

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

THE THEOLOGY OF THE UMBILICAL CORD WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE BAGWERE:

PASTORAL DEPARTMENT

***A PROJECT SUBMITTED AS A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS
IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES.***

PRESENTED BY:

KEREBBA NICHOLAS, C. S. Sp.

MODERATOR:


DR. REV. FR. KAWASONGA MARCELLUS

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DECLARATION

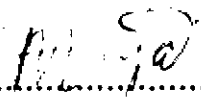
I hereby declare that this is the fruit of my own work achieved through research, personal reading and critical reflection. It is submitted as partial fulfilment for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any institute for academic credit. Finally, I have acknowledged all information from various sources.

Signed .....
Date...31st/1/2003.....

The Name of Student:

KEREBBA NICHOLAS, C.S.Sp.

This long Essay is submitted for Examination with my approval as the College Moderator.

Signed .....
Date...31-1-2003.....

The Name of Moderator:

DR. REV. FR. KAWASONGA MARCELLUS.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, relatives, friends, Bagwere elders, interviewees and the lovers of African Theology and those who are working for inculturation. May the Almighty God bless you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Carrying out the research, putting together ideas and finally writing a project like this is very tedious and demanding which calls for the support of others. I would like therefore to express my sincere gratitude to all those friends who have contributed in one way or another towards this work. It has not been easy but due to your support it has been possible. To begin with, I thank the Almighty God for His goodness, blessing, protection and guidance throughout my life and also for giving me the opportunity to share His knowledge. I thank my beloved parents who sowed the first seed of knowledge me. It is through their love and care that I am what I am today.

Special vote of thanks and appreciation goes to my moderator, Dr. Rev. Fr. Kawasonga Marcellus for his dedication, academic challenges and corrections. I can not forget to express my gratitude to my interviewees just to mention: Mr Lojjo Stefano, Mrs Lojjo Yozefine, Mr. Mbulaisimo Alfred; Mr. Mutaki Yokolamu; Mrs Kerebba Florence Ziporah and Mr. Mumbi John, for their spirit of generosity.

I owe a lot to the lecturers, staff, readers and students of Tangaza College for their generosity of knowledge, skills and values that I have shared during my stay at Tangaza.

Last but not least, with fraternity, thanks to the Spiritan Community for their support and encouragement through my journey of study and formation.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

“Kibumba” - Creator

“Bagwere” - An ethnic group in Eastern Uganda.

“Nagwere” - The founder of the Bagwere.

“Mugwira” - “to drop” or “to be a foreigner”.

“Titaabangi” - The Farther of many.

“Omukaago gusinga oluganda” - Friendship is better than biological relations.

“Ikaago” - Friendship.

Anamnesis - Memorial

Epiclesis - calling upon of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the gifts.

Invocation - to call upon

Christology - the study about Jesus Christ.

Doxology - The Liturgical formula for praising God.

ABBREVIATIONS

D.V.= Dei verbum: =The Declaration on Divine revelation

Can. = Code of canon Law

Ed. = Editor

Ltd. = Limited

Jn. = The gospel according to Saint John

Mt. = The gospel according to Saint Matthew

Lk. = The gospel according to Saint Luke

Heb. = The Letter to the Hebrews

1Tim. = The First Letter to Timothy

1cor. = The First Letter to the Corinthians

Cf. – Reference to

No. = Number

Vol. = Volume

Dr. = Doctor

Rev. = Reverend

Fr. = Father

Table of contents:

Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Denifition of terms	iv
Abbreviations	v
 CHAPTER ONE :	
1.1 General Introduction	1
1.2 The Evolvment of umbilical cord among the Bagwere	2
1.3 The umbilical cord	3
1.4 Who are the Bagwere	4
1.5 The Bagwere understanding of the umbilical cord	5
1.6 The function of the Ubilical Cord among the Bagwere	6
1.7 The notion of friendship among the Bagwere	9
1.8 The Blood friendship or umbilical cord relationship	10
 CHAPTER TWO:	
2.1 The content of Blood friendship or umbilical cord among the Bagwere	12
2.2 The significance of Blood or umbilical cord- among the Bagwere	19
 CHAPTER THREE:	
 Critical comparision between blood friendship and the New - Testament:	
3.1 Differences	23
3.2 Similarities	32
 CHAPTER FOUR:	
4.1 Pastoral application / Inculturation	35
General Conclusion	46
Selected Bibliography	48
Appendix: Questionnaire	50

Christianity. Thus let Christ find a home among the Bagwere and let them feel as the members of the Christian family.

1.1 THE EVOLVEMENT OF THE BLOOD FRIENDSHIP OR UMBILICAL CORD AMONG THE BAGWERE.

The Blood friendship or umbilical cord which is also known as Pact Blood brotherhood or sisterhood, evolved among the Bagwere people over Centuries. As a matter of fact, the practice is said to have been as old as the ethnic group of the Bagwere people themselves. However, it is quite difficult for one to be certain in the real dating of this practice. This is due to the very fact that there are no written documents or records to refer to this phenomenon. As a result of this, the information is based on interviews conducted among the elders who are regarded as the moving libraries among the Bagwere people. This brings the aspect that the elders are highly valued in the community. However, this in its self has limitations and consequently this will in one-way or another affect the research.

The Bagwere people are believed to have been very friendly right from the beginning. Nagwere who is believed to have been the ancestral father of the Bagwere is said to have been very friendly. The legend says, “when Nagwere first landed in the Eastern part of Uganda, he entered into the Blood friendship or covenant with the local chief who in turn saw him as a blood brother. This relationship did not only affect Nagwere and the local chief but also their children who treated each other as brothers and sisters. This covenant later came to be known as Umbilical cord

relationship. Nagwere was no longer a foreigner but a real citizen of the land. He enjoyed all the rights of the royal family since he was seen as a real brother to the chief.”¹ Hence, this so called Blood brotherhood marked the humble settlement of Nagwere in the Eastern Uganda.

The ancestors of the Bagwere who later in turn slowly after seeing its richness and values that were attached to it passed on to their descendants who kept it jealously and later on adapted this practice. Because of the values and uniqueness, it has managed to be preserved among the Bagwere People. It came to be seen as a sacred practice.

1.2 THE UMBILICAL CORD.

The umbilical cord is the " flexible tube of tissue connecting the placenta to the navel of the foetus and carrying nourishment to it before birth."²

The umbilical cord plays a very important role as far as the life and development of the foetus is concerned. Through the umbilical cord the foetus is fed with food, supplied with air and indeed ennourished before the child is born.³

Therefore, the umbilical cord is very instrumental in the development of the human person. It is the pivot on which the human society rests. As a matter of fact, it is life. It is so delicate that any damage of it puts the whole life in a serious danger if the right measures are not taken.

¹ *Interview: Alfred Mbulaisimo. July, 15 2002*

² A. P. Cowie *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*; New- York: Oxford University Press: 1989; Pg. 1386.

³ . Ibid Pg. 1386.

1.3 WHO ARE THE BAGWERE?

The Bagwere are the ethnic group of the Bantu people who live the Eastern part of Uganda. This group is relatively small as compared to other tribes in Uganda.

Etymologically, the word "Bagwere" comes from the word "Mugwiira" which means, "to be thrown", "to drop" or "to be a foreigner"⁴. Thus the Bagwere were seen as foreigners or people who dropped in the Eastern Uganda. The Bagwere are believed to have originated from either the Baganda or the Banyankole. This belief is based on the fact that the Bagwere have a lot to share with the two tribes for example, the names and totems.

The political structure; they were well organised politically with the King as the head known as "Iitaabangi" which means the father of the many. They had members of parliament, the heads of the clans and local chiefs. The king could give directives through his representatives.

Economically, they kept animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. They also grew crops such as bananas and yams. However, the bananas/ "matooke" were their staple food. They practiced barter trade.

Religiously, they are said to have been religious whereby they worshipped "Kibumba".

⁴ Op.Cit; Alfred Mbulaisimo; July 15; 2002.

1.4 THE BAGWERE UNDERSTANDING OF THE UMBILICAL CORD.

The umbilical cord among the Bagwere is accorded a great significance because of its uniqueness and cultural values attached to it. But what makes it very unique and central among the Bagwere? The Bagwere are very much aware of the role-played by the umbilical cord. This unique understanding, they derive from mysterious function it plays when the foetus is still in the mother's womb. In fact they would not hesitate to say that at this stage, the umbilical cord is the vehicle of life. This is so because the foetus totally depends on the mother who feeds it through the umbilical cord. So one can see the fundamental role, which it plays in life as a whole. Without it being in its proper place, then, we cannot dream of the development of the new life of the child.

It should be noted from the very beginning that the Bagwere when they are talking about life refer to it in its totality. It also includes the communitarian aspect. Bagwere, like any other African culture, cannot talk about life in isolation of the community. They cannot talk of the whole without the parts! Hence, their philosophy; "I am because you are"⁵, something which is common to all African culture(s).

⁵ *Interview*: Stefano Lojjo December 17; 2001.

According to my interview, carried out with some of the elders, it is said and strongly believed that, "this simple thread like fibre is a mystery and plays a mysterious function or role in the life of an individual and the community at large."⁶

1.5 THE FUNCTION OF THE UMBILICAL CORD AMONG THE BAGWERE.

When the newly born child and more especially the first born, there is a special ritual and ceremony of the umbilical cord which is performed by the elders and the entire community gathered to celebrate new life. This ceremony of the umbilical cord is performed when the umbilical cord of the baby breaks off. The ceremony marks the celebration of the new life in the community. It is very striking according to the interview with some of the elders. It is said, "When the umbilical cord breaks from the child, it is buried at a special banana plantation known as 'Ikaago' which literary means friendship."⁷ The burying of the umbilical cord has got anew and radical understanding among the Bagwere. It is referred to as a "new birth" or "to be born again" in the community. The word community here is used in the technical sense to mean both the living and the living dead or the ancestors.

Perhaps one can ask this question, why bury the umbilical cord? It is believed strongly as a means to stress the importance and the value of the land among the Bagwere. For the Bagwere the land is a very precious property and as a matter of

⁶ Ibid December 17; 2001.

⁷ Ibid December 17; 2001

fact it belongs to the ancestors. There is a unique relationship between the land and the people. The tie between the person and the land is so strong that when one dies, he or she has to be buried at the ancestral home and land where his or her umbilical cord is laying.⁸ Thus both the genesis and the end life is linked with it.

Kinship also among the Bagwere is linked and identified with the mystery of the umbilical cord. I find this to be strong whereby the elders when discuss about the origin and the relations of somebody or even the clan, they refer to this phenomenon of the umbilical cord. Thus the umbilical cord is seen as the summit of the community whereby an individual like the foetus in the mother's womb, he or she is linked to the community and the tribe at large.

After the baby has been born, the elders do the naming on the day when the umbilical cord breaks off. The name is normally from the ancestors. During the naming, there is a ritual that is performed. This ritual is linked with the umbilical cord. At this ceremony, people normally gather to celebrate the new life in the community. How is the reception of the newborn done?

According to Mr. Lojjo and Mr. Kaminza, "the Bagwere people have what they call as communal meal and that this meal is prepared by old women in a very special way." When preparing this communal meal, a small piece of the umbilical cord from the newly born child is cut and it is mixed in the meal. Then I asked an elder; why they mix the umbilical cord in the food? He replied, "This is a mystery, my dear

⁸ *Interview*; Yokolamu Mutaki, December. 18,2001.

son."⁹ He said that the significance of this is to show that the newly born child is being reborn or born again in the 'womb.' The word womb in this sense is used to refer to the community. This means that there is a very strong tie between the child and the community. The community is the womb of the child.

Bearing in mind the importance of the mother to the child, the child's life totally depends on the mother through this thread like fibre. By analogy, it implies that the community has the responsibility and duty to bring up the child as the mother. Therefore, this meant that the life style of the child up to maturity must be modelled and reflect the values of the community.

Another significance attached to the communal meal is that, " when both parents accept to partake in this meal, then, it is an official acknowledgement of their fidelity to each other as a husband and wife. Thus child born and especially the first-born, is declared legitimate."¹⁰ Otherwise, "if any of the parents partake in meal yet knowing that he or she was not faithful in the marriage covenant then the child could die."¹¹ From this kind of strong believe, this communal meal was a yard-stick for fidelity. Consequently, the child born is legitimate and can be the heir of the family. Then, "the child would be "incarnated" into the "new womb" that is the community."¹² The community like the womb is charged with full responsibility to see that the child grows in the right manner. Otherwise, the womb stands to be blamed since it is very

⁹ Op. Cit . Stefano Lojjo, December; 2001

¹⁰ *Interview*: Florence Ziporah Kerebba; July 15, 2002.

¹¹ *Ibid* July: 15,2002.

¹² Op. Cit Stefano Lojjo; Dec. 17; 2001.

clear that there is collective responsibility as far as the up bringing of the child is concerned.

Moreover the umbilical cord was also seen as a unifying factor, which could never be broken at any cost. It was a chain around which the relationship was peddling. It could bind individuals, families, and clans together. As a masterpiece of the relationship, then any attempt to interfere with it, implied that the whole life structure was threatened and indeed in great danger.

1.6 THE NOTION OF FRIENDSHIP AMONG THE BAGWERE.

For the Bagwere, friendship is highly honoured and respected. Sometimes it is perceived as a “divine” call due to uniqueness and enrichment attached to it. Why? Because among the Bagwere, there is an expression that, " a friend in need is a friend indeed."¹³ This can be equated with the story of the Good Samaritan. According to the Bagwere culture, friendship takes two forms thus: ordinary friendship and blood friendship, which is extra ordinary.

However, my main focus is going to be on the blood friendship. This notion of friendship is very striking and because of its uniqueness as it is going to be developed later on. This kind of friendship is highly respected and valued among the Bagwere people. In legal terms, it is a covenant with all its requirements. The covenant establishes a mutual understanding between the two parties and is

¹³ Ibid July 28, 2002.

irrevocable. It is very important to note that this kind of covenant is reached when the two parties willingly give their consent freely to each other without external pressures. Hence, they need ample time for proper discernment before the act of commitment to the covenant since its lifetime project.

1.7 THE BLOOD FRIENDSHIP OR UMBILICAL CORD RELATIONSHIP.

According to the Bagwere, the blood friendship used to take place among two or sometimes three parties. It was a covenant. The blood of the umbilical cord sealed this covenant. It is very important to note that not anybody could enter into this covenant because of its demands and implications were very strong. Thus both parties were to observe the fidelity and faithfulness. Because of this, it was only restricted to the elders. They were to be friends to each other for duration before entering into this mysterious relationship. The duration taken would go up to three or five years.

Perhaps one can ask, why all this long period? According to the research it is said that, "this is life time project and even it affects the children of the parties involved."¹⁴ Therefore, there must be ample time provided so that people may fully understand the task they are about to undertake in life. Similarly, this practice can be linked with Church's understanding of the Christian life especially during the period of Adult Initiation. Thus before entering this covenant there is ample time that is characterised by visitations and inquiries about the family background through the

¹⁴ Op.Cit; Yokolamu Mutaaki; July 15, 2002.

elders. This shows the significance and the importance of the commitment that the parties are yet to undertake. Hence, it was lifetime project.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 THE CONTENT OF BLOOD FRIENDSHIP OR UMBILICAL CORD AMONG THE BAGWERE.

There is a common proverb among the Bagwere and indeed among the Africans that “ Blood is thicker than water.”¹⁵ This expression is very rich and as a matter of fact is an affirmation that blood is life. It is equally important to point out from this perspective that for Bagwere, life is a gift from “Kibumba” that is the Creator. The blood is something that is very precious and indeed very dear among the Bagwere since it is life. It is from this angle that blood friendship or umbilical cord is treated with special respect and honour. This is due to the fact that the covenant was sealed by blood. Therefore, the whole ceremony is sacred, unique and mysterious by nature.

For the Bagwere, “blood friendship or umbilical cord involves two or three parties”¹⁶. From the research, “the parties were to be elderly and of the same sex. This is to ensure that both make a consent by themselves without any pressure from outside since this could not be allowed in the covenant.”¹⁷ Before entering into the covenant, the parties involved had to take a considerable amount of time and this was left to the elders to judge them worthy. This period was characterised with activities such as learning each other, openness, acceptance, trust, honesty, charity, love, and responsibility and ended with the initiation itself.

¹⁵ Joseph Healey, and Donald Sybertz; *Towards African Narrative Theology*; Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa: 1996; Pg. 257.

¹⁶ *Interview*: John Mumbi; July 17, 2002.

¹⁷ *Ibid* July.

2:1:1 The Covenant.

The word covenant refers to “any relationship of obligation, whether mutual or unilateral between the partners who by oath enter into the relationship.”¹⁸ It is also referred to as “a binding agreement or bond between two parties.”¹⁹ But the term covenant among the Bagwere, it is about love and life giving of oneself to the other person. The act in itself involves the “dying” of the self. The covenant was made through the blood that was cut at the umbilical cord of each partner. The two partners made a cut below their belly button thus the term umbilical cord relationship symbolised the ultimate union with one another and the entire community. This gesture symbolised that the two partners now share the same womb. They are no longer friends and blood brothers or sisters.²⁰

There is a general consensus from the interviewees that once the covenant is made, then, the two acquire the new status of the “real allegiance of the two blood-brothers to each other.”²¹ The Bagwere would not be hesitant to even say that, “Omukaago gusinga oluganda!” This expression means that friendship is better than the biological relations! In the covenant language, it puts the emphasis on the fidelity from both parties. The covenant is sacred and no human person can break it. Therefore, the covenant has the imprint character that cannot be repeated.

¹⁸ Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig; *The Modern Catholic Encyclopaedia*; Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd.; 1994; Pg. 209.

¹⁹ Joseph A. Komonchak; Ed.; *The New Dictionary of Theology*; Mary Collins: Wilmington Michael Glazier, Inc. 1987; Pg. 243.

²⁰ Op.Cit Joseph Healey. and Donald Sybertz; Pg. 257.

²¹ Ibid Pg. 257.

According to the Bagwere, once this covenant is performed, the two parties are charged with a high level of responsibility in mutually raising up their children. It is so strong that if one of the partners dies, the remaining has the duty to see the children through that is to say, he or she becomes an overseer or a guardian by providing their moral, material and spiritual needs. However, “the pact did not allow the living brother to participate in the family inheritance of the blood brother who died.”²²

The two families continued to enjoy the “koinonia” by sharing whatever they had in common according to the need. So much so that none of their family members was in need. For instance, when “a son of one of the two brothers reached the age of marrying, both the blood brothers took full responsibility to organize for successful marriage of their son. They gave material, moral and spiritual support. It should be noted at this point that there was “strict prohibition for the members of the two families of the covenant to marry each other since they belonged to direct line through the principle of consanguinity. Otherwise, they could be accused of incest and this was a mortal sin”²³. Hence, the covenant did not only affect the two parties but also their offsprings.

²² Ibid Pg. 258.

²³ Op. Cit. Yokolamu Mutaki; June; 12: 2002.

2:1:2 The Blood and Bananas.

The Bagwere, like other cultures, blood is life. It is the most precious gift that one can offer to someone who is very dear friend as a sign of the true and genuine love. When a Mugwere talks about this kind of love, “it is equated to what Christians call Agape Love”²⁴. Bananas are also linked with life. As their staple food and above all, when the four figure bananas were used in the sealing of the covenant, a higher value and meaning was given to it. If we are to use the sacramental language, they became “matter” while the word pronounced during the ceremony were the ‘form”. The Bagwere use a particular type of bananas known as “Ikaago”. From research, it is said that during the ceremony of sealing the covenant, four figures of bananas (Ikaago) were prepared and set ready to be roasted. The four figure bananas represented the four main characters in the covenant that is the two friends who are to seal the covenant, the witnesses, the community and “Kibumba”. The four bananas plus blood were used as the summit of the entire community life where the members brought their joys, prayers, good works and also sufferings.

2:1:3 The Ceremony.

This ceremony of the sealing of the covenant is not only solemn but also sacred among the Bagwere. How was the rite performed? During the ceremony people assemble from both sides of the two friends who were to seal the covenant. The two were to be initiated by the elder. Then a group of witnesses and only those who have

²⁴ Op.Cit. Stefano Lojjo; July; 15; 2002.

entered into the blood brotherhood or sisterhood are considered worthy. The eye-witnesses roasted the four bananas in the midst of the whole assembly. Once the bananas are ready, then, the two parties who are sealing the covenant are called forward by one of the witnesses. The first partner cuts at the umbilical cord, the blood is smeared on the two bananas and exchanged between the candidates who ate them simultaneously. After eating the four bananas the covenant was sealed. The two at this moment are no longer mere friends but brothers or sisters. Just as the Umbilical Cord is very important when the child is in the mother's womb, the two are linked together with this symbolic function. Similarly, they share the same "womb" and they are sons and daughters of two families and indeed entire community. Another area of interest to note was the emphasis put on the witness. They strongly believed that the supreme above them all was "Kibumba".

2:1:4 The Meal.

A part from the four bananas that were smeared by the blood of the two parties and eaten in ritualistic way by them, a group of old women were appointed to prepare a communal meal for the entire assembly. This meal was very central since it was a sign of communion not only for the blood brothers or sisters but the entire community. They were sharing life as a community. "A meal is perhaps the most basic and most ancient symbol of friendship, love and unity. Food and drinks taken in common are obvious signs that life is shared. In our African context, it is unusual for people to eat alone. Only a witch or wizard would do that. A meal is always a communal affair. The family normally eats together. Eating together is a sign of

being accepted to share life and equality”²⁵ For the Bagwere a meal is a communication between the living and the living dead.²⁶ The act of sharing a meal among the Bagwere, “is not only a symbol of unity but also brings about transformation in the community.”²⁷

The two parties, by sealing the covenant through blood, were seen as “victims” and at the same time the offerers of the sacrifice. The term sacrifice here is used to refer to the inner most intention of the person who is offering the sacrifice. They offer their lives to each other, to the community and consequently, to “Kibumba” through this “mysterical meal”. The meal shared is a sign of Agape. Therefore, the four bananas used in the ceremony, in the Sacramental language are “ Res et Sacramentum”. That is a visible sign that signifies grace.

2:1:5 The Celebration.

To mark the “new birth” of the two partners or parties, there is always a big celebration by the community. They celebrate the “new life” since the two are born in the community and life is communal. Life is a gift from “Kibumba.” The community therefore is obliged to offer Him the gratitude. During the celebration the typical musical instruments such as “namadu”, “mudiri”, “tongoli”, “miyogaand” and “muceredede” were played and people could express their joys by dancing and singing.²⁸

²⁵ Op.Cit.Yokolamu Mutaki July 15, 2002.

²⁶ Op. Cit. Joseph Healey, and Donald Sybertz; Pg. 257.

²⁷ Ibid Pg. 257.

²⁸ Op. Cit Stefano Lojjo July, 15 2002.

2:1:6 The Sacrifice.

The notion of sacrifice is highly up held and understood among the Bagwere. The sacrifice was not a mere slaughter of the victim but also as a demonstration of one's love to the other and the community at large. This case is referred to as the Agape. This love reaches its climax when the two parties "shed" their blood for each other. They shed the blood and indeed share life of one another by the four bananas which could be termed as "Res et sacramentum". The four figures of bananas and the blood smeared on them are symbolic acts of the sacrifice. The two blood brothers or sisters "die" for each other and to the Community. The community acclaims them as heroes.²⁹ The two blood brothers or sisters somehow suppress the ego in order to embrace the reality as demand of the covenant. Hence, the term sacrifice was used.

2:1:7 The Eye Witnesses.

The Bagwere have a very strong belief that any decisive moment in life has to involve the members of the community. The community has the obligation to bear witness. However, not every member of the community could be regarded as a witness in the strict sense of the term. It was only those who had entered the covenant who could bear witness to this particular case. The eye-witnesses had to be of the sex with the candidates and elderly. The sealing of the covenant was sacred since "Kibumba" was believed to have been present as the supreme witness.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid July 13, 2002.

³⁰ Ibid July 13, 2002.

A part from being the brothers or sisters, the eyewitnesses were to be exemplary to the community. The eyewitnesses had to contribute towards the celebration of the "new born" brothers or sisters. The contribution however, could be in terms of material, psychological and spiritual gifts. The eye-witnesses were also to accompany them on their journey of life. Amazingly, this requirement for witnesses is very enriching, supportive and well placed. If anything it is crystal clear that those eye-witnesses are similar to the Godparents or sponsors.

Another striking thing to note is that one person could not bear witness among the Bagwere. There had to be at least two and this particular case of the same sex. The eye-witnesses were equally charged with the responsibility of the upbringing of the children. This was used as an indicator to show how strong, unitive and supportive the relationship was.

2.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLOOD FRIENDSHIP OR UMBILICAL CORD AMONG THE BAGWERE.

The blood friendship or the umbilical cord relationship is highly treasured among the Bagwere. "It is seen as the most precious gift which one can offer to a friend. For there is no gift which one can offer to a friend than his or her own life (blood)."³¹ The two parties have to die by letting the past go so that they may embrace the new life and new reality. However, what kind of death is being referred to? It is the death to selfishness and the narrow understanding of who are my brother and sister. The

³¹ Ibid July 13, 2002.

occasion is an eye opener to the wider relationship. The two parties who are from different clans or tribes by the seal of the covenant, become brothers and sisters.

The blood friendship among the Bagwere promotes the spirit of “koinonia”. People share generously whatever they have without any discrimination. Their burning desire is that let nobody go on lacking anything in the community. As the motto goes, “Let us share the little we have so that we may enrich one another!”³² The implication of this is that through sharing we affirm our own existence. This is so because it is a self-realization through the love of the neighbour. Hence, the philosophy, “I am because you are.” which is very central in the community arena where there was an even distribution of resources and promoting the common good.

The blood friendship or umbilical cord relationship does not only help the Bagwere to understand what a covenant is but also to appreciate its uniqueness and the mysterious functions. For example, when the two parties enter into the covenant, they observe it and are obliged to keep the fidelity. This can help us to see as to why it was restricted to a particular group of people. It was ordained to only those who were exemplary in the community.

Further still, the blood friendship among the Bagwere was a strong weapon used to create peace and unity among various clans and tribes. For example, if two members of different clans or tribes sealed the blood covenant with each other, then, the two

³² *Interview*; Nakamwada Yozefina; July 15, 2002.

are automatically brothers or sisters and relationship affects their respective communities. This meant that the two clans or tribes could not go for war. Otherwise, they would be penalised for not only observing the covenant but for fighting their blood brothers and sisters.

In connection to the concept of peace and unity, the king for instance could use the bond established through the covenant to expand and strengthen the kingdom. Apart from marriage alliances, blood brotherhood was a common weapon used for consolidating power. As a result there was a cordial relationship between the sister kingdoms. Thus creating peace and tranquillity for their people and consequently this led to development.

Moreover, it also signified the fact that blood is life. These people acknowledged the fact that life was a noble gift from "Kibumba". This meant that "Kibumba" is sole giver of life and He is the one who can take it back. However, the concept of life was communitarian. Therefore, by eating the blood of one another through the seal of the covenant, it meant that they were sharing life not only among themselves but also with the entire community at large.

In a similar way it was used to safe-guard the traditional cultural values. For the Bagwere have a saying, "a community without culture has no identity and no future and indeed it is dead."³³ So the blood friendship was one of the main avenues of

³³ Op. Cit. Yokolamu; Mutaki; June 12, 2002.

inseminating the moral and spiritual values. The cultural values were highly preserved by the community. During the assembly, the parties sealing the covenant were being conferred the degree of morality as judged by the community.³⁴

It also inculcated some religious values and awareness among the Bagwere and they acknowledged the fact that life was a gift from divine reality that they called “Kibumba”. Above all, they strongly believed that during the ceremony of sealing the covenant, the supreme witness was “kibumba”. Hence, the covenant was irrevocable and no human person could break it.

Last but no least, the children of the two parties acquired a new status in the community. “They were referred to as the children of the covenant.”³⁵ Symbolically, they were seen as people who have been “bought” by the blood of their parents! What is interesting to note is that in case one of the parties was unable to propagate children, he or she automatically by the virtue of the covenant acquired the children who were legitimate through the adoption. Since the children were legitimate, then, one of them could be recognised as heir by the community.

³⁴ Op.Cit Alfred Mbulaisimo; July 15, 2002.

³⁵ Ibid July 13, 2002.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL COMPARISON BETWEEN BLOOD FRIENDSHIP AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

3.1 DIFFERENCES

The covenant among the Bagwere was sealed between the two equals, that is to say the two friends. Its main function was to create, foster a mutual horizontal relationship between individual persons, clans, tribes, ancestors and their God. The covenant was also limited by its very nature to a particular people. While from the Biblical point of view, the covenant is always between the superior and the inferior that is God and the chosen people. As a matter of fact, God always takes the first initiative and man on his part has to obey. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ inaugurates the New Covenant with his own blood. On the cross, the blood of Jesus Christ as the perfect victim seals, the new covenant between God and Man. He said to his friends: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you" (Lk. 22:20). Therefore, the covenant sealed by Christ's blood is not limited to a particular group of people but rather, universal.

Unlike the blood used in the sealing of the blood brotherhood or sisterhood among the Bagwere, Christ's blood brings about purification. The blood of Christ has the redeeming power. Jesus said: "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:28). Through the blood of Christ on

the cross, in the Spirit we are all children of God. The Spirit who dwells in us enables us to cry out Abba, Father! (Rom. 8:15). Hence, through the precious blood of Christ, we are all Children of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

For the Bagwere, the outward sign of the covenant is the cut below their belly button or umbilical cord and the four bananas signified the invitation to share the same womb between the two friends whereas in the New Testament the outward sign is the cross. In the New Testament the covenant is marked by the enthronement of Christ on the cross. Indeed the inauguration of the new covenant took place during the great episode which the Johannine author terms as the "hour or the prayer for the Glory of the Son." (Jn. 7:1-5).

Moreover, the covenant sealed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ not only surpasses but also brings to the fulfilment of the Old Covenant. In this case the blood friendship may be considered as part of the Old Covenant that Christ wants to transform and finally bring to fulfilment.

The Bagwere use the bananas and blood as the 'matter' to seal the covenant. The bananas are the produce of humankind when he or she tills the land. The bananas also bring about bodily nourishment and life whereas in the New Testament, Jesus Christ uses the bread and wine. As a matter of fact, the bread and wine, which Jesus

Christ gives, is his own body and blood respectively. Jesus is the bread from heaven that the Father has sent into the world. (Jn. vv. 32-35).

Above all, the bread that Jesus gives is the bread of life that is, it gives eternal life to those who eat it. Jesus said to his disciples: "The living bread is my flesh, the One who became flesh (assumed complete human nature (Jn. 1:14), offered himself to God in death, thus releasing his life for the life of the world. (Jn. 6:47). Therefore, "to eat and drink is to believe" (Jn. 6:47), "to appropriate, assimilate, and abide in Christ". (Jn. 6:56).

The meal that is shared among the Bagwere is an ordinary meal. It was to symbolize the communion with each other, a sign of oneness and unity. For them a meal is a communication between the living, the dead or the ancestors and "Kibumba". Whereas in the New Testament the meal offered by Jesus Christ is extra ordinary. For "the meals, Christ attends often echo the characteristically messianic age that is joy" (Mt. 9:15) pardon (Lk. 7:47) and salvation (Lk. 9:19)³⁶. Moreover, "the meals and works of Christ not only recapture the joy of paradise and review the miracles of the Exodus, (Jn. 6:31, Ex., 16:18), but also serve to announce another banquet, the Eucharist and beyond it is the eschatological feast itself."³⁷ Therefore, in the New Testament "Jesus inaugurates the meal of the New Covenant sealed in his own

³⁶ John P. Schanz: *The Sacraments of Life and Worship*; London: Geoffrey Chapman; 1967; Pg. 201.

³⁷ *Ibid* Pg. 201.

blood. In the place of the manna, he gives his flesh as nourishment, the true living bread that offers life to the world."³⁸

Saint Paul goes even further to develop the theology of the meal or Eucharist, when he says that the Eucharist is the meal that unites one with Christ and with his fellow Christians. "Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17) "In this way we are all made members of His body (1 Cor. 12:27) but severally members of one another (Rom 12:5).

Among this group of people, the meal is a symbol of unity and oneness in its own way, "in the New Testament, the meal acquires its full significance when Christ is present there. Christ frequently appears at meals; he is invited to the house of Lazarus (Lk. 10:38-42); to the wedding feast of Cana (Jn. 2:1-11). Frequently, his attendance at a meal symbolized the entire redemptive work He has come to accomplish."³⁹ Hence, the meal in the New Testament points to eschatological reality.

Further still, for the Bagwere the meaning of the meal is generally centred on the community. It has the binding character between the living and the living dead. While on the other hand, the Eucharistic meal is centred on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the sacrament. The notion of Unity and oneness is very paramount in the

³⁸ Ibid Pg. 201.

³⁹ Ibid Pg. 200.

Eucharistic meal. Therefore, "in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread we really partake of the Lord's body and we are raised into communion with Him and with each other."⁴⁰ This is so "because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (1Cor. 12:27), but severally members of one another (Rom. 12:5).

As stated before, the Bagwere perceive a sacrifice not as a mere slaughter of the victim but also as a demonstration of one's love to the other and the community at large. It is very important to make it clear that the kind of 'death' referred to by the Bagwere in this context is analogical. The two blood brothers or sisters by analogy die to each other by letting the self to go. Death as such is neither immanent nor does it actually occur during the sealing of the covenant. While on the other hand Jesus Christ in the New Testament becomes the paschal lamb that dies on the cross "as a ransom for many." (1 Tim. 2:5). For Jesus his death was definitive and actual though it remains a paradox. Ironically, the death of Jesus was "Jesus' hour of Glory and the truest exaltation, one with His enthronement in resurrection at the right hand of God."⁴¹

For the Bagwere, the aim of the sacrifice was achieved in its own way through the analogical "death of the two friends, while Jesus Christ achieved his task principally by "the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and

⁴⁰ Amanda G. Watlington, *Official Catholic Teachings: Christ our Lord*; Wilmington: A consortium Book: 1978; 354.

⁴¹ Evert Van Oostrom: M. AFR. *Class Notes Unpublished; The Johannine Literature*; 2002.

glorious ascension, whereby dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life (Cf. Easter preface of the Roman Missal).

For the Bagwere the sacrifice involved many “victims” since this could depend on the number of those sealing the covenant in a particular place and period. But Jesus Christ in the New Testament is both victim and the one who offers at the same time. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ was offered only once and for all (Heb. 25-28). Jesus Christ has offered a single perfect sacrifice that brings perfect forgiveness and holiness (Heb: 10:5-18). It is also important to take a note that the priestly character is brought out very clearly in the New Testament especially in the Pauline Theology where Christ is addressed the title of the High Priest.

Moreover, Jesus Christ’s death on the cross as a sacrificial lamb gave birth to two significant events: Thus He [“gave back the Spirit” so that, as he received from the Father at his baptism (Jn. 1:29-32), the Father may now give it to all human beings starting from the Son.]⁴² After being pierced by the Roman soldier, “and at once blood and water came out” (Jn 19:34). Amazingly, this has been interpreted by the Fathers of the Church as the event of “the creation of the New Eve, the Church, from the side of the ultimate Adam as he was sleeping the sleep of death(Cf.Gen.2:21-24). At the same time it was understood as the inauguration of the divine economy of the Eucharistic mysteries which offer the Holy Spirit.”⁴³

⁴² Joseph Ettorri, *Class Notes: Unpublished, Sacramento logy III (The Eucharist)* 2002; Pg. 32.

⁴³ Ibid Pg. 37.

The eye- witnesses among the Bagwere were to be of the same sex with the candidates and elderly who had entered the covenant but above all the supreme witness was “Kibumba”. While on the other side of the coin, there is explicitly divine witness involved in the sealing of the covenant as presented to us in the New Testament. For example, Jesus Christ in His public ministry was bearing witness to the Father. This famous statement reaches the climax when Jesus is brought to Pilate and asked: “So you are a king?” In response “Jesus describes His mission as a ‘witness to the Truth,’ testifying to God’s revelation by his teaching and acting.”⁴⁴ Truth in this sense refers to the biblical truth that is God’s revelation.

Apart from Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is sent by Christ to come and bear witness to Christ. The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth just as Christ himself is the Truth. For the Johannine author one of the fundamental roles of the Holy Spirit is to “bear witness to Christ and reveal especially the glorified Son.”⁴⁵ This becomes very central and critical in the life of believers because without the Holy Spirit it would have been impossible to recognize the risen Lord. Hence, “the Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin (unbelieving in Jesus) (Jn. 16:9); about righteousness (Jn. 16:10). And about judgement or triumph over evil (Jn. 16:11).

⁴⁴ Op. Cit. Evert Van Oostrom

⁴⁵ Joel B. Green: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel*; De Mont fort Street: Intervarsity Press; 1992; Pg. 349.

Furthermore, the disciples of Jesus Christ are often referred to as eye-witnesses. They have been commissioned by Christ in a very special way to bear witness to Him or to the Truth. This is only possible under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads them to the complete Truth. Thus Christ sends them just as the Father sent him to come and bear witness to Him in the world.

Another interesting element to note is the celebration whereby among the Bagwere, the celebration of the community is seen as the pivot on which the whole function rests. The celebration of new life for instance is understood as a community affair. While in the New Testament Christ is the summit of the celebration of any sacrament. During the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass, "the Church is nourished spiritually at the twofold table of God's Word and of the Eucharist."⁴⁶ Thus the Church grows in wisdom and in holiness respectively.

Further still, the area of distinction during the celebration is the fact that for the Bagwere, the celebration was salvific in character in the human history though in different way whereas in the Biblical context, it is focused on God's salvific act in the human history and this salvific act is Trinitarian. The celebration becomes the unfolding of God's saving power in history of humankind. This reaches its highest apex or climax in the paschal mystery that is the passion, death, resurrection.

⁴⁶ Austin Flannery, O.P: *Second Vatican Council: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium*; n 51.

ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus forming one single event of salvation of humanity that is made present whenever we celebrate Mass.

During the celebration of the Mass, we have the following “elements of prayer in an orderly succession: Dialogue; Preface or Theology; Introduction to Holy, Holy, Holy or Acclamation or A Trisagion: Christology; Account of the Last Supper; Anamnesis; Epiclesis; Invocation and Intercession; and Doxology.”⁴⁷ These elements are considered to be the chief elements making up the Eucharistic Prayer. While for the Bagwere in their celebrations, some of these elements were there but in a different form and structure.

The celebration of the blood friendship or Umbilical Cord among the Bagwere was non informal with words in form of instructions and the apex of it all was a meal. While in the New Testament and more especially in the modern Catholic Church today, when we talk of Mass, we distinguish two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These “two parts are closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship.”⁴⁸ Hence, in the Mass the table of God’s Word and of Christ’s Body, is laid for the people of God to receive from it instruction and food.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Op. Cit. Joseph Ettorri

⁴⁸ Op. Cit. Austin Flannery; S.C Art. 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid (D.V) Pg. 673.

Last but not least, our earthly Liturgical celebrations as Christians has the eschatological character that is, it anticipates the heavenly Liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Minister of the holies of the true tabernacles (Heb. 8: 2; Ps 110: 1).

3.2 SIMILARITIES.

Despite the differences of the values and functions as sighted above, the two modes of covenants have a lot to share in common and this can be used as a stepping stone for inculturation or pastoral application as this is going to be shown later in chapter four.

As the point of departure, in both cases the covenant is sealed by blood. Among the Bagwere for instance, the two parties involved into the covenant used blood to smear on the bananas that were exchanged and eaten by each one in turn thereby sealing the covenant. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ uses his own blood to seal the new covenant. Jesus said. “ For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26: 28).

The covenant in both cases, there is a new relationship that emerges between the parties involved. This relationship is so special that it leaves a mark on them. which cannot be repeated. The people involved are seen as a people set a part for a specific

function in the community. They were always referred to as the chosen or people of the covenant. Therefore, as people set a part, were to be exemplary to the community.

In both covenants, there raised the issue of adoption. The Children of the people of the covenant became not only adopted but also legitimate in the families. This meant that they were no longer foreigners but full members of the family with all the rights pertaining to them for instance they were heirs or co-heirs of the family.

The idea of witness is very common in both covenants. However, before one could qualify as a witness he or she had to be initiated first. This meant that one had to be initiated into the mystery before he or she could claim to be the holder of the same mystery. After which he or she could now bear witness to others.

Another area of common denominator in both covenants is the spirit of “koinonia” which prevailed among the holders of the mystery since they perceived each other as a brother or sister. As a requirement, they were not only to share with one another but also to live as people of one heart and one soul. This as their motto cemented the relationship among the people.

The notion of the sacrifice is highly up held and valued in both covenants. The sacrifice was manifested through the shedding of blood as a sign of one’s love for

the sake of his or her friend(s). The victims die from their own ego in order to embrace the wider relationship and the new reality.

The meal is equally very important in both covenants. The meal is a symbol of friendship, love and unity. By sharing a meal was also seen as a sign of sharing life. Since a meal is a symbol of unity and oneness, those who partake in the meal, were seen as the agents of that love, unity and peace. Thus the meal eaten had a religious value and function attached to it.

After entering into the covenant in both ceremonies, the fidelity to the covenant was expected from both parties. Each partner has the obligation and responsibility to be faithful to the covenant. Otherwise, failure to this was punishable.

The communitarian aspect was highly up held in both covenants. It is important to make a remark that in both covenants, people were bounded together with not only themselves but also with their Creator. It is no wonder that their lives had to be transformed.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 PASTORAL APPLICATION / INCULTURATION.

This research is meant to help the Bagwere to appreciate the richness and the values of their own culture with particular reference to the notion of the umbilical cord. With this at the back of their mind, then, they will come to appreciate and possibly deepen their Christian life or faith. They will welcome Christ at home and consequently have a sense of belonging. If this is done successfully, it will bear a positive fruits and as a matter of fact it will be an eye- opener to inculturation where the Church is seen as the family of God. This is very vital at this era where the Africans and Bagwere in particular “ want a theology they can identify with.”⁵⁰ It is important to note the fact that:

inculturation suggests a double movement: ‘ there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianisation of the culture. The gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain extent, a cultural phenomenon’ (Geffre’ 1982: 482), “Meanwhile it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context” (Schreiter 1985: 12f). On the other hand, it offers the cultures “the knowledge of divine mystery”; while on the other it helps them “to bring forth from their own living tradition original expression of Christian life, celebration and thought.”⁵¹

Hence, breaking “the idea of the faith as ‘Kernel’ and the culture as ‘husk’.”⁵²

The methodology of perceiving the faith as “Kernel” and the culture as “husk” is very crucial in helping us to understand our Christianity. This implies that we cannot

⁵⁰ Peter Wasswa Mpagi; *African Christian Theology: In Contemporary Context*; Kisubi: Marianum Publication Company Ltd.: 2002; pg. 111.

⁵¹ David J. Bosch; *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shift in Theology of Mission*; New York: Orbis Books; 1991; Pg. 454.

⁵² Ibid Pg. 454.

talk of the gospel in isolation of the culture. The two have to embrace each other as willed by the divine plan. This reached the climax when God became Man at the mystery of the incarnation. God out of His love and mercy, He came and made a home within us so that man could be saved. To drive this point at home, Mpagi quotes Waliggo: “ It means that as Christ himself chose to become man in order to save humanity, Christianity has no alternative but also to do the same in every culture and time in order to continue the salvation brought by Christ.”⁵³

Our human mind is accustomed to moving from the ordinary to extra-ordinary or from natural to supernatural. Similarly, the Bagwere understanding of the notion of the covenant, its values and demands is so rich that it should help them to catch the best glimpse of Christianity. After all, Christianity is a call to live according to God’s covenant which He makes with people through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Why should Bagwere have the best glimpse of Christianity? This is because the Christian understanding of the covenant is closely related to that of the Bagwere. For the Bagwere, the covenant is a binding force, life giving, unitive, obligatory, and irrevocable. Being at home with this, they stand a better chance to grasp and appreciate the richness of Christianity as a life of the covenant. Christianity therefore, should not be something completely foreign to them but rather a life style based on the new covenant in Christ. Thus it should bring new life and richness to the people.

⁵³ Op. Cit. Peter Wasswa Mpagi; Pg. 116.

Just as the umbilical cord sealed the covenant between the two parties and created the ultimate union with one another and the entire community, so is the sacrament of baptism. Why to compare this phenomenon with baptism? This is so because “ by baptism one is incorporated into the Church of Christ and constituted as a person in it, with the duties and the rights which, in accordance with each one’s status, are proper to Christians, in so far as they are in ecclesiastical communion and unless a lawfully issued sanction intervenes” (Can. 96). Through baptism all become adapted sons and daughters of God with the same equality and dignity before God, each building up the body of Christ (Can. 208).

The Bagwere through the covenant sealed by the blood, the parties involved plus their respective families enjoyed the spirit of “ koinonia”. They shared whatever they had in common. As a way of inculturation, this spirit should be taught and inculcated into the children and more so to the catechumens at the grass-root in Small Christian Communities. For the early Church lived this spirit: “All who believed were together, they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts. 2:44f). Through the spirit of “koinonia”, they can experience the Church as the family where there is participation. Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz quoting Kofi Appiah saying, “ For an African the centre of life is not achievement but participation”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz; *Towards an African Narrative Theology*; Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa; 1996; Pg. 116.

The African synod fathers highly exult the same spirit when they state that, “African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed community life in African societies expresses the extended family.”⁵⁵ However, this remains a big challenge for not only the Bagwere but also the entire Christians. As Christians one should ask himself or herself this question. How is my solidarity and participation in the Church? Am I active or not? And if not what can I do?

The Church is called upon today more than ever before to put emphasis on the “koinonia”. Let this spirit be lived in the Small Christian Communities.

On the contrary, the Church is experiencing division, hatred, envy and so forth. How can those who call themselves Christians remain divided? For Bagwere, “ harmony in the community life is highly up held. In fact this was a prime factor why people sealed the covenant. The two parties sealed the covenant with the motive of promoting love, peace, unity and tranquillity in the community.”⁵⁶ Equally, the local Church among the Bagwere should work for these cardinal virtues and guard them jealously since they will go to great length to create a harmonious community and promote peace and reconciliation.⁵⁷ The gospel of peace and reconciliation must be preached in homes, among the members of the Small Christian Communities and eventually consummate the universal Church. Hence, fulfilling the commandment of Jesus Christ: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I

⁵⁵ *The Church in Africa, No.43.*

⁵⁶ Op. Cit. Stefano Lojjo. July 18, 2002.

⁵⁷ Op. Cit. Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz; Pg. 116.

have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34-35).

Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz when treating the same concept of “koinonia”, quote Waliggo when he says.

The “koinonia” practiced in the early Church is nothing but familial relationship. Every believer is a brother or sister to the other. It was only through the subsequent development of the Church that this relationship and charismatic model of the Church became weak and was gradually substituted with the institutional model. One of the signs of the time in the Church has been the reawakening of this familial model through small groups, charismatic groups and others.⁵⁸

This kind of thinking is strong foundation for inculturation and moreover it is of the African model.

In chapter two, I mentioned the concept of the eye- witnesses as being very crucial and vital during the sealing of the covenant among the Bagwere. They were to be those who have been already initiated and were to be of the same sex with the candidates to be initiated. These eye- witnesses played a paramount role in the lives of the candidates. The eye- witnesses were to support their brother or sister (candidate) materially; morally, physically and spiritually in other words, they gave holistic support. This was meant to help the person to grow in the life of the covenant. I would like to compare the eye- witnesses with the God -parents today. But perhaps one can ask himself or herself, what is the role of a God- parent? Or how can a God -Parent accompany the newly baptized? The answer to this question

⁵⁸ Ibid Pg. 130.

is to adopt the roles of the eye- witness. The local Church among the Bagwere should reconsider the significance God- parents play in the line of eye- witnesses. As a matter of fact and indeed urgency, the God- parents and the parents are the backbone in the growth of the faith of those whom they are presenting to God. Why? Because they have been initiated in the mystery of the faith in which they have grown to a level of maturity and now they give a testimony by bearing witness. Hence, their authentic Christian way of life should be manifested especially in their homes and Small Christian Communities.

The God- parents like the eye- witnesses are called upon to support their children in baptism in a more holistic manner. The Church very often reminds them of cardinal role which they have in the upbringing of the newly baptized to the maturity in the faith. They are to fulfil this noble duty in collaboration with the parents and the individual concerned. By so doing this will go along way to foster the growth of the Church where she will be seen as a family of God where there is love, unity, solidarity, peace and participation. Perhaps we can ask, has the Church reached this level? The answer is no. Why? This so because some God- parents do not know their roles, some think that their role is at the baptismal font and once they leave the Church it marks the end.

At this point I would like also to put emphasis on the role of women. For long time their role has been jeopardized. The role of women is emphasized in the message of the synod that, " the equality of our Church as family also depends on the equality of

our women-folk, be they married or members of the institutes of consecrated life.”⁵⁹ God created man and woman as partners with different talents, which are supposed to be used in the building of one body, the Church. Let them explore their talents by taking up various responsibilities in the Church.

Another area of inculturation is the spirit of celebration. “According to the Bagwere tradition, whenever a child is born he or she is a source of joy and gift not only to the parents but also to the entire community. The community was very vibrating to celebrate the new life.”⁶⁰ But the question remains, do we have this spirit in the Church today? It is high time that the members of Small Christian Communities taken up this vibrate spirit to celebrate the life in local Church. The community should express their gratitude to God for the gift of new life in the Church. For the Bagwere, let them celebrate while playing their traditional musical instruments such as “mudiri”, “tongoli”, “miyoga” and emizira so that people can express their joys by singing and dancing. But looking at the Church today, the celebrations have been left to the rich thereby discriminating the poor. Remember that each person feels at home, when he or she is welcomed and this builds the sense of confidence, belonging, fraternity, and solidarity hence living by the gospel values.

In connection with the celebration, is the aspect of the meal is very central. A meal as stated before in the African context is very essential in people’s lives. It is a sign

⁵⁹ *Message no. 68.*

⁶⁰ *Op. Cit., Stefano Lojjo, July 18, 2002.*

of communion with one another, the ancestors and the creator. Sharing a meal is a gesture of love and unity. Each community member, therefore, is obliged to share the life with other through the meal. Failure to have communion meal with one another is a denial of love unity and life. Similarly the Bagwere should have the same attitude towards the Eucharist. They should perceive the Eucharist as the sign of love, unity and life. For Christ in a very special way comes to his people through the Eucharistic meal.

In the Eucharist we come into communion with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the community at large. The Eucharist is not only the sign of love and unity but also spiritual food for nourishment and life giving:

The blessed Eucharist in which Christ the Lord himself is contained offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. The Eucharistic sacrifice, the memorial of the death and the resurrection of the Lord, in which the sacrifice of the cross is forever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By the means of it the unity of God's people is signified and brought about, and building up of the body of Christ is perfected.⁶¹

Any baptised person should strive to see that he or she receives the Eucharist. This is so important because the Eucharist is the summit of our Christian life. Otherwise, failure to receive the Eucharist is the refusal to have life. For Christ said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven whoever eats of this bread will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51).

⁶¹ Thomas Pazhayampallil: *Pastoral Guide Vol. 11: Sacraments and Bioethics*: Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications: 1995;Pg. 133.

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II says:

The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes of itself the school of the active love for the neighbour. We know that this is the true and full order love that the Lord has taught us: 'By this every one will know that you are my disciple, if you have love for one another' (Jn. 13:35). The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way, it shows us, in fact what value each person our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers himself, equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine. If our Eucharist worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of that dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbour.⁶²

Nevertheless, not all Christians partake in the Eucharist. Then, what should be done to help such people who do not partake in Eucharist? I think the Church ministers should help the community to recapture the significance and the effect of communion, which is expressed through the meal. For we have seen that the four bananas plus blood among the Bagwere were used as a summit of community life where the members bring together their joys, prayers, good works and sufferings. Why not to choose a day and have a similar celebration? Then, thereafter, the Church minister should use this opportunity to explain a deeper meaning of communal meal in relation to the Eucharist.

⁶² Pope John Paul II; in " *L'Osservatore Romano*"; ed. English; 24 March; 1980; Pg. 6.

SOME LIMITATIONS.

Much as I have showed, the Bagwere understanding of the covenant is expressed in the umbilical cord relationship, it is so rich but it cannot exhaust the unfathomable mystery of God's love for his people. So this remains a challenge to theologians and scholars.

The blood relationship among the Bagwere is confined to a particular group of people, clan and tribe. This means that the relationship is narrow and particular. And this narrows the sense of universality. As the Bagwere say, blood is thicker than water on other hand Christianity teaches that the baptismal water is thicker than blood!

Another limitation is that this practice among the Bagwere is dying out. It is not very common these days. This means that the young generation do have enough knowledge about this kind of relationship. It is only the elders who own the key to the library, so when an elder dies marks the end of this knowledge.

Much as we advocate for inculturation, we need to have a critical mind. Otherwise we can easily water down the gospel message in the name of inculturation. This means that the Church has to localize and yet not to lose a universal aspect in some specific areas such as the Eucharist.

Inculturation has also faced a lot of opposition from the so-called conservative Christians, that is, from the Church ministers and the laity. This is due to the fact that they have been brain washed in the sense that anything cultural is perceived as evil.

GENERAL CONCLUSION.

What we have tried to come up with and maintain throughout this essay is the approach of theology from the African perspective as a means to inculturation. The title “The Theology of the Umbilical Cord” is a stimulus to help an African and the Bagwere in particular to understand and reflect upon their relationship with “Kibumba”. How does a Mugwere encounter God? Is there any relationship between the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ and the culture? From the research, I can say that as a matter of fact, the gospel and the culture are almost inseparable. To support this argument Mpagi quotes Waliggo: “ It means that as Christ himself chose to become man in order to save humanity, Christianity has no alternative but also to do the same in every culture and time in order to continue the salvation brought by Christ.”⁶³ Hence, the two need each other.

The Bagwere unique and mysterious understanding of the notion of the umbilical cord is rich and vast. It has a lot to share in common with the New Testament understanding of: covenant, blood, meal, celebration, sacrifice, and eyewitness. The critical understanding and analysis of the umbilical cord and Christian life is a stepping-stone towards inculturation among the Bagwere. It is a form of contextualising theology so that it can be relevant to the people.

⁶³ Peter Wasswa Mpagi: Pg. 116.

It remains a challenge to theologians and the Church ministers. They are called upon to study theology, digest, allow transformation to take place within themselves and thereafter they will be able to communicate effectively to the people and this will touch people in their own lives. The theologians and the Church ministers have a task to bring Christ at home and also help people to have a sense of belonging in the Church as a family.

It is my hope therefore that the effort made in this research will benefit the Bagwere to see the richness and beauty of their culture and this can be used by them to understand, appreciate and deepen their Christian way of life. However, this cannot be achieved within a short time, we should allow the dialogue between the gospel and culture to continue. This has its limitations as mentioned and sighted above.

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Mr. Mutaki Yokolamu; Decmber; 2001 and June -July; 2002.

Mr. Mbulaisimo Alfred; July; 2002.

Mr. Mumbi John; July; 2002.

Mrs. Nakamwada Yozefina; July; 2002.

APPENDIX

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE THEOLOGY OF THE UMBILICAL CORD.

I am a student at Tangaza College. I am carrying out a research on the Theology of the Umbilical Cord in the context of the Bagwere Culture. I would like to find out the cultural meaning of this phenomenon of the Umbilical Cord which seems to be very unique and mysterious among the Bagwere people. Please, here are some questions which will greatly be of help to me in carrying out my research. Your Maximum Co-operation in this project will be of a great contribution towards not only on my research benefit, which is part of the requirement for my B. A degree in Theological academic disciplines or studies but also I am optimistic that it will be of great importance to the Bagwere and all those people who will come a cross it. I promise to be respectful to all your contributions and responses. I express my vote of thanks to you in advance.

Please, you may give the following information:

- (a) Name.....
- (b) Age.....Sex
- (c) Occupation
- (d) Religion.....

Instructions: Please fill in the spaces provided.

1. What is Umbilical Cord ?

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2. What is the Bagwere understanding of the Umbilical Cord ?

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3. What are the main functions of the Umbilical Cord among the Bagwere people ?

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4. How has this relationship of the Umbilical Cord affected or influenced the Bagwere people?

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5. Can this relationship be improved upon?

If so suggest some ways.....

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