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Catholic Church Facing the Challenge of the
African Traditional Religion and the Question
of Salvation

Moderator

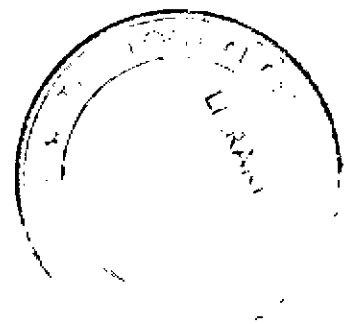
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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate
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Catholic Church Facing the Challenge of the African Traditional Religion and the Question of Salvation

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all... No one therefore can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit...” (*Redemptoris Missio*, No.5)

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the members of Team II (2006-2007) of the Missionaries of Africa formation house. They are:

Bill Moroney

Bonaventure Mwenda

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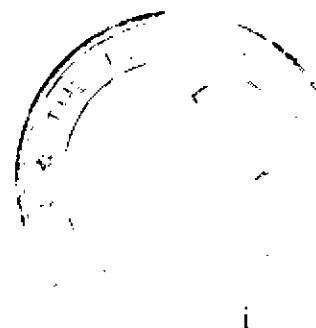
Felix Turyatamba

Filiyanus Ekka

Hilaire Guinko

I also dedicate this work to my parents Mr. Victor SOMDA and Mrs. Georgette SAWADOGO and all the Refugees leaving in the Refugee Camps in the diocese of Rulenge, Tanzania.

I also dedicate this work to all my ancestors who practiced the African Traditional Religion and are now enjoying Life in the Eternity.



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Hoping that I did not forget anybody else, I would like to thank God for helping me with good health and courage in order to bring out this work.

May God bless you abundantly.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) 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 Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:



Name of Student: Beter Nir Anselme SOMDA

Date:

28/11/2006

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

Signed:



Name of Supervisor: Fr. George KOCHOLICKAL, S.D.B.; S.T.L.; S.T.D.

Date:

28/11/2006

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

We see that many people in our home village and many other places in Africa are very excited to become Catholic Christians. We even sometimes miss teachers to instruct them. For the first year of catechumenate their numbers can reach almost 800 people for the whole parish. After following the required instruction, they receive the sacraments of initiation and become members of the Catholic Church. They confess that Jesus is the Saviour and recite the creed: I believe in the holy, Catholic Church...

But we noticed that the same Christians coming to the Church every Sunday, are the very ones going to see diviners, witchdoctors and make sacrifices in order to succeed in their work, or to help their children to pass exams, or to get good health...

Facing these facts we ask ourselves for which reason do they go back to their traditional practices though on the day of their baptism they confessed that Jesus is their Saviour and he saved them. This situation led me to start thinking that maybe it is because they do not experience the savioric presence of Jesus by belonging to the Church or the Church does not accommodate them. meaning that they do not see the Church as the instrument established by Jesus for the salvation of the world. It looks like people see the Church as a social association or the provider for the poor. If they were totally convinced that the Church is the instrument of salvation, during the time of crises they would have remained in the Church while praying more intensely instead of going back to their former practices.

So at the end of my theological studies, I tried to reflect on the main factors which push those converted Christians to go back to their former practices. I discovered that though the Church is the instrument of salvation it does not respond fully to the aspirations of the newly converted Christians: for example the element of diviners who can read the future of people, the element of offering sacrifice to obtain favour or the sacredness of the religion. People were trained to believe in what they do not understand. When the traditional doctors speak in words they do not understand they see the mystery and are easily drawn to believe in them.

As a first step towards this study I did first a general reading of many books around the topic. I also discussed with some people about the topic. The fruit of that research, study and reflection are expressed in three chapters in this essay.

The first Chapter will be the presentation of the notion of salvation and its relationship with the Catholic Church. We shall also talk about the ways through which God offers salvation to people.

The second Chapter will look at salvation and the mediation of salvation in the African Traditional Religion. We shall also look at the position of the Catholic Church towards the African Traditional Religion.

The third Chapter will look at the reason why people do go back to the African Traditional religion, the elements the Church can get from the African Traditional Religion in order to help the newly converted Christians (which aspects of Jesus and of the Church to develop more) and finally I shall give my personal point of view about African Traditional Religion and the Catholic Church.

I foresee some limitations for this work. Since I am not an expert in African Traditional Religion, I will not be using a particular African Traditional Religion. I am using the books in general on African Traditional Religion.

The notion of Salvation is not understood totally in the metaphysical sense meaning we are not going to be discussing on sins and the mystical interventions.

This work is intended to create an awareness of what is happening. When I will be writing a doctorate dissertation in the future, it will be more expanded and will be more scientifically done.

CHAPTER I: DEFINITION OF THE NOTION OF SALVATION AND ITS RELATION TO THE CHURCH

1. Introduction

The quest of God is an existential reality. When men and women come to the full consciousness of their being, they discover that there is a supreme being who is more powerful than them and can give them what they are lacking. Therefore when cornered by difficulties they wait for salvation or help from above: "Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence."¹ Our forefathers in the African Traditional Religion worshipped God in various ways. But for us Christians, Christ came as the summit of all revelations and the One bringing salvation. He created the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit so that it may be an instrument through which he may continue to offer salvation to all people.

Our work in this chapter will be to define first, the notion of salvation according to the Catholic Church. We shall later on dig out the motivations, which pushed the Church to emphasize the close relationship between herself and salvation. Finally we shall end our work by mentioning the different ways through which God offers salvation to humanity.

2. General approach about Salvation according to the Catholic Church

The notion of salvation went through many understandings depending on the time, the place, the culture and the people who define it. Every religion uses this

¹ Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, No. 1, p. 653.

term salvation for this reality appears not only a religious issue but also an existential question: “It can be argued, of all religious terms, ‘salvation’ is the most comprehensive and that almost all religions can be seen as expressions of the universal seeking after salvation in some form or other.”² Every human being is in search of the enigma of human existence and asks himself or herself many questions: What will happen after my death? Where am I coming from? Who am I? Where am I going? And if I have a goal in my life how can I reach there? So salvation concerns everybody and all human beings regardless of their religion as pointed out by J.A. Dinoia: “Despite their disagreement on other topics, inclusivist and pluralist positions in varying degrees share the assumption that salvation in some form is what all religious people seek.”³

Many people tried to find salvation in material things: social comfort, money, land, wealth... They saw salvation as a worldly satisfaction: getting many material things. They thought that they could have access to salvation by their own works or merits. In this perspective, salvation was not any more a gift from God as the Catholic Church teaches but a state human beings can claim for. Salvation was seen as a reality of this world. In this vision, human beings did not have a transcendental goal.

Contrary to those ones who saw salvation as a worldly reality, another tendency was to see salvation as only an “other-worldly” reality. People could neglect this world and start living for another world.

The Catholic Church taught a balance between these two positions. Though salvation is a transcendental reality it starts here on earth and finds its completion in

² John Patrick Brennan. *Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World*, p. 23.

³ J. A. Dinoia, *The Diversity of Religions, A Christian Perspective*, p. 42.

heaven. That is why Jesus came to establish the Church as the instrument of salvation on this earth. The Church believes that man was created to share God's life: "While the mind is at a loss before the mystery of death, the Church, taught by divine Revelation, declares that God has created man in view of a blessed destiny that lies beyond the limits of his sad state on earth."⁴ The beatitudes preached by Jesus expressed this element of human beings longing to have happiness in God. But this longing for happiness in God is already God's grace acting in human beings: "The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it..."⁵ The beatitudes are for us a confirmation that we have a transcendental goal to achieve which is life with God: "The beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God."⁶ This official teaching gives us a good summary of salvation according to the mind of the Catholic Church: life in the Kingdom, sharing the Trinitarian life.

3. The understanding of "salvation" at the time of Jesus

When Jesus started his mission, his first preaching was oriented to the Kingdom: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel"(Mk1, 15). Salvation was understood as turning away from our selfishness to allow our life to be ruled by God. Salvation was seen as re-establishing people to new life physically and spiritually. To the question of the

⁴ Vatican II, *Gaudium Spes*, No. 18

⁵ CCC, No. 1718

⁶ CCC, No. 1726

disciples of John the Baptist who were sent to Jesus to ask: are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? Jesus replied: Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them (Lk7, 22).

Something outstanding in the praxis of Jesus is that salvation was offered to everyone who welcomed him in his/her life. Here we can recall the example of Zachaeus. Zachaeus accepted Jesus. He listened to Jesus and was touched. He decided to change his life. And for accepting to be converted Jesus told him: "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham" (Lk19, 9). Here we can say with John Patrick Brennan, "Salvation is concerned with human wholeness and happiness and this is an intrinsic mutual relationship involving the solidarity of man with the living God who is concerned with mankind."⁷

Salvation hence is all about allowing oneself to be led by God, to be wholly open to the Kingdom of God. Karl Rahner presented the evangelists' description of salvation in these words: "Salvation is often expressed by the image of the Kingdom of God. This is characterized by the fact that God's will is done (Mt 6:10). Salvation is also manifested by Jesus' turning to sinners, the poor and the sick (Mk2: 1-12; Lk7: 36-50)."⁸

So during the time of Jesus, Salvation was understood as the saving presence of God among his people: "As the kernel and center of His Good News, Christ

⁷ John Patrick Brennan, *Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World*, p. 28

⁸ Karl Rahner, (ed.); *Encyclopedia of Theology, A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 1505

proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and being given over to Him.”⁹

The New Testament presents some images describing salvation: “New Heaven” “the day of the Lord”, “The Kingdom of God”... According to John Patrick Brennan these are expressions or words put up to define and to help us to understand salvation: “Some terms put forward are the traditional ones like ‘redemption’, ‘eternal life’, ‘the Kingdom of God’; others, more modern sounding but also with a good foundation in Scripture, are terms such as ‘liberation’, ‘wholeness’, ‘fullness’, ‘shalom’.”¹⁰

4. Salvation in the perspective of the Catholic doctrine

At the beginning God spoke through the prophets, but now he has spoken to us: “In the past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, in these last days, he spoke to us through the Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (Heb 1: 1-2). Here we discover that salvation is God’s Work and involves the three persons of the Holy Trinity. But Jesus became the concrete person through whom God’s salvific action becomes visible to all people.

4.1. The person of Christ

The Gospel is clear on the person of Jesus as the source of salvation. Christ won our salvation and is the one through whom all of us are justified and saved. It is

⁹ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No.9

¹⁰ John Patrick Brennan, *Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World*, p.24

through Christ that we all become adopted sons/daughters of God. Jesus himself proclaimed: "I am the way, the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). This quotation from the Gospel presents Jesus as the only way through which human beings go to God. And Jesus insisted in saying, "nobody can reach God" except through him. So the whole world is saved through Jesus. The first letter to Timothy stressed on the aspect of the man Jesus as the only mediator of salvation by teaching: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time" (1Tm2: 5-7). The Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* pointed out the uniqueness of the person of Jesus in the mediation of salvation by stating: "No one therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit."¹¹

Seeing Christ as the way which God chose to give us salvation is well expressed in the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians: "...For us there is only one God, the Father from whom all things come and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and through whom we exist" (1Cor 8,6). St Paul shows clearly that we depend on Christ for our salvation. And God willed Christ to be the mediator of our salvation since the beginning of creation as he expressed in his letter to the Colossians: "He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers -all things were created through him and for him. He existed before all things and in him all things hold together"(Col 1: 15-18a). Through the phrase "in

¹¹ John Paul II. *Redemptoris Missio*, No.5

him all things hold together,” St Paul presents Christ to us as the mediator of grace and salvation. He is the One appointed by God since the foundation of the World to bring us his salvation: “Christ’s one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware.”¹²

The Church document *Dominus Iesus* stressed the person of Jesus as the only Saviour in saying: “In fact, the truth of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and only Saviour, who through the event of his incarnation, death and resurrection has brought the history of salvation to fulfillment, and which has in him its fullness and center, must be firmly believed as a constant element of the Church’s faith.”¹³ We have to say that it is through the paschal mystery that Jesus accomplished completely his role as the universal Saviour: “It must therefore be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.”¹⁴

Another important element to underline is that the man Jesus is the Word of God. And because he is the Word of God he is the one giving God’s life as Peter rightly confessed: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn6: 68-69). The Church document *Dominus Iesus* expressed the idea of Jesus as the Word of God in these words: “Jesus is, in fact, the Word of God made man for the salvation of all.”¹⁵ Pope John Paul II also insisted on the aspect of Jesus as the

¹² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No.5

¹³ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.13

¹⁴ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.14

¹⁵ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.15

Word of God for our salvation: "The Church acknowledges and confesses Jesus as 'The Christ, The Son of living God (Mt16: 16): Christ is no other than Jesus of Nazareth: he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all."¹⁶

This claim, Christ as the source of salvation, is rooted in our faith in him: "The claim that the Christian faith is necessary to salvation is of course grounded in the dogmatic belief that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between the creator and creation."¹⁷

4.2. The cross (suffering and death of Jesus) and salvation

We cannot talk of the role of Christ in our salvation without mentioning the centrality of the cross. It is on the cross that Jesus expressed his love for the Father and for us human beings. On the cross, Jesus experienced the evil of our sins and won for us the battle against Satan. He accepted suffering and death for the ultimate good: to restore "the broken communion"¹⁸ of human being with God. By raising Jesus from the dead, after his suffering on the cross, God accomplished our salvation. At this point of our reflection on the cross of Jesus and salvation we can affirm with Kereszty that, "God saved us from our sins through the death of Christ on the Cross."¹⁹ The Catholic Church believes and confesses that salvation is brought by the death and resurrection of Christ as stated clearly in the Church document *Dominus Iesus*: "It must therefore be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No.6

¹⁷ George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, vol.1, p. 182

¹⁸ This expression is from the book of R.O. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ. Fundamentals of Christology*. New York 1991

¹⁹ R.O. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ. Fundamentals of Christology*, p.110

once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God."²⁰

But we have to notice that it was not easy in the Jewish society to see the crucifixion of Jesus as the climax of the coming of the Kingdom, salvation: "But we proclaim Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1Cor 1: 23). It was seen as a curse from God: "Cursed is everyone who has been hanged on the tree" (Deut 21:23). But it is Paul who explained the salvific value of the cross: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"(1Cor 1: 17). The cross is seen as the tree of life planted by God in Genesis: "Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow...with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad"(Gn 2:9).

Peter expressed well that salvation comes through the suffering death and resurrection of Christ when he was asked to give an account of the healing of the lame man in front of the religious authorities: "If we are being examined today about a good deed...then all of you ...should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed"(Acts4: 9-10).

Donald Senior talks about the salvific value of the cross in these words: "The cross therefore, is an active symbol because it is the ultimate expression of Jesus' commitment to give life to others...Jesus chose the way that led to the cross and as Mark repeatedly states, the cross as a sign of life given on behalf of others..."²¹

²⁰ CDF. *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, No. 14

²¹ Donald Senior, *The passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, p.143

Through his cross Jesus reveals us the Love, Compassion and Forgiveness of God. We too are called to love one another even our enemies and to show compassion and forgiveness to all. We believe that it is by sharing the joy and sufferings of Jesus that we shall be able to enjoy his glorification as he said: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me"(Mk 8,34b).

Vatican II insisted that the cross should be preached as the source of our salvation: "It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace."²²

4.3. The resurrection and the birth of the Church

Without the resurrection, the cross would have been meaningless as St Paul pointed out: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith"(1Cor 15:13-14). With his resurrection, Christ became a life-giving Spirit and therefore gives us the Spirit, the principle of our divinization, sanctification, and redemption: "In his death and resurrection, Christ was changed from a living soul into a life-giving spirit... The spirit is an overflowing principle, a soul wide open, endowed with limitless power, with a universal power of giving life."²³

Since the Church is the body of Christ, she died together with Christ, the head and rose together with him: "The Church has sprang up in the body of Christ, sown in Spirit from the first, but needing the husbandry of the passion to make it

²² Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no.5

²³ F.X. Durrwell, *The resurrection, A Biblical Study*, p.185

bear fruit. She forms one body with that body; she was born in the same act which brought forth her Saviour to a new existence.”²⁴

By his resurrection Christ becomes the Spirit-sender. He gives his Spirit to the Church: “Endowed with the gift of the Spirit himself, Christ has become the dispenser of it. He gives it to the Church which is one with his bodily humanity vivified by the Spirit.”²⁵

The Church receives life from Christ, the Spirit-sender. She receives life from Christ so that she may give that life to others: “Just as Christ’s risen body is the principle of the diffusion of the Spirit, so the Church identified with that body is a leaven of life by the force of her apostolic charismata, and the power of her rite of sanctification.”²⁶

4.4. Relationship between salvation and the Church

We affirm that the Church is necessary for salvation in the sense that she is directly connected to Jesus: “Christ won the Church for himself at the price of his own blood and made the Church his co-worker in the salvation of the world. Indeed, Christ dwells within the Church. She is his Bride.”²⁷

About the relationship between Christ and the Church in the matter of salvation, John Patrick Brennan made this observation: “The claim that the Church is necessary for salvation arises from her relationship with Christ, the mediator of Salvation for the whole world.”²⁸ When we affirm boldly that the Church is necessary for salvation we have on the back of our mind the great affirmation of Vatican II, the Church as the universal sacrament: “Rising from the dead (cf. Rom. 6:

²⁴ F.X. Durrwell, *The resurrection, A Biblical Study*, p.202

²⁵ F.X. Durrwell, *The resurrection, A Biblical Study*, p.104

²⁶ F.X. Durrwell, *The resurrection, A Biblical Study*, p.235

²⁷ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Redemptoris Missio*, No.9

²⁸ John Patrick Brennan, *Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World*, p.84.

9) he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through him set up his Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.” The Church is seen as the universal sacrament of salvation in the sense that if Christ is the Universal Saviour making God present in our midst and if the Church continues to make Christ present in the World and she is allowing Christ’ salvific grace to reach people therefore she can be understood as Sacrament of Christ: “If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the Sacrament of Christ; She represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work but she is his very continuation, in a sense far more real than that in which it can be said that any human institution is its founder’s continuation.”²⁹

Johann Auer, following Vatican II insisted on this aspect of the Church as The Universal Sacrament of Salvation in putting clearly his position in these words: “The Church is also the universal mediator of salvation the space in which Christ’s saving action in word and sacrament has its effective subsistence and imperishable vitality.”³⁰ Johann Auer continued to develop his point of view of the Church as the Universal Sacrament in these terms: “The Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation its life flowing from the primal Sacrament, Christ in the celebration of the hierarchical Church for the Salvation of individual members of the body of Christ and the historical cosmos whose center is Christ with his cross.”³¹

Vatican II highlighted the aspect of the Church as intrinsically linked to Christ by using the Pauline terminology “Church as body of Christ”. As body of Christ, she is the instrument through which Christ reaches out to his people:

²⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, p.29

³⁰ Johann Auer & Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogmatic Theology, The Church the Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, p. 2.

³¹ Johann Auer & Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogmatic Theology, The Church the Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, p. 484.

“Therefore, the fullness of Christ’s salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord.”³² Pope Paul VI expressed the link between Christ and the Church in these terms: “Between Christ and the Church there exists a manifest relationship which prompts us to think of a marriage, of a mystical identity. In understanding the Church as body of Christ, that leads us to make a close link between Church and salvation. This logic comes from this statement: if Christ came to offer salvation to humanity, and if the Church is a creation of Christ on the Cross, as pointed the gospel according to St John: “but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out” (Jn19, 34), we can therefore say that the Church is the creation of Christ so that people may still get salvation. Here it is good to have in mind that the death of Jesus on the cross is the source of our salvation. We can support our view with the quotation of Vatican II: “when Jesus, having died on the cross for men, rose again from the dead, he was seen to be constituted...Henceforward the Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom.”³³ With this understanding we can agree with Johann Auer that salvation is life in the Kingdom of God and the Church is offering that life to all: “The Kingdom of God has begun in the Church of Christ in this World and the Church is the only and the authentic instrument of God’s Kingdom in this World.”³⁴

³² CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.16

³³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 5

³⁴ Johann Auer & Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogmatic Theology, The Church the Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, p. 476

Another element is that the Church does not put herself as the source of salvation but as instrument of salvation. And that is a logical result because since she is the Body she depends on the Head from where everything comes. That is our faith and that is our conviction: "...Reformulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the head through the Church which is the Body: ... basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation..."³⁵ The Church document *Dominus Iesus* pointed out the difference and at the same time the close link between Jesus and the Church in the matter of salvation in these words: "And thus, just as the head and the members of a living body, though not identical, are inseparable, so too Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, and constitute a single whole Christ."³⁶

The Church therefore believes that there is only one Saviour who is offering Salvation to the whole world and no other so-called saviours can take over this role. And it is also the duty of the Church to lead people to this Universal Saviour as pointed out by the Second Vatican Council: "For the Church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full realization of the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the Source of salvation for the whole world."³⁷ We can therefore say that even if the Church feels obliged to promote inter-religious dialogue, she strongly believes that she alone possesses the full means of salvation as pointed out in this declaration: "Therefore, the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence

³⁵ CCC, No. 846

³⁶CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, No.16

³⁷Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No.17

and his work of Salvation in the Church and by means of the Church (cf. Col 1, 24-27), which is body (cf. 1Cor 12, 12-13, 27; 27; Col 1, 18).”³⁸ The Catholic Church affirms without fear the necessity of the Church for Salvation. She wishes everybody to belong to the visible Church because she is aware of her connection with Christ: “Therefore, in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith.”³⁹

4.5. Sacramental grace

The Paschal mystery is the source of our salvation as we have just seen through our development on the cross and the Church born from the paschal mystery: “The Church was born of the paschal mystery.”⁴⁰ If so, we can therefore say that the Church was born so that Christ may continue to bestow the grace of the paschal mystery (salvation) to humanity: “Jesus’ words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished.”⁴¹ The way of actualizing this paschal mystery in our life is through the sacraments as stated in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came ‘the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church’.”⁴² St John made the connection between the paschal mystery and the sacraments (baptism and Eucharist) by mentioning the flowing of water and blood: “In his gospel (John), whenever water is giving a symbolic significance, it always indicates the principle of

³⁸ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, No. 16

³⁹ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, No. 16

⁴⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, No. 3

⁴¹ CCC, No. 1114

⁴² CCC, No. 1067

salvation...a grace which is a communication of the Spirit of Christ (Jn 7:37-39)... and finally, it was for Christ an instrument of healing in as much as it symbolized this baptism in the Spirit."⁴³ Water stands for baptism and blood for the Eucharist.

Since Christ entrusted the sacraments to the Church so that through those sacraments celebrated in the Church he may continue to bestow salvation to people we can say that the Church, because of her sacraments, is the Channel through which Christ acts in people's lives: "Therefore, the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church (Col.1: 24-27)."⁴⁴

The Sacramental grace is the "[T]he grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament."⁴⁵ Jean Daujat also pointed out the same idea about the sacraments: "Our Saviour himself instituted the means whereby we are engrafted upon himself, incorporated in him and made to share his life."⁴⁶ The Eucharistic prayer No.3 states this fact with these words: "From age to age you draw all people to yourself." *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also points out the aspect of being united with Christ through the sacraments of the Church, which make us a new creation in Christ: "Therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself."⁴⁷

It appears clearly that the sacraments give us the possibility to encounter Christ and therefore to enter into his salvific plan for us. By so doing we are grafted

⁴³ F.X. Durrwell, *The resurrection. A Biblical Study*, p.87

⁴⁴ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.16

⁴⁵ CCC, No.1129

⁴⁶ Jean Daujat, *The Theology of Grace*, p. 148

⁴⁷ CCC, No.1999 quoting Jn 4: 14; 7:38-39

into him and therefore we are saved: “Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body... The fruit of sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Saviour.”⁴⁸

Among the sacraments, the sacraments of initiation are vital for salvation. Baptism gives an indelible character to the baptized and erases away his/her sin and makes him/her a member of the visible Christ’s body which is the Church: “Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte ‘a new creature’, an adopted son of God, who has become a partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ and co-heir with him...”⁴⁹

Confirmation perfects in us the baptismal grace and gives us the Holy Spirit who is the agent of our sanctification: “Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry ‘Abba! Father.’ It unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it renders our bond with the Church more perfect...”⁵⁰

Eucharist unites us more intimately to Christ himself and also to his body the Church: “The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus.”⁵¹ Jesus Christ himself said that: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whoever eats this bread will live for ever and the bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world”(Jn 6:51). The Eucharist continues to nourish in us the graces of our baptism: “Thus by the gift of his body

⁴⁸ CCC, No.1997

⁴⁹ CCC, No.1265

⁵⁰ CCC, No.1303

⁵¹ CCC, No.1391

and blood Christ increases within us the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in Baptism and bestowed as a “seal” in the sacraments of Confirmation.”⁵² The Lord Jesus entrusted this precious gift to the Church: “Do this in memory of me”(Lk22: 19).

All these sacraments of initiation have for aim to increase our communion with the Trinity and also to unite us more closely to the visible body of Christ, the Church. Therefore they are necessary for salvation because salvation is all about our life with the Trinity: “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for Salvation.”⁵³

God is the first cause of our salvation because he is the One who bestows his grace upon us in order to help us to turn to him: “Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love.”⁵⁴

Another important element taught by the Church about salvation is the element of freedom. God does not force human beings. He respects their freedom and seek for their cooperation: “God’s free initiative demands man’s free response. for God has created man in his image by conferring on him, along with freedom, the power to know him and love him. The soul only enters freely into communion of love.”⁵⁵ Even this free cooperation of man is already grace for it is God who moves his will: “The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace.”⁵⁶ About the cooperation of man in the work of salvation, Pope John Paul II stated: “Salvation, which always remains a gift of the Holy Spirit, requires man’s

⁵² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, No. 17

⁵³ CCC, No.1129

⁵⁴ CCC, No.2000

⁵⁵ CCC, No. 2002

⁵⁶ CCC, No.2001.

cooperation, both to save himself and to save others. This is God's will, and this is why he established the Church and made her part and parcel of his plan of salvation."⁵⁷

Salvation is also seen as the forgiveness of sin. This element of forgiveness of sin makes the role of Jesus as the mediator of salvation very relevant for it is on the cross that Jesus takes along our sins on himself and destroys the power of sin and makes us victors through his resurrection by giving us the power to fight against sin.

6. The unknown ways through which God offers Salvation

Through Christian revelation, we can know that salvation comes to us through Jesus and Jesus offers salvation through the Church and the sacraments of the Church. That is our belief and we cannot deny it. But we also accept that we cannot comprehend all the ways of God. It is true that Jesus is the way and the source of salvation. But before his physical birth on earth (incarnation) God by his own ways was saving people through the same Jesus Christ. Therefore we can be open to the fact that God might save people in ways unknown to us as pointed out by Jean Daujat: "If the sacraments are the principal and privileged means whereby God gives us grace, they are not the only means, for his action is not limited by his own ordinances and may work by other means."⁵⁸ We have to precise that those unknown ways are linked to Jesus Christ and to the teaching of the Church about salvation: "With respect to the way in which the salvific grace of God which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio*, No.9

⁵⁸ Jean Doujat, *The Theology of Grace*, p. 148

itself to the statement that God bestows it in ways known to himself.”⁵⁹ The Church believes that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. But since the call to salvation is God’s personal initiative we believe that he can bestow salvation to anybody he wants through his Son Jesus: “This vocation to eternal life is supernatural. It deepens entirely on God’s gratuitous initiative, for he alone can reveal and give it. It surpasses the power of human intellect and will, as that of every other creature.”⁶⁰

7. Conclusion

This Chapter helped to understand the different dimensions of salvation. Since the foundation of the world God has chosen his Son Jesus to be the mediator between himself and humanity. In this perspective, salvation comes from God to us through his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. He is the only mediator. Jesus accomplished his role as universal mediator of salvation through the paschal mystery: his passion-death-resurrection.

In order to be always present in the lives of people and to give them salvation, Jesus created the Church. The Church is therefore the instrument through which Jesus touches the lives of people. She is the instrument through which the grace of the paschal mystery is actualized in the lives of people.

With all these considerations of Jesus as the source of salvation and of the Church as the instrument through which Jesus continues to give salvation to all humanity we now ask: how can we at the same time be open to the other religions especially the African Traditional Religion as far as salvation is concerned?

⁵⁹ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.21

⁶⁰ CCC, No.1998

CHAPTER II: SALVATION IN THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND THE POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Introduction

African Traditional Religion remains one of the oldest religions of the world. It came to being as the natural expression of man/woman's desire of relating to a supreme being who can help them to solve their problem as pointed out by Vatican II: "Throughout history even to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and events of human life...This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense."⁶¹ Our ancestors felt satisfied in practicing it. It still remains relevant because many people do practice it.

Our main task in this chapter will be first to point out the notion of salvation in the African Traditional Religion. Later on we shall bring out the mediators of salvation in the African Traditional Religion. We shall also try to find out the understanding of the Catholic Church towards the African Traditional Religion and we shall end our chapter with other positions, which have been colouring the catholic theology.

We shall use African Traditional Religion in singular because there is no specific meaning to use it in plural: "Whichever side one takes, the fact is that the

⁶¹ Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, No.2

problem of the use of the expression 'ATR' in the singular or 'ATRs' in the plural, is primarily an academic one which has little practical significance."⁶²

2. Relationship between God and humanity in the African Traditional Religion context

We start our point with this observation: "In African religious tradition, God relates to people in concrete, experiential, and practical terms rather than in a mystical and spiritual manner."⁶³ This assertion shows that God is discovered in the day-to-day lives of people. Many images are given to God. But we will limit ourselves to few images, which will enlighten our presentation.

"God as a father": this idea of father establishes a close link between God and humanity. People claim joyously that they are God's children. This image of father gives an idea of a family: "it shows a close relationship between people and God. It implies that God has not only 'begotten' or made people, but he is also their protector, provider and keeper."⁶⁴

Another image is "God is a friend". This image of friend leads African believers to trust God and to rely on him as pointed out by John S. Mbiti: "This is an image which shows great confidence in God. People feel at home with him, believing that he is trustworthy, faithful, close to them and ready to help them just as a true human friend would do."⁶⁵

⁶² Francis Anekwe Obrji, *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion, issues of Interpretation and Mission*, p.11

⁶³ Robert J. Schreier. (ed.), *Faces Of Jesus In Africa*, p. 53

⁶⁴ John S. Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, p. 47

⁶⁵ John S. Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, p. 47

Other understandings like “God is all-powerful”, “God is all-knowing”, “God is merciful” are also very helpful in the perspectives of salvation in the African Traditional Religion.

3. Salvation according to the African Traditional Religion

In the African Traditional Religion, Salvation is all about having good relationship with the divinities. When a divinity is not happy a bad thing happens in the community and the community should look for means to appease that divinity. Salvation is understood as having a peaceful life. People believe first in the practical salvation before having a notion of the mystical salvation. Therefore when a man experiences a fruitful harvest, when he has got many children and all are in good shape, he feels that he is blessed by God and for this reason experiences salvation from God. In the same line John S. Mbiti observes: “Traditional religions and philosophy are concerned with man in past and present time...There is no messianic hope or apocalyptic vision with God stooping in at some future moment to bring about a radical reversal of man’s normal life...Man’s acts of worship and turning to God are pragmatic and utilitarian rather than spiritual or mystic.”⁶⁶

About the understanding of Salvation in the African Traditional Religion, Raphael Ngong Njia made a very relevant observation: “The story of Salvation for Africans is more of restoring broken relationships or bringing in what lacks in the human quest through rituals and sacrifices. Quest is understood to be spiritual,

⁶⁶ John S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.5

mental or physical. It is an endeavor to receive all the things that cause problems for the Africans."⁶⁷

4. The mediators and their ways of mediating salvation in the African Traditional Religion

When we talk about Salvation in the African Traditional Religion we have to have in mind the terms: the prophet, the priest and the sacred king ruler as pointed out in the book entitled *Faces of Jesus in Africa*: "In African Religious tradition, mediation between humanity and divinity; between the natural and the supernatural; between the world of man and world of spirit was accomplished through three main religious specialists - the prophet, the priest and the sacred king ruler, chief-elder of the accepted potentate."⁶⁸ As in the case of Christianity where Jesus mediates salvation, in the African Traditional Religion, salvation is mediated by specialists as pointed out by John S. Mbiti: "Specialists are in effect the repositories in knowledge, practice and symbolically, of the religious communities. They are the ones who make history of African Traditional societies both sacred and religious. Specialists are the symbolic points of contact between the historical and spiritual worlds. In them are the continuity and essence of African religious thought and life."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Raphael Ngong Njia Feh, O.H., *I Am Because We Provide, the Africanist Conscientious and Compassionate Gifted-Giver*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Robert J. Schreier, (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.193

4. 1.Diviners

The diviners are mediators of salvation: “diviners and prophets alike are the mediators of the divine.”⁷⁰ Their aim is to find out what to do, or which type of sacrifice to offer in order to obtain healing, in case of disease or to get favour from God. They use many things like cowries, dreams, nature to be able to accomplish the divination. Laurenti Magesa made a pertinent observation: “In both Ifa divination and in divination with sixteen cowries, the central objective is to determine what kind of sacrifice the client must make to get rid of an affliction or to obtain a favor.”⁷¹

Divination is seen as a means established by God so that people may know his will, or get his favour and also solve their problem: “What is central in Africa is the belief that divination is a tool bestowed by God upon man so that he may be better fitted to cope with the practical problems of life on earth...”⁷²

4. 2. Priests

The priests play a very important role in the mediation of salvation: “The priest in African religion is seen as the medium through which the life-giving power of God comes to man. The priest contains within himself the ‘life-force’, which he mediates to his people. In the community the priest presided over religious rituals, led the people in worship, and solemnized the Rites of Passage ceremonies.”⁷³ This latter assertion can be a summary of the role of the priest in the mediation of salvation.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Ray, *African Religions*, p. 111.

⁷¹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion, the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, p. 222

⁷² Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion, The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, p. 224. He was quoting S.F. Nadel, Nupe.

⁷³ Robert J. Schreiter, (ed.), *Faces of Jesus In Africa*, p. 59

The priests are the ones who perform the rituals and sacrifices and are seen as the direct mediators of salvation for the people: "People go to them with the hope of allaying their fears and sufferings. They lead in the communal sacrifice where God's intervention to meet the needs of the community is sought. It is through the priest that the divine power is employed for the purpose of changing the human condition for the better."⁷⁴

4. 3. Kings

In the African Traditional Religion, the king is seen as the representative of God on earth: "These rulers are symbolically the representatives of God on earth...They exercise authority believed to come from God."⁷⁵ A good king brings a blessing to his people and a bad king brings curse to his people. When the people have a good king, they receive lots of blessings and are happy: "The king or ruler plays a priestly role on behalf of his people on the basis of the fact that he stands as the intermediary between them and the divinity."⁷⁶

4. 4. Sacrifices

All those mediators we have cited above rely on sacrifices. Sacrifices are seen as the instrument to get a favour from God, to appease his fury or to get blessings. Kwesi A. Dickson gives us some ideas about sacrifices: "Basically, the sacrifices are offered to a spirit, however indefinite, who is supposed to be more powerful than human beings in the natural state, sometimes to the ancestors who,

⁷⁴ Robert J. Schreiter, (ed.), *Faces of Jesus In Africa*, p. 60

⁷⁵ John S. Mbiti, *In Introduction to African Religion*, p.163

⁷⁶ Robert J. Schreiter, (ed.), *Faces of Jesus In Africa*, p. 60

now spirits, are more powerful than the living, and in a few rare instances to the supreme God.”⁷⁷

Contrary to Christianity where we are called to be in constant union with God, African Traditional Religion does not see the need of turning to God when there is no major problem. They prefer to remain quiet and adore the spirits as pointed out in the book entitled *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*: “When the people are happy they must not pester Ngai with prayers and thanksgiving. But when he punishes someone for, say, looking up towards the sky during a thunderstorm when lightning flashes around, or on serious occasions like drought or an outbreak of an epidemic or a severe illness, a sacrifice may be offered to Ngai.”⁷⁸

Another element about sacrifice in the African Traditional Religion is that they bring about union between divinity and humanity: “The priest officiates these rituals in order to establish the bond between the people and the divinity and between the people themselves. The sacrificial animal provides the link between the people and divinity through the symbolic actions and words of the priest.”⁷⁹ The point of view of Laurenti Magesa gives us a good summary about sacrifices in the context of African Traditional Religion: “The fundamental meaning of sacrifices and offerings lies in their efficacy to restore wholeness. If wrong-doing causes a dangerous separation of the various elements of the universe, sacrifices and offerings aim to establish unity and restore balance.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Kwesi A. Dickson & Paul Ellingworth (ed.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, p. 62.

⁷⁸ Kwesi A. Dickson & Paul Ellingworth (ed.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, p. 63. They quoted the work of Jomo Kenyatta, *facing Mount Kenya*, London, Mercury Books, 1961, Cap. X

⁷⁹ Robert J. Shreiter. (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, p. 60.

⁸⁰ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion. the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, p. 203.

5. The position of the Catholic Church towards the African Traditional Religion

5.1. The Church and the African Traditional Religion

The will of Jesus was to make people to belong to the Church as pointed out by St Mathew, the evangelist: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age"(Mt 28,18-20). The Second Vatican Council put the same idea in these words: "Sitting at the right hand of the Father he is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church and, through it, join them more closely to himself, and, by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood, make them partakes of his glorious life."⁸¹ It is clear through these verses that belonging to the Church is a consequence of accepting to be baptized in the name of the Triune God and also to follow his commandments. So now what about the people of the African Traditional Religion who are not baptized?

The Church acknowledges that the African Tradition Religion has some good elements since the Holy Spirit of God moves wherever It will: "Certainly, the various traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God, and which are part of what the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of people, in cultures, and religions."⁸² But she does not see in those elements as having complete salvation. She sees them as seeds to the Gospel: "With regard to African Traditional Religion, a serene and prudent dialogue will be able...to foster

⁸¹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 48

⁸² CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus (2000)*, No. 21.

the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator...They can even be seen as a preparation for the Gospel, because they contain precious *semina Verbi* which can lead, as already happened in the past, a great number of people to be open to the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel.”⁸³ The Church believes that we are saved through Jesus alone and the Church is the only true instrument for salvation: “With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the Salvation of all humanity (cf. Acts 17:30-31).”⁸⁴ This last assertion shows the belief of the Catholic Church. Even if she does not reject the other religions like the African Traditional Religion, it is her hope to see those people coming to the Church because she believes that it is Jesus who gives salvation and he does so through the mediation of the Church: “If it is true that the followers of other religions of the world can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”⁸⁵ Pope John Paul stated this same aspect clearly: “The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.”⁸⁶

The Church, reading the history of our forebears recognizes in the African Traditional Religions the beginning of Revelation as pointed out: “This leads us to think that, previous to the revelation to the patriarchs and prophets, we must take

⁸³ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa*, No.67

⁸⁴ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.22

⁸⁵ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*(2000), No.22,

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No.55

account of a first revelation of the promise of a Saviour, made to Adam and Eve when repentant, and so at the beginning of human history; and it seems to us that, even amidst the errors and superstition, it is possible to find distorted vestiges of that primitive revelation in all the religious traditions of the human race.”⁸⁷ The Church document *Dominus Iesus* expressed this same idea in these words: “Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the actions of God.”⁸⁸ But these elements should be considered carefully because some can be against the spirit of the Gospel: “Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.”⁸⁹

We can affirm that the Church has got a great respect for the other religions. But she believes that the truth that Jesus Christ is the Only Saviour must always be proclaimed with confidence: “This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another.’”⁹⁰

5.2. The necessity of belonging to the Church for salvation

We have just seen that the Church does not condemn the African Traditional Religion. But as far as salvation is concerned she insists that belonging to the Church is necessary for Salvation.

⁸⁷ John Parratt- (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, p.96

⁸⁸ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.21

⁸⁹ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.21

⁹⁰ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.21

It is necessary to belong to the Church because the Church possesses the fullness of the means of salvation. Belonging to the Church does not mean automatically that we are saved or we shall have eternal life: "However, all the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged."⁹¹ But belonging to the Church gives more elements for salvation: the sacraments, the teachings and guidance of the magisterium...

Being convinced of her intrinsic link with her Saviour, the Church, continues to call people to herself because she is certain that she is doing the will of Christ. Pope Paul VI expressed this fact in these words: "The Church, therefore, is the channel and boundary, under different aspects, of the salvific divine action in humanity. She is the communication, sign and presence of Christ."⁹² Though she is made of sinners, she does believe that Christ is working through her (the sacraments) and she is there as the visible instrument of Christ's work of salvation to the whole humanity: "The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, since, united always in a mysterious way to the Saviour Jesus Christ, her head, and subordinated to him, she has, in God's plan, an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being."⁹³

The church document *Dominus Iesus* teaches that every human being belongs to Christ. It can be in the visible way (through baptism) or in the invisible

⁹¹ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.22

⁹² Pope Paul VI, *The Church light of all Mankind*, p. 98

⁹³ CDF, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.20

way (by the fact that everything was created through Christ and he is the only mediator between God and human beings): “For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, Salvation in Christ is accessible by the virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit; it has a relationship with the Church...”⁹⁴

6. Other considerations about those who do not belong to the Catholic Church

6.1. The axiom: “Extra ecclesiam nulla salus”

In our work on salvation and the Church we cannot forget this axiom: “extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.” This axiom has its root in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch,⁹⁵ Irenaeus,⁹⁶ Clement of Alexandria.⁹⁷

This famous axiom was addressed to the group of heretics, those who rejected the Church and separated themselves from it. It is Origen who put a lot of emphasis on the negative interpretation of this action by saying: “Let no one persuade or deceive himself: outside this house, that is outside the Church, no one will be saved: for if someone leaves, he is himself guilty of death.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ CDF, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000), No.20

⁹⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, Philadelph. 3:2; translation found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*; William A. Jurgens (ed.), Theological Publications, India 1984, p.22

⁹⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. Huer. III*, 24, 1; PG 7, 966; translation found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*; William A. Jurgens (ed.), Theological Publications, India 1984, p.101

⁹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus I*, 6; PG 8, 281; translation found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*; William A. Jurgens (ed.), Theological Publications, India 1984, p.178

⁹⁸ Origen, *In Jesu Nave* 3, 5; PG 11, 841; translation found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*; William A. Jurgens (ed.), Theological Publications, India 1984, p.191

This axiom remained hanging up to the time of Cyprian. Cyprian took it seriously and made an analogy with the ark of Noah: "Anyone who separates himself from the Church and unites with an adulteress (schism), shuts himself off from the promises of the Church, and anyone who leaves the Church of Christ, will not deserve Christ's rewards. He is an outcast, unholy, an enemy. God is not his Father, if the Church is not his mother. If anyone outside Noah's ark had been able to escape, then so might a man outside the Church."⁹⁹

Following Vatican II teaching, we can say that this axiom is still valid for those who know that Christ is the Only Saviour and the Only mediator between God and humanity and that the Church is the instrument through which Christ offers salvation and yet deliberately refuse to join the Church: "Basing itself on scripture and tradition, it teaches that the Church ...is necessary for salvation...Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it."¹⁰⁰

Vatican II teaches that this axiom is not applicable to those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart...those too may achieve eternal salvation."¹⁰¹

Concerning the axiom "outside the Church no Salvation", the position of George H. Tavard seems to be appealing because the author does not dismiss the axiom completely but explains it in a very comprehensive way. He starts with this

⁹⁹ Cyprian. *De Unitate Ecclesiae* 6; CSEL 3/1, 214; translation found in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*; William A. Jurgens (ed.), Theological Publications, India 1984, p.220

¹⁰⁰ Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*, No.14

¹⁰¹ Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*, No.16

assertion: “the problematic of extra salus, however, may be reversed. Rather than trying to identify that community, membership in which is necessary to salvation, one can believe that God’s grace is active everywhere and in all human persons.”¹⁰²

With this assertion, George H. Tavard puts the foundation of his point of view. If the Church is the instrument willed by God for the salvation of all human beings, so whenever God offers salvation to people, those people join the Church of Christ: “And whenever someone experiences God’s gifts, bestowed in view of eternal salvation, there is the holy community, the Church, in its inner spiritual reality of communion with God. In this case, ‘Extra ecclesiam nulla salus’ reflects no restrictive doctrine on membership. It is a negative form of the positive statement, ‘Ubi salus, ibi ecclesia’: where there is God’s grace, salvation, there the Church of God is.”¹⁰³

All these interpretations of the axiom “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” show that early in the history of the Church, people discovered the Church as the instrument of salvation. With Vatican II, this affirmation “outside the Church there is no salvation” still remains valid because it affirms the role of Christ and also the place of the Church in our salvation: “This means that all salvation comes from Christ, the Head, through the Church which is his body.”¹⁰⁴

6.2. The concept of “anonymous Christians”

The theory of anonymous Christians is very important and can therefore not be left aside since we are discussing about salvation and the Church. Our first attempt will be to understand what Karl Rahner meant by his theory. According to

¹⁰² George H. Tavard, *The Church. Community of Salvation an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, vol.1, p.182

¹⁰³ George H. Tavard, *The Church. community of Salvation an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, vol.1, p. 182

¹⁰⁴ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No.171

Jacques Dupuis by anonymous Christians Karl Rahner meant: "it is the hidden, unknown operative presence of the mystery of Christ in other religious traditions that Karl Rahner has designated by the controverted term 'anonymous Christians.'¹⁰⁵

According to Karl Rahner the human person cannot search first for God. It is God who goes first to human being and therefore he/she can be able to answer. And God does so through Jesus.

The most important element which led Karl Rahner to call people from other religious traditions anonymous Christians is that grace goes to humanity through Jesus Christ: "Whether this is thematically apprehended by the person's awareness or not, the offer and gift of grace always take place concretely and existentially in Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁶

With this theory of anonymous Christians of Karl Rahner we can read implicitly that he puts Jesus as the universal mediator of salvation as pointed Jacques Dupuis in explaining the theory of Karl Rahner: "Jesus Christ, in whom the absolute mode of divine-human union is actualized is the 'absolute Saviour' of humankind, the center of salvation history, because in him the openness to God inscribed in transcendental human experience finds its total realization."¹⁰⁷

We have to mention that Hans Kung does not agree with Karl Rahner because for him it is not because all people are saved through God's grace in Jesus Christ that we have to call everybody Christian: "It seems mistaken, however, to apply to extend the concept of the Church to people who do not belong to a community believing in and publicly acknowledging Christ. What sort of a Church

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, page 114.

would it be, composed of people who know nothing and even wish to know nothing of Christ? Can a vague association of 'well-meaning people' be termed a Church?"¹⁰⁸

7. Conclusion

Through our work, we tried to point out the notion and the mediators of salvation in the African Traditional Religion. African traditional Religion offers a lot of elements, which can lead people to salvation. The African Traditional religion touched the lives of many people and up to now people continue to experience it as a way to their salvation.

The position of the Catholic Church in front of the African Traditional Religion is that she respects the believers of that religion. But she continues to affirm that Christ is the Way to salvation and that belonging to the Church is vital for salvation. Believing in Christ as the universal Saviour, the Church confesses that everybody is saved through the grace of Christ and therefore everybody is visibly or invisibly linked to the Church, the body of Christ.

But since some newly converted from the African Traditional Religion to the Church continue to go back to their former practices in time of difficulties, the Church can look into the African Tradition Religion in order to inculturate some elements which will make people feel at home. Those elements as far as they are not contrary to the Catholic faith can be helpful because: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in

¹⁰⁸ Hans Kung, *The Church*, p. 317.

many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men”¹⁰⁹. Pope John Paul II pointed out the necessity of inculturation by stating: “Inculturation, through which the faith penetrates the life of individuals and their primary communities, is also a path to holiness. Just as in the Incarnation Christ assumed human nature in everything but sin, analogously through inculturation the Christian message assimilates the values of the society to which it is proclaimed, rejecting whatever is marked by sin.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* No.2

¹¹⁰ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa*, No.87

CHAPTER III: THE ELEMENTS WHICH CAN HELP THE CHURCH TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEWLY CONVERTED FROM THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

1. Introduction

The Church is seen as the instrument established by God for the salvation of humanity. She is therefore playing her role by leading people to Jesus.

Among those joining the Church are found Africans from the African Traditional Religion. These new converted sometimes do not experience enough elements, which they find meaningful for their salvation especially in times of difficulties. Richard J. Gehman made this observation about this situation: "Today there is a cry throughout Africa for a genuine, authentic African Christianity, one which is truly rooted in the lives of indigenous peoples."¹¹¹ It means that if the Church wants to remain relevant for the newly converted Africans, she has to make some efforts to integrate some elements from the African Traditional Religion.

Our work will be to look at first the reasons leading people to go back to their former practices. We shall later on point out some elements that the Church can integrate in order to help the newly converted Africans to feel accommodated. We shall end our work in looking at the African Traditional Religion as a preparation for the Gospel.

¹¹¹ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p.21

2. The reasons making Christians to go back to their African Traditional Religion

2.1. Times of difficulties

As to start this point it is good to state the observation of Richard J. Gehman: “The cultures of Africa today are no more what they used to be. In so many areas the traditional customs are changing...Yet we find that during times of crises, especially death, even professing ‘Christians’ revert to traditional beliefs and practices. The fact is that superficial customs change easily with the passing of time. But the deep core world view beliefs of a people are very persistent.”¹¹² This assertion points out a fact. The reason, which pushes people to go back to their Traditional Religious practices is crises, difficulties. So it means that when people are cornered by difficulties they feel that the Church does not answer to their problem. Richard J. Gehman continues his reflection further in saying: “Witchcraft and sorcery are great temptations. Reliance upon the ancestors is a felt need during times of emergency, even for many Christians. The traditional help derived from the medicine man is often felt strongly during times of great need.”¹¹³ The same author continues insisting that what leads people to go back to their former African Traditional practices is difficulties of life. He pointed out this fact by quoting Idowu: “While, as we have said, every African may wish to be regarded as connected with one or the other of the ‘fashionable’ religions, most are at heart still attached to their own indigenous beliefs...It is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to

¹¹² Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p. 17

¹¹³ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p. 18

the passages of life and the crises of life, African Traditional Religion is regarded as the final succour by most Africans.”¹¹⁴

Mbiti will call this scenario of running to former practices while remaining Christians a ‘religious concubinage’: “Mbiti speaks of a religious concubinage’ in which people embrace ‘the good’ in both Christianity and African Traditional Religion.”¹¹⁵ We can end this part with this relevant observation of Daidanso ma Djongwe cited by Richard J. Gehman: “Suffering and sickness lead the people back to African Traditional Religion.”¹¹⁶

2.2. The African World View

In many of our cultures there is not a mere sickness or a mere death or a mere failure. Even a child who fails his exam because he did not study is interpreted in another way: the ancestors are not happy. There is always someone who causes the failure. There is witchcraft behind the death of a man even if he dies of HIV related sickness. Somebody should be at the root of any misfortune, which happens because people believe that if there is nobody causing it no misfortune will happen. Chukwudum B. Okolo expressed this fact in these words: “His sense of happiness and security essentially depends on the careful execution of the injunctions of his particular tribe according to the laws of the land.”¹¹⁷

Another element which leads converted Christians from the African Traditional Religion to go back to their former practices is their past background. They were taught that if the Ancestors are not happy, they disturb the living. If you

¹¹⁴ Richard J. Gehman. *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. p. 20.
He was quoting Idowu 1973:205,206.

¹¹⁵ Richard J. Gehman. *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p. 19

¹¹⁶ Richard J. Gehman. *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p. 20

¹¹⁷ Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times: a Socio-Political Analysis*, p.3

miss your duties towards them you will get misfortune in your life. To heal that misfortune you need to offer them a sacrifice. And to offer that sacrifice you need to go to the diviners to know what the ancestors want you to offer them. Chukwudum B. Okolo made this pertinent observation: “Legalistic duties and obligations thus bind him to his community of elders, the ancestors, and the gods. The carrying out of familial and ancestral duties is an assurance of the blessings of the gods and the warding off of spiritual and bodily harm from self, the family and the community.”¹¹⁸

With this type of worldview where people have been taught that their happiness depends on their relationship with their ancestors and divinities, it looks obvious that during the times of difficulties, the temptation to go back to their former practices is very high: “The African consequently lives in awe of the supernatural which is the controlling center of his life and true source of his spiritual and bodily goods.”¹¹⁹

3. Elements that can help the Church to help the newly converted to feel at home in their new religion

After studying the relationship between salvation and the Church and the African Traditional religion, we ask ourselves which type of Church can fit with the newly converted African’s expectations. But since Church is linked to the Founder, we can ask ourselves which type of Jesus for the Africans.

¹¹⁸ Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times: a Socio-Political Analysis*, p.3

¹¹⁹ Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times: a Socio-Political Analysis*, p.3

So basically we have to ask ourselves who is Jesus for the Africans? That was the same question Jesus asked his disciples in the gospel of Mark: “Who do people say that I am? They said John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets. But Jesus asked them: “But you who do you say that I am?” Peter said to him in reply: “You are the messiah” (Mk 8,27-32). Like Peter who professed his faith without understanding fully the implication, likewise are many African people who converted from their Traditional Religion to Christianity. They profess Jesus as their Saviour, their Redeemer. But some people did not experience him as their Saviour. They are called to make a journey like the one Jesus helped his disciples to make. They are supposed to make the journey from mere profession of faith to a profession out of their experiences of life. The book entitled *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, put this fact clearly: “Other people may say a thousand things as to who Jesus is; it will never suffice, however, for the disciples of Christ to mimic the confessions of others, no matter how valid. Ever since the coming of western missionary Christianity to Africa, African Christians have more or less been content to embrace the answers supplied to them by the ‘mother’ Church.”¹²⁰

Since people are used to some images of God, which remain instilled in them, if they experience Christ under those images their faith in him maybe stronger. We have to remember this observation of Anselme Sanon: “In this context, discipleship of Christ is initiation into the community of believers, the Church. Christology and ecclesiology are closely linked.”¹²¹ These images are:

¹²⁰ Robert J. Shreiter, (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, p. 52

¹²¹ Volter Kunster, *The Many Faces Of Jesus Christ*. He was quoting Anselme Sanon, p. 62

3.1. Jesus Christ as the chief

The image of Christ as the King when well understood will help many newly converted Africans to have recourse to him for their deliverance. In many African milieux the king is associated with strength or force, wisdom, mediation. On this point Volker Kuster made a very pertinent observation: "That Christ is the Son of God, the Bantu have learned only through Christian revelation. But that God is the Chief of the universe, the ultimate recourse, they know by their ancestral faith. The theological discourse of the Bantu religions asserts this from the beginning to end."¹²² This observation is very relevant because many African people do not adore a weak god. They adore a god who is a king meaning very powerful, able to destroy enemies in order to give victory to his people. That is why in the history of African Traditional Religion, you find people moving from place to place to get some statues of powerful gods when their owns are not answering to their needs.

This aspect of Jesus as a King well associated to the African Christian perspective might help people to be close to him. Volker Kuster made a good remark here: "The dignity of Jesus as chief finds its visible expression in the liturgical use of traditional attributes of a chief, such as a leopard skin, elephant tusks or spears."¹²³

So belonging to the Church will be like belonging to a powerful empire where you are always protected and in this sense you enjoy prosperity, happiness that are attribute of salvation in the African perspective.

3.2. Jesus Christ as the master of initiation

Jesus as the master of initiation evokes more the element of discipleship. Discipleship is very important in the sense that it introduces slowly people into a

¹²² Volker Kuster, *The Many Faces Of Jesus Christ*, p. 60

¹²³ Volker Kuster, *The Many Faces Of Jesus Christ*, p. 61

family and once introduced they become fully members of the community and therefore do not feel lost in the community. So taking into consideration this image of Jesus as the master of initiation will help people to follow Jesus seriously and after their baptism likewise in their traditional set up they will feel the sense of belonging to the Church for they know the founder and they can trust him more.

3.3. Jesus Christ, the ancestor

The idea of ancestor translates the element of the presence of Jesus among his people and also the element of mediating life. Jesus as the ancestor in the African way is that he mediates life for us. Everybody in the African Traditional Religion feels connected to his ancestors and the ancestors give us our identity. Therefore Jesus being our ancestor is therefore the one who unites us and protects us. Volter Kuster pointed out the idea of Jesus as the ancestor in these words: "Just as in the traditional notion of ancestors, so too Jesus mediates in fullness the life given by God."¹²⁴

3.4. Jesus Christ as the healer

This image of Jesus Christ as the healer should be very much underlined. If we look around us, we can notice that many people, when confronted with sickness, just rush to their traditional practices because the aspect of healing is very much evident there. Many Christian denominations or ecclesial communities (sects) are flourishing because of this aspect of healing. We easily read at some corners of the town, the redeemed Church, the miracle Church...

Our Catholic Church, to be relevant to the newly converted Christians from African Traditional Religion, should emphasize the image of Jesus as the healer. When

¹²⁴ Volker Kuster, *The Many Faces Of Jesus Christ*, p. 62

people will experience Jesus as the healer in times of distress or sickness they will remain fixed on him because they know that only He can grant them deliverance. Volker Kunster also translated his thought in these words: "For the black African person, the aspiration to life, to eternity, is so primary that the persons called to administer it hold a place of eminence...Accordingly, Islam and Christianity have, and will continue to have credit with the African only to the extent that they share, side by side with the African person, the struggle for life."¹²⁵ We should emphasize the sacrament of the sick, which portrays well this aspect of Jesus as the healer. Pastoral ministers should give an important place to this sacrament and should be ready to administer it. That will help people to be comforted during their sickness and the temptation of going back to their former practices will be less.

So we can say that if all these African images are well integrated in the person of Jesus, the newly baptized Christians will feel closer to him and therefore will feel at home in the Church because they know its founder. Apart from all these elements mentioned above, other elements should be kept in mind in order to help the newly converted Africans to feel at home in the Church.

4. Other important elements

4.1. The notion of sacrifice

In the African context, sacrifices are made in times of difficulties or to thank the ancestors for their help in the community. Usually people offer in sacrifice animals, human beings in some context or mixing grains with something else and put on the ant-hill. People have been used to those practices and find meaning in

¹²⁵ Volker Kuster. *The Many Faces Of Jesus Christ*, p. 66.

them. When they come to Christianity this aspect of giving something in order to receive blessings or favour from God is not strongly stressed.

The pastoral ministers can stress on the aspect of prayers during times of difficulties, sickness (for example the sacrament of the sick), misfortunate, death... People should be taught about the Eucharist, which is our Christian sacrifice. They should also be taught that during Mass, we offer ourselves together with the bread and wine. The sacrifice of Christ, which happens once for all, is made real at every Eucharistic celebration.

During the time of catechesis, the element of the cross should be emphasized. People should be taught to integrate the cross in their life. Jesus accepted suffering, the cross to save us. The Christian should be taught that sufferings, difficulties should not separate us from Christ but they should help us to be close to him as he himself said: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mk 8: 34b).

4.2. The aspect of diviners

In the Catholic Church we do not have diviners who foretell the future or who will try to find out the root of sickness or bad luck in the life of people. We rely on prayers, which do not satisfy the newly converted Africans. For example we have already seen that in Africa any bad luck is associated with someone behind or the anger of the ancestors. Now when the newly converted come and there is not this element of diviners, in case of difficulties he/she feels lost. So the Catholic Church should look at the way of compensating this emptiness.

To fill this emptiness, we can develop more the aspect of spiritual direction where people will be helped to discern what is going on in their lives. People will be

trained to be open to the Holy Spirit and to listen to the voice of God. They should also be taught to read the signs of time.

4.3. The way of conducting the prayers and the sense of mystery in the Church

In the Catholic Church prayers are conducted in a very open way. Those who know the liturgical language can understand the words used. That does not impress many new converted Africans.

People were used to see the mystery in what they do not understand. For example we commonly hear some old people who were used to the Mass celebrated in Latin praise their time. Some people go to the point of saying that at that time they were praying better.

So the challenge is to try to find some rituals in our prayers, which will touch the heart of people. For example during ordinations, even though the central rite of the ordination is not the laying down of the candidates during the litany of the Saints, people do feel touched at that time while the prayers of consecration which should be the center of everything is received passively.

So, by developing the sense of the mystery in what we do in the Church will help to accommodate the newly converted Christians from the African Traditional Religion who used to see mystery only in things they do not understand.

4.4. Salvation as the wholeness of life

This element is very important and should be stressed if we want the newly converted Africans to be at home in the Church. African Traditional Religion is seen as part and parcel of the daily of people: "There was no separate day of worship

because the whole rhythm of life was a continuous liturgy that permeated such common place things as eating, drinking, love-making etc.”¹²⁶

Sometimes the Church fails to show this aspect of wholeness of life. We find some Christians who are very much devoted to Mass on Sundays, but they are involved in criminal cases, injustices... They do not feel that their lives should be guided by their faith.

Salvation should be seen not only as a good relationship with God, but also as an integrated relationship with one another, with the environment. In African Traditional Religion, people live according to their faith. They view the nature, everything in relations to their faith. So by helping people to see the Christian life as a well integrated reality, the newly converted Christians will feel more closer to the Church and will live an integrated life: “Life was such a whole that even death could not disintegrate it.”¹²⁷

Salvation is not merely material and physical well being, but it is also and principally, the inner well-being, sense of being loved by God. the sense of belonging to God. People feel deep down in their heart that God is with them (Emmanuel- God-with us) and feel united to Him and call Him “Abba”, Father.

4.5 African Anthropology

African anthropology is very important and should be taken into consideration in order to help better the African people entering the Church. Africa has got some values which can be used by the Church to help the newly baptized to feel part of the Church.

¹²⁶ John Parratt- (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology*. p.95

¹²⁷ John Parratt- (ed.), *R reader in African Christian Theology*. p. 95

4.5.1. The notion of family

This element has already been taken seriously by some dioceses in Africa. We assisted at the creation of Small Christian Communities. It answers to this element of the Church as a family. People become closer to one another and are able to know one another better and support one another.

4.5.2. The rites of passage

In Africa, the rites of passage play a very important role. People are well prepared to face the difficulties of life. They are introduced into the life of their community and know how to live the life of their community.

So, our sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), should be taught and celebrated in the way which will help people to feel that they have been initiated into a community and they feel part of that community. If these rites of initiation are well done before receiving the sacraments of the Church, they will help people to see that they have to live the life of their communities even when they encounter difficulties.

4.5.3. The world of the spirits

In Africa, people see spirits almost everywhere. They feel that they are surrounded by the spiritual world, which influences their way of relating to one another, to the nature.

This aspect can be transformed. Instead of seeing spirits everywhere, the newly converted Africans should be taught to feel the presence of God everywhere. God is always present in their lives in whatever circumstances they are.

People should be taught about the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the guardian Angels...They should know that they are there to intercede for us and to

protect us. In so doing the notion of the spirits to which the newly converted African was used to before, will be oriented according to the Christian understanding. The newly converted Africans should be introduced to the devotion to the Blessed Mary, the saints...and to learn to call upon those saints so that they may intercede for them.

The Catholic Church remains the instrument of the salvation of the whole humanity. We do not deny this fact. The elements we suggested are meant to help the newly converted Africans to be really introduced into the Church. Christianity came to Africa with the envelop of the European culture. Now when we try to present Christianity with the envelop of the African culture, people will feel part of it for Christ did not die only for the Jews or for the Greeks. He died for the whole world.

5. The African Traditional Religion as a preparation to the Gospel of Salvation

African Traditional Religion though viewed by some Christians as lower than Christianity has been a bridge for Christianity to reach out to people. It contains some seeds which helped the Gospel to be accepted by Africans: "For all that can be said of the religious world-view of the African, or however naïve this might seem to the outside world, it did serve him well with regard to the reception of the Christian faith."¹²⁸ With this observation we notice that Christianity is not completely strange to Africans. The doctrines are likely different but some beliefs concur with one another as pointed out: "His religious sense disposed him to receive and retain the

¹²⁸ Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times: a Socio-Political analysis*. p.5

Christian faith from the missionaries. The values of his religious culture found a confirmation in many of the ethical maxims of the Gospel.”¹²⁹

As the Old Testament is seen as a preparation to the New Testament the African Traditional Religion is seen as a preparation to the Gospel. As Jesus himself said about the Mosaic Law: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Mt 5:17). Likewise we can say that Jesus did not come to abolish the African Traditional Religion but he came to perfect it. So the true study of the African Traditional Religion by already converted Africans will help to find a kind of way of presenting Christianity, which will give satisfaction to the Africans.

African Traditional Religion is seen as being used by God to be a way for the Gospel: “God has not totally abandoned anyone but continues to disclose Himself through nature and conscience. As much we find that African Traditional Religion has been used by God to prepare Traditional Africans for the Gospel.”¹³⁰

African Traditional Religion is seen as the preparation to the Gospel in this sense:

In African Traditional Religion, salvation is seen as blessing in life: good life, good health, many children... When people receive all these things, they thank God for his blessing in their lives. When they experience the lack of those things in their lives, they have to offer sacrifices in order to please God and therefore receive his favour, blessing.

¹²⁹ Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times: a Socio-Political analysis*, p.20

¹³⁰ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p.223

In Judaism, the aspect of blessing is there but it does not come at the first place. Salvation is seen as being member of the covenant, as being member of the special people, the chosen people of God. People thank God for choosing them. When they do not experience blessings, they feel that they did not keep the stipulations of the covenant that God established with them. To go out from their crises, they have to turn towards God, by following the stipulations of the covenant.

All these understandings of salvation were a preparation to Christianity. In Christianity, salvation is becoming member of the new covenant established by Jesus on the cross by the shedding of his blood. This new covenant makes sons/daughters of God in Christ. We thank God for giving us this grace to share his divine life by sharing the Eucharistic meal. Crises happen when we realize that we lost this sanctifying grace by breaking our union with God. Therefore we go to confession in order to restore this communion with God.

Salvation is not anymore in term of natural blessings, good life only, but in term of communion with God. We can be having misfortunes in life, but what is very important for us is that total communion with God. The greatest blessing is to become a true child of God in and through Christ and his Church and live with him forever.

6. Conclusion

We can say that the newly Africans converted to Christianity are still tainted with their past lives. When they are facing difficulties, they feel that the Church cannot help them. Therefore they go back to their former practices because they experience some satisfaction in those practices.

Since the Church is convinced that she is the instrument willed by God for the salvation of the world, she has the mission to call people to Jesus by calling them to become its members. To make this call, to belong to the Church, more relevant the Church is called to look into the African Traditional Religion in order to find the good elements which can be useful for the newly converted African to be satisfied in their quest for salvation because “the Holy Spirit stamps everyone with the mark of the divine life, but this life then reflects the cultural diversity of the people.”¹³¹

The African Traditional Religion is seen as the instrument used by God to prepare the hearts of Africans to receive the Gospel. Viewed in this perspective, we can say that African Traditional Religion envelops many valuable elements, which can be used by the Church to help Africans to feel that the Church is there as the instrument of salvation.

¹³¹ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, p.21

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In Chapter I, we have seen the notion of salvation and the Church. Salvation concerns the whole human person, body and soul. God is the source, the first principle of our salvation and he offers salvation through his Jesus Christ. Jesus is therefore the mediator between God and humanity. He mediated salvation for us through his passion, death and resurrection.

In order to continue to mediate salvation for us, he created the Church. The Church becomes the instrument through which Jesus offers salvation to humanity. The sacraments of the Church are means established by Jesus so that his New Life, salvation may flow towards the whole humanity.

In Chapter II, our work was to understand more salvation according to the African Traditional Religion. Contrary to Christianity, where salvation is seen in two levels: the earthly reality and the other-worldly reality, African Traditional Religion views salvation as this worldly reality, as God's blessing on people here on earth. So the notion of the other-worldly reality is not so much stressed.

Even though some newly converted Christians from the African Traditional Religion still go back to their former practices, the Church still believes and confesses that she is necessary for salvation and that Jesus is the only One mediator between God and humanity.

Chapter III was more about finding out the reasons why some newly converted Christians are falling back to their former practices and suggesting a way forward. We discovered that in times of difficulties, the temptation to go back to their former practices is very high, for African Traditional Religion seems to answer more to their aspirations.

With this observation, we suggested some elements, which the Church can integrate in order to allow Africans to feel that the Church was established by Jesus as the means of salvation. Looking at those elements, we can say that African Traditional Religion has been used by God as a means to prepare the way to the Gospel.

In this age of the arising of many sects, religions claiming to offer salvation to people, this work helped me to set clearly the place of Jesus in the salvation of humanity. Indeed I am convinced and I affirm openly that Christ is the Only mediator between God and humanity and therefore salvation comes to us from God through the mediator of Christ.

Although other religions, sects can claim to offer salvation, they cannot be equal to the Church founded by Jesus Christ as the instrument of actualizing the grace of the paschal mystery in the lives of people: "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and the repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all nations..."(Lk 24: 46-47).

I believe that Christ is the light of the world: "This life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1: 4-5).

Since Jesus, the Head of the Church, is the true light and the Church, his body, receives the light from him in order to enlighten the whole world, she is therefore the light of the world: "Lumen Gentium."¹³²

¹³² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No.1

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