

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

THE MUKHANDA INITIATION RITE
FOUNDATION FOR SUKU CULTURAL VALUES
AMONG THE BASUKU OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
CONGO
VIS -A - VIS CHRISTIANITY AND INCULTURATION

ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BY

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this essay is my original work achieved through my original reading, research and reflection. It has never been submitted anywhere for academic credit purposes.

Signed..... *TSUNDA SERGE* Date... *15/02/2000*

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DEDICATION

To the Congolese youth
so that they may live their cultural values vis-à-vis
Christianity, I dedicate this Long Essay.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. 0. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many African Theologians and Philosophers have dedicated a lot of works and essays on African traditional religions; so, they want an African face of Christianity. The whole question is on the Negro African identity as Christians. “*African Personality*” of Blyden is very eloquent as he urges Africans to think from the African personality and the culture which impregnates them. This culture is alive and rich as well. It presents a coherent system of institutions and customs, invigorated by ethical and spiritual values. The African is not inferior to anybody, but different in his personality. To promote this African personality, Blyden proposes a threefold program, for instance, the rediscovery of this personality first of all, then its modernization, lastly the definition and the pursuit of some universally known values out of a complementarity of human races.

Taking into account these words, we have given ourselves the task of looking at some values of the Suku community of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Basuku have their “*weltanschauung*”, their world vision, which makes them distinct from any other culture, but also similar to some. The Mukhanda initiation rite introduces us to this “*weltanschauung*”. It gives access to the Suku culture. Our task in this essay is to give a description of this initiation rite which will create an awareness of traditional values which can help a Musuku grow in his faith in Christ. This awareness will help him challenge as well some practices which alienate the human person. We will give the methodology used to collect our information. An overview of some books will help us reflect more deeply on the Suku culture; a summary of the Kimbanguist Theology, a Christian Church rooted in African traditions among the Bakongo, is very eloquent on the

matter of any inculturation. Our conclusion will help us question some practices of the Mukhanda initiation rite and give some suggestions. Human race being “project”, we believe that a new Mukhanda will bring a positive change in practices such as polygamy and mistreatment of initiates.

1. 1. Background to the problem

In Many African communities in general and Bantu ones in particular, an initiation rite introduces officially youngsters into the society. It introduces them into manhood and womanhood. This initiation rite prepares boys and girls for the moral, religious and traditional lives of their community. So, they become adults and can fully participate in the culture of the society and take responsibilities. It is a rite of passage that makes them mature and wise people. Circumcision is the climax being the visible sign which testifies that one passed through the initiation. But formation is not limited to this special time only; it continues as the boy grows. Ngoma supports this idea, saying:

le transfer des connaissances n'a pas lieu en un seul et unique instant. Il se fait tout au long de l'enfance depuis la prise de conscience, sinon bien avant, jusqu'à l'âge adulte et même au delà.¹

When we were primary school boys, we remember being insulted by fellow pupils who had passed through the traditional initiation rite. For them any boy who was circumcised at birth in a hospital was not fully a man, since he did not suffer the pain of the Mukhanda initiation rite and the cultural education it offers. We were beaten up, defenseless during break times and at the end of classes, so that we could have an idea about the way boys are treated at the Mukhanda initiation rite. This terrible experience

¹ Ngoma Ngandu, **Initiation dans les Sociétés Traditionnelles Africaines, le Cas Kongo** (Kinshasa, Zaïre: Presses Universitaires du Zaïre, 1981), 21

made us ask our dad and uncles questions about this initiation rite. After explanation , we stopped calling Mukhanda initiates villagers and uncivilized. So, we started respecting them.

This change of attitude made us reflect more deeply on the Mukhanda initiation rite and its importance and relevance as we were growing up. This thirst to know made us make our first research on the Mukhanda during our philosophy studies. It was very amazing for us to know that many missionaries who evangelized Basuku and the colonial administrators wrote books about Mukhanda initiation rite. Their findings showed the religious, social and moral dimensions of this initiation rite.

Any time we go home, we notice a gradual religious indifferentism to the Catholic cults and the number of Church attendance is decreasing. This can be due to different factors such as the influence of urbanization with the modernity it offers, mass media... People go many to independent churches where they feel accommodated culturally. This point reminds us about the study done by professor Shorter and Onyancha on the phenomenon of secularism in Africa.² They show that a Colloquium held in Uganda in 1972 by the Secretariat for Non-Believers pointed out the threat of Secularism in countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. But now we notice a religious revival in African countries. Looking more closely at Suku people, this indifferentism which leads to secularism can be the result of modernity, but it goes back to the time of the first Evangelization, i. e. the encounter of Christianity with Suku culture.

² Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, Secularism in Africa, A Case study: Nairobi City (Nairobi, Kenya: Kolbe Press, 1997), 12

1. 2. Statement of the Problem

The Evangelization of Africa was closely tied to colonialism and, it still suffers from that dubious situation today. This made people understand Christianity as the religion of the oppressor. This ambiguity persisted in the heart of the new Christendom. Quoted by Ngindu, E. Mveng shows it clearly, saying: *Christians in Africa feel at liberty to emphasize that Evangelization was carried out in tandem with colonization.*³

There was no possible way for European missionaries to escape the ambiguity of their historical situation. The mission of the Church, in its personnel, its culture, its daily life and its actions gave the impression of having struck a treaty of mutual assistance with colonialism. *Thereby a heavy, painful ambiguity prevailed, and attempts were not always made to resolve this, whether in concrete fact or in an underlying theory.*⁴ For this reason people thought of Christian religion as an imported affair of colonizers and something which came to get rid of their "weltanschauung". Using the language of Hans Kung, *the Church of Jesus Christ has remained a European and American Affair*⁵.

The imported religion created a big dichotomy in cultures. And attitudes towards missionaries were very mixed. Mongo Beti, in his *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, gives us different images people had about a missionary: administrator, colonizer, forest exploiter, a businessman, a constructor, a trouble maker, a White sorcerer, a defender of Black people, a man of God, and a pastor.⁶ Thus, there was a lot of misunderstanding from both

³ Ngindu Mushete, "An Overview of African Theology" in **Paths of African Theology**, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis, 1994), 11

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11

⁶ Lucien Laverdière, **L'Africain et le Missionnaire, L'Image du Missionnaire dans la Littérature Africaine d'expression Française: Essai de Sociologie Littéraire** (Montréal, Canada: Bellarmin, 1987), 341-342

sides: missionaries overlooked the cultural background of people they evangelized, and the encountered cultures felt disturbed by the brutality of the evangelizers who tried to eradicate their cultural beliefs.

1. 3. The objective of the Study

Our study intends to reconcile Christianity with culture. The encountering of Christianity will bring about richness on both sides. Our quest is to see whether Suku culture can contribute something in the new religion: Christianity. Can we find trace of monotheism in the Suku religious tradition? Our study will give evidence of a people whose culture and religion is a prepared ground for Christianity. An inculturation of some rites among Basuku will make them say, it is our religion, the religion of our ancestors. What we are trying to do is not to criticize negatively the first Evangelization and its methods, but to find a Suku language of Christianity with the help of the signs of the times we are reading. It will be immature to embrace all Suku Practices and canonize them in the context of a Suku Christian Church. We will select some practices which can be inculturated in Christianity. Christianity was brought to us by European missionaries. They achieved this task with a European background. Thus, what we are trying to do is to "Africanize" Christianity, using the expression the Congolese Episcopal Conference in 1977. The Bishops state

ce pays ne sera pas chrétien tant qu'il n'aura 'assimilé' le christianisme. Autrement dit: tant qu'il ne pourra pas penser et exprimer en langage africain son expérience du Christ (doctrine et vie). Il va sans dire que ce travail ne pourra être fait que par les Zaïrois. Cette africanisation du christianisme se conçoit à tous les niveaux: expression théologique du message, africanisation des structures de gouvernement et l'exercice de l'autorité, genres littéraires africains dans la prédication et l'éloquence sacrée, expression et symbolique africaines dans la liturgie, africanisation de la discipline ecclésiastique, recherches de valeurs africaines (solidarité, partage, vie commune,

hospitalité) dans les modes de vie de l'Eglise Zaïroise, et dans les manifestations collectives de la foi. L'épiscopat est invité à faire preuve d'esprit inventif et créatif.⁷

1. 4. Significance of the Study

The study of Basuku, as we have the intention of looking at its religious and social dimensions will help us to integrate the Gospel in the heart of their lives. This will help the Musuku to live his faith in integrity: *"vivre sa foi dans l'intégrité de sa personnalité, l'exprimer dans son propre langage et libérer tout un héritage de richesses spirituelles."⁸* This will lead him to use his symbols and signs that express his religious universe. Evangelization will never transform, touch Suku hearts unless it is done in a language which is theirs. Malula challenged Africans to africanize Christianity saying,

hier les missionnaires ont christianisé l'Afrique. L'Esprit de Dieu était avec eux. Aujourd'hui les Negro-africains sont appelés à africaniser le christianisme. Le même Esprit de Dieu sera avec eux.⁹

In these terms we would like to 'Sukulize' Christianity. This dream gives rise to an adaptation of Christianity. But adaptation is what we would like to avoid. In Evangelization we would prefer incamation, indigenization, localization, inculturation, africanization and contextualization. Mgr Monsengwo prefers inculturation to adaptation as well; he states,

l'inculturation est une formulation nouvelle, une re-expression du message, non pas au sens d'une adaptation - dont on verrait d'ailleurs mal l'object - mais au sens d'une synthèse nouvelle. L'inculturation est une génération nouvelle du message, non pas dans son principe qui est le Christ, mais dans sa manifestation expressive.¹⁰

⁷ Paul de Meester, **Ou va l'Eglise D'Afrique?** (Paris, France: Cerf, 1980), 34

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35

¹⁰ Laurent Monsengwo, **Inculturation du Message à l'exemple du Zaïre** (Kinshasa, Zaïre: St Paul Afrique, 1979), 11

For Shorter, inculturation is *the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures... A continuous dialogue between Faith and Culture.*¹¹

1. 5. Scope and limitations of Study

We are looking at the Suku religious belief within its cultural context. It will be impossible to look at peoples' religion outside their cultural background. Lamin Sanneh states that generally speaking, culture has to do with customary beliefs. To this Lesslie Newbigin adds another important element close to culture: language which *provides the means by which they express their way of perceiving things and coping with them.*¹² Matthew Arnold, quoted by Lamin points out that

*religion, the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself-religion, that voice of the deepest human experience- does not only enjoin and sanction the aim which is the great aim of culture, the aim of setting ourselves as certain what perfection is and to make it prevail; but also, in determining generally in what human perfection consists, religion comes to a conclusion identical with that which culture*¹³

With regard to these three complementary elements which are: religion, culture and language we will try to show how Basuku live their life vis-à-vis their Creator.

¹¹ Aylward Shorter, **Toward a Theology of Inculturation** (London, England: Geoffrey Chapman Press, 1988), 11

¹² Lamin Sanneh, **Encountering the West, Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The african Dimension** (New York, USA: Orbis, 1993), 26

¹³ Ibid., 27

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 0. INTRODUCTION

Many books have been written about Mukhanda initiation among Basuku. Most of them are from first missionaries to the Basuku and the colonial administrators. Lamal, who did a serious study on the Suku people and their origin, whose book we are using at the moment did not want to make another research on Mukhanda initiation, since Plancquaert dedicated a full book on this initiation. So, this initiation is a social institution which has a capital importance in the life of a Musuku adolescent.

Mukhanda, has many meanings in its different expressions:

Dans kulwala mukhanda, être blessé de la circoncision, il se rapporte à l'opération, à la circoncision, elle même... dans kusonga mukhanda et kukinisa mukhanda, exhiber la mukhanda, faire danser la mukhanda il désigne le groupe de tous ceux qui ont subi en même temps l'opération. Dans l'expression kukota mukhanda, il s'applique à l'institution elle-même et aussi au lieu de l'épreuve avec son chemin interdit, sa cour et ses constructions.¹⁴

Our focus will be on the instruction given during this institution. This institution is not profane, but religious. We have in mind religion. Okolo¹⁵ defines religion as a social institution characterized by the existence of a community uniting individuals by their relationship individual - a spiritual power superior to human beings. Through the Mukhanda, the candidate is elevated spiritually; by the Mukhanda practice young people are in contact with the shades of their ancestors. Mwadi confirms it saying,

la spiritualité de la case initiatique Suku est fondée sur la croyance à l'Être Suprême et sur le culte rendu aux ancêtres, une spiritualité d'amour mutuel dans la communauté du bois sacré. Par ce rite, le Suku cherche à faire alliance avec l'Être Suprême.¹⁶

¹⁴ M. Plancquaert, **Les Sociétés Secrètes chez les Bavaka** (Brussels, Belgium: Bibliothèque Congo, 1930), 56

¹⁵ Okolo is a Congolese philosopher who teaches at the University of Kinshasa.

¹⁶ Barthélemy Mwadi, **La Case Initiatique Traditionnelle Suku: Un Rite de Spiritualité** (B.A. thesis, Institut de Spiritualité Africaine, Kinshasa, 1994), 3

The initiates are asked to keep secret the science of the Mukhanda. This initiation introduces them to the life, culture and beliefs of the Suku society. The initiates need a formation which will help them move from ignorance to adulthood as condition to be considered as full member of the society. To show the communal aspect of this initiation rite, it goes beyond a family organization. Basuku believe that the state of uncircumcised man is an impurity.¹⁷ Experts are invited to perform the acts of initiation on each candidate. We will look at these people. Lamal, questioning the moral and the educative values of this institution and the attitude to take towards this initiation, answers that, never among Basuku, circumcision initiation rite has given rise to immoral practices among Basuku.¹⁸ Mukhanda in the olden days was equivalent to schools we have today.

Plancquaert attests that this institution has reference to God: "kulwala Mukhanda mutuka ku Nzambi Phungu".¹⁹ Initiation is a crucial moment which reveals to the adolescents the culture they are living in. They get answers to all questions dealing with relationships with God and ancestors, sexual and moral life, life before and in marriage and different sciences. We will talk first of all about the organization of the Mukhanda initiation rite, then we will go into some thoughts given to the initiates.

¹⁷ Kusukwasa Mvula and Ndjibu Mulamba, "La Circoncision dans la Société Traditionnelle Suku: Aspects Rituels et Rôles", in ***Pistes et Recherches*** Vol 5, No 1(1990). 42

¹⁸ F. Lamal., ***Basuku et Bavaka des Districts Kwango et Kwilu au Congo*** (Tervuren, Belgium: 1965), 235

¹⁹ Plancquaert, 164

2. 1. ORGANIZATION

2. 1. 1. INTRODUCTION:

Mukhanda initiation rite is organized through the initiative of young men who have fulfilled all required conditions: between 10 and 20 years of age as one. This late age is explained by the fact that Mukhanda is a big test that requires that one should be strong enough to endure the suffering of this initiation rite. But the decision is taken by the chief of the village, after discussion with his council. Let us note that the chief of the village is also the spiritual leader who has a privileged communion with the spirits of the ancestors. So his decision and agreement is very important. His "yes" symbolizes the will and blessings of the ancestors. Gifts such as animals are given him by parents and relatives for the blood of their children which will fall on his land. Blood being source of life, his blessings will bring healing to initiates.²⁰ This gives to Mukhanda initiation rite its communal aspect and not a family affair. In order to have a success, everybody is asked to behave well otherwise a bad omen will affect the candidates. Mukhanda initiation rite is held outside the village to keep its secret and sacred characters.

2. 1. 2. COMPOSITION

Many people participate in the Mukhanda initiation rite playing each of them a particular role; we have for instance: Mfumwa-Mbedi, Kayudi, Kisidika, Kitapa, Kifika, Nkalaweni, Tulombosi and Tundanzi.

²⁰ Mvula and Mulamba, 45

1. Mfumwa-Mbedi

Mfumwa-Mbedi is the chief of the village or a group of villages to whom the last word belongs in decision taking, in the life of the people entrusted to him. He symbolizes the unity of all the members of the community among themselves and with their ancestors. He incarnates the blessing and will of ancestors over the whole community against any evil. He blesses the candidates and the facilitators of the Mukhanda. His blessing is a condition "sine qua non" for starting the initiation.

2. Kayudi

Kayudi is the pedagogue, the initiator, the master of all ceremonies and rites of the Mukhanda. He teaches the candidates and introduces them to the culture and customs of the society. His instructions are based on the ethics, religion, different sciences and life in the society, history and the origins of Basuku as well.

3. Kisidika

Kisidika is the one who keeps the fetish of the Mukhanda. He is also the physician of the whole group at the Mukhanda. He takes care of the wounds after circumcision. He protects all the candidates against any evil powers like witches attacks. Some times this role is played by the chief of the village himself. He appoints another person to play this role if he is not available. Kisidika attracts the spirits of ancestors on the candidates so that they may grant them vital forces. He invites the spirits to be in communion with the

candidates. He is the intermediary between the spirits of the ancestors and the candidates before they get autonomy of contact with them.

4. Kitapa

Kitapa is the surgeon or the operator of circumcision. Kitapa comes from the verb "kutapa" which means to cut. He is paid for his work done. He is expected to have a good conduct and good moral life, otherwise he will bring bad luck to the candidates whose foreskins he is going to cut, and blood symbolizing life will come out.

5. Kifika

Kifika is the only woman allowed to the Mukhanda initiation rite. With regard to the secret and sacred character of the Mukhanda initiation rite, women are not allowed to see the candidates during their intensive training. Candidates use bells on their legs which make noise. They are not to walk on the road to avoid going on women's footsteps, so they use the bush.²¹ Women who go to fetch water or walk around hide into the bush when they hear bells ringing. Otherwise they will have to pay a chicken for the expiation to the candidates. And also women are afraid of being cursed with regard to the sacred character of Mukhanda initiation rite. Kifika is chosen for her wisdom and good moral life. Candidates expect her to answer, of course questions dealing with female affairs. She cooks for the community at the initiation camp.

²¹ Mvula and Mulamba, 43

6. Nkalaweni

Nkalaweni is the artist who makes masks and ornaments for the candidates. He decorates each candidate according to his wish about the animal he wants to represent at the dance. The dance to the masks is important since it allows communion with spirits. He is chosen by the chief of the village.

7. Tulombosi

Tulombosi are the former candidates of the previous Mukhanda initiation rite. They accompany and help the new candidates in their Mukhanda initiation rite's formation. They are chosen for their skills and highly appreciated performance in their initiation. It is a kind of training which will lead them to play any role one day in the Mukhanda.

8. Tundanzi

Tundanzi are the candidates to the initiation; those for whom the initiation is organized. The singular form is kandanzi and the plural Tundanzi. The word designates also the uncircumcised. When one tries to play with a girl before initiation, she looks down at him saying, "kandanzi". They come to the Mukhanda to get wisdom from the elders. The climax or the sign of their initiation is the cutting of their foreskins. Circumcision is a visible sign that testifies that one has passed the formation. Wise people among Basuku are those who grasped the Mukhanda formation. This formation makes one say with pride that I am a Musuku who stood the sufferings of a harsh formation. Because of some treatments, it happens that one dies at the initiation camp. It is kept secret until the end, when they come back solemnly. Let us note that one was not supposed to cry at the cutting of the foreskins. This gives them endurance for any

problem they face in their life. After initiation women are asked to respect them. Gifts are given them to congratulate them for having gone through the ordeal manfully by their parents and relatives.

2. 1. 3. MUKHANDA NAMES

Initiates are arranged according to their age. This order will be the same on the day of circumcision, and the hierarchy of power and organization of authority at the initiation camp. They are given new names; the elder is called Kapita (leader of the group), helped by Mbala. They show their leadership and endurance to others. In return others respect them. They are followed by Mulopu, Makengu, Mwadi and Kasiala. All others take any name of their choice.²² From this time, the initiate will be called by this new name which replaces the name of birth. Anybody who calls him by the older name will be sanctioned.²³

2. 1. 4. THE MUKHANDA DANCE AND KHINDULA CEREMONY

"Khindula" refers to the Mukhanda dance, mostly the ceremonies which follow it. Insults are allowed the week before and the day before circumcision. "Khindula" means uprooting. There is "khindula mwana" (uprooting of the child), a week before circumcision, and "khindula ngudi" (uprooting of the mother), a day before circumcision.²⁴ In 1989, we had the opportunity of visiting a village which organized a Mukhanda initiation rite. The day before circumcision we witnessed the "khindula ngudi"

²² Mvula and Mulamba, 46

²³ Lamal, 186

²⁴ Mvula and Mulamba, 47

ceremony. One could insult anybody even his mother or sister in the village. Asking the idea behind this rite, we were told that it is in order to remove the shame of birth, since everybody comes out naked.

2. 2. SUPREME BEING

2. 2. 1. NOMENCLATURE:

Basuku believe in a Supreme Being they call Nzambi. To Nzambi they add Phungu. Nzambi Phungu: God almighty who transcends any fetish and power. They have different names for God; Nzambi Phungu Mawesi-Mawesi (God almighty), Nzambi Tata (God the Father), Mfumu Nzambi (God the King), Nzambi ya nkenda (merciful God), Nzambia Phungu Kalunga (the Infinite). Kalunga designates the red soil in a deep hole.

One has to go very deep into the ground to see it. The depth also means the dwelling place of the dead. The Almighty is also Nzambi of the dead. There is no dualism of God of heaven and God of hell. Kalunga has also the sense of immensity and ocean (nzadi mungwa). Tsangu will say,

son lieu de résidence est le kalunga qui est l'axe central des entrailles du cosmos où se trouve aussi les mânes des Ancêtres-Défunts. C'est pourquoi pour le prier, on frappe quelquefois le sol, on danse pour correspondre à son rythme; ou pour les Ancêtres, on verse dans le sol des libations destinées à les abreuver.²⁵

For Basuku, God created everything ("Nzambi wahangi bima bioso"). This was exactly repeated in the first catechism. To the first rains of August after three months of dry season, kids will sing: *Nzambi kanokisa mvula... tso... tso... mukongo mvula... tso... tso... mama wakuna nguba... tso... tso... Nzambi kanokisa mvula... tso... tso*, meaning God makes rain fall tso...

²⁵ Viviane Tsangu, "Approche Africanologique et Problématique du Dialogue Idéologique entre les Peuples", in **Les Nouveaux Appels de la Mission**, ed. African review of Mission Studies (Kinshasa, Zaïre: Baobab, 1994), 338

tso... so that mum may sow groundnuts. God's name is mentioned every time: *Nzambi watuhanga watunenga, watusona* (God has made us). Many riddles (binsumu) refer to God.²⁶

2. 2. 2. BELIEF

Basuku are strict monotheist. There is only one God. Nzambi Phungu of Basuku is the same God of their neighbors Bambala, Baluwa, Bahungane, Bapende, Batshoko, Bayaka. Lamal attests about the religion of Basuku that there is no idolatry. He writes,

*la croyance religieuse des Basuku pourrait se résumer ainsi: monothéisme strict mais sans culte public; absence totale d'idolâtrie, de culte solaire ou lunaire ou de déification des phénomènes de la nature. Ni angéologie, ni démonologie. Aucun esprit intermédiaire entre Nzambi et les hommes.*²⁷

2. 2. 3. GOD, SPIRIT AND INVISIBLE

God is without body (kheku lutu). He is without arms and legs. He is not man or woman. He does not grow old, he does not die. There is not any representation of God by drawing, statues or symbolic signs. Basuku laughed at the first missionaries who showed them an image of God as an old European with a long beard. For them, God is spirit, there is no word to express this abstract notion.

They use wind and breath instead. They say that *Nzambi kena bosu muhanga, mfunzi, kibungila*; meaning God is like wind, and whirlwind. When a sudden silence occurs in a group conversing, they will say that God has passed. When wave passes on leaves and branches, they say also that God is passing (*Nzambi hioki*). God is indescribable (*Nzambi bamutumbulakoko*). A Suku priest reports that once upon a time, as kid, he was chased from the house after swearing in God's name to his Father. Where is God, said his father.

²⁶ Lamal, 158

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180

Basuku do not raise their hand towards the sky to show God. This is only found once in the fables.

2. 2. 4. NZAMBI, OMNISCIENT

God knows everything. Whatever I know comes from God. When something is stolen and the robber unknown, they will say that God's intelligence only penetrates mysteries. So he knows the guilty.

2. 3. ANCESTORS

Basuku pay serious tribute to their ancestors. They are the forefathers and they are believed having a supernatural power. They are founders of clans and laws. They exist in a spiritual form. One becomes an ancestor by his good living on earth. They stand in unique communion with the living they protect. The living are in perfect relationship with their ancestors to whom they address their needs. A cult given them is a way of keeping this communion constantly.

They pour out their blessings on the living. Before any activity, a prayer is addressed to them so that this enterprise may be successful. They are given the fruits of the harvest; wine is poured down for them, so that they may drink also as sign of gratefulness for the prayers they have heard. Basuku believe that their ancestors have a watchful eye on them. Any bad action will raise their anger and punishment. They are intermediaries between the living and God. In this respect they are venerated. They watch also over the welfare of the community to whom they pass life on. To keep them

memorable, their names are given to the newly born children. They are still alive. A special respect is given them.

2. 4. DEATH

Death is caused by a sorcerer. It can be a punishment when rules are broken by some one in the clan. There is no death without cause. But there is one that is attributed to no one but to God. It is called "lufwa Iwa Nzambi" (God's death). God has called, they say. To show the powerlessness of medicines they will say that "nganga mukomba Nzambi" (a physician is weaker than God). When one dies he goes to Kalunga, the dwelling place of the dead and ancestors.

In Kalunga they are good and wicked people. It is there that the unsolved problems and conflicts during earthly life are solved. With reason they say that Kalunga is open to you and me; we will meet there to finish up our quarrel and the truth will be known.²⁸ There is still interaction between the living and the dead since the dead care for the living.²⁹ In 1978, during a bush fire accompanied by mum and our sister, we ran after an antelope and caught it. Everybody kept on saying that their dead are really caring for them. So the dead continue to play the same role they played when they were alive. A father and a mother still have some thing to do with their children. They are to be respected as if they were alive. An elder who was a model in his community, will receive the same treatments after his death.

²⁸ Lamal, 167

²⁹ Ibid., 180

2. 5. SPIRITS

The dead good or bad are called “bamvumbi” (dead). Basuku call these spirits bamvumbi. Life after life is determined by the moral qualities the dead had during his earthly life. The spirit of those who do not become ancestors because of their bad earthly life, abide in forests where they will be disturbing the living. These ghosts are called "bitsutsu". Beir says:

les envouteurs, les voleurs incorrigibles, les adultérins, les incestueux, tous ceux qui vivaient en marge de la vie clanique et faisaient beau jeu des observations ancestrales, sont bannis de la communauté outre-tombe.³⁰

Meaning the witch, the thieves, the stubborn, adulterous, incestuous, those who lived outside their clans and did not follow the observances of ancestors, are outcast of the community.

They have a strong belief that individuals have a spirit which they release at death. Some spirits are good others are evil. They also believe in a relationship between the spirits, former living beings and the living ones. So each person has to strengthen his relationship with the spirits. It is with reason Kenyatta points out that

the spirits of the dead, like living human being, can be pleased or displeased by the behavior of an individual or a family group... in order to establish a good relation between the two worlds the ceremony of communing with the ancestral spirits is observed constantly.³¹

One can have access to this world of spirits. And this can only be possible by death. However, Mukhanda dance creates communion with the spirits of ancestors. Masks used for the dance are very important for Basuku who believe that they have a power "sui generis". Kisidika and Tundanzi use them. Kisidika wears masks when he performs

³⁰ L. Beir, **Religion et Magie des Bavaka** (St Augustin, Germany: Anthropos, 1975), 163.

³¹ Jomo Kenyatta, **Facing Mount Kenya** (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1932), 264.

sacrifices and rites. During this dance the candidates communicate with the world of spirits. Popular hymns believed transmitted by spirits accompany the dance. We have for instance: *Kubanda pumbu, kubanda pumbu, mbongwa bantu yenda nleki mu kalunga. Nzambi pungu ugioka; ufula nkumba mbwa, ukonda mbau*³²; Meaning, below the house of circumcision, below the house of circumcision, the foreskins of men I have thrown it out on the earth. The Supreme Being takes it away, he dries up the dog's umbilical cord without fire.

This dance does not aim only to entertain, rather its deep motivation is the transmission of vital force in the communion with the spirits. Masks represent the spirits which will take body in the candidates who will live again earthly realities; for this reason mask dancers disguised are not to be identified. They are like ghosts. People say about them that today our ancestors have come back. To any question about spirits, Basuku answer that the world of spirits exists and the spirit is released when one dies; this spirit released continues to live. This world is parallel to the world of the living. Having reached a higher state of being, the spirits have obligations towards the living. They protect the living against other powers. They have an impact on the living ones. The belief on the survival of man or woman is the basis of moral and social life of Basuku. The dead live in Kalunga. They are under ground, in the cemetery, under abandoned villages, under trees, under rivers; but they wander also in forests, in the air and among stars. Kalunga is not clearly localized. The dead come back to frighten and amaze the living.

They are endorsed with special powers. For this reason they are called "banzambi" (gods, ghosts). When whirlwind raises some soil Basuku say that

³² Plancquaert, 104

“bamvumbi” have passed. But the sudden silence during a conversation is attributed to God passing; it can also be “bamvumbi” or “banzambi”. All these are spirits. There are also spirits of ancestors called khita. They are called when needed. For instance when a woman has difficulty to deliver.

2. 6. SUKU ETHICS

Suku ethics are based on the laws of ancestors to observe. They are called "misiku mia bambuta" (laws of ancestors). About the commandments of ancestors, Basuku say that it is God who passed them on to us. These commandments are: respect of parents and ancestors, prohibition of adultery and robbery (you will not steal anything from others, you will not steal any one's wife). From all institutions it is marriage which propagates life in the clan and it is directly linked to God. Plancquaert, affirms that the institution of Mukhanda has reference to God who founded it (“kulwala mukhanda kutuka ku Nzambi Phungu”).

A common song sung during a public judgment gives us more information:

*Au Kalunga d'où tu es venu, retourneras-tu? D'ou tu es venu, retourneras-tu? Au Kalunga, d'où tu es venu, ne retourne pas. D'où tu es venu ne retourne pas, ô ma mère. Le jour ou je retournerai au Kalunga, la terre sera rouge; La terre qui boit le sang. Le soleil (couchant) est imbibé de tukula, de couleur rouge; kalunga est imbibé du sang des hommes.*³³

³³ Lamal, 165

2. 7. SEXUAL MORALITY

Sexual morality is very strict among Basuku. We will see this when we will talk about engagement. Basuku are very reserved people. Bad jokes are forbidden in public (kutamba nsaka za nsoni). When boys come close to a river, they shout, they sing to let girls aware so that they may hide. In the past it was rare to see boys and girls walking together. Any sexual act between girls and boys is a serious offense, even if the girl is not pregnant.

There is a confession for the girl to know whether she had ever had sex before marriage. If so, an expiation is compulsory even if the act was committed years before. There is a custom called "mabuku" which deals with such situations. Any boy who had sexual intercourse will pay the girl as an expiation for the offense. In 1952, a man was condemned for having had sexual intercourse with a woman in his adolescence, yet the woman was married and had children. Making a girl pregnant is a serious offense and it is punishable.

2. 8. ENGAGEMENT

Marriage is a social institution which brings together four families: the patrilineal and matrilineal parents of the fiancés. Any disagreement of these parties annihilates the marriage. Any premarital intercourse is strictly forbidden between fiancés, cohabitation as well. A girl visiting her fiancé will never be left alone; she will go with her mother carrying food. The dowry will be doubled if this rule is broken. The consent of the girl is required. But there are cases whereby the consent is forgotten and the girl is forced to accept a man.

2. 9. MARRIAGE

A. Rubbens complains, about sexual behavior in the Congo of his time; but

Lamal argues that this does not apply to the Basuku whose marriage has still a value:

*le Congo se meurt par l'atteinte que porte l'anarchie sexuelle aux sources même de la vie. Le mariage coutumier n'existe plus; il n'y a plus que le concubinage et la prostitution. Ces affirmations, posées pour expliquer la dénatalité dans certaines populations du Congo, seraient erronées, appliqués à la population Basuku. Le mariage y demeure une institution stable et respectée.*³⁴

A sacrifice of a goat (nkombwa nsiku) or a chicken is a condition 'sine qua non' of a valid marriage. This gives them right and power for procreation. Mgr M'sanda shows the importance of the coming together of the two partners:

*Les deux géniteurs en s'unissant transmettent l'élément matériel sanguin à leur descendance. Ce sang même dans sa matérialité constitue le fondement de la parenté bilatérale clanique.*³⁵

A rite called "kulokula meti ha pambwa nzila" (throwing saliva at cross roads) is very important for the new couple. The spouses and their parents, and relatives go to the crossroads with a pot and a chicken. Every one will throw his saliva into the pot. The throat of the chicken will be cut and the blood will be rubbed on the arms and shoulders of the woman marrying. Then the confession to the lemba (brother of the mother) follows. She will tell him privately the names of boys she had sex with in her youth. These boys or men will have to pay as sign of expiation for this evil.

Every offense confessed will be forgiven. If this rite was not done in the beginning of the marriage, it has to take place when the woman is in travail or when the child is sick. The idea behind this rite is the expiation of any offense committed, otherwise a misfortune will come to the new family. Another important moment and rite is the "kusula mukhetu". Solemnly, the lady will be taken to the house of her husband,

³⁴ Lamal, 241-242

³⁵ Dieudonné M'sanda, La Dote Maritale et le Libre Consentement de Mariage Congolais (Doctorate thesis in Canon Law, Gregorian, 1968), 78

by young girls and women singing, carrying, utensils for the new wife. This rite shows the existence of a true marriage, distinct from a cohabitation. Then the "lemba will pronounce his blessings and instructions saying, *"hwenda buta bana ye nzala ye nsuki"*; meaning go and bear children with nails and hair, to say living children.

During his instructions he tells her the *misiku* (law) of the ancestors she has to observe. Thus, the "lemba" (uncle) gives the vital force for procreation to his niece. This uncle being brother to the mother has the same vital force.

La force vitale n'est communiquée principalement que par la mère, ou l'ascendant féminin. Le Congolais dira souvent pour exprimer la communication de la force vitale par les femmes: 'Mu vumu dimosi tuna', nous sommes du même sein; 'nzemb'eto mosi', littéralement, nous avons la même 'placenta', le même sac amiotique. 'Kia dia ngudi kia dia mwana', ce que mange la mère, c'est cela que mange l'enfant, c'est-à-dire l'enfant ne communique qu'à la vie de sa mère, à la force vitale de sa mère; 'kima kia kingudi kia ngeyi, kia kitata kiangani', littéralement, ce qui appartient au côté de ta mère est ta propriété, ce qui est au côté de ton père reste étranger à toi.³⁶

Mum told us about another rite which follows the first night of the new couple. It is about the checking of the bed to know whether the woman was virgin. If so, a lot of gifts will be given her.

³⁶ M'sanda, 79-80

CHAPTER III

3.0. RESEARCH METHOD, PROCEDURES AND FINDINGS

3. 1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter three deals with method, procedure and findings of the research we conducted within different social stratum of Basuku in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Basuku have a very rich culture whose ethics are a prepared ground for Christianity. For this reason, it was not difficult for missionaries to pass on the Christian message to Basuku. The Mukhanda initiation rite prepares people to live cultural values. Our quest dealt on how can a Musuku live an authentic Christianity without losing his cultural values. Our original intention was to conduct our research using the following procedures:

A. Data collection through works written on Basuku and Congo people, different essays and works on inculturation and African Christianity (the case of Kimbanguist Church in Congo).

B. Interviews and dialogues with Basuku elders, men and women alike, young people who passed through this initiation rite and those who did not, Basuku priests and a European missionary two stayed two decades among Basuku, Basuku who were baptized in the Catholic Church but left for some reason. We conducted this research during our pastoral year and our holidays in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1997-1998). We started collecting information during our holidays at home. Then, during our pastoral year we traveled from one town to another to visit some libraries and Basuku priests who did their doctorate dissertations on the Basuku. These movements were not easy to make. But it was easy to meet all those people and our dialogue was in friendly atmosphere. We had

to make appointments in advance in order to make those people aware of our visit and its purpose. These two procedures gave us valuable information and material on the Suku culture in general and the Mukhanda initiation rite in particular. We dialogued with and interviewed 46 people, all exclusively in the DRC.

Number	Subjects	Number of participants	%
1	Old women in Matari	6	13.04
2	Old men in Kimbau Matari	8	17.39
3	Men (Catholics & and those who abandoned)	7	15.22
4	Young men in Matari & Kinshasa	14	30.43
5	Girls	4	8.70
6	Priests (Basuku & European)	7	15.22
	Total	46	100%

3. 2. INTERVIEWS AND DATA COLLECTION

We got very valuable information and books in the Jesuits' library, ISP (a College) and Uniband (University of Bandundu) in Kikwit, and individuals offered us their books to read. This helped to evaluate all the information we had been collecting from individuals. The respondents were interviewed individually, this with the intention to give each person freedom to express himself without being influenced by anybody. It was a dialogue type encounter which lasted more or less one hour. Some questions were asked in order to get the information needed. Two questions were asked to old people

about missionaries and their influence. One question dealt with the reason why many people have left the Catholic Church for independent ones, one was about the Kimbanguist Church the DRC. Six questions dealt with the Mukhanda initiation rite and the possibility of inculturation. In this, as a Musuku missionary, I saw a need of inculturating the Christian message for a fully African Church among Basuku.

3. 3. SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

In order to get valuable information about Suku and their relationship with missionaries whom they met at first with a lot of fascination, we first talked to people who did not go to school at all and passed through the initiation rite of Mukhanda. Then, we talked to learned people who some of them had left the Catholic Church, boys and girls, priests (one of them being a European). All those people are Christian. The choice of these different groups helped us to evaluate and have a broader knowledge the Suku culture in relationship with Christianity.

3. 4. POPULATION SAMPLING

Our research was conducted among people of different age. There were four groups:

Number	Subjects	Age	Number of Participants	%
1	Old people	60-80	14	30.43
2	Middle Age people	38-50	7	15.22
3	Boys & Girls	18-27	18	39.13
4	Priests	28-78	7	15.22
	Total		46	100%

All the men we encountered were circumcised; but not all of them passed through the Mukhanda initiation rite. All old men had the experience of this initiation; most of the middle age were initiates of the Mukhanda; none of the boys experienced it; and two priests only had this initiation.

3. 5. LANGUAGES USED

Two languages were used during our interviews and dialogues: Kisuku and French. Since our research concerned Basuku, so Kisuku was the principal language and French was an alternative one. There was no way for old people to deliver us information in a language other than Kisuku; this was to our advantage in so far as the information was very authentic.

3. 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3. 6. 1. MUKHANDA AND ITS GRADUAL DISAPPEARANCE

Basuku believe that Mukhanda initiation rite is a very important moment in a boy's life; he comes to know his culture; and so, he becomes a man and can take up responsibilities. All old men told me with conviction that Mukhanda initiation rite had a lot of values and it is through this initiation that one can come to know the law of ancestors. They regretted that the education system brought by colonizers and missionaries was a challenge to the traditional inheritance. This new education fought the Suku tradition of Mukhanda taking it for an evil custom. This provoked a gradual disinterest for those who went to the new school and a gradual disappearance of this initiation rite started. Young people who went to school looked down on their customs and tried to live like Westerners. When they got married, they sent their children to hospitals for circumcision few days after their birth. For old people, those boys will remain boys since they do not know the traditions of their ancestors.

Missionaries brought an attractive civilization. To adhere to it one had to go to school and be baptized. African authors such as Mudimbe-Boy made some studies on the first evangelization in the Kongo Kingdom; he writes, Selon L. de Caltamassisseta,

les Noirs se font baptiser pour recevoir le titre de "don" et pour être considéré comme civilisés. L'enthousiasme et l'adhésion, apparemment spontanés, à la religion Chrétienne, n'empêchent cependant pas les critiques des évangélisés contre l'enseignement et la pratique missionnaire.³⁷

The impression Missionaries gave is that they wanted to get rid of the traditions they encountered among the peoples they evangelized such as Basuku. Young people on their side told me that they agreed with the Mukhanda initiation rite which was a good practice

³⁷ Mudimbe-Boyi Mbulamwanza, "La Pratique Missionnaire des Capucins Italiens", in **Combats pour un Christianisme Africain**, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete and Others (Kinshasa, Zaïre: St Paul, 1981), 57

in order to know their culture in spite of some practices they did not like. Being circumcised is not enough. The knowledge of one's culture makes one live its values. They said Mukhanda initiation rite is a very tough time and one could lose his life because of mistreatments. They suggested that some changes be made so that this initiation may be revived again. For learned Basuku, the Suku culture is very compatible with Christianity. It is with reason Lamal attests that

l'évangélisation trouvait au pays Suku un terrain favorable. Le monothéisme ancestral, le respect des "nsiku" des anciens dont le fonds n'est que l'expression de la loi naturelle, constituaient des valeurs s'harmonisant avec le Christianisme.³⁸

3. 6. 2. CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON BASUKU

A. Emancipation of Women

We have just mentioned that Christianity met a fertile ground on Basuku territory. But some practices limited the freedom of women. It happened that a girl was booked since her young age by an old polygamous man for marriage or forcedly married to a man who is not of her choice. For this reason, many girls flocked to Catholic mission stations for catechumenate. Baptism and the Catholic practice gave them a chance to make a free choice on their marriage. Lamal adds that

l'accession au statut Chrétien est pour la jeune fille une libération. Elle pourra épouser un jeune homme de son âge et souvent de son choix. Elle ne sera plus promise dès son jeune âge à un vieux polygame.³⁹

Women mentioned to me with delight this good side of Christianity in opposition to the imposition of an unwanted husband. They were very grateful for the liberation missionaries brought to women as far as marriage is concerned.

³⁸ Lamal, 181

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 182

B. Scolarization

Scolarization brought by colonial power and missionaries is the cause of loss of the Suku culture mentioned old people. Hence this western education offered to their children gave them a chance to get their own teachers, doctors, religious and priests, they recognized. They mentioned that brutality as means of this education was unfortunate and made many local people very biased about it. They also mentioned that parents lost control of their children who went far to study in boarding schools; they were in a sense uprooted culturally. They were spoiled by the city life. Those who went to these schools started questioning their culture, up to the extent of opposing some practices.

C. Rise of missionaries' hospitals

Many paid tribute for building hospitals and improving health conditions. Child mortality went down with all the medical facilities sisters were offering to people, said many. This increased the population in number. Women were very happy that sisters gave them a lot of instruction on health and life in a family.

D. Father - Mfumu

The new appellation (father) brought by missionaries was not easy to understand said many, since they believed that the father is some one who has a genital son. A old man said that it was funny to call a very young man father. Priests were also called "mfumu" (chief), same title given to chiefs among the Basuku. This appellation brought a lot of misunderstanding about priests. To say, father Joseph, they preferred "mfumu" Joseph. Some chiefs felt that their power was some how challenged by strangers to whom people paid a lot of respect. Gifts were given to both.

3. 6. 3. INTOLERANCE

A. Polygamy

Polygamy was one of the points where missionaries and Suku culture had a lot of misunderstanding. Old people said that the mundele (the white) did not understand why there was polygamy among the Basuku. Many said that the incompatibility between polygamy and Christianity made them forget about the new religion and were not interested in it at all. The chief had to have many wives. This was a pride for him. Some people told me that sons and daughters of polygamous men were not allowed to join religious life. Many left the Catholic Church for this reason.

B. Imperialism

Missionaries were behaving like colonizers or princes said old people. Their authoritarianism was cause of a lot of misunderstanding. They were taken for traders and oppressors. Many believed the fact that catechumenate took a long period before being baptized was a sign that missionaries did not want people to join Christian faith. Those who left the Catholic Church said that this Church is oppressive and it does not give freedom, forcing everybody to obey imported rules.

C. Testimony of a missionary on Mukhanda

A missionary who has worked for four decades in Congo, half of it among Basuku, accepted that Basuku were not difficult people to evangelize; their religious and moral life is very compatible with Christianity. Nevertheless, many practices such as

polygamy and fetishism were not acceptable. He was very pleased with the Mukhanda initiation rite which prepares mature people for the society and moral life. He related to me that one day, coming from a outstation with a sister, he met with initiates of the Mukhanda who were furious to see a woman. They demanded her to pay for this serious offence. The priest pleaded for her saying that a sister is different from other women, she is consecrated to the Lord. She is some how a kisidika, the good woman of the Mukhanda initiation rite.

CHAPTER IV

4.0. MISSIONARY IMAGINARY AND FASCINATION OF CONGOLESE PEOPLE

4. 1. FASCINATION⁴⁰

When the pre-colonizers arrived in the Kongo Kingdom, people were very fascinated to see these white people arriving. It was a new face, new race and above all people believed that it was a message from the divinity. And so, they were fascinated and enchanted. Then, they were afraid when they saw things changing and asked each other: what did they come to do exactly; did they come for our death? So, they started suspecting them.

With the slavery trade things became worse. Some people collaborated and this built a relationship between the West and Africa. This relationship gave to the pre-colonizers the opportunity to become colonizers and settle in the African land. Once they settled, something else happened because in their imaginary, these lay colonizers resembled the image of the pre-colonizer missionary. Jean Francois, a French missiologist calls this missionary romantic. He states,

*il vient , sillonne, découvre le pays et il fait des relations missionnaires à son peuple. C'est quelqu'un qui croit encore à l'humain, c'est-à-dire il veut trouver la terre vide à évangéliser, il sillonne mais il ne s'installe pas. Et ce missionnaire fascine.*⁴¹

But when they passed from the pre-colonizer to the colonizer, their imaginary changed as well, because, who was he in their mind?

⁴⁰ Kamana, "Busculer l'Imaginaire Missionnaire en Afrique", in Les Nouveaux Appels de la Mission, ed. Baobab. Kinshasa, Zaïre, 1994, 398-399

⁴¹ Ibid., 399

- First of all, a conqueror, some body who imposes himself. Nothing could be done against the conqueror because he has all the means to master everybody.

- Secondly, this master becomes master in their land and takes them as slaves. Worse, he becomes their father, i.e. the relationship interiorizes; it is not something external to them and so they adopt and assume, and feel part of this master. There is something proper to the missionary; he takes part in this collective imaginary; that is why they are always called father. This means something fundamental: the mission of the father, was also mission of the master, mission of the conqueror and they stayed in this imaginary. They struggled against the missionary, the neo-colonizer and the lay neo-colonizer. The neo-colonizer is subtle because he is a colonizer who is gone but remains in their imaginary under some form of a new fascination. The colonizer is brutal, but the new colonizer is fine and imposes himself in their imaginary with some systems.

4. 2. MISSION ACTIVITY OF THE CAPUCHINS IN THE KONGO KINGDOM (17TH-18TH CENT.)⁴²

From the time of the beginning of evangelization outside Europe, Propaganda instructed missionaries on an ideal attitude toward people to evangelize. It insisted on the necessity for the missionary to respect and safeguard cultural originality and the identity of the evangelized, when they are not opposite to the principles of Christian religion and morality. Propaganda meant the expansion of a non assimilating and supra-national religion. It insisted also on the necessity and the importance of knowing the local

⁴² Mbulamwanza, 51-61

languages for a better communication with people. "Missione in prattica" (1747), a summary of one hundred years of missionary experience of Capuchins repeats the same directive of propaganda, adding to it some elements, fruit of experiences of concrete situations. Besides, Mudimbe-Boy, reader of this "Missione in prattica", gives clearly the superior- inferior relationship between the missionaries and people of Kongo Kingdom.

He says,

Cet ouvrage en outre, définit l'attitude du missionnaire face à l'évangélisé: elle est celle d'un supérieur vis-à-vis d'un inférieur. Il préconise aussi l'instauration d'un système policier et coercif pour contrôler les Noirs dans leurs pratiques Chrétiennes et les punir en cas de délit.⁴³

Their missionary activity oscillated between two ideals: on one side to know and respect local customs according to directives of Propaganda, on the other side, modify the pagan society through new constitutions and so assure a true conversion. In their explicit desire to modify social structures is manifest in their fight against polygamy, idolatry, fetishism, seen as institutions in the society to evangelize. They tried to spread the faith and impose the Gospel. Three important points form the essential of their missionary activity; for instance the spread of the Gospel, the cult of Sacraments and the practice of Christian life.

4. 2. 1. SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

This was done by the preaching which allowed the missionary to display and make known essential points of Christian religion, prepare people to receive sacraments. They were helped by local catechists. They conducted the repetitions in the Church, teaching them the Christian doctrine, conducting songs and prayer during the cult. They

⁴³ Mbulamwanza, 52

also taught how to read and write. These catechists unhappy with what missionaries were giving them, started keeping for themselves gifts offered them. This resulted in many abuses. To solve this Propaganda decided to prepare local clergy, at Laonda (Angola), for young Congolese. Unhappy about the idea, Capuchins asked Propaganda to wait.

4. 2. 2. CULT AND SACRAMENTS

Sacraments occupied an important task for evangelization, in particular Baptism, Penance and Marriage. Missionaries considered in them a source of spiritual generation. Baptism constituted the important task of their missionary journeys. In their vocabulary they mentioned that Baptism is the door to heaven and opens to a participation in Christ's merits. A preparation for this Sacrament was assured. Besides, marriage was also an important sacrament as well. The only valid marriage was monogamy. They had a fierce fight against the traditional marriage of polygamy. They faced a serious resistance from the Congolese populations who did not see any contradiction in this custom as it was opposed to the Christian religion. To get rid of this practice, missionaries called women concerned: prostitutes and concubine. They went far calling sexual intercourse in marriage impure and a sin. They used threats, physical punishments and even excommunication to stop this practice.

4. 2. 3. PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Once one was baptized, he manifested a new state by a specific way of life: regularity to mass, sacraments of penance and Eucharist, religious marriage and renouncement to traditional practices such as idolatry and fetishism. According to

missionaries, Christian religion forms the true norm of life. There were many motivations to be baptized: in order to keep friendship with the White, not disappoint Congolese princes who were the first to be converted and at last to get a social consideration. Some were baptized in order to be called civilized and so keep their business with the White. Local people believed that this new religion limited their freedom; it was oppressive with its demanding practices; it was doing "divide et impera".

4 . 3. POPULARITY OF KIMBANGUISM AS AN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY⁴⁴

In its beginning, this religion created by Simon Kimbangu, intrigued seriously colonial and religious authorities. Colonial powers were facing an uncontrollable political force which fought hard for the independence of Congo. Catholic and Protestant Churches did not feel at ease in front this charismatic religious trend which made them feel strangers in this African continent. They preached in a language which was theirs. This challenged missionaries. For decades relationship between the two sides was very polemical. It was only at the independence that Kimbanguism became an official religion. The founder was presented as a hero and a prophet with a religious message at the independence. This Church is a very popular one in central African countries. This has attracted many historians and theologians.

The secretary of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference visited DR Congo to get in touch with Kimbanguism in order to see how they could take care of black Brazilians

⁴⁴ Jules Dubois, "Les Kimbanguisme vus par eux mêmes", in **Combats pour un Christianisme Africain**, ed. A. Ngindu Muhsete and Others (Kinshasa, Zaïre: St Paul, 1981), 127-132

attracted to various sects. Kimbanguists are very proud of being true African Christians. They are very grateful to missionaries who are true messengers of God for having brought the Gospel to Africa. God has aroused African prophets and Independent Churches so that his Almighty may be shown to Africans; and only Africans could do this. In these Churches, Africans have met the Risen Lord who has become their brother and one of them. The ministry of the prophet Kimbangu showed that inspired by the Spirit, the African could find in the Bible essential truths of Salvation without intermediary. Being in the heart of Africa, Kimbanguism is aware of being the religion which receives Jesus-Christ's revelation while safeguarding as much as possible the inheritance of Negro-African culture. The blossoming of any one can not take place in crushing and renunciation of one's cultural inheritance. Dubois praises their theology, saying

*la théologie Kimbanguiste est donc solitaire de la lutte dans laquelle sont engagés les peuples hier opprimés et aliénés, en vu du découverte de leur "âme", de leur identité culturelle, de leur histoire.*⁴⁵

4. 3. 1. BELIEF IN GOD

For Kimbanguists, there is no doubt that it is God, our God, God Almighty, the creator of their ancestors called Nzambi-a-Phungu who came down to reveal himself and so save them. Only God could do this. According to ancestral traditions, Africans believed that this God creator, tired of people's sins and lack of gratefulness withdrew far from them. They believed that he exists, but far from them. Spirits and Ancestors are replacing pales; but they are not good some times. Africans thirst for life, that is why they have traditional ancestral ceremonies.

⁴⁵Dubois, 129

4. 3. 2. FAITH IN JESUS- CHRIST

Some people took Simon Kimbangu as a black Messiah or Holy Spirit. This is a lack of humility. But he called himself great in so far as he was a simple servant of Jesus-Christ. Their profession of faith is inspired by the Nicea Symbol. To avoid any ambiguity, kimbanguists distinguish first of all Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity and spirits as known among Africans; then, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the one of Pentecost which produces love, purity and discipline, and the inspiration of psychological or occult origin which causes agitation and loss of control; lastly faith in Jesus- Christ which wakens people's responsibility for progress and freedom, religion, and private affairs which deepen individuals in selfishness.

4. 3. 3. FAITH AND BELIEF IN ANCESTORS

The pride of belonging to an African Independent Church does not lead Kimbanguists neither to a total compromise in front of ancestral traditions, nor to political nationalism. The safeguard of cultural values does not overwhelm the new identity, which is universal, received when one accepted to become Christ's disciple and servant. The acceptance of the faith makes one renounce without any constraint or violent cultural values which are incompatible with Christianity, such as cohabitation before religious marriage, offering food or drinks to the dead and polygamy. They take polygamy as lack of respect for women and source of tensions in the society. They believe the fact that Adam was given only one wife is an indication of divine intentions on monogamous marriages.

4. 3. 4. SACRAMENTAL LIFE

They have four Sacraments: Baptism, Communion, Marriage and Ordination. They practice baptism by prayer and imposition of hands with reference to John the Baptist. In the beginning, they had a lot of polemics and arguments on how to celebrate Communion. After then, they decided on the following formula:

- a) Diluted honey will be used as Blood of Christ since John the Baptist used it.
 - b) A cake made of potatoes, eggs, maize and bananas will be used as the Body of Christ.
- After the prayer of blessing, honey and the cake become effectively the Blood and Body of Christ. Taking Communion is more than remembering Christ; it is really drinking and eating the Blood and Body of the Lord. To underline the sacro-sanctum character of Communion, this Sacrament is celebrated on few chosen days: 25th December (birth of Jesus), 12th October (anniversary of Kimbangu's death), 6th April (anniversary of the beginning of his Christian ministry) and at Easter.

4. 3. 5. CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Kimbanguist Theology teaches that political and socio-economic order is temporary. It will disappear at the second coming of Christ, to give room to the new order where justice, happiness, peace and reconciliation will prosper. One should not wait passively for the coming of this new order; rather, he should fight all scourges which mine the society and prevent people from living as reconciled with God and one another.

La théologie Kimbanguiste ne demande pas à l'homme de remplir et surtout de réussir la mission que seul Christ peut réussir, à savoir: l'instauration d'un ordre nouveau sous lequel l'homme trouvera les conditions de son plein épanouissement. L'homme doit

*préparer jusqu'à l'extrême limite de ses capacités et de sa bonne volonté, l'avènement de cet ordre de justice.*⁴⁶

Kimbanguists are not silent in front of violence, oppression, injustice, racism, corruption, selfishness which alienate the human race. They are committed in economical and social activities which sustain government efforts to improve the conditions of life of the population. They are very involved in social works, such as hospitals, schools, farms, cooperatives as ways of responding to integral needs of the person. Their builders help people free of charge at the end of their permanent work to live the words of their spiritual leader (Kimbangu): "je m'aide en aidant les autres". They understand that the Gospel is not living for oneself but for others.

4. 4. CHRIST AS PROTO ANCESTOR⁴⁷

Benezet Bujo proposes a Negro-Africano-Christocentric moral. For him, Christ in the African context is the initial ancestor and this has to take root in the life of a Negro-African Christian. Words, gestures and rites characteristic of ancestors and elders are very important in the life of the Negro-African. They become the rule of conduct for the living who will repeat them. On this depend their present and future, life and death. This means that the past which forms the tradition of forefathers is not past, rather salvation depends on it. The veneration of ancestors is not profane but takes place in a religious context.

The Negro-African looks at an integral salvation of the human race. The actualization of memories of forefathers and elders is a kind of commemorative-narrative destined to assure the total and final community, beyond graves, with all good and

⁴⁶Dubois, 131

⁴⁷Benezet Bujo, "Pour une Ethique Africano-Christocentrique", in **Combats pour un Christianisme Africain**, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete and Others (Kinshasa, Zaïre: St Paul, 1981), 21-31

benefactor ancestors. Based on these considerations, a theology able to embody in a Negro-African culture and from which a proposal of Africano-centric Christian ethics can be developed. For instance, that which occupy ancestors and elders in the life of Negro-African should push the African Theologian to create some thing new; he can go up to the point of giving to Christ new messianic titles, so that a new theological language can be elaborated.

For Bujo, one of the ways to create this new language consists in giving to Christ the title of Ancestor so that he may become Proto Ancestor. This has some advantage; the African anthropocentrism is put in evidence in the "ancestrologic" thought to give capital ways to the incarnation of Christianity. If the legitimate desires of ancestors are assured and transcended in Christ as the only ancestor, source of life and happiness who guarantees the future; then, this will be a starting point for a Christology for which the African enthusiasm will not be of short duration. If Christ is the Proto-Ancestor, source of life and happiness, it is his "memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis" which should be actualized, bringing to it all the acts of humanity. So, Christ will become the only pole of attraction; once elevated he will attract all to him (Jn12: 32) and consecrate by his Cross all "humanitas africana" so much wanted by ancestors. Nevertheless, Jesus corrects and completes the traditional view Negro-African views; the moral act rooted in Christ does not concern only the good of one's clan, parents or friends, but rather the one of all humanity without distinction of race.

CHAPTER V

5. 0. GENERAL CONCLUSION

5. 1. SUMMARY AND PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS

We have gone into the meaning, the importance and the *raison d'être* of Mukhanda initiation rite among the Basuku. We have noticed that this initiation rite concerns the whole Suku community, men, women, children alike, since its aim is to prepare mature people for the society. Mukhanda, being an initiation rite for males, it may seem paradoxical to talk about the wholistic aspect of the Suku tradition, nevertheless, as long as it involves the formation of future leaders of the society it touches the whole community which will enjoy its good fruits. Looking at the way women are treated in many African communities in general, and the Basuku in particular, questions may rise. Why are they marginalized?

If there is a point which attracts our attention on any inculturation, confession is one. A question rises still: why is confession done only to girls before marriage? A Musuku may say that life comes from women who in actual fact are supposed to keep their purity. A similar confession is to be done also to men; since life comes from an encounter of both sexes, the two of them should keep their purity. The Church has taken a strong stand in protecting them and giving them freedom in their choice of a future husband. Preaching against such a discrimination is a task for Basuku pastors. Some other practices such as the rite of insults on the days around circumcision and the bad treatment of the initiates have to be challenged as well. An evangelization of this initiation is a strong means for changing Suku society. We can not try any inculturation of any aspect of the Mukhanda initiation rite if we do not first of all challenge all the bad

practices. Having gone through the study of this traditional formation, we have found some points which can be inculturated in the Church.

It is important for the Gospel to penetrate culture. Culture and Gospel can be compatible. But the Gospel must impregnate the cultures of people evangelized. A knowledge of the culture should be prime to everything. Culture and the Gospel enrich each other in their relationship. But the Gospel is prime and has to keep its prophetic role. Our reflection has prepared a way for deep inculturation among the Basuku. Let us note that the africanization of this initiation rite is a project in which inculturation will transform cultures. The inculturation in which we involve ourselves will lead to deep conversion of the Basuku.

5. 2. PROJECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Our study of the Mukhanda initiation rite did aim at criticizing the methodology of missionaries in Africa; rather we had in mind the intention of creating an awareness of a possible dialogue between Suku culture and the Gospel. This initiation rite gives us more elements for such a dialogue which can hopefully lead to an inculturation. It is too early to make any specific suggestion for inculturation without any other study of some elements of this culture offered in the Mukhanda rite. And so, we have assigned ourselves to a further research on the following points:

- a. A study on the laws of the Basuku and their ethics.
- b. A study of the Suku culture among those Basuku who live in Angola to make a comparative study on their traditions.
- c. A study more deep on the veneration of ancestors to help Basuku understand that Christ is our Proto-Ancestor.

- d. A study of the rite of confession for women in order to preach Basuku on the importance of confession in our relationship with God and one another.

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