conflict between them.
- Ashes for catching the knee: A rite of reconciliation between the offenders and the ancestors. This is supposed to appease the anger of the ancestors who might have reacted or may react by sending a calamity or disease to the offenders or to the community as a whole.
- Ashes on the community: i.e. reconciliation between the community, the offenders and the ancestors for peaceful relationships on all levels. The community grants pardon to the offenders in the presence of the ancestors.
- Joking relationships play a very important role in the reconciliation of conflicting parties. All the clans have their playmates who throw ashes for each other in times of crisis to sympathize and console each other. The playmate is also a sympathetic friend whose intervention automatically calls for an immediate solution. The Ash -

thrower is included in this category.

- The Ash thrower's intervention is considered final. Under no circumstances should his/her intervention be disputed or the effectiveness of what he/she does be in vain. The Dagaaba believe that all conflicts can be resolved. There is no conflict, tension or 'heat' that cannot be reduced to ashes. Any opposition to reconciliation results in a definitive and absolute separation from the community and the ancestors. This is the worse evil in traditional African societies⁵⁸ because separation symbolizes death.

The celebration itself is made up of 3 rituals. These are:

- 1) A ritual for the reconciliation of the offenders,
- 2) Reconciliation between the offenders and the community,
- 3) Reconciliation between the community and the ancestors.

When the above rituals are performed correctly according to the stipulations of the tradition then, thus begins the re-establishment of the initial equilibrium of the society i.e. Peace/harmony.

4. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

From the above analysis, we see that the Church's understanding of sin and reconciliation is not so foreign to the Dagaaba Christian from the point of view of Dagaaba traditional concept of sin and reconciliation. Dagaaba reconciliation is imbued with rich symbolisms and meanings that have proven to be very effective in

⁵⁸Cf. Healey and Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology, pp. 116-117.

reconciling conflicting parties. However, the Christian faith demands that the Dagaaba transcends this traditional view to grasp the true meaning and consequences of sin in Christian life and the urgent necessity of reconciliation. Where does the Dagaaba find Christ in all this? How significant can the role of the Church be perceived in all this?

Sin from the biblical perspective (cf. Gen. 3; Mt. 25:31-46) brings about true alienation with God, within oneself, with others and with the cosmos. Sin therefore distorts the original established equilibrium that God foresaw in the beginning of creation (Cf. the Genesis account in the light of God's creation as a reflection of peaceful co-existence). Sin is not just a shameful act as understood by the Dagaaba, but a failure of human beings as regards their true vocation and identity (i.e. image of God). It is experienced as humiliating. Individuals and the whole society suffer as a result of this. It is in this regard that Vatican II talks about the social consequences of sin or what human solidarity in sin is all about i.e. individual sins having repercussions on the entire human community.⁵⁹ This whole idea of solidarity in sin complements so well the Dagaaba notion of sin as a communal event.⁶⁰

God is a God of peace. He loves peace and that is why he desires reconciliation⁶¹ He desires that, human co-existence reflect that of the Trinity, the example par excellence of peaceful co-existence in love.⁶² Therefore to draw all to himself, God through Christ reconciles the world to Himself and pleads that we let

⁵⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 25.

⁶⁰ Cf. p. 32, the role of the community in the celebration of reconciliation.

⁶¹ Like the prodigal son's father, God waits eagerly for our return (Lk. 15:11-31). On our return, God turns a sad event into a joyful event – reconciliation.

⁶² Cf. Last Supper discourses in John's Gospel with particular reference to the prayer of Jesus (Lk. 17).

ourselves be reconciled to Him (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20). This plea resounds throughout history, from generation to generation and in every tribe and nation. This was the basis of Christ's ministry. Christ in his person and ministry not only proclaimed the Good News of God's mercy but exercised it. God's forgiveness through Christ was offered as a gratuitous gift to sinners (Cf. Col. 1:20-22). And since then, Christians have benefited constantly from God's forgiveness through the Church as an expression of his love and quest for peace.

As already mentioned, reconciliation is the mission of the Church.

Reconciliation finds a permanent historical expression in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, in which the Son of God calls together 'his brethren from all peoples' and, as her Head (Cf. Col. 1:18), is her principle of authority and action that constitute her on earth as a 'reconciled world'.⁶³

This implies that, reconciliation must first and foremost be an event in the Church's life. It is then that the Church as a 'reconciled world' can be very instrumental in the conversion and salvation of sinners. Here, the Dagaaba community is called to transcend its tribal boundaries and clan divisions to consider itself as part of this 'reconciled world' with a common mission.

Christ is our peace (Cf. Eph. 2:12-16). Through his death on the cross, he has established perfect integrity between God and humans, between humans and their fellow humans and finally, within the human heart. In him, all hostility has been killed and all who are incorporated in him through baptism (LG 11) are restored in the true and authentic life-giving relationship with God. They have gained their reconciliation and peace (Cf. Rom 11). Once reconciled, the Dagaaba community is therefore called

⁶³Paul VI, On Reconciliation within the Church, (Washington: U.S.C.C., 1975), pp. 3-4.

to transcend its tribal and boundaries and clan divisions to consider itself as part of the 'reconciled world', the Church. By proclaiming the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), through the 'sacrifice of ashes, Dagaaba Christians pursue reconciliation as an act of love for one another and towards the whole human race. For them, reconciliation will no more be one option among many but the only option.⁶⁴

It is in this context that Dagaaba Christians are called to renew and re-express their quest for peace and harmony through the practice of reconciliation. The renewed understanding of reconciliation through Christ enriches and consolidates Dagaaba convictions about reconciliation. If this is well grasped, Dagaaba rites of reconciliation will become "the nursing mother of love and the begetter of unity."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cf. Mark Hay, Ukubuyisana: Reconciliation in South Africa, (South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1998), p. 165.

⁶⁵ Paul VI, On Reconciliation within the Church, p. 13.

5. CONCLUSION

The intent of this chapter was to explore the dynamics of ‘the sacrifice of ashes’, its theology and practice from the Dagaaba point of view. This we did with the help of a structural analysis of the rite itself. We also considered from a Christian perspective how best this could be understood with the central role of Christ and the role of the Church as our focal point of reflection. The entire chapter sums up to give us a better knowledge about reconciliation and its practice in the Dagaaba community. Assisted by the knowledge acquired from this chapter, we shall take a case study as a practical illustration of an attempt towards the liturgical inculturation of Dagaaba reconciliation within the context of the celebration of Ash Wednesday.

CHAPTER IV

A CASE STUDY:

RECONCILIATION OF SEPARATED COUPLES ON ASH WEDNESDAY

1. INTRODUCTION

During the patristic age, with the ritual celebration of public penance within a liturgical celebration at the beginning of Lent, it became evident that this practice tended to separate too much the penitents from the rest of the community. Slowly, the faithful lost the sense of their sinfulness. The reconciliation of separated couples on Ash Wednesday if not well integrated could also lead Dagaaba Christians to loose sight of their sinfulness. It should be well understood that the reconciliation of separated couples is only meant to be a sign for all who experience separation within themselves, with their neighbours and with God. And therefore, the separated couples should also see themselves as having a very important and privileged role to play on this day of reconciliation. Once they have been led by the community to get reconciled with each other, they in their turn must witness and convey the message of reconciliation in the community. To stress this ministry of reconciliation, it would be appropriate if provision were made for the separated couples to participate in the

distribution of ashes to the whole community.

In this chapter, we shall briefly touch on some basic ideas about Dagaaba traditional marriage, divorce, separation and reconciliation. This will pave way for a better understanding of how the reconciliation of separated couples can be celebrated within the context of Ash Wednesday. But before we move into this area, we shall first of all consider the link between Ash Wednesday and the 'sacrifice of ashes', how the two celebrations complement each other in terms of symbolism and meaning and finally, out of this will flow our case study as a practical illustration of this.

2. DAGAABA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE.

Two terms express Dagaaba marriage, *pog-de* (wife taking) for the man and *sir-kul* (husband-homing) for the woman. For the man, marriage is considered a means of acquiring someone to render domestic services, the sole domain of women. For the woman, marriage is seen as the initial step in starting her own home. Nevertheless, in both cases, the main purpose of marriage is procreation and the legalization of offspring.

Dagaaba marriage can be defined as the union of a man and a woman, having in mind the reciprocal services of domestic life and the procreation of children. This union is made possible through agreement between the kinship groups of the man and the woman. Dagaaba marriage requires that the woman leaves her home for that of the man, this allows for polygamy. It marks also marks a change of status for them and establishes new relationships of consanguinity and affinity.

In the past, the explicit consent of the man and woman was not necessary.

However, a period of courting (*pogebuobo*) was foreseen for that purpose. Here, it was the man's responsibility to take the initiative and court the woman. The woman showed her consent by accepting cowries from the man's family. The woman's family received the bride wealth,⁶⁶ not as an outright purchase, but as a symbolic gift of cowries and parted with their daughter. The man's family on the other hand received the woman as a gift. This way of proceeding still prevails. But today, due to the scarcity in obtaining cowries, money is generally accepted.

No age limit is stipulated as regards marriage except on the basis of one's physical and psychological development i.e. when one can be said to be ready for marriage. Some qualities to be looked out for in a boy or a girl are: politeness, respectfulness, one who is not a thief, hard working, good cooking, capable of looking after a family, etc.

Marriage creates a new relationship between two clans. It gives exclusive sexual rights to the individuals involved and legalizes the marriage and offspring. It also imposes on the individual, services and obligations to be rendered to the clans such as visiting sick members of their clans, attending funeral, etc.

To sum up, marriage is not only the individual's affair but also communal. It is meant to establish a lasting relationship between the families/clans of the partners.

⁶⁶ Cf. Shorter, African Culture: An Overview, p. 90.

According to Fr. Shorter, in most African cultures bride wealth is understood as an indemnity to the bride's family for their expense in bringing her daughter up. It is also a compensation for losing a productive and reproductive family member and a legal document, signifying that marriage has taken place and that the husband has conjugal rights. It legitimates the children of the union and confers legal rights over them upon the father. And finally, it stabilizes marriage, because many individuals of the bridegroom's family contribute to it and many individuals of the bride's family benefit by it.

2.1. Divorce, Separation and Reconciliation.

As already mentioned, Dagara traditional marriage is considered a life-long commitment. This however, does not exclude the possibility of separation and divorce. To mention but a few, breakdown of marriages can occur in cases of infidelity, infertility, stubborn refusal to comply to a grievous prohibition, utterance of curses against each other as regards the attendance of each other's funerals, and the refusal to adhere to the implications of marriage in terms of responsibilities towards the respective clans of the partners as already mentioned above.

Dagara say that, "quarrels in marriage are as old as marriage itself", that is why attempts are always made to settle them. All marriages in principle should be successful and long lasting. But where there are grave difficulties, separation and not divorce, is the norm. The return of bride wealth is quite rare in this society. The Dagaaba say, "quarrels can enter a marriage, but the 'going to call back the wife' is the settling of the quarrel. Even where the case is beyond repair, you may reject your wife but you never refuse her funeral.⁶⁷ To repair broken marriages, couples can be asked to provide some animals or birds and some produce from the field. This varies from case to case depending on the gravity of the issue at stake.

⁶⁷Cf. Tengan, "The Institution of Marriage among the Dagaaba", in Edward Tengan, ed., Dagaara and Sissala Traditional Marriages in the Light of Christianity, p. 30.

3. THE RECONCILIATION OF SEPARATED COUPLES ON ASH WEDNESDAY

3.1. *Ash Wednesday and 'Baghr Tampello' (The Sacrifice of Ashes)*

Lent begins with the imposition of ashes and the invitation to 'repent and believe in the Gospel' (Mk 1:15). This is the most appropriate time for the Church to awaken in all the faithful the urgent necessity of repentance and reconciliation. Initially, the imposition of ashes was reserved to those guilty of serious sins.⁶⁸ Upon the recommendation of pope Urban II, this rite gradually became universal embracing all the faithful.⁶⁹

From the Scripture the use of ashes is a sign of repentance (Cf. Gen. 18:27; Job 42:6, Mt. 11:21). According to l'abbé Julien, by their nature, ashes are also a symbol of death and warning of the reduction to dust (Cf. Gen. 3:19).⁷⁰ However, it is worth noting that in the Bible, 'Dust' and 'ashes' are portrayed as related concepts and very often a mingled concept in usage that the Church has also inherited. For instance, on Ash Wednesday, the New Missal makes reference to ashes as showing that we are dust. On the whole, dust/ashes can be understood as a symbol of scattering or dispersal, a symbol pointing to the nothingness out of which we are created and the nothingness to which sin leads.

⁶⁸ Cf. Adam Adolf, The Liturgical Year: Its History and its Meaning after the reform of the Liturgy, trans. J. O'Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 95.

In the early beginnings of the Church, this rite, understood as an expression of sorrow and repentance, was foreseen at the beginning of Lent for those guilty of a serious sin. It was done within the context of a community liturgical celebration where penitents were officially admitted into the 'order of penitents'. The final celebration of reconciliation normally took place at the end of Lent.

⁶⁹ Cf. Adolf, The Liturgical Year, p. 98. Pope Urban II made this recommendation during the Synod of Benevento in 1091.

⁷⁰ Cf. Beatrice Callery, "Ash Wednesday: A Celebration of Values". Worship, 66 (1992) no. 1, pp. 54-55.

With the advent of Christ, ashes as an expression of sorrow and repentance are “not only a reminder of death but inevitably (though tacitly) a pledge of resurrection. The ashes of a Christian are no longer mere ashes (...) but a sign of Christ victory over death.”⁷¹ Can this be said of Dagaaba experience of ashes in the context of reconciliation?

The Dagaaba experiences the ‘sacrifice of ashes’ as the ‘cooling down’ of a conflict, rendering it incapable of ‘burning again’ by means of a ritual. In other words, conflicts are called to ‘die out’ completely. When this understanding is confronted with the risen Lord, the story does not end there i.e. leaving the past in ashes because with the risen Lord, a new reality, a new life must spring out of death. In the same way, through the celebration of reconciliation, participants are called to let their conflicts ‘die’ and to experience new life in Christ. Reconciliation must pave way for the creation of ‘new hearts’ for new relationships. With this understanding, the ‘sacrifice of ashes’ within the context of Ash Wednesday will not result in a confusion of symbolism for the Dagaaba Christian but a renewal in understanding that will demand new forms and approaches in reconciliation.

⁷¹ Thomas Merton, Seasons of Celebration: Meditations on the Cycle of Liturgical Feasts, (Canada: Ambassador Books, 1965), p. 114.

3.2. The Inculturated Rite

3.2.1. THE SETTING OF THE PLACE

The reconciliation will be celebrated within the context of the Eucharistic celebration. It is foreseen in two parts namely, the ritual of ashes (the reconciliation rite) and the Eucharistic celebration (as a thanksgiving celebration). The first will be within the vicinity of the Church but outside the Church building, preferably under a tree whilst the second, takes place inside the Church building. Under the tree, an icon, 'house of God'⁷² will be placed right in front of the congregation. (see fig. 3). This way of proceeding is to mark the distance/separation between the community and God, and to show the necessity of reconciliation before approaching God's altar.

A calabash of cool water will be used to perform the reconciliation rituals. Before the water and the ashes are used, they will be blessed so as to make them effective in bringing harmony and coolness. The ashes will be used for absolution.

The Word of God will be placed on a traditional stool that symbolizes God's throne. The skin represents the ancestral shrine through which the community will communicate with God. All sacrificial elements will be placed on the skin.

⁷² Cf. Tengan, House of God. This icon is found on the cover page of Tengan's book and is designed by Stefan Bekaert. It is an icon representing the House of God that is built on Jesus Christ the source of unity of all clans and peoples. The icon has a representation of all the totems of the different clans. This symbolizes the original harmony and unity that God intends for them as a community. The Church on top symbolizes Christ as their new totem and dume, the power of God manifested to them through Christ's salvation. For further explanation, see footnotes on p. 25.

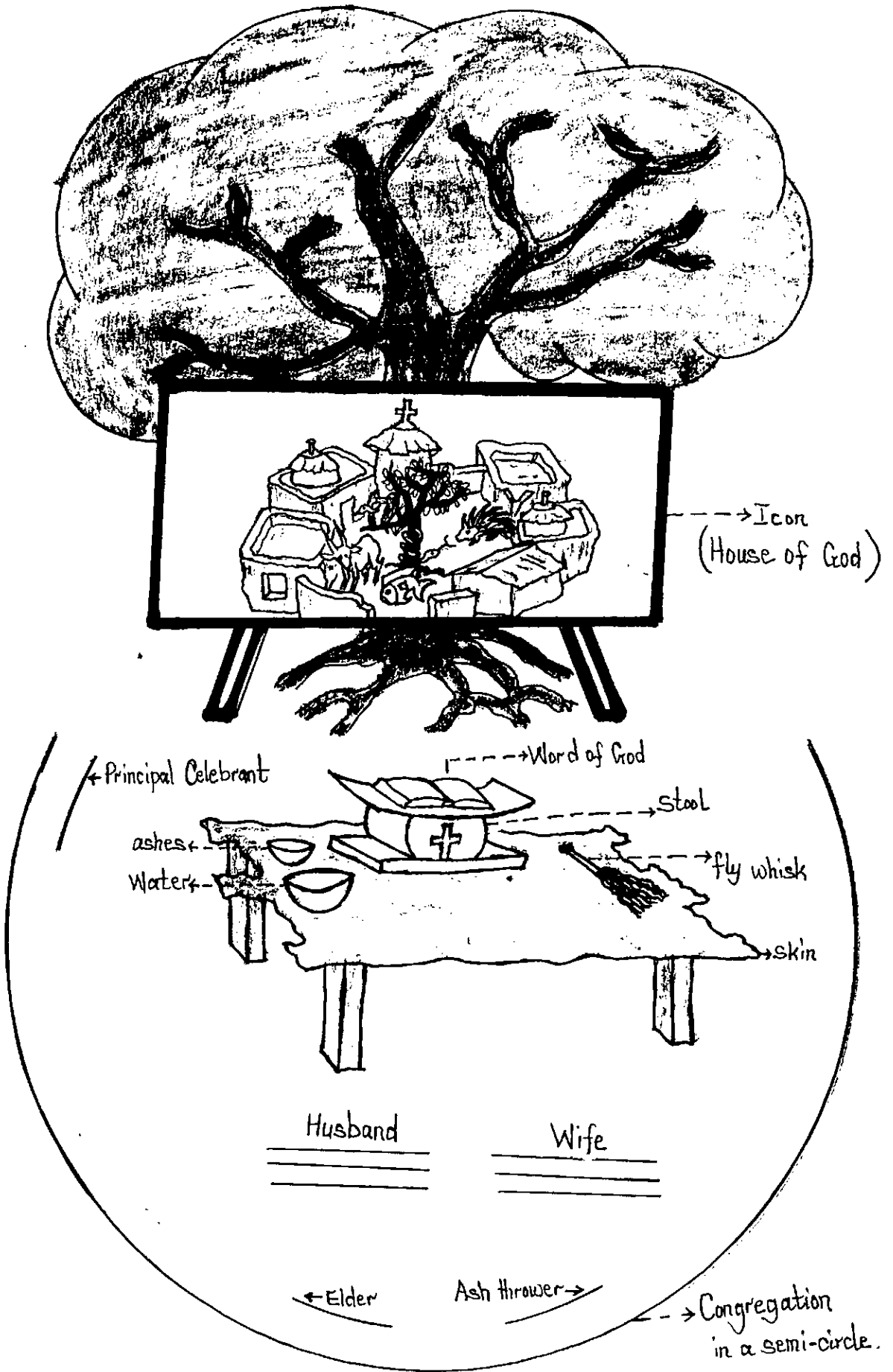


Fig. 3.

3.2.2. A RECONCILIATION RITE WITH REFERENCE TO SEPARATED COUPLES

In the coming pages, we shall limit ourselves to the first part of the celebration. This will strictly touch on the 'sacrifice of ashes' as an inculturated rite on Ash Wednesday. Our case study will be that of separated couples. The performers of the ritual itself are the elders of the community and the ash-thrower with the priest as the main celebrant.

The rite can be adapted and used for all seasons to emphasize the necessity of reconciliation in a Christian's life. It can also be taken as a helpful means of reminding Christians that Christ's way demands constant conversion so as to be strengthened, renewed and ready to meet him when he comes.

I) PURPOSE OF GATHERING.

The elder of the community will highlight the purpose of the ceremony.

Community Elder: Today is Ash Wednesday and we are gathered under this tree to respond to God's call for reconciliation in a special way. We shall do this by offering a 'sacrifice of ashes' in our traditional way. This will enable us to be reconciled with God and the ancestors, and with one another.

On this day, we also want to remember our separated couples in a special way. They have become strangers in our midst by distancing themselves from each other. In this, they are wounded, likewise each one of us as the proverb says, "the eye can not cry and the nose keep quiet". This means that the faults they have committed have an effect on all of us. We pray therefore that Jesus our 'dume'⁷³ may soften their hearts so that they may forgive themselves and that we may once

⁷³ Cf. Tengan, *House of God*, p. 82.

Tengan in his book suggests that for the Dagaaba, the best analogy for Christ is that of 'Jesus Christ as *dume*'. He says this will enable the Dagaaba to reflect more on the salvific significance of Jesus. As *dume*, Christ saved the Dagaaba from physical death and from all spiritual ills, such as *lonome* i.e. the fear of witchcraft, that prevent the Dagaaba from experiencing fullness of life.

again rejoice with them. However, before we begin the 'sacrifice of ashes', let us ask for the success of this celebration.

II) PEACE SEEKING RITUAL⁷⁴

The community elder comes in front of the ancestral shrine with a calabash of cool water to call for peace, protection and the success of the celebration.

Community Elder: Father, get cold water.

He then puts some in his mouth and spurts it over the ancestral shrine three times.

The third time he says:

Community Elder: Take this cold water and give it to the elders.

This is followed by a hymn invoking God's presence.

III) OPENING PRAYER

Principal Celebrant: Lord send us your spirit to cleanse us in the water of repentance so that our eyes, ears and hearts may be open to see and treasure your presence among us. May it change our attitudes and actions towards one another and towards you, in our journey, so that whatever we do, may be for the good of one another and for your greater glory.

ALL: Amen.

⁷⁴ Cf. Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara, p. 41.

V) PROCESSION OF THE WORD OF GOD.

The word of God is brought from the Church in a procession accompanied by a group of elders, one of them carrying the word of God riding on a horse.⁷⁵ One holds a fly whisk (cow tail) to guard against flies touching it. Three people are in front with three lit candles. The ashes and a calabash of cold water, that is to be used for libation and reconciliation, will also be brought at the same time and placed on the shrine whilst the congregation sing.

Upon reaching the shrine, the elder goes on his knees and places the word of God on the traditional stool. The celebrant now stands up and prays with outstretched arms invoking the spirit of God so that the word of God may be proclaimed in faith and love.

Principal Celebrant: God fill our minds, mouths and hearts with the power of your spirit so that your word may be proclaimed with faith and trust.

After the proclamation of the Word of God, the principal celebrant gives his homily covering the following topics:

- a) The importance of Ash Wednesday for the faithful at the beginning of Lent:
Repentance and reconciliation as an ongoing process in Christian life.

⁷⁵ Cf. This is a visible sign of kingship. In most cases, during public celebrations, this is reserved to kings or chiefs.

- b) The pursuit of reconciliation by all Christians as the only option to be united with Christ and with each other in love.
- c) Reconciliation as the mission of Christians in our world of today, a world wounded and scared by selfishness, wars, conflicts, etc.
- d) The unity of meanings that reside in the symbolic use of ashes in Dagaaba and Christian context with emphasis on the novelty in meaning with the advent of Christ i.e. hope in the resurrection.

VII) THE RITUAL OF ASHES

The celebrant blesses the water and ashes. He then pours water libation, followed by a prayer with the congregation responding.

Principal Celebrant: Great elder, spirits of the earth and land, and all you our ancestors, we your children have gathered here today to ask for your pardon, forgiveness and blessing. We ask for your help to be able to forgive one another and ourselves.

ALL: Father we ask you to forgive and bless us.

Principal Celebrant: We ask you to bless this water and ashes so that when they touch us they may be the sign of your cleansing and purifying power that frees us from the bondage of the evil one. May their touch give us renewed hearts to repent and to forgive. May they also be the sign of your forgiving love, peace, hope and generosity.

ALL: Loving father, purify our hearts and bless us

Principal Celebrant: Great Spirit, do not allow any evil to come to us through this water and ashes but rather peace, harmony and unity.

ALL: You our great elder are our strength.

Principal Celebrant: May the use of this water and ashes remove from our hearts, minds every stain of sin and evil, and reunite us with one another and with you great elder.

ALL: King of Peace bring us back to you.

He now calls the separated couples, each one by name to come forward. Each one answers when called, showing that they have come willingly to repent and to reconcile. He also calls the ash the ash-thrower and the community elder to come and witness to this. The ash-thrower dips his or her hand in cold ashes and uses that to 'catch the knees' of the couples. He calls each by name and says:

Ash Thrower: (Name of wife/husband) ... look, this was fire, now it is cold ashes. By these words, I have used God to catch you, I have used your ancestors to catch you.⁷⁶

Response: Amen.

The principal celebrant pours water libation as a sign of communicating with God and the ancestors. He says:

Principal Celebrant: Our father, these are your people, this is your will, let us be at peace, let the souls of the people be cool; you are our father, remove all evil from our path.⁷⁷

He then sprinkles some on the couples and on the community saying:

May the touch of this cold water bring you peace.

⁷⁶ Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara, p. 43.

⁷⁷ Cf. David Shenk, Reconciliation and Peace, (Nairobi: Uzima Press Ltd., 1983), p. 9.

Afterwards, he gives the calabash of water to the couples to rinse their mouths as a sign that they have forgiven each other.

Principal Celebrant: (Name)... take this calabash of water and rinse your mouth as a sign that you have truly forgiven each other.

Each one takes the water and rinses his/her mouth and pours it out saying to her husband or his wife:

(Name)...this calabash of cold water that I use to rinse my mouth is a sign of my forgiveness of you. May we be reunited once again more strongly in love.

The community elder comes before the ancestral shrine and encircles the shrine with ashes. The congregation, including the couples, then squat before the shrine. The elder then says:

Community Elder: We have disobeyed your commands of love and sharing by quarreling. We have shamed you with our greed, which separates us, from you. Forgive us your unwise children, our fault, for we are only children, may you accept us back Lord.

Then letting the wind take the ashes away, he continues to say:

Take these ashes, take these ashes, take these ashes and let this case be cool and do not get angry.⁷⁸

He turns to the couples and says:

Community Elder: May you be free from all that separates you from being in communion with one another, God and your ancestors. And may the peace and joy of Jesus our dume be with you.

COUPLES: *Amen.*

⁷⁸ Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara, p. 41.

VIII) GIVING OF PEACE

The couples embrace each other while the congregation sings. At this juncture, all welcome the couples to join the congregation in joy, ululating, giving one another the sign of peace and singing a thanksgiving hymn.

The presider in the company of one of the couples, chosen to represent the others, stands at the entrance of the Church and distribute ashes to the faithful. The faithful, after the reception of ashes proceed silently to the Church for the second part, a thanksgiving celebration inside the Church (Eucharist).

4. CONCLUSION

The above exposition brings us to the climax of our objective: the liturgical inculturation of 'the sacrifice of ashes' among the Dagaaba people. We took marriage as an example to illustrate this. Our main objective came out clearly when we established the link between Ash Wednesday and the 'sacrifice of ashes'. This was our background for the development of the 'sacrifice of ashes' as a rite within the context of a liturgical celebration.

As we have already seen, inculturation is a process that includes the whole of Christian life and consequently, every area of Dagaaba life. Our study was narrowed down to only one aspect of Dagaaba life, namely reconciliation. Although limited in scope, this topic can help us look to the future with hope if other areas of Dagaaba life undergo a similar process. It is in view of this that our general conclusion will be to provide us with some suggestions for further inculturation of the Christian message in other areas of Dagaaba life.

GENERAL CONCLUSION:

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER INCULTURATION OF RECONCILIATION AMONG THE DAGAABA

Inspired by the rich symbolic use of ashes as an effective means of reconciliation among the Dagaaba, I have tried to inculturate this idea within the context of a Eucharistic celebration. I gave preference to Ash Wednesday as the most suitable day to illustrate more meaningfully and clearly, the symbolic use of ashes from the Christian and Dagaaba point of view. In my exposition, I examined some basic concepts related to the identity of the Dagaaba, which helped to situate us in the Dagaaba world before proceeding to talk about inculturation. I also tried to highlight clearly the meaning of inculturation, especially related to the rite of reconciliation of the Church and the Dagaaba. By reflecting on the christological and ecclesiological implications of reconciliation, I presented my case study as a practical illustration of my objective i.e. the inculturation of 'the sacrifice of Ashes' on Ash Wednesday.

Despite the vast nature of our topic, reconciliation proves a vital component in all areas of life where humans interact. It must be acknowledged that a lot remains untouched and needs to be said about the need for reconciliation on the level of interpersonal relationships among the Dagaaba. Conscious of the fact that not all conflicts can be taken up within a Eucharistic celebration, as provided in Chapter four, I now intend to offer some brief suggestions as to how reconciliation can be further inculturated among the Dagaaba:

1. Yir tampello ('house ashes') i.e. the use of ashes in interpersonal relationships among the Dagaaba⁷⁹: Here, provision could be made for the symbolic use of ashes at any time when need be. For instance, in each Christian community, ash-throwers could be identified as healers and assigned the task of attending to all cases of conflicts. To them will be given the responsibility to reduce 'heat' between two conflicting individuals or families before calling on the 'sacrifice of ashes'. This could be practically conceived in an inculturated form of ritual making it easily accessible to all Dagaaba Christians.
2. Yir tampello and the Church's pastoral care for the sick and dying: Among the Dagaaba, ashes are also used in situations of sickness and death,⁸⁰ which are also said to also generate 'heat' in a household. In such situations, 'heat' is twofold: 'heat' on the individual especially in the case of sickness and, 'heat' on those affected i.e. the household. This corresponds very much to the Church's pastoral care for the sick and dying. Notwithstanding, the symbolic meaning and value of oil in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and the extreme unction, ashes could as well convey the same message and probably even better for the Dagaaba. In this regard, Thomas Merton talks about ashes themselves as a spiritual medicine, like all the sacramentals. For he says: "blessed and sanctified by the sign of the cross, the ashes become a health-giving medicine and they bring wholeness, cleanness to the body as well as

⁷⁹Cf. Tengan, The Social Structure of the Dagara, p. 44.

⁸⁰ Cf. p. 30

protection to the soul, both of these availing for the remission of sins.”⁸¹ This is another area that could be very much explored for inculturation to stress the aspect of consolation or ‘coolness’ for the sick and dying. The symbolic use of ashes could also be understood as bringing physical and spiritual healing to the sick, strengthening them in their illness and in their hope about the resurrection of the dead.

3. The theology of sin, forgiveness and communal responsibility from a catechetical point of view: It is vital that these concepts are fully understood and examined within each specific cultural milieu. Such a foundation ensures a more genuine and fruitful means of inculturating the Dagaaba understanding of reconciliation at the interpersonal level. When these concepts are well understood, reconciliation will be celebrated as a joyful event and not focused on the sinfulness of the penitent but on the mercy of God.
4. Joking partnerships: As we have already seen, the joking partnership refers to the pairing of clans and social houses into joking relationships. It can be understood as a pledge of friendship that is meant to facilitate daily interpersonal relationships and create a climate of trust among members of the joking clans. It is on account of this pledge that joking partners have the right and duty to intervene and advise each other especially in matters concerning conflicts and reconciliation. Whoever plays the role of Ash thrower assumes a role that is only understandable within the context of the significance of ‘ash’ in daily interpersonal relationships and on the basis of the joking relationships.

⁸¹ Merton, Seasons of celebration, p. 123.

From this perspective, joking partnerships are seen as a social mechanism for peace and reconciliation.

During my pastoral experience in Mali, I was given a *jamu* i.e. a family name which automatically inserted me in the joking relationships among the Bambara. Could this apply to all Christians who are strangers in the land of the Dagaaba? In this way strangers feel not only at home among the Dagaaba but actually part of the Dagaaba families as ‘families of God’? Furthermore, this could be linked to the ‘sacrifice of ashes’, which could have a more universalistic impact. Joking partnerships as a social mechanism for peace and reconciliation would no longer be thought to function exclusively among them but be open to all who profess the Christian faith and live among them.

“Happy are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons and daughters of God” (Mt. 5: 9). The Dagaaba quest for ‘coolness’ (peace) is in itself a Christian vocation. By seeking to reconcile individual, family and clan conflicts through the symbolic use of ashes, the Dagaaba make themselves instruments of peace and participate in preaching and witnessing of the reconciliation gained by God through Christ. A reconciliation fulfilled in a more complete and universalistic way.

Today, the special ministry of reconciliation within the Church and is aimed at making all Christians ministers of reconciliation in the World. Dagaaba Christians once forgiven and mutually reconciled in Christ will thus be able to bring to the world the forgiveness and reconciliation which Christ our Peace (Eph. 2:14) offers to humanity through his Church.⁸²

⁸² Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 79, p. 62.

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