INCULTURATION AND ANCESTOR VENERATION: THE CASE OF THE DAGAABA CATHOLICS

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by

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DEDICATION

TO MY BELOVED FATHER, DANKYE BARTHOLOMEW DAPILA, WHO DIED WHILE I WAS WORKING ON THIS THESIS. I MISS YOUR EARTHLY PRESENCE. GREETINGS TO YOUR FATHER, MY GRANDFATHER AND ALL MY ANCESTORS.

THESIS TITLE: INCULTURATION AND ANCESTOR VENERATION: THE CASE OF THE DAGAABA CATHOLICS.

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ABSTRACT

The tension between indigenous African cultures and religions on the one hand, and Christian Churches on the other, is a well know fact that has been addressed by all concerned but still not resolved. From the point of view of the Africans, the history of the Christian missions is filled with misunderstandings and a lack of sensitivity on the part of the Churches. The African Synod of Bishops held in Rome in April 1994, is only the latest example of the problems surrounding the Church's attitude towards African Christians.

From a personal experience of the tension between indigenous African cultures and religions, the author analyses the situation of the Dagaaba Catholics as it exists and lays out the tools that can be used to come to a mutually acceptable solution. In the light of the ongoing modifications in the process of evangelization, the thesis explores the interaction between Catholic missionaries and the Dagaaba of Upper West Ghana from the beginning of the Christian mission to today. The area chosen for this study is ancestor veneration as it was and is practised by the Dagaaba.

The discussion of the Dagaaba's beliefs and practices related to their ancestors showed, on the other hand, the centrality of the latter in the life of the Dagaaba, and, on the other, important similarities with Christian attitudes towards the saints. Both Dagaaba ancestors and Christian saints are community heroes that were "sanctified" by the group from which they hailed. They are models for the members of the

respective communities. The images of the ancestors and saints are meant to establish a lasting memory of the heroes and make them ever-present. Both the Dagaaba sculptures and their ancestors and the statues of Christian saints are placed in locations where they are easily accessible, i.e., either the house or the church.

As a result of the analysis the author confidently states that the integration of Dagaaba ancestor veneration with the Christian cult of the saints would be a vital step towards inculturation. If the Church were to allow the ancestors to play the role which in Christianity traditionally is played by the saints, Dagaaba Christians would become fully Christian and at the same time they would not feel that they have to abandon their African roots. The elements that play a vital part here are the naming of children after Dagaaba ancestors rather than European saints to whom the African have no relationship; the saying of prayers that include the ancestors; the celebration of the Eucharist in the consciousness that living and dead form the community of the faithful; and the performing of family rituals that involve past and present members.

Together, clergy and lay persons must embark on the road towards inculturation. The process itself must be informed by thorough research into the genuine meaning of the beliefs and practices of Africans in view of the teachings of Christianity.

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INTRODUCTION

The tension between indigenous African cultures and religions on the one hand, and Christian Churches on the other, is a well known fact that has been addressed by all concerned but still not resolved. From the point of view of the Africans, the history of the Christian missions is filled with misunderstandings and a lack of sensitivity on the part of the Churches. The Roman Catholic African Synod of Bishops held in Rome in April 1994, is only the latest example of the problems surrounding the Church's attitude towards African Christians.

In the light of the on-going modifications in the process of evangelization, the present thesis wants to explore the interactions between the Catholic missionaries and the Dagaaba of North-west Ghana from the beginning of the Christian mission to today. More specifically, it will focus on one particular aspect, i.e. ancestor veneration, and show that this traditional Dagaaba practice is compatible with Catholic doctrine. The practice may therefore form an essential base for an evangelization process that will make the Christian message understandable to the new congregation.

The concern with the integration of one of the most basic traits of Dagaaba religion with Catholicism grew out of my personal experience. I grew up in a family whose first members became Catholic in 1935, but of which other members continued to practice their traditional faith. This led to pressures on both sides that had a profound effect on the whole family, including myself. The predicament was compounded by the fact that certain members of my family had been prominent soothsayers, medicine men and necromancers before their conversion, and their offices were continued by other members who did not embrace Christianity; these offices are in existence up to this day.

But despite the fact that the thesis deals with an intense personal concern and, moreover, enters into inner-Church discussions, it is not intended to be a polemical tractate. Rather, it wants to analyze the situation as it exists and to lay out the tools that can be used to come to a mutually acceptable solution.

Research into traditional Dagaaba religion has to be done differently from the usual academic approach which relies on written sources. Very little has in fact been published about Dagaaba religion. My foremost source for this aspect of the thesis is therefore my own experience. I was born and grew up in a traditional Dagaaba village and lived with my family all my life. This means that my upbringing and every-day existence were suffused with traditional Dagaaba customs, beliefs and practices, and at the same time with the values and traditions of the Catholic Church as they were and are inculcated in Ghana and in particular by one part of my family. Those few works that were published about the Dagaaba culture and religion have of course been consulted and quoted when appropriate. Moreover, studies about related groups have also been included.

It should also be pointed out that virtually all of the writings on the Dagaaba come from missionaries. Very few come from anthropologists. Both groups are Westerners who bring their own perspectives and interests to the field. Only in very recent years did native members begin to write about their own culture and religion.

The thesis will put forward the claim that traditional Dagaaba ancestor veneration and Catholicism are compatible with each other. It will analyze the nature of ancestor veneration, confront it with the Catholic Church's teachings about Jesus and the saints, and show that the two concepts are in fact so close that they can be seen as two expressions of one underlying idea.

In the course of the history of the Church, many attempts have been made to reconcile indigenous religious traditions with Catholic doctrine and practices. One of the major dangers that the Church saw in this process was syncretism. The most famous case is that of the Chinese Rites in the eighteenth century. However, there were numerous other occasions where the Church intervened because of fear of syncretistic practices. The thesis tries to clarify the issues surrounding the use of "syncretism" and to dispel misconceptions that have hampered attempts at integration of values from different traditions.

For some time now the two partners, i.e. African Christianity and the Catholic Church, have termed the attempt at reconciling indigenous beliefs and practices with Christian traditions "inculturation." The thesis will therefore discuss this concept in depth.

It should be emphasized that even when the following discussion makes reference to arguments by the Church and uses theological language, it is done with the intent of analysis only and of entering into the thought-world of the participants in the dialogue in order to present possible solutions to some of the problems.

This thesis consists of five sections. In chapter one, the geographical space and historical background of the Dagaaba of Eremon will be described. In Chapter two, the main traditional beliefs and practices of the Dagaaba will be set out as necessary background for the discussion on the interaction between Dagaaba religion and Catholicism.

The history of the Catholic Church in the Dagaaba land constitutes the third chapter. Already here the tensions between the two entities will surface. They will be thematized in the fourth chapter. The fifth and final chapter will show that and how Dagaaba ancestor worship can

be reconciled with the Christian veneration of Jesus and the saints.

CHAPTER ONE

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DAGAABA OF EREMON.

1. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The land area inhabited by the Dagaaba[1] is found between latitudes 8° and 15° North of the Equator, and longitudes 2° and 4° East. It extends along the East and West banks of the Black Volta in the Sudan belt of West Africa. Lying between the Sahara Desert and the tropical forest, it is drained mainly by the Niger and Volta rivers. After the partition of Africa the territory of the Dagaaba was split among three countries, Burkina Faso, La Côte D'Ivoire and Ghana.

In Ghana, the Dagaaba are found in the Upper West Region, towards the northwestern corner of the country. Their settlement covers an area of over 3500 square kilometres, the main towns being Kaleo, Nadoli, Jirapa, Lawra, Nandom and Hamile. The population of the Dagaaba in Ghana is about 300,000.[2] In Burkina Faso, the Dagaaba are found in the towns of Dissin, Dano and Oaessa which spread over an area of about 160 square kilometres with a population of about 15000. They are however about 5000 in La Côte D'Ivoire where they occupy a much smaller territory. The

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1 The name of the tribe is sometimes written as 'Dagara,' 'Dagaba' or 'Dagaaba.' Other tribes also wrongly address them as 'Dagarti' which is the anglicized name for the tribe. The variation is as a result of the different dialects and phonetics. The people are Dagaaba (sing. Dagao) and their language is Dagaare or Dagara, but their home land is also referred to as Dagao. We shall use the name 'Dagaaba' throughout this research.

2 The 1984 population census of Ghana gave a figure of 10,000,000 as total population, with the Upper West region having a population of 438,008. The UN population estimate for Ghana (1991) is 15,494,000. Since the Dagaaba are three-fifths of the total population of the Upper West Region, the figure given is my estimation of the total number of Dagaaba in the region today. See Kaleidoscope: Current World Data Ghana (1991), p.1.

Dagaaba as a tribe are therefore close to half a million people, with a population density of about 80 persons per square kilometre. Though they are divided by political boundaries, their way of life is the same in all three areas and some family ties extend across the borders. The Dagaaba tribe is surrounded by the Wala to the South, the Sisaala to the East, the Grunsi and Mossi to the North and the Lobi to the West.

The vegetation of the territory of the Dagaaba is described as guinea savannah or savannah woodland with high plains and an altitude of between 100 and 200 meters above sea level. The soil is savanna ochrosols and savanna glysols which account for about 80% of the soils in the region. The uplands are characterized by poor lateritic soils which are susceptible to erosion, while the soils in the river valleys are richer and heavier. The region once had a continuous grass land which is now broken into patches due to human activities. The grass grows to about four metres in height, while the trees are semi-deciduous and are widely spaced. The trees are drought resistant with thick barks to withstand the heat from the sun and the annual bush fires. The most predominant trees include the shea, the dawadawa and the baobab.

There are two main seasons in the region, a dry season which extends from October to March and a rainy reason, from April to October. During the long dry season, the region is affected by the North East Trade winds, called the Harmattan winds. The Harmattan winds come from the Sahara desert, bringing hot, dry and dusty air to the region. They start in November and are severest in January and February but normally stop blowing by the beginning of March.

Annual temperatures range from a maximum of 34.5°C to a minimum of 22.2°C, giving an average temperature of 28.3°C, with the hottest months being February, March and April.

Temperatures fall by 4°C to 6°C by night, yet are seldom below 18.3°C. The annual rainfall is between 101.6cm and 127cm per annum, with the heaviest amount of rain falling during the months of July and August.

The months of April to October form the most humid period in the Northern part of Ghana with an average relative humidity of 95% during the nights and 70% during the afternoons. The months of November to March are much drier. The average night relative humidity is about 80% and may be as low as 25% during the day.[3]

2. ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Farming is the main occupation and is done at the subsistence level. Crops cultivated include guinea-corn (sorghum), late millet (pennisetum typhoides), maize (zea mays), groundnuts (arachis hypogea), yams (dioscorea sp.), farafara potatoes (coleus dysentericus), bambara beans (voandzeia subterranea), sweet potatoes (ipomea batatas), rice (oryza sp.), various types of beans (vegra sp.) and calabashes (crescentia cujete). The Dagaaba also rear animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and poultry. They are used for traditional customary practices, and much more recently for trade, but rarely for home consumption.

Other economic activities include lake and river fishing. The Black Volta river winds through the territory of the Dagaaba on its way to the Atlantic Ocean and provides suitable fishing grounds. There are also streams and man-made dams from which fishing is done. Individuals may

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[3] E.A. Boateng, A Geography of Ghana (Cambridge: At the University press, 1970), p.36.

go fishing during the rainy seasons, but the dry season is the main fish harvesting season. Dams and river streams usually ebb away during the course of the dry season making it possible for individuals to fish with bows and arrows or a line. Groups of individuals may also bail the water off and use baskets to harvest the fish, while cast-net fishing is practised where the rivers and dams are deeper. However as one moves further away from the river, less and less fishing is done as dams and streams dry up much faster and all available sources of water have to be preserved for home use.

The dry season is also a period of hunting. The grass withers and dries shortly after the rains stop falling in the months of November and December, and with the arrival of the Harmattan winds, bushes and grasslands are burnt easily in preparation for the hunting season. Individuals may go hunting with bows and arrows and, recently, with guns. The popular practice is group hunting were several clans come together to form a hunting team for the expedition. Games include antelopes, deer, grass-cutters, guinea fowls, monkeys, partridges and rabbits.

There is also the gathering of shea-nuts for the extraction of oil. Shea trees are plentiful and grow wild. Between the months of April and June, the nuts of the tree fall to the ground and are then collected by the women. Shea trees within cultivated lands become the property of the farmer, and may not be picked without his permission. Men sometimes assist women in picking the nuts. The crop is mostly sold in the markets and the money earned is used to supplement their food supply in times of shortage. The butter extracted from the nuts serves as cooking oil, and recently women have been trained to use the oil in the manufacture of soap. Other trades include craft work - weaving of baskets, sleeping mats and hats as well as the carving of stools. The preparation of leather (tanning and dyeing) and the production of metal tools from iron, and of pottery, are others.

The Dagaaba also learnt the art of weaving cloths from the Mossi.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Due to lack of written documents, the history of the origin of the Dagaaba is not certain. Information on their recent history is also inadequate and their prehistory is speculative. Any lead on the history of the Dagaaba is based on oral traditions and modern records of their legends, both of which are unreliable. Archaeological excavations are also few due to their dependence on government funding which are minimal.

There is no consensus among scholars on the original home of the Dagaaba. Two main hypotheses are put forth, the first being the Dagomba-Origin hypothesis[4] which is supported by the work of James Anquandah.[5] According to this hypothesis, the Mole-speaking Dagomba existed as a loosely organized people without a centralized form of government till they were attacked by a "conquering band of strangers" who are associated with the descendants of Toha-Zie the Red Hunter. The new empire builders could either absorb the conquered and offer them protection or leave them alone but constantly raid them to capture slaves. The theory suggests that the overlords absorbed and lived with the conquered and established the Dagomba Kingdom. During the reign of Na Nyagse (1476-1492) there was a dispute over the ownership of land in which the foreign

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4 Paul Bekye, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions: With Particular Reference to the Dagaaba of West Africa (Rome: Leberit Press, 1991), p.103, quoting J. Hébert, Les Dagara (Ouagadougou: Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Education, la Science, e la Culture: Réunion d'Experts sur la Coodination et Planification de la Collecte de la Tradition Orale en Afrique, 26 juillet - 2 août, 1968, the work was not accessible to me).

5 James Anquandah, Rediscovering Ghana's Past (London: Longman, 1982), p.80.

overlords tried to dispossess the indigenous Mole-speaking Dagomba. There was an uprising against the foreign overlords which led to a bloody war. The bloodshed forced some people to move away in search of much more peaceful areas.

The second hypothesis, the Mossi-Origin hypothesis, suggests that the Dagaaba might have moved to their present settlement from the North. According to the historian Ivor Wilks, the history of the Dagaaba is probably linked to that of the Mossi of Burkina Faso. Though it is not certain when the Mossi states were founded, it is however evident that they were organized as a people by the middle of the fifteenth century. They struggled with the Songhai empire over control of the Middle Niger.[6] Wilks believes that during the formative periods of the Mossi states, autochthonous peoples were subjugated and were sometimes dispossessed,

> but more usually they were integrated into the new societies as commoner lineages and allowed to continue in occupation of their lands. But the Mossi kingdoms remained surrounded by the territory of unassimilated and indeed never subjugated Bassari, Tallensi, Kassena, Awuna, Dogon, Konkomba and the like. As early as the seventeenth century some sort of equilibrium may have been established: that is, that although the stateless tribes remained subject to constant raids by Mossi cavalry parties, and were sometimes brought under a nominal overlordship like that of the Mamprussi over the Tallensi, no concerted attempts were made to integrate them more fully into the centralised system. Unincorporated, they constituted pools of manpower from which the demands of raiding parties in search of slaves could be met; incorporated they acquired status and with it protection. It was perhaps in consequences of this situation that in the seventeenth century leaders of Mamprussi, Dagomba, and even Wagadugu cavalry groups created for themselves small chieftaincies, not in the vicinity of their homelands, but far to the west of the middle Black Volta. Best known of these are Wa in the country of the Dagaba, and Buna in that of the Kulango. Paradoxically, it was groups from as far west as the Komoe river, engaged as mercenaries by the Gonja and Mamprussi kings in the mid-eighteenth century, that were allowed to settle near the Mamprussi frontiers and to develop there a small state centred

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6 Ivor Wilks, "The Mossi and Akan States 1500 to 1800," in: J.F.A. Ajayi, History of West Africa, Vol.1 (London: Longman, 1976), p.416.

upon Sansanne Mango.[7]

All the tribes listed above by Wilks run from Ougadougou in the Northeast, to Salaga in the Southeast of the Dagaaba settlement. Wilks mentioned that chieftaincies were established to the West of the Black Volta as checks on the Mossi invasion with Wa "in the country of the Dagaaba" as an example. What this suggests is that the Dagaaba were already on the land during the Mossi invasion of the fifteenth century and before the Dagomba established Wa as a garrison in the seventeenth century.

Legends also trace the Mossi-Dagbani group which was once made up of the kingdoms of Mamprussi, Dagomba and Mossi to a common ancestor. The identifiable ancestor, Toha-Zie, is believed to have descended from a tribe of giants (Tiyawumya) living near Lake Chad.[8] According to John-Parsons, Toha-Zie was driven away from his home town Zamfara and forced to move Southward to Mali. The descendants of Toha-Zie were later to establish kingdoms including Mamprusi, Dagbon, Nanumba and Mossi kingdoms which together cover the area from present day Timbuktu, stretching Southward to engulf Ougadougou in Burkina Faso and continuing down to Salaga in Ghana.

Based on legends of the origin of some towns of the Dagaaba such as Eremon,[9] Lawra,[10]

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7 Wilks, "The Mossi and Akan States 1500 to 1800," p.414.

8 D. John-Parsons, More Legends of Northern Ghana (Accra-Tema: State Publishing Corporation, 1960), p.15.

9 D. John-Parsons, Legends of Northern Ghana (Accra-Tema: State Publishing Corporation, 1958), p.12.

10 John-Parsons, Legends of Northern Ghana, p.46-48. Goody also reports that the people of Lawra speak of themselves as having moved to their present settlement from Wa area sometime in the latter half of the eighteenth century, thus supporting the Southward movement of their founding father; see Jack Goody, The Social Organisation of the LoWilli (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.106.

Hang[11] and Nandom,[12] and the account of the early missionaries which testify that many Dagaaba travelled across the Black Volta river to inform other members of their families about the works of the missionaries,[13] we shall briefly put forward a third hypothesis on the possible trend of migration of the Dagaaba.

In reconstructing the historical background of the Dagaaba from the information available, we agree with the suggestion that the Dagaaba are a subgroup of the Mossi-Dagbani or Gur-speaking peoples. Like the rest of their descent group, they most probably migrated to their present settlement from Niger before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D., following the rising power of the Songhai Empire. In the course of the migration, the Dagaaba might have broken up into two groups, with one group travelling Eastward with tribes such as the Dagomba and Mamprussi while the other branched off towards the Western corner of the Northern Territory of Ghana.

It is evident that by the time of the Mossi invasion of the fifteenth century the Dagaaba were already on the land,[14] which makes a date of their arrival during or before the fifteenth century most probable, but not later.[15] The Dagaaba who went toward the East in the company of the Dagomba

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11 R.S. Rattray, The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, Vol.II (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1969), p.406.

12 John-Parsons, More Legends of Northern Ghana, p.6-9.

13 D. Glenn Kittler, The White Fathers (London: W.H. Allen, 1957), p.241.

14 Wilks recorded that the Mossi kingdoms were created in a territory of which the indigenous people had little affinity in culture and tradition. He noted that the indigenous people lacked centralised political institutions but were organised on the basis of areas of ritual jurisdictions under the tendaana; see Wilks, "The Mossi and Akan State 1500 to 1800," p.418-419.

15 Yangyouru is among scholars who suggest that the Dagaaba migrated to their present home in the fifteenth century. See: Yvon Yangyouru, "Dagara Traditional Cultic Sacrifice as a Thematization of Ultimate Reality and Meaning," Ultimate Reality 7 (1983), p.210.

and Mamprussi, probably settled together with those tribes, most likely as a minority group, long enough to experience the disadvantages of chieftaincy before later moving to their present location. The reasons for the movement away from the Dagomba tribe, whether to escape from dictatorial reign or to get away from bloodshed to a much more peaceful location, is not important to our case.

For whatever reason, when the Dagaaba decided to move away from among the Dagomba, they travelled Eastward toward Bole and then Northward to the "country" of the Dagaaba. Due to the presence of the first group of Dagaaba who branched off earlier on and settled to the East of the river Black Volta, the second batch of settlers were easily absorbed by their fellow tribesmen. While in the region, the Dagaaba moved around by clans and families looking for suitable places that will meet their economic needs and also keep them away from the black fly and the tse-tse fly. This will explain the Eastward trend of movements reported by Rattray. It will therefore be logical to argue that not every Dagao experienced the bitterness of chieftaincy and those who did would only have been too glad to join their fellow tribesmen in their stateless communities.

When Dagaaba oral traditions say that they have not always been where they are today,[16] two things could be implied: either they are referring to the major wave of movement together with the rest of their descent group, or an internal movement by their clans. Since the information on the historical background of the Dagaaba is mainly oral, our guess will be that the Dagaaba may only relate to their immediate history rather than pre-historic events or very distant events a thousand years or more back. It is most likely that when the Dagaaba elders speak of a migration from somewhere to their present settlements they would be referring to internal movement within the

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[16] Bekye, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religions, p.97.

Dagaaba region, an exercise which continued into the present time. As Kuukure suggested, "we must avoid confusing the Dagaaba's migrations several centuries away, with the more recent movement of populations occasioned by incursions..."[17]

We may therefore summarize our position by saying that some Dagaaba clans were probably in the region long before the Mossi invasion of the fifteenth century. Clans and families however relocated from time to time before they were joined by a second batch of Dagaaba from Dagbon area. The Dagaaba were probably unincorporated during the formation of the Mossi empire, and therefore constituted a pool of manpower from which raiding parties in search of slaves met the demand. Their material culture has been greatly influenced by that of the Mossi as can be noticed in textile weaving and fashion designs as well as stool carvings. However, due to the closeness of the social and religious practices between the Mossi and the Dagaaba, areas of influence in those aspects of the culture cannot be identified.

4. SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE DAGAABA

(A) The descent Group

The Dagaaba descent group is divided into clans, lineages and nuclear families. A clan consists of members who trace their descent to a common ancestor and within it, each member has two lines of alliance: *dogrong* (lit. the line of giving birth), which refers to the line of relations in the paternal descent, and *balong*, which is the relations within the maternal descent, i.e., descent

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[17] Edward Kuukure, The Destiny of Man: Dagaare Beliefs in Dialogue with Christian Eschatology Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985, p.28.

from women of the same ancestress.[18] Through the former, an individual associates himself or herself with all the brothers, sisters, uncles, grandparents and so forth, who relate to his/her father, and through the latter, all the relations on his/her mother's line. The clans live in patriclans which bear names of their founding ancestors. Due to the claim of a common descent, they are exogamous, and endogamy is considered incestuous.

Most Dagaaba clans are patrilineal with common rights of inheritance over land bequeathed by the founding ancestor. Children from a marriage belong to the man and sons may inherit from their fathers side. A man's property may go to his brothers but they could also be passed down to one of his sons. Where there is no surviving brother, the eldest son inherits his father's property. Clan members are expected to live in unity, sharing in the joys and sorrows of other members.

The nuclear family refers to a man and his wife and children, living as a household with the father (*yir doo* - man of the house) as head. The family eat their meals together, with all men eating from one bowl and the women together from another. Meals are eaten in an order, with the oldest in the group serving himself first. Relations within the nuclear family tend to be wider than is the case in Western cultures. Through the two lines of relations, (*dogrong* and *balong*), membership to a family expand to include both lines. This expanded family links, more popularly referred to as the `extended family' system makes it possible for an individual to be related to a great majority of the people in the settlement, and also allows a visitor to find a "home" away from home.

(B) Political System

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[18] Kuukure, The Destiny of Man, p.34.

As is typical of most agricultural societies in Africa, the Dagaaba moved from place to place in search of suitable arable lands and pasture for their animals. As a result they do not have a highly structured political system such as is prevalent among the Mossi, and other tribes which were more sedentary. However, the absence of a centralized political structure does not mean that they live in anarchy.[19] As observed by Goody, the society is so organized as to maintain law and order and "make possible the peaceful co-operation which agriculture demands."[20]

Since the land is considered sacred and is the principal factor of production, there is common allegiance to the Earth deity and the Dagaaba are united by their common aspiration to maintain a peaceful co-relation with the deity to ensure rains and other conditions necessary for the production of crops. The land is treated with reverence and is not used arbitrarily.[21] Land taboos are therefore universal taboos that all, irrespective of clan, have to observe. Any commission or omission on the part of any person or group of persons can lead to drought or other epidemics sent by the deity as punishment, which will inevitably affect all in the area.

The priest of the deity (*tendaana*) is the enforcer of the land taboos and where necessary, is called upon to pacify the deity for infringements. By virtue of his relation to the deity, the office which is held in high esteem, is therefore occupied by a carefully selected candidate from the descendants of the founding member or first settler of the land. The *tendaana*, is therefore first and foremost, a religious leader but through his duties of enforcing the taboos of the Earth deity, has

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19 Jack Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the LoDagaaba of West Africa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p.3.

20 Goody, The LoWiili, p.114.

21 Kuukure, The Destiny of Man, p.39.

assumed social responsibilities of restoring peace and arbitrating disputes related to the land and its usage. In consequence, he is placed above the descent group. His authority is however limited to the ritual jurisdiction of the Earth deity and he supervises over the parish with the help of a council of elders.

Besides the *tendaana*, there are other authority figures within the descent group whose powers are much more confined. At the descent level, there are the clan heads whose authority extend over lineages within the clan. The clan head is considered the living representative of the founding ancestor, which gives him the mandate to dominate certain decisions. His decisions are respected and go unchallenged because of the supernatural base of his authority. He also has ritual duties and appeals to ancestors to punish recalcitrant members within his clan. He can however banish sorcerers and witches without seeking supernatural mandate.

Within the clan, there are lineage heads. Their authorities extend over the families within their lineages. A lineage head is usually the oldest surviving male of the oldest generation. He deals with problems that cannot be solved at the family level and his powers are derived from the ancestors. The final figure of authority is the family head whose authority is limited to the nuclear family. He supervises over the affairs of his family and controls the use of family property including land. His duties also include those of ritual services and upkeep of the family ancestral shrine.

Authority among the Dagaaba is therefore vested in the ancestors and is placed in the hands of the old who are believed to be closer to the former. No authority figure has absolute power because they see themselves as sitting in the seats of the ancestors and cannot therefore abuse the

power entrusted to them. For all practical purposes, all figures of authority see themselves as agents and instruments in the hands of the ancestors. The political organization of the Dagaaba is therefore religion based.

When the British colonial adminstration arrived in the area and found the traditional system of authority inadequate especially for their policy of indirect rule, they appointed chiefs and vested them with `absolute' powers over defined geographical areas which could overlap two or more ritual parishes. The chiefs were often appointed from the most powerful families or the descent of the first settlers. The popularity of the chief depends on how closely related he is to the family of the *tendaana* and for that matter the descent of the first settlers. Where the chief comes from the family of the first settlers, he plays both political and religious roles and is recognized more by the people because of the religious backing behind his authority. The traditional office of *tendaana* combines with the political office in one person, giving his authority both religious and secular support. Ironically, with the religious backing behind his authority, the chief, though vested with absolute powers by the British authorities, could not act as a despot because he came under the domain of the ancestors as well.

The office of the chief is treated like a property and passed down from one member of the family to another.[22] He rules with the help of a council of elders, at the head of which is the *tendaana*. These elders could also be divisional or sub-chiefs and they assisted the chief in his administration of the area. Because the office is a foreign creation, the chief could not be deposed without the consent of the colonial authorities, but the people could withdraw their support by

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[22] Kuukure, The Destiny of Man, p.36.

refusing to cooperate.

The spiritual base of authority among the Dagaaba puts their social organization in the context of religion and subsequently stresses their social practices as religion based. It is therefore necessary for all social and religious authorities to have a divine backing if they are to command the respect and obedience of the Dagaaba. Religious leaders among them will also be respected and obeyed not because of who they are but because of whom they are believed to represent. The Dagaaba lack of civil authority, perhaps as a result of their acephalous life, has made it necessary to centre their social practices in the divine. Consequently their conceptualization of the authority of the Supreme Being cannot be understood in terms of the mundane such as the chief-motif, as we shall see later on.

Among the Dagaare-speaking people of North-western Ghana, two main divisions can be made, Dagaaba and LoDagaaba. *Lo* comes from the Dagaare word *logu* which refers to the "West", as against *sapar* (direction the rain comes from) or the "East." Any settlement to the West is referred to as *lore* while the settlement from which the speaker emerges call themselves and any settlement to their east Dagaaba, but also accept that they are *lore* in relation to their eastern neighbours. Settlements to the "far East" may be called *Saparee*. As an example, settlements to the West of Eremon include Tampie, Zambo, Yagtuure, Lawra and its surrounding villages as well as those across the Black Volta, are *lore* to the people of Eremon. On the other hand, Dowine, Boo, Jirapa, Ullo and Hang are Dagaaba from the stand point of the people of Eremon, with Sabuli, Ullo and their surrounding areas commonly referred to as *Saparee*. At the same time, the eastern neighbours of the people of Eremon call them *lore*.

Dagaare-speaking people acknowledge only place names and are identified by the place they live or come from e.g. Eremuolee of Eremon, Tampielee of Tampie, Zambuolee of Zambo, etc. Distinctions may be recognized in the way some customary practices are performed such as the way of playing the xylophone, dancing, singing of funeral dirges and even styles of farming and of designing pottery. As one moves further away from his/her settlement, dialect distinctions become more obvious and sharp, and vocabularies may take different and opposed meanings to that of the referent area. Paradoxically, there are few discontinuities between neighbouring groups. The interlocking of social relationship is paralleled by a gradual and continuous change of culture over the whole area. People may recognize their affinity with some neighbours in matters such as bride wealth payments, totemic veneration and clans. It may therefore be more appropriate to speak of Dagaaba and *lore* customs rather than Dagaaba and *lore* as a designation of distinct people which is meaningless to the people so described.

The history of the Dagaaba of Eremon (which forms our research area) would not be any different from that of the rest of the tribe. In all probability, the village of Eremon constituted part of the Mossi empire but was unincorporated, and therefore came under constant raiding.[23] Our choice of Eremon as the research area is based on its historical importance and its influence on a considerable portion of the region. Clan relations can be traced to other villages in other parts of Dagaaba settlement. We have already seen that the people of Hang (close to the border between the

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[23] Some elders of the village remember sites where Mossi traders travelling through the village to or from Wa were killed and buried by the people of Eremon. It is often indicated that Mossi traders killed were secretly buried in anthills and bushes in the woods. It may be suggested that the secret disposal of murdered Mossi people was for fear of revenge. Though stories of attacks on Mossi traders date to the beginning of the twentieth century, they probably indicate the relationship that existed between the Dagaaba and the Mossi in the past.

Dagaaba and Sissala tribes) trace their roots to Boo through Jirapa. We also saw from legends that the people of Boo and Eremon have a common ancestry. It will therefore imply that traditional practices in Eremon will not be different from that of Hang and its surrounding villages.

Before the colonial period, Eremon was the paramountcy of what now constitute Lawra-Jirapa District council. Chiefs of surrounding villages including Lawra paid allegiance to the chief of Eremon.[24] After Lawra was chosen by the British as their administrative centre in 1907, the chief of Eremon was given a permanent seat in the District local council in honour of his traditional role. Eremon has therefore been influential in the Dagaaba land east of the Black Volta and its central location is certainly advantageous. It is also about the largest traditional village presently still with clearly distinct clan settlements. Sub-divisions of Eremon include Buree, Danko, Dazuuri/Bumpare, Kakaltuo, Kwoyang/Baapare, Naayir, Tang-zu, Yagra and Zimpen, which are also clan divisions with their distinct totems.

Last but certainly not the least, the writer hails from that village and will be able to provide first hand information on most traditional practices related to the research topic. Readers from other sections of Dagaaba land may realize that they do things differently from what we describe here. It is precisely because we are aware of the differences in details that we found it necessary to speak from a specific cultural group.

Despite the lack of much written literature it is however certain that the Dagaaba practised

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[24] The people of Nanyagr, a settlement about five kilometres away from Eremon still send tenganbome (items that belong to the Earth shrine) to Eremon because Tampie, which was their original home, was once subservient to Eremon.

the traditional religion until the early part of the twentieth century[25] when they were said to have massively converted to Catholicism with the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in the area.[26] The mass movement to Christianity did affect the customs of the Dagaaba, but not so much as to make them abandon their former practices. Due to the long period of attachment to the traditional beliefs and practices, Dagaaba converts to Christianity have a divided loyalty between the two belief systems.[27] The religious and social life of the Dagaaba of Eremon before the arrival of the missionaries will be our next topic to be discussed.

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[25] The Mossis who were the overlords of most of the upper Volta states protected the traditional practices of their subjects against Islam. In their determination to preserve the cultural identity of their states, they kept a watchful eye over immigrants such as the Mandingo traders, Hausa craftsmen and Fulani herders. The Yar-naba was appointed to control the activities of the Fulani. See G.T. Stride and C. Ifeka, Peoples and Empires of West Africa: West Africa in History 1000-1800 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1973), p.82-84.

[26] G.B. Der, "God and Sacrifice in the Traditional Religions of the Kasena and Dagaba of Northern Ghana," Journal of Religion in Africa 11 (1980), p.178.

[27] Yangyouru, "Dagara Traditional Cultic Sacrifice," p.218.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DAGAABA TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

1. THE SUPREME BEING

Before the arrival of the missionaries,[28] the Dagaaba conceived of and worshipped a Supreme Being[29] whom they called Naangmen or simply Ngmen. They portray their beliefs in the Supreme Being in most aspects of their daily lives and carry it with them wherever they go. The concept of the Supreme Being (whom the Western world calls God) was therefore not borrowed from the missionaries as some scholars would have it.[30] The Dagaaba do not indulge in philosophical arguments on the existence or non-existence of the Supreme Being. Rather, they take his existence for granted and live out that belief. Since they are mainly non-literate, their religious beliefs and practices are not documented in written form like the Bible of the Christians or the Koran of the Muslims. Their ideas of the Supreme Being exist in oral form and can be found in several practices

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28 Not much has been documented on the traditional practices of the Dagaaba. Most of the information provided here will be from the researcher's own experience and participatory observation. We will be able to cross-check our facts with documentations of missionaries who worked among the Dagaaba of Ghana and Burkina Faso as well as the work of the British anthropologist Jack Goody who stayed in the area for about two years during which period he learnt the language of the people. Oral tradition will also be an important source of our information. See: Jack Goody, The LoWiili, p.vii.

29 The term "Supreme Being" as a designation for the ultimate reality in Africa sounds loathsome to some African scholars. See: Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), p.80-88. We shall however continue to use the term all the same. Our reasons are that the Dagaaba see Naangmen as a being like themselves, but with ultimate qualities. Relationships between the Dagao and his deity are described in terms of his social structure and family relation. The attributes of the deity are as any individual may posses. The philosophical concept of "being" in the Aristotelian sense is not intended here.

30 Emil Ludwig had earlier doubted that the "untutored African can conceive of God," and continued to write that "Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing." See: Kwabena Amponsah, Topics on West African Traditional Religion: For G.C.E. "A" Level Religious Studies, General Paper, and African Studies (Legon-Accra: Adwinsa Publications [GHANA] Ltd, 1977), vol.1, p.8, quoting Emil Ludwig. The work was not accessible to us.

in the lives of the people.

(A) The Name of the Supreme Being

The name of the Supreme Being of the Dagaaba was not invented by the missionaries. Before the arrival of the missionaries, as mentioned above, the Dagaaba worshipped a Being whom they referred to as "Ngmen." It is however difficult to establish what the term means. One may associate the name Ngmen with the sun, "ngmenaa," and probably suggest an initial worship of the sun as a god. However, the sun is never mentioned together with deities and deified beings during Dagaaba religious practices. There is no shrine dedicated to the sun and no clan claims the sun as a god whom its members serve as priests. In fact, the sun is never mentioned as a god and divine power is not associated with it. Nor are there any taboos connected with the sun as a supernatural force. It is therefore most probable that the Dagaaba have never worshipped the sun as a god or attached divine powers to it.

The association of Ngmen with the sun, if there is any at all, therefore does not suggest an original worship of the sun as a god but may be pointing to the "home" of the Supreme Being.[31] The Supreme Being is believed to reside somewhere in the sky and is often depicted as a Being above other gods. Worshippers going to consult a diviner are often described metaphorically as "climbing

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31 Girault wrote of the Dagaaba of La Côte D'Ivoire that: "Le nom de Dieu est Namwin, appelé tantôt Mwin... Mwin ou Mwina est le soleil et son idée est inséparable de celle de Dieu. En aucun cas on ne peut parler d'une identité, mais plutôt d'une même localisation, puisque la résidence de Dieu est le ciel: sa ou salom." See: R.P. Girault, "Essai sur la Religion des Dagara," Bulletin de L'Institut Français D'Afrique Noire 21 [1959] 332. Goody also rejects the etymological connection between the sun and the Supreme Being; see Jack Goody, The Myth of the Bagre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.25.

to the Supreme Being" (*Do ngmen*). Similarly at the beginning of any human activity, the Supreme Being is invited to "come down" and be present throughout the duration of the event. These religious expressions complete the picture of the Dagaaba concept of the Supreme Being as a being residing above the world of men.

The Dagaaba also call the Supreme Being "Naangmen" from which two words `naa' and `ngmen' may be derived. "Naa" is used in one sense to mean chief or ruler of a group of people as in Eremon-naa (chief or ruler of Eremon). Figuratively, the term may be used to stand for anything associated with chieftaincy or supremacy. The office of a chief is associated with material property such as cattle, lands, children as well as respect and authority. Any individual who displays any of the characteristics associated with a chief may be called "naa." People in positions of authority and leadership may also be called *naa* due to the similarity in role with that of the chief of a village. We may therefore have *we-naa* (chief of the bush, i.e., the leopard), *Kuor-naa* (chief farmer) and *bipulo-naa* (leader of the youth). In all these cases, the term `naa' is suffixed to the noun with which it is in construct and acts as the governed. There are times when `naa' occurs as a prefix in compound words to describe properties associated with the chief and governs the compound word. Such is the case with *nakog/naakog* (the throne of the chief), *naa-wie* (the farm of the chief), *naa-pog* (wife of the chief).

In its present form the term Naangmen could therefore be taken to be a compound noun composed of `Naa' and `ngmen' which will literally mean "Chief-god" or "Head-god." From this standpoint some scholars suggest that Naangmen refers to the chief of the gods.[32] However, the

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[32] Girault, "Essai sur la Religion des Dagara," p.333.

Dagaaba believe in the existence of other supernatural powers but acknowledge the Supreme Being as head of all existing supernatural forces by virtue of his being the creator of all. As we shall see later, the lesser divinities are part of the created world of the Supreme Being. The ultimate supremacy of the Supreme Being is demonstrated in the religious ceremonies of the Dagaaba.

E. Kuukure also objects to "Naangmen" being translated as Chief-God on grammatical grounds, for

> if God were considered simply as chief- or head-ngmen, as primus inter pares - he would be called Ngmimme naa (Chief of the deities), just as the best hunter or director of hunting would be called nabagl-naa and a confirmed bachelor, deko-naa.[33]

It is true that the Dagaare language will suffix rather than prefix *naa* to *ngmen* if chief-God is intended as the final meaning. But the Dagao never conceives of the Supreme Being as a "primus inter pares" (first among equals). The lesser divinities and the universe as a whole are considered the created work of the Supreme Being and it will be illogical to equate the creator with the created. A further argument in support of Kuukure's objection to the translation of "Naangmen" as chief-god is the fact that the chief was never seen as an authority figure unless his office was backed by the ancestors. As mentioned above, authority was not seen in term of the secular but the sacred.

Alternatively, the term Naangmen, if considered a prefix of `Naa' to `ngmen' to denote an object possessed by the chief, could be translated as "god of the chief." Since the Dagaaba chiefs were not dictatorial and could not impose their religious beliefs on the people, such a translation is inappropriate. The Supreme Being of the Dagaaba expected reverence from his people, each according to his ability. More was expected from those who had more, and less from the less

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[33] Kuukure, The Destiny of Man, p.45.

privileged.

It is possible that the designation Naangmen has developed from a statement related to one or the other attribute of the deity. The all-encompassing word `naa' which carries with it most of the attributes of the deity, could have been key in the divine appellation. Our guess is that the original name included a phrase such as *naa anga ngmenaa* (supervisor like the sun) referring to the most prominent property of the deity. As the sun's light covers the entire universe, so is the watchful quality of the Supreme Being. With time, the phrase shortened to Naangmen. It is not uncommon to find proper names contract to forms that mean differently from the original. A name such as Eremon, for example, in its present form will mean "speak without," which is the direct opposite of its original meaning, "*te kong tuo ermong taa*," (literally, "we cannot speak without each other").

Francis Bagr also thinks that the divine name was originally a statement referring to an attribute of the deity. He suggested however that emphasis was placed on the mysterious nature of the deity. In his opinion, Naangmen

> may be derived from bom-na-ngmille-a - something inexplicable or mysterious or unpredictable, or constantly changing, as implied in these words: bu-ngmilla (mysterious thing), bi-ngmilla (unpredictable child). Ngmil can also mean bo-bie, bo-bang guura (a strange thing, some unknown force - kpeng kang); only its actions are known but not the force itself as such.[34]

Although the Dagaaba do not understand the ways of their deity, his mysteriousness is not emphasized in their religiosity. Bagr's derivation is therefore not acceptable.

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[34] F. Bagr, "The Dagaaba Belief in God, the Spirits and the Ancestors," The Northern Review 7 (December 1988), p.1.

(B) Worship of the Supreme Being

In the Dagaaba social context, requests of importance are not made directly to the benefactor but through an intermediary, even when the benefactor is present. In the same way, the Dagaaba approach the Supreme Being through intermediaries, more out of respect rather than fear of being destroyed by his ultimate purity.

At the beginning of a sacrifice, the name of the Supreme Being may be mentioned immediately before a rogation of deities, ending with the name of the deity at whose shrine the religious ceremony is taking place. Alternatively, the name of the Supreme Being may be mentioned after calling upon the lesser divinities. In most cases the Supreme Being is first praised and acknowledged as the creator and lord of all the deities. The lesser divinities invoked are also reminded of their dependence on the Supreme Being after which they are requested to relay the purpose of the ceremony to the Supreme Being. An example of a Dagaare prayer may help to illuminate our point:

All you Bushes listen to us
We have assembled here not to go to war
We have assembled here because of food
It is the way of our fathers, and we are merely following it
We have no evil intent, and anybody who is here with an evil
mind, let him collapse on the way
Keep away dangerous animals from our hunting area
We have children among us, and we entreat you to protect them
The lion, the leopard, the buffalo should lie still like logs
Give us a successful hunting expedition
Keep the antelopes, the duikers, the monkeys within our reach
Confuse the paths of the guinea fowls
We place our petitions before you,

That you may carry them over to Apa,[35] to both the male and female gods
Also take our petitions to Kokolaa, Dangbang and Manipiir[36]
Who would inform all other water-deities of our petitions
And together they will carry the message to the goddesses of
Eremon, and Tom and Lisa and all lands that we will tread on
So that the goddesses can take our petitions to the Supreme
Being.[37]

As much as possible, direct communication with the Supreme Being is avoided, for, as an elder from Daffiama once put it, "God is the All-Powerful one. But it is the spirits who deal with humanity. He is too big to be concerned about us."[38]

There are therefore no shrines and/or specifically designated points through which communication with the Supreme Being can be effected. Altars are not also established for the worship of the deity. As a result, some scholars see the role of the Supreme Being among the Dagaaba and most African societies, as insignificant, and they suggest that he should be ranked last in the hierarchy of the supernatural beings.[39] Others think of him in terms of a withdrawn deity,[40] or a "*deus otiosus* in a different dress,"[41] as a deity "too far off and not so intimately acquainted with

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35 A mountain deity.

36 All these are river deities and refer to different sections of the Kambaa river.

37 My construction from the general pattern of prayers made by the leader of a hunting party before hunting expeditions in which I frequently took part.

38 A reported conversation between Fr. Remigius and some elders from Daffiama who in 1932 had gone to ask for rain from the God of the Christians. See: McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.113.

39 Edith Clarke, "The Sociological significance of the Ancestor-worship in Ashanti," Africa III (1930), p.431-470.

40 James O'Connell, "The Withdrawal of the High God in West African Religion: an Interpretation." Man 62 (1962), p.69.

41 E. Idowu Bolaji. African Traditional Religion: A definition (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), p.144.

human affairs,"[42] making him "too lazy or too indifferent to exercise any control over earthly affairs..."[43] Such opinions are relics of Western concepts resulting from contacts with Christianity and Islam. The apparent non-involvement of the deity in the lives of the Dagaaba may be due to the fact that the lesser divinities and ancestors serve as a half-way house to the Supreme Being.

Raffaele Pettazzoni however thinks that the "otiositas itself belongs to the essential nature of creative beings and is in a way the complement of their creative activity," since "the world once made and the cosmos established, the Creator's work is as good as done. Any further intervention on his part would not only be superfluous but possibly dangerous, since any change in the cosmos might allow it to fall back into chaos."[44] He attributes the "idleness" of creative beings not so much to their character as Supreme Beings as to their being Creators.[45] This may be true of a creator whose creative work is done once and for all. In the case of the Dagaaba, creation is never complete. It is an on-going process and every created thing or being lives in constant expectation of modification of their physical appearances.

Though no sacrifice is made to the Supreme Being, all sacrifices are meant for the Supreme Being. The lesser divinities and ancestors are the intermediaries between men and the Supreme Being. Since he occupies a unique position, communication can only be done through

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42 A.B. Ellis, The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1887), p.30.

43 A.B. Ellis, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1894), p.34.

44 Raffaele Pettazzoni, "Myths of Beginnings and Creation-Myths," in: R. Pettazzoni, Essays on the History of Religions (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), p.32.

45 Pettazzoni, "Myths of Beginnings and Creation-Myths," p.33.

intermediaries. For the Dagaaba, the importance of the Supreme Being in their socio-religious life cannot be overemphasized. In times of emergency, all intermediaries may be by-passed and the Supreme Being appealed to directly. The mother of a child that has suddenly fallen ill may pray, "*Naangmen wa sung ma*" (Supreme Being, come to my aid).

(C) Theophorous Names

In the tradition of the Dagaaba, for three months after the delivery of a baby, both mother and child are not permitted to make official public appearances. Some time during the period of seclusion, the child is named by any member of the immediate family such that the name reflects the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. If a disaster has just struck the family, the new born may be named "*Ngmensu*" (it happened because of the Supreme Being), or "*Ngmenkuu*" (Death from the Supreme Being), and many others. Some children are named "*Ngmen-nyema*" (the Supreme Being sees me), others "*Ngmen-kaarama*" (the Supreme Being watches over me). These theophorous names which are many and varied portray the Dagaaba beliefs in the Supreme Being and also recall his attributes. Dagaaba theophorous names express, among others, the beliefs that the Supreme Being sees whatever one does, he watches (and protects) individuals and the society as a whole and he controls events in the world including the occurrences of death.

(D) Myths and Legends

Dagaaba myths and legends are a primary source of information on the religious beliefs and practices of the people. Unlike most people in the Western world, the Dagaaba do not make a

distinction between myths and legends, both are *singsuolung* (stories) to them. Myths and legends provide explanations for the humanly inexplicable such as: how did everything come into being? where did death come from and when did it enter the world? One myth, for example, tries to explain the origin of death. According to the myth, after the Supreme Being created the world and everything that is in it, he wanted mankind to live forever. At that time, all the animals and birds were still in the country of the Supreme Being. He dispatched the flee-footed dog with the good news of immortality but warned that the dog may not stop anywhere until the message had been delivered. After a while, the Supreme Being also sent the much slower billy-goat to the earth with the message of death and the same warning as given to the dog. The first message to be delivered was to be implemented. On the way, the dog felt hungry and could not resist the tempting scent of some human-dung in a nearby grove and so stopped to help himself. The billy-goat however continued running and got to the earth ahead of the dog and delivered the message of death. The myth seeks to establish that in the beginning the Supreme Being intended mankind to be immortal but due to disobedience, death entered the world. The dog is however not the source of death - the Supreme Being remains the source of both life and death, but men cannot blame the Supreme Being for the presence of death in the world.

(E) Songs and Everyday Speeches

The Dagaaba also portray their religious beliefs through their songs and speeches. They mention the name of the Supreme Being frequently during the course of their daily activities. In planning for the activities of the following day, a Dagao often says "*Ka Naangmen wa yuo pan...*"

(If the Supreme Being opens the door...[I will do such and such a thing]), "If the Supreme Being permits, I will start the reconstruction of my room tomorrow." A person embarking on a journey is often told by well-wishers, "*Ka Naangmen tuuro fo*" (May the Supreme Being follow you). One who has just escaped from danger often says, "the Supreme Being was behind me." The Dagaaba are absolutely religious and live out their religious beliefs wherever they find themselves and under most situations. Most Africans also express their joys and sorrows through songs. Dagaaba traditional songs raise questions concerning the nature of the land of the dead and also bring out their religious thoughts.

(F) Attributes of the Supreme Being

The Supreme Being is considered the sole creator and sustainer of the universe. According to the Dagaaba myths of creation, in the beginning there was only the Supreme Being in the universe and since he was lonely, he decided to create all things. He created man out of clay like a potter, part by part beginning with the head, after which he breathed into his creations thereby giving them lives. According to the Dagaaba myth of creation, the process of creation is never complete with the birth or coming into being of the creature. The Supreme Being continuous to work on all creatures until they die and return to him in his country. Loss of body parts during the course of one's life are seen in the context of the uncompleted creation.

He sustained and provided for his creation by living close to the earth in the form of the clouds. People did not have to work for food, for the clouds served as food. They were low enough for anyone who was hungry to reach out and cut off a piece for a meal. The Supreme Being

however forbade people to take off the lids of their cooking-pots while cooking. Unfortunately, on one occasion an impatient old lady removed the lid of her cooking-pot while her food was still on the fire. The clouds escaped from her cooking-pot and with the rest, withdrew beyond the reach of humans. People then had to work for their living. The Dagaaba still attribute success in farming, hunting and all other economic activities to the Supreme Being.

The Supreme Being is also considered to be all powerful and all seeing. He sees all the activities of men and punishes or rewards according to the moral value of the deed. He is all powerful and can do everything. However he has delegated his powers to the lesser divinities and ancestors who act on his behalf. The Supreme Being is also everywhere and no one can hide from him or escape his presence. He knows of both the present and the future.

The Dagaaba also call the Supreme Being the judge of all. He acquits the innocent and punishes the evil. No antisocial activity goes unpunished in the here-and-now. Punishment may come in the form of sickness, accidents and other misfortunes. The righteous on the other hand will be rewarded with children, wealth, tranquillity and no misfortune will come their way.

The Supreme Being is also described as immortal. He is immortal so that if the wicked dies before receiving punishment for his deeds he will be punished while journeying to the land of the dead. The spirit of the wicked is made to wander about the face of the earth till it dies and is reborn to the earth where it is given a chance to live a better moral life.

2. THE LESSER DIVINITIES

In the hierarchical order of the supernatural forces, the Supreme Being is placed topmost on the ladder and above the lesser divinities. The latter are nature deities associated with hills, rivers, trees, bushes, and the earth. Among the Dagaaba the lesser divinities include the Earth goddess (*Teng-gan*), hills (*Tanne*), rivers and bodies of water (*Bare ani kule*) and the bush (*wie*). The lesser divinities are localized and derive their power from the Supreme Being which allows them to preside over their jurisdictions.

(A) The Water-Deities

Eremon is located to the South of the Kambaa river. The river runs through many farm lands and serves as a source of drinking water for farmers when they are in the farm and for animals during the dry seasons. The river however does not supply water to the homes as the main settlement is about eight kilometres away. During the rainy seasons it floods its banks and can only be crossed by canoes; during the dry seasons it breaks up into pools of water. The deeper sections of the river such, as Dangbang, Manipiir and Kokolaa, are able to hold water all year round, and it is these sections of the river that form the main centres of human activities. They form permanent fishing grounds, and shrines for the river deity are set up at these sections. During sacrifices, all the sections with shrines may be invoked as separate deities with Kokolaa as their superior.

The River Deity is consulted for many reasons: by barren women who want to have children, traders for success in trade, patients to have their ailments cured, farmers for prosperity in farming,

and accused persons who wish to declare their innocence of crimes for which they have been charged. To make a request from the river deity, the devotee together with the chief-priest of the deity, take a chicken to one of the shrines on the bank of the river. In the presence of the chief-priest, the devotee makes the request aloud to the hearing of all present and asks for the assistance of the deity with a promise of a bigger sacrifice should the request be granted. The chief-priest re-iterates the wishes of the devotee to the deity and assures the devotee that the request will be granted. The devotee is then given a smooth stone pebble picked from the altar, which he/she is expected to carry at all times. A student may also be asked to place the stone pebble on his books all the time, while traders may be advised to carry it with them wherever they go and to keep it within the items of trade.

Should the devotee feel satisfied that the wishes have been granted, he/she returns to the shrine with the chief-priest to perform votive and thanksgiving sacrifices. An offering of the items promised during the first visit are presented to the chief-priest who may take a portion for himself and leave the rest at the shrine. Livestock are left to wander about the vicinity of the shrine and may be killed and eaten on behalf of the deity by hunters and other passers-by. A lucky passer-by may take home fowls meant for the deity and rear them. One-third of the total number of fowls bred must however be sent back and left at the shrine as the share of the deity. Moneys recovered from the altar of the deity may be spent on food and drink but never invested in economic ventures.

Individuals may also set up shrines for the river deity in the privacy of their homes. A stone pebble picked from the altar of the deity is brought to the home and the chief-priest or any other person who has already got the shrine in his/her home may help set it up. The shrine of the river

god in private homes consists of a small jar containing water and a stone pebble from the altar of the god. Yearly sacrifices are made to the river god from private homes. Occasional sacrifices are performed to the deity by the community as a whole, especially in times of drought.

Within the settlement itself, there are some man-made dams which supply water to the homes. These bodies of water are also used as a means of veneration by the people of the immediate settlements.

(B) The God of Hunting and Bushes (Wie)

The deity for hunting and bushes, as the name implies, is responsible for hunters and their activities and any person who finds himself/herself in the farms and the woods. There are no specific places where sacrifices may be offered to the deity. Sacrifices are therefore offered under bushes, groves and trees that evoke the idea of the sacred.

The deity is associated with a specific clan which oversees its affairs. Before each hunting expedition the priest of the deity, who is also leader of all hunting parties, reiterates the rules and taboos of hunting and invokes the protection of the deity on all hunters as well as curses on those who would provoke the anger of the deity by violating the taboos. Although the priest is in charge of hunting parties, he does not own the bush. Hunting weapons (axes, arrows, knives, skin-bags) found in the course of an expedition are left with the priest to be claimed by their owners; should nobody claim them, they become the priest's property. All games of which the killer cannot be determined go to the priest, and with the exception of rabbits and quadrupeds smaller than that, the right fore-limb of all other quadrupeds also go to him. These are to be sold to meet the expenses

of sacrifices to the deity. Individuals may go out hunting on their own but when misfortune occurs and is found to be a result of violating one of the hunting taboos, the priest of the deity is consulted for the performance of the required sacrifice. The deity can also be called upon to exonerate the innocent and punish the guilty in times of dispute over kills.

(C) The Earth Deity and the Tendaana

The Earth deity is perhaps the most popular and most important of all the lesser divinities venerated by the Dagaaba. Speaking of the LoWiili, the Eastern neighbours of the Dagaaba of Eremon who are distinguished from their Western counterparts principally by their dialect and location, Goody noted that as far as the LoWiili settlement is concerned, the most important focus of religious activities is the earth shrine because through its veneration the settlement emerges as a social unit.[46] The deity, known as *tengan* (Lit. skin/crust of the earth), is responsible for areas that come within human agricultural activities as distinct from the jurisdiction of the Hunting deity which cover mainly areas not actively being involved in human activities. Her authority is therefore limited to a geographical area and the inhabitants within a mapped out zone. Strangers who have eaten the soil or drunk the water of the land may also come under the protection of the deity. All livestock except the dog also come under her authority. The dog therefore constitutes an important sacrificial victim during the expiation of grave offenses such as the shedding of the blood of another community member.

The deity is also noted to be most concerned about the wellbeing of her devotees. She

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[46] Goody, Myth of the Bagre, p.16-17.

provides protection for all within her jurisdiction. Unweaned children who have lost their mothers may be placed under the guidance of the local earth shrine. They become the property of the deity and girls under her protection have to be redeemed from the shrine before they go into marriages. Sick persons may also offer themselves to the deity for cure and will also have to redeem themselves after recovery. Stray persons and livestock, lost and found items, are all deposited at the shrine to be redeemed later by their owners or become the property of the deity.

The main concern of the deity is peace within her jurisdiction. Prohibitions of the deity therefore include the shedding of the blood of another member of the community, fighting while on the farm, being sold into slavery and the practice of witchcraft. These prohibitions ensure peace and harmony within the settlement and through the prohibition of slavery, maintain the strength of the settlement. Other prohibitions such as suicide, sexual intercourse in the bush, theft of the deity's property - property paid as fines, stray livestock (except the dog), lost metal objects,[47] relate to the deity directly by protecting her purity. It is also forbidden to cut down trees within the vicinity of the shrine.

Any infringement will lead to a reprimand of the violator and/or his immediate family. When a number of people die as a result of an epidemic, they are believed to be victims of the deity for contravening her prohibitions. No proper funeral rite is performed and the victims are buried without mourning. Among the LoWiili, victims of the deity are buried on the bank of a stream so that their "dirt" may be washed away by the running water.[48] Fines and sacrifices may also be

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[47] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.151.

[48] Goody, The LoWiili, p.92.

prescribed for guilty persons. A family that fails to comply with a fine for an earlier violation of the taboos of the earth deity may have the funeral celebration of a member stopped until the overdue fine has been paid and the necessary sacrifices performed.

The deity may manifest her anger through droughts and epidemics and other natural catastrophes. For a violation of one of her prohibitions, individuals may be struck by lightning, die of dropsy, or commit suicide. As rains are gifts from the deity, droughts are manifestations of her anger and are therefore treated with seriousness.

Generally, there is one central shrine of the deity in every settlement but each clan and individual may also establish their own shrines in their localities. However, these local shrines are recognized and treated as segments of the central shrine. The altar of the deity consists of a circular ring of stones located in a grove of *gatiir* (diospyros mespiliformis) within the settlement. It is believed to have been established by the first settlers or founding members of the community. Individuals may also establish an altar for the deity by raising a mound of earth.

Sacrifices are made to the deity on regular bases by both individuals and the community at large. From an individual's activities in food production, one may offer a yearly sacrifice to the deity in appreciation for the land and its products. The deity is responsible for the land and the rains needed for food production. The sacrifice may therefore be omitted during years of bad harvest. Sacrificial items include the produce of the land, monies and livestock. Most individual and community sacrifices are performed by the priest of the deity.

The most important religious functionary is the *tendaana* whose title literally means "owner of the land." His title must not be taken to mean that he controls the use and distribution of land.

The office of the *tendaana* is occupied by members of the clan of the first settlers or founding members of the community.[49] It is treated as a property of the clan and is inherited patrilinearly. Due to the importance of the office, only persons with good moral aptitude are considered for the position. Any abuse of his authority can bring disaster upon the whole settlement. To ensure the proper running of the office, a council of elders who are concerned with the shrine and affairs of the deity are appointed to help the *tendaana* in his administration.

It is more appropriate to describe the *tendaana* as the chief-priest of the Earth deity, for his functions are mostly religious. He is the ritual supervisor of the community in relation to the deity and he performs religious duties on his own behalf, on behalf of the community founder and the lineage as a whole. As priest of the Earth deity, he performs sacrifices to the deity at the shrine (*teng-gan-par*). The *tendaana* is an intermediary between the shrine and the ritual community.[50] In times of drought he may be called upon to perform sacrifices to appease the deity, just in case she is responsible for the drought.[51]

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SUPREME BEING AND THE LESSER

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[49] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.7.

[50] Goody, The LoWiili, p.99.

[51] This role should not be taken to mean that he is also a priest of the rain-god. Like any other priest he performs sacrifices for rain in times of drought. Among the Dagaaba of Eremon, the Tiedeme are the official priests of rain and thunder and are expected to perform sacrifices related to that god. They are also expected to make or stop rains as the occasion might warrant. While all other deities might be associated with families, the Earth deity is the god of all in the community. The tendaana only undertakes a sacrifice for rain when all things fail in a persistent drought period. The deity is most likely to be provoked to anger (consciously or unconsciously) more easily than any other god because of its numerous worshippers. The tendaana's sacrifices are therefore to propitiate the goddess for all unknown offenses and at the same time feed all other gods of the land that might have been neglected because they have no designated priests, as is the case of the god of the hills.

DIVINITIES

As mentioned earlier, the lesser divinities are understood to be part of the creation of the Supreme Being. They derive their power from him but may use their delegated powers independently in the administration of their jurisdictions. The lesser divinities are accountable to the Supreme Being on whose behalf they act. They are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. As observed in the prayer given above which was offered to the deity for hunting, the lesser divinities are required to carry petitions of the devotees over to the Supreme Being.[52]

The lesser divinities are religiously receptive because of the belief that they are only messengers and intermediaries between the worshippers and the Supreme Being. A devotee may consult different deities in different localities over the same issue without offending any of the deities involved. The consultation of many divinities serves as double insurance to the devotee, i.e., if one divinity does not relay the message to the Supreme Being, another will. It is not uncommon to see the shrine of a deity dismantled and abandoned because that deity has not proved its worth in playing the role of an intermediary. When veneration through one deity ceases, the worship of the Supreme Being continues through others.

There are therefore checks on the powers of the lesser divinities. A deity which is believed to be too harsh on its devotees may be abandoned on the grounds that it cannot be handled with success (*N kong tuo o taa*). Deities may also be abandoned because requests made to the Supreme Being through them did not yield results. It is believed that the Supreme Being is all loving and

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[52] Despite being the ultimate creator of everything, evil, diseases and misfortunes are not attributed to the Supreme Being but to the lesser divinities and other supernatural forces operating in the world. People who live full lives and die of old age are said to have died "god's death" (naangmen kuu) because the Supreme Being is the ultimate cause of everything that is good and no malevolent force has cut life short for those individuals.

always provides for the needs of all who ask from him. If a worshipper makes a request and receives no positive result, the intermediary is blamed on the grounds that the Supreme Being was not informed of the request. The dependence of the lesser divinities on the Supreme Being comes out more clearly in emergency situations when they are by-passed and the Supreme Being appealed to directly.

4. THE ANCESTORS

(A) The Nature of the Ancestors

Apart from the lesser divinities, the ancestors are another channel of communication with the Supreme being. The ancestors are family members who have lived socially acceptable lives and through death have attained superhuman powers. Not everybody who dies is honoured as an ancestor. For one to be recognized as an ancestor one must have belonged to a family,[53] must have married, raised children including one or more sons,[54] lived to an old age, died a natural death and was given a proper burial rite. Heroes in wars may be recognized as ancestors by a particular community but if they have no sons to carve their figures and establish shrines for them, they will only be remembered during general sacrifices. Forty days after the death of someone who qualifies to be an ancestor the final funeral rite is performed which include the carving of the ancestral figure

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[53] Illegitimate children and people excommunicated from the society are considered as having no families and may therefore not qualify to be ancestors.

[54] The person who should carve an ancestral figure and establish a shrine for a deceased person is one's own biological son. The bearing of sons therefore becomes a primary requirement for being an ancestor.

by the oldest surviving son. The figure is an anthropomorphic statue representing the deceased which keeps his memories alive in the community. It may be added to the collection of figures of previous ancestors which the son inherited from his father.

At the death of the father, the oldest surviving son inherits the property of the father including the up-keep and duties associated with the ancestral shrine. In cases where the oldest surviving son is already living separately from the father, the shrine may be moved to his residence. All other sons of the family may then attend ancestral religious services at the residence of their eldest brother. Sons who move out to new settlements still come under the protection of the family ancestors and may symbolically show their devotion to the ancestors by venerating them through a pole erected in front of the new home. Major sacrifices still have to be performed at the residence where the ancestral shrine is pitched.

Individual ancestors are neither remembered nor actively venerated forever. Family genealogies are kept orally and with the passage of time, some ancestors may be forgotten and therefore automatically fall out of the list of ancestors enumerated during sacrifices. They however remain in the memories of those who knew them before their death and when the last survivor to have known that ancestor dies, later generations only hold illusive and shadowy memories through stories and acts of bravery recounted of that ancestor. Such stories of remembrance soon degenerate from factual to "legendry" and with the passage of time and generations, sacrifices to such an ancestor are discontinued.[55] Though sacrifices are not offered to such an ancestor specifically,

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[55] The elders in Eremon tell stories of one Bayoung who was a brave warrior during the territorial wars in the early part of the twentieth century. To the present generation, Bayoung is a mythological figure but to his compatriots (few of whom are still alive) he is a true figure.

he/she still benefits from general sacrifices performed for "all the ancestors." No ancestor is "abandoned" as such, as Goody maintained,[56] rather, their relation with the living becomes dormant. The shrines of some ancestors may not be rebuilt after destruction by termites or fire because no one among the living knows for whom they were built. Such ancestors remain in the background and benefit from general sacrifices.

An ancestor will never merge with a god. Someone may be honoured nation-wide or be deified, but the one's veneration never merges with the worship of another deity. When an ancestral shrine has been turned into dust by termites it does not mean that that ancestor's veneration has merged with the veneration of the Earth goddess. Goody recounted the story of Zeng, the founder of the village of Tom, after whom the market of that village has been named. According to Goody he inquired from the villagers to see the shrine of Zeng and was told, "*Zeng in ten*," literally meaning "Zeng has become soil" which metaphorically refers to the nonexistence of Zeng's shrine. Unfortunately Goody understood the statement literally and translated it as "Zeng is earth," subsequently concluding that "the shrine gradually disintegrates into dust; at this point the worship of the Earth and the worship of the ancestors merge into one."[57] This certainly is a misrepresentation. Goody is aware that the ancestors are typical of families and clans and they operate within their respective families. He is also aware that the Earth goddess is venerated throughout the settlement and has taboos which are different from those of the ancestors. A merger of an ancestral cult with the veneration of the Earth goddess will lead to a conflict in religious

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[56] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.389.

[57] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.389.

practices among the Dagaaba.

(B) Daily Veneration

Since the ancestors are family members who have attained superhuman powers through their death, they are closer to the living members of their families than ever; they are in a better position to address the needs of the family than they were during their life on earth. The ancestors therefore receive the greatest amount of religious attention. Each morning, while rhythmically pouring water on the shrine of the oldest known ancestor, the head of the family makes a simple prayer to the ancestors, thanking them for the protection received over the night and asking for further protection for the rest of the day. The ritual is again repeated in the evening, to thanks the ancestors for a successful day and ask for protection throughout the night. In the event of an emergency during the course of the day any male member of the family can offer a drink of cold water to the ancestors to "cool them down" and to ward off further dangers till the head of the family is able to determine the cause of the misfortune, and the type of sacrifice to be performed to prevent further disaster. A propitiatory sacrifice will later be offered to the aggrieved ancestor or ancestors.

There are also occasional sacrifices of thanksgiving at both family and clan levels. A person has an obligation to offer to the ancestors part of the goods acquired not only through incoming bride-wealth payments, but also through inheritance, farming, hunting, labour wages and other economic activities. In the opinion of Goody, sacrifices to the ancestors consist of rendering them their due and can hardly be called gifts. He also commented that sacrifices are made by the living to the dead members of the same property-holding groups, i.e., persons who have joint rights in each

other's property. However, in his opinion, a gift is "a transaction between members of different property holding corporations."[58] By this definition, he disqualifies as gift-giving the Dagaaba sacrificial rites, since the ancestors bequeathed their property to the living. Through bequeathal, ancestors remain share-holders to the property and require a share of the profits accrued. In Goody's view, the ancestors are therefore still members of their former property-holding corporations and can by no means receive gifts from their living partners.[59]

Goody on the one hand is right in saying that the ancestors are members of a property holding corporation but on the other, it is doubtful if the living cannot make gift-offerings to the ancestors. It is possible to own something jointly and still give it as a gift to the other partner. This can happen when one member relinquishes his rights over a property making the other a sole owner of that property. A gift can also be offered by giving rights of ownership of a property to someone who would otherwise have no claim to it. If a son through his own activities earns enough money to buy a gun, the gun becomes his sole property. He may offer it as a gift to the ancestors by making them co-owners of the gun. In this way, the ancestors have come to possess something they never owned. The son on the other hand has given away (as a gift) the right of sole ownership of his property by making it a jointly owned property. Through inheritance, a son becomes co-owner of the family property with the right to dispose of any of it as he wishes after informing the ancestors. Through sacrifices, he relinquishes his rights to co-own a property so that the ancestors may use it as they please. The element of gift-giving is doubtlessly present in the Dagaaba sacrifice.

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[58] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.394.

[59] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.395.

An ancestor who has not bequeathed any property to the living does not expect sacrifices from the living and cannot punish anyone for not receiving sacrifices. Yet all ancestors are invited to partake of sacrifices performed. One cannot justifiably exclude the idea of gift-giving in the Dagaaba sacrificial practices.

Goody also suggested that the Dagaaba wait for a misfortune to occur before a sacrifice can be performed. He writes that

> in a sense, most occasional sacrifices to the ancestors are unfulfilled obligations. It is the failure to fulfil an obligation that is thought to anger the dead man and cause him to take retaliatory action, which is often capricious, cruel, and out of proportion to the offense. Even the very first sacrifice to a particular ancestor is of this retrospective kind. When the shrine is taken into the byre at the last funeral ceremony, it is set apart from the other figures, being finally placed among them at a later rite performed by the heir. But often nothing is done until the dead man reminds the living of this duty by causing some misfortune, the reason for which is later revealed by a diviner.[60]

Sacrifice amongst the Dagaaba would therefore consist mostly of expiatory rather than thanksgiving and votive offerings. Goody admitted that regular sacrifices involve asking and thanking the ancestors for specific favours and that occasional sacrifices can sometimes be accompanied by small offerings and a conditional promise of a larger reward should the request be met.[61] Propitiatory sacrifices may form the majority of observable Dagaaba sacrificial practices, but it does not exclude other forms of sacrifices.

(C) Women and Ancestral Sacrifice

Women may not perform sacrifices to the ancestors, but may offer gifts to their deceased

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[60] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.394.

[61] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.395.

husbands or paternal ancestors. A woman wishing to offer a gift to her paternal ancestors has to invite the custodian of her family shrine to her marital home. Since the shrine cannot be brought along, the sacrifice is performed at a crossroad leading to the natal home of the woman. The custodian of the woman's ancestral shrine performs the sacrifice on her behalf with the items she provides. Family members who find themselves far away from home and away from the ancestral shrine but are under obligation to offer sacrifices to appease aggrieved ancestors may also perform the offering at cross-roads leading to their family homes.

On the other hand, if a widow wishes to offer a gift to her late husband, she may approach the custodian of the husband's ancestral shrine with the items and the sacrifice will be performed on her behalf. If the custodian is not willing to perform the sacrifice, she may leave the sacrificial items by the shrine and announce the intended recipient of the sacrifice; after that the sacrifice is considered as having been offered. The custodian of the shrine will be compelled to slaughter the sacrificial victim or face the wrath of the ancestors.

(D) The Day of Pito-Offering ("Bagmaal Daa")

Once in a while a sacrifice is performed for all the family ancestors to ensure that none is neglected for too long. The day of the Pito-Offering is a day when all the ancestors of the family are remembered and revered.[62] As mentioned above, sacrifices to some ancestors fall into oblivion

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[62] Pito is the locally brewed beer. It is brewed over two days from the malt of guinea corn (sorghum) or corn (zea mays) and fermented with yeast to increase the alcohol content. The amount of alcohol in pito varies from one brewery to another, but on the average it contains less than 10% alcohol. It is served into calabashes from pots. The drink is served at social gatherings and work sites, and may accompany many gifts. Pito is an important item in most socio-religious rites such as the taking of oaths and the undertaking of any of the rites of passage. The drink is gradually replacing wine in the liturgy of the Dagaaba Catholic mass.

when all the survivors who knew those ancestors during their life time die out. The day of the Pito-Offering provides an opportunity to revere them all.

It is also a day of thanksgiving. The local descent group or a subsection of it comes together to give thanks to the ancestors for the blessings received over the years. The ancestors are the protectors of the family and they desire to be commended for what they have done. Services from the dead to the living are unmerited and can be withdrawn if the living are not showing enough appreciation. Regular sacrifices are a way of showing appreciation and occasional sacrifices are to make up for neglects.

The day of the Pito-Offering is also an opportunity to give back to the ancestors some of the farm products they helped procure. The day is celebrated in the dry season when all crops have been harvested and stored and there is less work to be done. Livestock and grains are contributed by the different compounds according to the generosity of each family-head. The clan or family-head does not complain of a contribution too small. It is left to the ancestors to determine if the donation is proportional to the assistance they gave to the donor, and punish or reward as fit.

Fowls are killed at all the shrines in the farms and in the houses, and new crops offered at the same time. Each family-head performs a mini sacrifice at his family ancestral shrine while the main sacrifice is performed at the compound of the clan-head. During the invocation, a rogation of as many of the ancestors as possible is given, going as far back as the founder of the clan. All the ancestors are invited to be present and to partake in a communion meal with the living. Many animals are sacrificed and food is prepared with the grain contributed by the clan members. It is a feast to which everybody including passers-by are invited.

(E) Pog-yaare Naab ("Daughters' Cow Offering")

With time, when the family-head deems fit, a cow is sacrificed to the ancestors on behalf of all the "daughters" of the family. The paternal ancestors deserve thanks for continuing to protect and offer services to their "daughters" even when they go into marriages. Usually a cow is selected from among those that came into the family as bride wealth. All the "daughters" given away in marriages are invited to the compound of their clan head on the day of the sacrifice and in their presence the cow is sacrificed to the ancestors. The meat is distributed among them all including the unmarried girls.

5. DAGAABA SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND THEIR SACRED DIMENSIONS

(A) Farming and Farm Land Acquisition

The Dagaaba of Eremon initially were probably nomadic and acephalous but with time they settled in areas where it was easy to defend themselves and at the same time procure food.[63] The nuclear family consisting of a man, his wife and children, built their home where they found convenient and farmed on any available piece of arable land. Land was easily available and people began by farming around their houses, choosing appropriate areas for the different crops. A farmer could clear a piece of land on the plains for millet, and another in the much moister valley area for rice. He may also seek out a less stony area for the cultivation of bambara beans, potatoes, yams and other root crops. As a result, the farm lands for a family may be located distances apart. As

[63] Most of the information provided in this section is from my own experience and participatory observation.

more sons were born into the family, the work-force became stronger but at the same time there were then more mouths to feed. It became necessary to cultivate larger plots which often entailed moving farther away from home to obtain cultivable lands. The unwritten rule was that a piece of land became the property of its first cultivator.[64] When two farms shared a common border, the farmers agreed among themselves and established straight borderlines using trees as landmarks, "so that our children will not quarrel over it." Instead of the normal round-shaped mounds, a long ridge was raised around each farm land as a demarcation.

Family lands, by virtue of the fact that the ancestors once owned and worked on them, came under the protection of the ancestors and may not be sold. All business transactions involving land are done in consultation with the ancestors. Speaking of the LoWiili, Jack Goody writes:

> the selling of land...is wholly inconceivable to the native; such an act would be sacrilegious both to the ancestors and to the Earth shrine (tengan). Retribution would inevitably follow.[65]

This view on the sale of land is equally cherished by the people of Eremon. The oldest surviving male of the family acted as an overseer and redistributed the land as needed. Once a son got married he could ask for a portion of the family land to cultivate alone or with other brothers. Any plot allotted to him passed from him to his sons and grandsons. The end result is that what began as a large plot of farm land could be split into small units under the custody of "brothers" of the family.

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[64] Even today land disputes are resolved by establishing the first person to have cultivated the disputed plot. This is done by consulting the elders in the presence of the tendaana, one of whom might remember going as a voluntary worker to that farm. I remember my paternal uncle laying claim to a small strip of land about the area of a room. The neighbours did not dispute over its ownership since my paternal grandmother cultivated okra on that plot long before the arrival of the new settlers.

[65] Goody, The LoWiili, p.35.

In the event of a household migrating or dying out, their plots returned to the larger family unit and could be redistributed. For fear of displeasing the ancestors, no piece of land was left loose to be claimed by outsiders. In the event of a man dying while his sons were still young, the children were cared for by the brother who "married" the widow but as soon as the sons reached maturity, lands that once were under the care of their biological father were returned to them.

When a family grew too large to be supported by a piece of land and there was no more virgin land to be acquired, excess land could be leased from friends who had more than they needed and were willing to lease out a portion. The donor family however reserved the right to harvest fruit trees such as dawadawa and shea-trees. The tenant continued to cultivate the land as long as the relationship between the two families remained cordial, but was prepared to leave the land on a one-farming-season's notice. A piece of land could go from one family to another if the family of the landlord died out and no close kin came forward to claim it while the land was under lease.

(B) Housing

In the past, houses were structured with shelter and defence in mind. Small openings of about fifteen centimetres in diameter and one-and-a-half meters above the ground were made on the walls for ventilation and also to allow defence (from within with bows and arrows) against would-be invaders. The walls were built with mud to a thickness of about thirty centimetres and a height of about two-and-a-half meters. Huts were thatch-roofed while all other rooms were ceiled with gravel over thick strong wooden beams.

The number of rooms depended on the number of male adults in the family. A man with

many wives provided separate rooms for each wife and her children. There was usually a central courtyard in which all family members assembled for meals and family gatherings. There was one main gateway to the house and the ancestral shrine was built close to this entrance. Most families had separate rooms for the granary and the kitchen but if necessary, more fire places were built in the courtyard.

As male children grew to marriageable ages they attached their own huts to that of their father's compound and over the years a family compound could expand to cover a vast piece of land, with a man living with his sons and grandsons down the generations. A son could voluntarily move away to within a few hundred meters from the father's house and build his own house and start a family while still recognising the authority of the father. Aggrieved sons could also move out to build their separate homes. The end result is that many families of the same descent (clan) settled in the same vicinity and came under the authority of one head (the clan leader). Settlement patterns were therefore mainly according to clans for purposes of defence as well as religious practices.

Establishing a new compound is a process that involves the priest of the Earth goddess, diviners, and the senior members of the lineage. The *tendaana* must first approve the new site and through divination, the opinion of the ancestors is sought over the project. After the building has been completed, the ancestors are again consulted before the head of the newly built house removes his father's ancestral figure from the family collection to the new compound. The maintenance of the shrine then becomes his responsibility and any failure or negligence brings retribution upon him or all of the occupants of the compound.

(C) Labour

Labour in the past, was organized on communal basis. Though there was no compulsion, all lineage members were morally obligated to help fellow kinsmen. Clan consciousness preceded individualism and duties to the clan superseded individual responsibilities. Gregory Kpiebaya observed that:

> In Dagaare society communal responsibility existed in the extended family system. The good of the family passed before that of the individual. Work, cult, etc., were organised in view of the life of the group and not for the individual as such. Those in the community who had special talents, like smithery, weaving, building, etc., did not capitalise on their talents but socialized them, that is, they put them at the service of the community for little or no profit at all. In such a society even the weakest and the less intelligent could live.[66]

The building of homes and the procurement of building materials were undertaken with the help of clansmen.

As mentioned above, though farm lands were cultivated by family units, when a family became too large, the aging father distributed the land between sons living outside the main family home and those living with him. Sons could also work in groups, with each group harvesting and storing their grain in a common granary. Any of the groups could seek help from their brothers or other members of the clan to carry out a project. In the event of sickness the clan and family members took over the farm work of the patient until he recovered.

There was division of labour mainly between the sexes. The men cultivated the land while the women sowed the grain and kept the homes. Both men and women however came together for harvesting. During building projects the women fetched water while the men moulded the mud for

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[66] E.G. Kpiebaya, "Living the Christian Faith Today," in: V. Gregoire, ed., That They may have Life: An account of Activities of the Church in North-West Ghana 1929-1979 (Wa, Ghana: Wa Catholic Press, 1979), p.24.

the building. When the building was complete, the women came together to plaster the rooms and the courtyard using gravel mixed with cow-dung. Men and women worked separately and a man was not expected to perform the duties of a woman, such as keeping the home.

(D) The Birth of a Child

Child bearing is the principal aim of marriages among the Dagaaba. Each clan expects to continue growing both in size and strength and hopes to maintain itself through procreation. All clans also expect the ancestors to visit the family from time to time. Through child bearing the ancestors are given a chance to reincarnate into their families. It is therefore significant that when a child is born a diviner is called upon to identify which ancestor it is that has returned. Barren women are not given proper burial rites because they did not provide the channel for the ancestors to return to the family. Barrenness is considered a curse and such women are buried with hot pepper to ensure that they never come back to the family.

A woman in labour is usually taken before the ancestral shrine so that the child may be delivered under the care of the ancestors. After a successful child delivery, a fowl, *bir mɔ*, (literally "fowl of the breast/milk") is sent to the mother's home for sacrifice to her paternal ancestors to enable the new mother to produce milk for the nourishment of the baby. If a child is born at the wife's paternal home and before her paternal ancestors, a brother-in-law is sent to the house of the husband to announce the good news by snatching a cock or a hen, according to the sex of the new born baby. This fowl will later be sacrificed to the woman's paternal ancestors for performing the duties of the ancestors of the husband by ensuring a safe delivery. The fowl so snatched may be

seen as a gift from one group of ancestors to another. The fowl has to be taken forcefully because of the unwillingness of most Dagaaba to part with their fowls. Negotiations can be made with the in-laws to receive a smaller chicken.

(E) Marriage

The ancestors sanction and conclude marriages. Traditionally, marriages are concluded with the payment of the dowry or bride wealth. The essential element in the dowry is the *libi tuo* (bitter money) which consist of 360 cowries. This money is taken by the father of the groom and placed before the ancestral shrine. The gesture is to inform the ancestors before using the family money to pay the dowry. It also informs them of the incorporation of another person into the family for whom their protection is necessary. The ancestors are also asked to purify the money and exonerate the family of their in-laws of any mischief that might have come with its acquisition. The presentation of the *libi tuo* to the ancestors indicate that the marriage transaction involves the living and the dead and that the fertility of one's wife is placed under the care of the ancestors. A breach of any of the rights over the woman such as adultery will call for a pacification of the ancestors.[67] When the dowry is finally sent to the home of the bride, it is placed before the ancestral shrine. Some of the money is used to purchase a black fowl which is sacrificed to the deceased members of the lineage. The sacrifice to the ancestors, as Kuukure put it, is

> to ensure their blessing and protection on the woman, the rights over whom are being vested

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[67] However, in a case where a man is found to be sterile, with the consent of the couple and after a sacrifice has been offered to the ancestors, one of the brothers of the man or a "lover" of the woman could have sexual intercourse with her, in order to raise children for the impotent man.

in another lineage as a whole, in its dead as well as its living. And any abrogation of these rights (by adultery) has henceforth to be expiated by sacrifice at the ancestor shrines.[68]

After between three to five years of a woman going into marriage, when the husband's family is satisfied that she can bear children for them, the marriage contract is concluded with a payment in cattle (*pog doe*) according to the number of cows requested by the clan of the woman. Significant in the cattle payment is the inclusion of a bull. The bull is sacrificed to the founding ancestor of the bride's lineage either at his shrine or at the bride's paternal ancestral shrine.[69]

6. MORALITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD: RETRIBUTION AND THE ETHICAL CODE

(A) The Dagaaba and Their Dead

The Dagaaba of Eremon have some myths which bring out their ideas of retribution after death. It is believed that after the death of a person an aspect survives the bodily death. This essential part of the being takes different identities as it journeys to the Land of the Dead.[70] The soul is believed to consist of three aspects: an aspect which a witch can attack and capture, causing the body to die (*nyaakpii*), an aspect likened to the shadow (*dasualong*) which follows the body wherever it goes and disappears at the death of the person, and an aspect that cannot be attacked by

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68 Kuukure, The Destiny of Man, p.31.

69 Dagaaba marriages that are not supported by the culture and for that matter the ancestors, tend to be really fragile and vulnerable. In the early 1970s when the then bishop of the Diocese of Wa, P.P. Dery tried to encourage the reduction of the traditional dowry system to an insignificant amount (100 cedis), to set an example, he sent his sister into marriage with the proposed amount. The woman constantly accused her husband of giving next to nothing in payment for her dowry which finally led to the termination of the marriage.

70 The Land of the Dead is also called the Supreme Being's country (kpiime teng/Naangmen teng) or Dapare.

witches (*sie*). It is this third aspect, which we shall refer to as the soul, that continues to travel to the Land of the Dead. The soul (*sie*) accompanies the body wherever it goes and parts with it after death while the body is confined to the grave.

Within the first forty days after burial, the soul is only a ghost and can appear to people visually as well as in dreams. It can still visit the house but since it is considered dangerous and prone to harm, precautions are taken to keep it away from the house. The forty days following the death of the individual are a limbo period in the existence of the ghost as it cannot go back to the house and cannot also start travelling to the Land of the Dead till the final funeral rites are performed. During the period of seclusion, the ghost lives on trees and bushes. It only becomes a spirit (*nin-sie*) forty days following the entombment of the body, after which the final ceremony is performed and it can then proceed on its journey to the Land of the Dead.

On the day of the final ceremony, the spirits of earlier ancestors assemble at the house and bathe the ghost of the newly departed in pito (*ko-[illegible]a*) brewed and left in big jars outside the house. The bathing of the ghost ends the period of seclusion and initiates the new soul into the world of the living-dead. The ghost now becomes a spirit and sets out for the land of the dead. As a spirit, it relinquishes all specific claims to mundane objects such as rights to his wife (in the case of a man) as well as personal property, and now assumes general responsibilities as an ancestor. The eldest son carves a figure to represent the newly deceased and adds it to the family collection.

The Land of the Dead is believed to be in the west with a river to be crossed by means of a ferry. As the departed spirit journeys toward the river, it is met on the way by a woman with one breast who is said to be the child of a god. This woman discloses the cause of death to the spirit and

if a witch was responsible, the spirit becomes angry and wishes to return and avenge its own death by killing the witch. The woman with the one breast tells jokes to make the spirit laugh. If the spirit laughs, it cannot return to the Land of the Living, but if the spirit persists in returning to avenge its own death, the woman with the one breast kills the witch on behalf of the dead. The spirit then continues the journey to the river bank. If the spirit lived a good life, it pays twenty cowries to the ferry man and is transported across safely. Spirits of people who had lived socially unacceptable lives will drop into the water and will have to wait there till the people they had wronged die and their spirits come to the river and a confession is made to them. A thief will remain in the water until the people he/she robbed die and come to the river bank. The thief is then humiliated in the presence of all, before he/she is able to cross. Witches will be forced to eat up their own right arms and right legs before they are dropped into the river, where they will spend two years trying to swim across. When they finally do, all the inhabitants of the Land of the Dead will recognize them as witches and humiliate them.

There is also a final judgement conducted by the ancestors, not so much on individual merits as on collective responsibility. All the dead are separated into groups based on patrilineal descent. Upon arriving in the Land of the Dead, new spirits are purged by the ancestors who make them perform some difficult tasks. For example, they have to sit in the sun which is believed to be so close to the land that meat left outside will be grilled. The good will sit in the sun for three months, while the evil will be exposed to the sun for six months. Witches and rich men[71] will remain in the sun for three years, thieves five months and liars four. The next task is to cultivate a plot of land.

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[71] It is believed that in the process of acquiring wealth a person will have to resort to as much antisocial activities as the practice of witchcraft.

Those who were hard working while on earth will complete their contracts early, whereas the lazy will remain on the task much longer. They are also subjected to extreme heat from the burning of *kongdazugu* wood.[72]

The aim of the purging of souls in the Land of the Dead is to enable the ancestors identify their images in their descendants. The belief is that the neglect of moral responsibilities and duties to one's family and ancestors make the evil souls so dirty as to hide their identities from their ancestors. As long as a spirit is not recognized by his ancestors it will remain at the purging stage till it dies and is reborn to the earth.

If all the members of a group are good, they go on to enjoy a pleasant life and are provided with all the material things they need. However, if there is a witch in the group, the whole group is punished for a thousand years. Thieves and liars get the same sentence as witches. Punishment is however not forever, for after three thousand years of suffering, the Supreme Being forgives all the evil ones of their offenses and they join the good people in material happiness.

The Dagaaba death rites and myth of life-after-death bring out some of their traditional conceptions. The rite of death bring out the view that not everybody who dies becomes an ancestor. By the traditional standard of morality, immoral persons do not qualify to be ancestors. For the Dagaaba, any word, thought or action that threatens the peaceful co-existence and the survival of the clan is considered immoral. The argument is that through their actions they have not promoted the unity of the community and the growth of the society at large, which is enough evidence that they will not seek the welfare of the society while in the Land of the Dead. The myth also indicates

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[72] The kongdazugri (also called dazugri) is a plant which when dried, burns with great heat and for a long period of time. The fire with which "dirty" souls are purged is therefore called "Dazugu vuu."

that judgement is not based on individual merits but on collective responsibility. Families are brought together and rewarded or punished according to the moral aptitude of the group at large.

Children do not qualify to be ancestors since they fall between two distinct categories. A newly born child may be an ancestor reincarnating into the family on a visit or on a mission to correct some moral evil. It could also be the return of someone who lived a socially unacceptable life for which reason he/she was disqualified from being an ancestor. Such a person may not have been given any proper burial which made it impossible for the one's spirit to journey to the land of the living. The ghosts of persons not given proper burial rites wander about on earth till they die and may be reborn to live a better life. A new born child could also be a fresh actor on the family scene. Children are not considered full members of the community until they reach maturity. They are not expected to have a community awareness in them and their deeds therefore, may not be subjected to the moral norms of the community.

It must also be mentioned that if a child had earlier on been found through divination to be the reincarnation of an ancestor, he/she is given the name of that ancestor (sigra). An early death of such a child is more a message for the living than a misfortune. Ancestors who reincarnate into their families may leave as suddenly as they came if they find the moral standard in the family to be lower than expected. The living members of the family may immediately take the necessary steps to rectify the situation.

The Dagaaba myth also indicates the belief that life after death is a carbon copy of the present. Reward and punishment is in terms of material wellbeing. Those who have lived morally acceptable lives, after passing the "test by fire," rest to enjoy all the material things that they desired

in life. Punishment is in terms of revenge and bodily pain and a denial of material goods. The woman with one breast takes revenge by killing witches responsible for the death of some people now in the Land of the Dead. Witches are also mutilated and humiliated in the hereafter, and after judgement, the wicked and the malevolent are punished to work for their own food just as they did before their death. The difference between the righteous and the wicked is that the righteous do not have to work for their living. Reward and punishment are in terms of the concrete rather than the abstract. On the road to the land of the dead, monetary transactions are carried out with currencies used in the mundane world. As noted by Mbiti, the Christian "notion of messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in the traditional concept of history."[73]

The Dagaaba traditional belief system includes the existence of a moral code. Goody recorded three categories of authority involved in the dispensation of justice.[74] First, there is the authority of the living over the living. At the family level, there is the family-head who exercises authority over the members of his family including punishment and reward for deeds orchestrated to tarnish or uplift the image of the family. At the broader level, there are the clan head, the council of elders (*tendeme*) and finally, the chief. At all these levels, rewards include verbal praises, gifts of animals or jewellery, or the honour to represent the family head at ceremonies, or even to sit in the council of elders. Punishment also include scolding and songs of ridicule, corporal punishment, fines, banishment and in the case of notorious rapists and thieves, execution through lynching.

There is also the authority of the dead over the living. All Dagaaba come under the authority

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[73] J.S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy (New York: Praeger, 1969), p.17

[74] Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.376-377.

of the ancestors at all times. The ancestors are agents of social control. The ancestral cult provides checks on the moral behaviour of the living by giving supernatural support to the system of authority and threat of divine retribution both now and in hereafter. It is therefore believed that traditional norms of the society are handed down from on high, thereby placing social regulations above each individual. The validity of the norms is established by authority that no human agent can readily challenge even though he may at times overlook them.

The third authority, according to the myth about life in the Land of the Dead, is a council with authority over the dead. The myth mentioned a disciplinary body that punishes the wicked and the antisocial, and rewards the righteous. We might even add a fourth authority, the authority of the Supreme Being who can reverse all sentences meted out to the wicked and the antisocial after a period of service. In general, judgment at all levels is based on moral and ethical norms.

(B) The Dagaaba and the Hereafter

In the Dagaaba traditional belief system, the secular world is the scene of both divine and human activities. It is also the stage on which the living and the dead meet. Although they are in the supernatural world, the ancestors are at the same time invisible members of the natural world and occasionally reveal themselves to their families through reincarnation. In the Dagaaba religious cosmology the ancestors and deities live in a place called *Dapare* of which the living have little knowledge and can only speculate. One song which women sing in times of relaxation raises the question "if *Dapare* is not a pleasant place to be, why is it that our fathers have gone there and are all not returning?" This is the song of a woman in desperation due to the insufficiencies in her life.

The presupposition is that the world of the living is expected to be better than the world of the dead, such that even the dead are expected to return. A second song comes from an orphan pleading with death to come to terms with her. The complaint is that death (often personified) has taken away her father and her mother. In subsequent verses of the song, the musician invites death to share her food with her as a compromise, rather than take away her parents. Much as the song may be alluding to the pain of losing loved ones, it does indicate that the deceased are sent off to a place worse of than the present, or rather to a place where they are not expected to be.

There is no joy and anxiety among the Dagaaba to get to Dapare. There is no stronger oath than to declare that one's ancestors should come for him/her should he/she be found guilty of a crime of which one is accused. Desolate persons may wish that death had dispatched them to the land of the ancestors so that they may be able to meet their loved ones, but the shallowness of such wishes is illustrated in a folk tale of an orphan who wandered through the bush in desperate search for food. At the close of a disappointing day, he lay under a tree and made a wish that death may take him to the place where his parents are. The story continues that death manifested himself to the orphan in the form of an old man with a long beard. The orphan quickly retracted his words and lied that he had made no such wish. Death laughed and disappeared into thin air.

The much more popular belief among the Dagaaba is that there is only darkness after the light of this world goes off. It is therefore not surprising that the main concern is with the here and now. Religious practices are therefore to provide an insurance for the benefits of this life. It may be argued that the Dagaaba have elaborate burial rites which include donations and messages which the deceased are to deliver to relatives who have died long ago. The dead are also given items of

this world to take to the land of the dead where they will be put to use. It only goes to explain that mundane objects are the main desires of life both now and in the hereafter. The Dagaaba burial rites confirm the belief that death does not say "finish" to life. Life goes on even after death and with the same desires as in the mundane world. Death is only a transition from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors. The Dagaaba burial rites do not in anyway weaken our argument that the world of the living is more desirable than the world of the dead.

7. SUMMARY

The examination of the traditional religious practices and the sacred dimensions of some social activities of the Dagaaba show the centrality of the ancestral cult in the Dagaaba religiosity. Of the two pillars of the traditional religion (the ancestors and the lesser divinities), the ancestors are the main channel of communication with the Supreme Being and are the pivot on which the religious life of the people revolve.

Since they are the living-dead of the family, they are believed to be much more powerful than the living due to their superhuman qualities, but are still full members of the family. They are seen as the custodians of family property such as land, cattle and the granary with its content. No family property may be disposed of either in the form of a loan, lease or sale without the permission of the ancestors. A family member who dedicates any of his personal properties to the ancestors ceases to have complete authority over that item. A son who purchased a cow with money he single-handedly earned may "show" the animal to the family ancestors. Thereafter, he cannot use

it as he pleases without informing the ancestors. Wanton destruction of family property is not acceptable.

The ancestors are also the enforcers of social morality. There are social and religious taboos which must not be contravened so as to disturb the unity and harmony of the two worlds. Any word or deed that threatens this unity and harmony does not go unnoticed and the guilty person or persons must take the necessary precaution to restore the distorted relation. The ancestors are people who have lived morally good lives and wish that their descendants follow in their footsteps. The way and life of the community was established by the ancestors and they bequeathed it to their descendants. Culture is therefore seen as coming from the ancestors as a piece of inheritance.

The ancestors are known to reprimand offending descendants more than once for the same breach.[75] A son may be punished both by his dead father and grandfather for the same negligence. If the grandson had offered sacrifices to his father, the grandfather would have received his share of the sacrificial meat. The tradition is that a son always gives the hind-limb of his games to his father.

It is also worthy of note that the cycle of life - birth, marriage and death - so important in the religious and social activities of the Dagaaba fall within the jurisdiction of the ancestors.[76] It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the ancestors are the pivot on which the religious and social life of the dagaaba revolves.

The ancestors are also a decision-making body in the Dagaaba social and religious practices.

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[75] Goody, Death, Property and the Ancestors, p.393.

[76] Goody, The Myth of the Bagre, p.17.

They are consulted before major decisions are made: before establishing new farms, building new houses, going on journeys, and deciding issues related to the marriage and the cycle of life.

The ancestors also play an intercessory role between the living and the Supreme Being and between one ancestor and another.[77] Their intercessory role can be seen in a vertical dimension where they mediate between the living and the supernatural world, and horizontally between one member of the lineage and another. All sacrifices including those of reparation are made to the Supreme Being through the ancestors. The ancestors are also called upon to be witnesses when oaths are taken.

Salvation among the Dagaaba is not based on any abstract thinking but is grounded in the peaceful relation between the members of the community which include the living, the dead and the yet unborn. Peace in the community is portrayed by health, the presence of abundant material possession including food and children. It also calls for harmonious interpersonal relationship between members in the mundane world and solace with the ancestors in the hereafter. Peace within the community also involves the suppression of the powers of the evil forces. Due to the involvement of the secular and spiritual worlds in the concept of salvation for the Dagaaba, Albert Kuuire considered the concept of salvation among the Dagaaba on two levels - the temporal level which concerns his salvation in his mortal state, and the "transcendental or eschatological" level

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77 Some doubts have been raised on the mediatory or intercessory role of the ancestors in some African societies. See: Aylward Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited" African Ecclesial Review 25 (1983), p.200. However for the Dagaaba there is little doubt on the intercessory role of their ancestors. The structure of their prayers and the ability to appeal to the Supreme Being directly in times of emergency both indicate the ancestors as a half-way house to the Supreme Being.

which concerns his salvation in the hereafter.[78] In relation to the Dagaaba, he defined salvation as:

> that which consists in a life guaranteed against all evil, physical as well as moral, and in the present life as well as in the life of the `After-this-Life', in the existence of which he believes. Salvation means for him then a life of security in its full sense - both in this life and in that of the transcendental; and thus the quest for salvation for him could be summed up as quest for an aspiration to that state of life in which he will have total security that guarantees peace and happiness, be it in this present life or in the life in the company of his ancestors....[79]

It is against this background that Christianity found itself when it was first introduced to the area.

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[78] A. Albert Kuuir, Dagaati Solidarity and Salvation in the Light of "Gaudium et Spes": An Anthropologico-Theological Study (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Academia Alfonsiana, 1976), p.89-90

[79] Kuuire, Dagaati Solidarity and Salvation in the Light of "Gaudium et Spes", p.90.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE DAGAABA LAND

I. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NORTHWESTERN PREFECTURE

The history of the Catholic Church[80] in the Northwestern section of Ghana where the Dagaaba are to be found, must be treated in conjunction with the development of missionary activities in the French Sudan. Africa was divided into prefectures and vicariates for the administrative purposes of the Missionaries of Africa.[81] A prefecture or a vicariate referred to a territory administered in the name of the Holy See, usually in areas where the ordinary Church hierarchy has not been established.[82] Each prefecture or vicariate was administered by a bishop or a priest known as prefect apostolic or vicar apostolic. The prefecture of our concern is that of the former French Sudan which covered the entire area of the French colonial territory south of the Sahara, now occupied by Burkina Faso.

Initial attempts at evangelizing Africa south of the Sahara had been hampered by struggles against slave traders. The slave traders were constantly waging wars against the indigenous people

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[80] Most of our information on this topic comes from the memoir of Fr. Remigius McCoy, MAfr., Great things Happen. He is one of the first missionaries to the Dagaaba land. Fr. McCoy was born on October 1, 1897 in Mayo, Quebec (Canada). He later joined the Missionaries of Africa and was ordained priest on June 28, 1925, in Carthage (Algeria). He was assigned to the prefecture of Navrongo in 1926 where he served under Mgr. Oscar Morin. In 1929, he was sent to Jirapa as the Superior of the missionaries to start a mission in that region. He spent sixty years in region before finally retiring home to Canada where he died in June of 1993 at Ottawa's St. Patrick's Home on Riverside Drive. He was ninety-five. It is certain that the tone and context of the memoir is different now than it would have been in 1930. Much caution has been taken to present a good relation between the traditional religion and Christianity. Where possible, we will also refer to documents on the area by other missionaries.

[81] The Missionaries of Africa were formerly called the White Fathers. We will therefore use the designations interchangeably throughout this research.

[82] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.325.

through which they could capture slaves. As a result, all "white men" became synonymous with slave raiders, making it difficult for the Missionaries of Africa to gain audience for the propagation of the Christian faith. Many indigenous people escaped at the sight of them and others even threatened their lives. The slave raiders also hated the missionaries for preaching against slavery. They therefore refused to co-operate with them, thereby aggravating an already difficult situation. The missionaries also faced opposition from the traditional religion's practitioners, who saw them as a threat to their religion. To the Muslims, the missionaries were religious rivals and for the government officials administering the country, they were a political threat. The first missionary attempt to evangelize sub-Saharan Africa proved a failure and was not taken up again until 1894.

Missionaries of the late nineteenth century reached the French Sudan area not by crossing the Sahara, but from the West through Senegal. In 1895 some mission stations were established in Timbuktu and Segu,[83] which soon expanded to cover a large territory that belonged to France including Bamako in Mali, Waghadugu (Ougadougou) and Bobo Dioulasso, both in Burkina Faso.

Missionaries of the late nineteenth century still encountered the same difficulties as their predecessors. Relationship with the French government officials did not improve until the time of vicar apostolic Mgr. Lemaître (1911-1920). There was still some rivalry with the Muslims whose influence by that time was great in the Sudan. The Muslims presented Islam to the indigenous people as the religion of blacks because the propagators of Islam were black while Christianity was the religion of the whites for the opposite reason. The natives were expected to stay with their religion (Islam) especially when nationalism was on the rise and blacks were about to take over the

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[83] Donald Attwater, The White Fathers in Africa (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1937), p.56.

reins of governments from the whites in Africa. Christianity was therefore slow in growing.

However, to the South of Ougadougou were the Mossi, Grunsi and other tribes which were untouched by Islam and were still practising the traditional religion. The Missionaries of Africa therefore saw the area south of Ougadougou as a more promising area for evangelization. At the same time, there was violence against missionaries in France which was perpetrated by the French government, causing the then vicar of the Sudan, Bishop Bazin to fear that the French anticlerical attitude will be extended into French colonial territories.[84] He therefore decided to extend his prefecture into the British protectorate more for protective reasons but also to assure himself of a possible area of evangelization should he and his missionaries face expulsion.

Fortunately, the British consul in Dakar, Governor Gordon Guiggesberg, had encouraged missionaries to establish outstations in the Northern Territory of the then Gold Coast which formed part of his administrative area. In an initial survey of the area, Fr. Oscar Morin chose Wa as a suitable site to establish a mission but the British officials wanted to reserve that town for Islam. Fr. Morin was advised to try Navrongo which lies to the Northeastern part of the British protectorate. In March of 1906, the first Catholic mission station in the north of the British protectorate was inaugurated, from where the mission was later to extend to the Dagaaba in the Northwest.

The Navrongo mission was administered and sponsored by the mission office in Ougadougou until 1926 when it was made an independent prefecture on the recommendation of the British government, with Mgr. Morin as the first vicar apostolic. When he decided to establish more

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[84] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.29.

mission stations in his prefecture, Mgr. Morin looked to the Northwest where he received word of encouragement from the District Commissioner (D.C.) of Lawra, Captain Armstrong, that the Dagaaba "were good, hard working people, known for their *solid family traditions*. They had a good reputation among other ethnic groups and ... would make good Christians one day."[85] Morin chose Jirapa as a site for the new mission partly because of its central location among the Dagaaba villages.

2. THE JIRAPA MISSION

The history of the missionary activities in the Dagaaba land went through two periods of development. The first period, which we shall call the missionary period, covers the time between 1930 and 1960 during which period the development and administration of the Church lay in the hands of the missionaries. During the first period Christianity was completely dependent on funds procured through the efforts of the missionaries. The second period which we shall call the post-missionary period, covers the time between 1960 up to the present day. After 1960, many local priests were trained to take up positions of authority in both the religious and political sectors of the diocese. The first native bishop was consecrated and a diocese created to cover mainly the land of the Dagaaba. Ten of the fifteen parishes in the diocese today were created after 1960, most of which are run by local parish priests. Some sons and daughters of the indigenous people had become religious Brothers and Sisters, and educational institutions established by the missionaries were run

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[85] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.34. Emphasis ours.

by the people of the area giving the missionaries enough confidence to gradually hand over the affairs of the diocese to native administrators. In fact, while the number of local priests increased, that of expatriates diminished. By 1987 there were sixty-one local priests and six White Fathers; forty-four local religious Brothers and four expatriates, and ninety-eight local religious Sisters as against fifteen expatriates of the same vocation.[86]

Our reason for dividing the history of Dagaaba Christianity into two time-periods is to be able to examine the attitude of the local Church towards ancestral practices during the time when expatriates who knew little about the culture of the indigenous people, were solely in charge of the affairs of the diocese and the relation between the two institutions when the local clergy consisting of priests coming out of the culture of the people into Christianity, took over the affairs of the diocese.

It is obvious that the native clergy were caught between two worlds - the world of Christianity and that of the native culture, coming out as they did from their traditional culture. They were by nature sympathetic to African values and yet by their Christian training and formation which was done under the strict supervision of the expatriates, they came to accept the denunciation of their own cultural values. We shall be examining their evangelization policies as they lived between and betwixt the two cultures, and their being more Roman than Rome itself. The division will therefore enable us determine the differences in attitude towards the traditional religious practices during the course of the development of the Church in the area. Issues to be addressed here include what the native clergy are doing in response to their own culture as a way of

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[86] Quinquennial Report: Wa Diocese - 1987, p.13.

strengthening the Catholic Church in the Dagaaba land, cultural aspects which the missionaries probably overlooked; and significant changes in attitude, if any, within the local Catholic Church in the area between the two periods.

(A) The Missionary Period

The first group of missionaries to travel to Jirapa from Navrongo were Br. Basilide Koot (Dutch), Fr. Arthur Paquet (Canadian) and Fr. Remigius McCoy (Canadian).[87] After a day's journey on a lorry, the missionaries presented themselves to the District Commissioner and the Provincial Commissioner at Lawra. However, because the chief of Lawra refused to give land to the missionaries, they passed on to Jirapa. On November 30, 1929, the first missionaries to the Dagaaba land were received coldly and with caution by the people whose souls they had come to save. The chief of Jirapa and his people welcomed the missionaries (for the sake of and out of fear of the District and Provincial Commissioners)[88] and tried, in their little way, to make their unwanted guests comfortable by providing them with food and accommodation.

There was initial suspicion as to the real reason why the missionaries came to their region. The missionaries were suspected to be at worst slave raiders and at best traders but not philanthropists, for they "found it impossible to believe that men could leave home and country just to help them - people of a different race - whom they had never seen before and with whom they

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87 McCoy, Great Things Happen, 1988, p.39.

88 McCoy, Great Things Happen, 1988, p.48.

had no *personal ancestral ties*..."[89] The indigenous people later distinguished them from other "Europeans" (mainly government officials working in the area) by their kindness and willingness to identify themselves with the people. The attitude of the natives towards the missionaries remained cold.

Until they could gain the confidence of the indigenous people, medical care was the most important weapon in the hands of the missionaries which could be used to draw the people closer to them and to show their concern. In a region that was plagued by one natural disaster after another, diseases and sicknesses were the only things the people could boast of. There were yaws, malaria, leprosy, guinea worms, diarrhoea and dysentery, just to mention a few of the common diseases in the area.[90] The missionaries began by attending to medical cases around them, using their own resources and later, with the approval of the District Commissioner, a clinic was set up in Jirapa. After treating a case, they would invite the patient to pray with them which led the indigenous people to identify the God of the missionaries as the "Praying God." Even then the people were still not confident in approaching the missionaries because "they believed that all sicknesses (and every misfortune for that matter) was caused by spirits - either evil spirits or the spirits of their ancestors whom they had offended in some way."[91] Within a year or two the people began to build up some confidence in the missionaries.

There was much tact in presenting the Christian message to the people. When the elders

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89 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.47, (emphasis ours).

90 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.55.

91 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.56.

from Daffiama came to Fr. Remigius in 1932 to request rain from the "Praying God," they were invited to make three promises:

1. not to sacrifice to spirits,
2. to grant freedom to those who would want to accept the Christian faith, and
3. freedom of marriage rather than force girls to marry any one against their will.[92]

The last two cases did not pose much problems because they related more to social issues than religion, but the first did. As one of the eldest challenged, "God is the All-powerful one. But it is the spirits who deal with humanity. He is too big to be concerned about us."[93] Clearly the Dagaaba were prepared to accept social changes but not religious. In the end Christianity proved appealing to the Dagaaba because it encouraged the people to establish direct dialogue with a God whom they had all along recognized but chose to communicate with through intermediaries.

The missionaries observed that the Dagaaba believed in the Supreme Being who lived in the heavens and who deserved their respect. However, due to the gap between them and the deity the Dagaaba could better communicate with him through gods and spirits (including the spirits of their ancestors). Since all misfortunes came from either the ancestors or evil spirits, sin was a meaningless concept to them because actions that offended the spirits needed not be deliberate. As opportunities presented themselves through natural disasters and "miracles" of healing, "raising of the dead and making of rain," the Dagaaba came to appreciate the "Praying God" not as a monotheistic God, but one of the spirit powers that came to the aid of people when asked. As an

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92 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.112.

93 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.113.

elder said during the 1932 drought, "even if we must abandon our fetishes (intermediaries), we shall do it on your word (referring to the missionaries), because they themselves have abandoned us and no longer listen to us."[94]

The first group of people to show interest in the "Praying God" were those cured of illnesses and treated at the mission clinic, as well as social outcasts such as those accused of possessing witchcraft powers who had taken refuge in the mission-house to escape execution. What was attractive to these early sympathizers was the fact that a more powerful god had arrived which was capable of protecting them and providing for their needs. As the missionaries themselves noticed,

> the main reason for the hesitation of the Dagaabas to embrace Christianity was their natural cautiousness. The decision to break with the `old ways' and risk incurring the anger of their ancestors was a big leap they were not prepared to take. Who could be certain what lay on the other side? A commitment to Christ demanded a new way of life, and they were not prepared to give up their ancestral beliefs and well worn customs so easily.[95]

When a "miracle" of healing was performed on a prominent member of the society such as Nameri who was "raised from the dead,"[96] he became a convert or rather a sympathizer to Christianity and took his family with him into the new faith.

One should not call this initial sympathy toward Christianity real conversion but a shift from one god to a more powerful one that is able to provide the necessities of life. As long as the new god was meeting their needs, they went to Church but as soon as the droughts returned, Church

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[94] C. Aidan Dasuah, "The Evangelisation of the Dagarti People: A miracle of Grace," (unpublished speech delivered at the General Assembly Meeting of the National Missionary Council [Ottawa], on March 18, 1978), quoting from Jirapa Mission Dairies, 10 July, 1932.

[95] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.72.

[96] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.59.

attendances fell accordingly. The real purpose for the sympathy easily came to light during times of crises. When there was drought and the locusts posed a threat, the most appealing solution was to fall back on their long standing traditional approach to the problem - consult a diviner and perform the appropriate sacrifice to the affected spirit for pacification. *Fear of the spirits could not be eradicated.* The case of the Daffiama elders comes to mind readily. McCoy records that in June of 1932, a delegation of elders from Daffiama had gone to the missionaries and after accepting to denounce the spirits, they prayed together with the missionary for rain and their prayers were granted. In October of the same year, somebody stumbled onto the hatchery of a swamp of locusts and reported the discovery to the chief. The immediate reaction was to offer sacrifices to pacify their ancestors and other spirit powers for the neglect.[97] The missionaries highlighted the persecution of those catechumens who refused to perform the sacrifice and how the locust became selective in their feeding - feeding on only the farms of all those who had gone ahead to perform sacrifices to the spirits to the exclusion of the farms of the catechumens. What did not strike them was the propensity to fall back on the ancestors and spirits in times of crises.[98]

According to the memoirs of the missionaries, it was nearly a year after arriving in Jirapa before they recorded their first real converts. These were two brothers, Kyefondeme and Yelesigra. Before they could go over to the missionaries to declare their intention of becoming Christians, they first informed their cousin, the chief of Jirapa (not in his capacity as chief but as a family member).

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97 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.117.

98 We are not alone in this observation. Donald Attwater also observed in 1937 that the mission was much more successful among the Dagaaba because of the "miracles" of rain, locusts and healing performed by the missionaries. See Donald Attwater, The White Fathers in Africa, p.60.

Both men had been working for the missionaries since their arrival - Kyefondeme as a mason and his brother as a daily contract worker. A week after the two brothers had declared their intention to follow the "Praying God," three (out of four) others of their brothers, some friends and relatives also joined them as followers of Christ. The two brothers formed the nucleus of Christianity and its expansion revolved around the Gala family.

Poreku was to the people of Ko as Kyefondeme and his brothers were to the people of Jirapa. Poreku and his brother Mwankurinaa (also called Ngmenzie) were well known as diviners and soothsayers throughout Nandom-Lambussie traditional area and as far as Dissin and Dano in Burkina Faso. Poreku first heard of the missionaries from a friend in Jirapa. When he decided to embrace the new faith and give up his role in the traditional religion as a soothsayer and a diviner, his brother Mwankurinaa objected and asked him to provide a fowl with which to consult the ancestors on the switch of faith. Recounting the story, the Most Rev. Peter Poreku Dery, Archbishop of Tamale and son of Poreku writes:

> The chicken for the sacrifice was provided by Poreku. I was called in to hold the chicken. Ngmankurinaa started the incantations, calling upon his tengama [earth-deities], the kolle [river deities], the hills and then the ancestors. The chicken was killed. It jumped round and suddenly fell on its back and died. This was, according to their belief, an undisputable sign that the ancestors, Naabilengmen and all the spirits were happy and supported Poreku in his choice. Ngmankurinaa's face fell with disappointment. He could not argue any more and disowned his own brother from that day. The destiny of many thousands had been decided by a sacrificed chicken.[99]

It was only then that Poreku was able to continue in the new faith undisturbed. He convinced some of his family members to go with him to Jirapa on his routine Sunday visits. With the conversion

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[99] P.P. Dery, "The coming of the Christian Faith to the Upper West," in: V. Gregoire, ed., That They may have Life: An account of Activities of the Church in North-West Ghana 1929-1979 (Wa, Ghana: Wa Catholic Press, 1979), p.8.

of a prominent traditional religious leader to Christianity, it was easier for the new faith to be accepted into the homes of many. In the planting of Christianity in the area, the traditional community leaders played a vital role. In many localities, when no prominent and influential personality accepted Christianity, evangelization was at a stalemate. McCoy records that until the conversion of a woman called Maria, Tebano was stubbornly anti-Christian.[100]

The missionary activities in the Northwestern section of the British protectorate attracted other Dagaaba on the French side of the border. Before the establishment of political borders, the Dagaaba lived as one tribe and movement within the territory was unhindered. However, with the partition of Africa, political borders were jealously guarded by the colonial masters concerned, but the Dagaaba were still not deterred from visiting other family members on either sides of the border. When those on the British side of the border heard the news of the activities of the missionaries, they promptly shared it with their relatives on the French side of the border.

The records of the missionaries indicate an influx of enthusiastic people from the French side of the border who wished to be Christians, with people travelling long distances on foot to attend Church services in Jirapa.[101] In 1932, people from Wessa (French Territory) arrived in Jirapa requesting to be accepted into the new faith. This put great deal of pressure on the missionaries in Jirapa and by 1933, there was the need for the White Fathers in the French Sudan to open missions at Dano and Dissin leading to the formation of Dioubogo Diocese.[102]

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100 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.84.

101 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.125.

102 McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.125-126.

There were violent confrontations between over-zealous catechumens and the traditional religious authorities. McCoy records that at Ginginkpwe, some new converts went on rampage and destroyed the traditional religious shrines in the area.[103] They were tried and imprisoned by the District Commissioner in Lawra. Another such situation arose in Baazing.[104] This time not only were the culprits imprisoned but they were also flogged. The clash between the new converts and the traditional religious practitioners epitomized the real position of the missionaries in relation to the Dagaaba traditional practices which the new converts were made to denounce and despise. As they were extremists among the Christian converts, there were also the over-protective among the traditional religious practitioners. Children of some non-Christians were barred by their parents from attending Church services. The Chief of Sankana tried hard to prevent his sons from defecting from ancestral practices and other traditional values to Christianity.[105] With the passage of time, the missionaries began to address cultural practices and moral values which they consider as contrary to the principles of Christianity and the rights of the individual.

(B) Process of instruction

The period of catechumenate lasted four years[106] - a period long enough to determine and

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[103] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.129.

[104] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.129.

[105] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.130.

[106] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.300.

ensure genuine conversion and to guarantee proper knowledge of the Catholic doctrines.[107] After the first year, the catechumens were given medals of the Blessed Virgin Mary which, to the missionaries, symbolized their candidature as catechumens.[108] In the third year they received the Holy Rosary and before finally receiving the Sacrament of Baptism, all candidates took a two-months intensive course at the end of which an assessment test was conducted to determine their knowledge of catechism. Unsuccessful candidates were not baptized and had to repeat the course the following year.

The missionaries, as we recalled, put much emphasis on prayers, with the "Lord's Prayer" and the "Hail Mary" being primary. These two prayers were the first to be translated into Dagaare which we shall reproduce to bring out how it appealed to the minds of the people.

Te saa na be Tengvelaa puo	Our Father who is in good land
Ka fo youri be kpong	And your name is great
Ka fo naalong wa	May your reign come
Ka te sagra fo tenga zu	May we obey you on earth
Sing ba nang sagra fo Tengvelaa puo.	As you are obeyed in the good land
Ko te bondire zine ka sing te	Give us enough for today's sustenance
Di te yelbebe suuri ko te	Forgive us our evil-deeds
Sing te nang dire suuri koro te taaba.	As we continuously forgive our colleagues
E ka te ta sagra belle	Do not let us accept deceits
Ire te yelfaare puo. Amina	Remove us from evil-deeds. Amen

As the Lord's prayer was presented to the Dagaaba in their own language, there was no part of it that contradicted any of their previously held beliefs. To them, the Supreme Being lived in a land from

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[107] This section is based on a recorded interview with Robert Bongvlaa, one of the first converts from the area. See: "Interview with Robert Bongvlaa," in: V. Gregoire, ed., That They may have Life, 1979, p.65-69.

[108] Here again it should be pointed out that, as Attwater commented, the Dagaaba were said to be strong "heathens" and their request for medals which to the missionaries was a symbol of enrolment as catechumens, was looked on simply by the people "as a new powerful fetish." See Attwater, The White Fathers in Africa, p.61.

where all good things came to them. It is therefore logical that it should be a good land. They accepted his greatness and the fact that he was ruling over them. It was a well known fact that if one did not obey the taboos of any god, one was merely inviting disaster upon oneself and one's house-hold. The prayer also asked for their material sustenance and protection from evil. There could be no better desire from the Dagao than as imbedded in the prayer.

The "Hail Mary" was also translated as:

Yaane Maria	Hail Mary
Fo paale ni la garasie	Full of Grace
Naangmen be la fo zie	The Supreme Being is with you
Naagmen maal fo la gang pogba zaa	The Supreme Being has blessed you more than all women
Kye ka fo puo bie Yezu nye puubo	And Jesus the product of your womb has obtained praises
Maria Song	Holy Mary
Naangmen Ma	Mother of the Supreme Being
Puor Naangmen ko te	Greet the Supreme Being on our behalf
Te nang waa yelbebe deme	Because we are evil beings
Pampanga ani te kuu daare	Now, and the day we will die
Amina	Amen.

This prayer did introduce some new concepts to the Dagaaba such as the concept of grace (*garasie*),[109] and the Supreme Being having a mother. However, its basic theme of using Mary as a mediatrix between the devotees and God was not foreign. The Dagaaba use persons (their ancestors) as intermediaries and mediators between them and their object of worship. It was therefore not difficult for them to see and understand Mary's role as an intercessor.

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[109] There is no term in Dagaare to describe the concept of Grace. The missionaries therefore invented the term "garasie" from the Latin term "gratia." It was a common practice to use Latin words to make up for any lack. Thus there was "Sakramanti" for Sacrament, "confirmantio" (confirmation), "order" (Order), "Trinitati" (Trinity), "Vino" (Wine), just to mention a few.

The Catechumens were also expected to:

a. Attend Church regularly,

b. be of good behaviour,

c. renounce polygamy, levirate marriage, the practice of having "lovers" to raise children in case of impotence,

d. abandon "*juju*" (magic) practices, and

e. to renounce most of their customs.[110]

As discussed in the previous chapter, marriage among the Dagaaba is an institution entered into for procreation but principally to ensure the continuous visitation of the ancestors to the family and to place parents in a position to join the line of ancestors. Polygamy, levirate marriage and the practice of taking "lovers" go to express the strong desire to be honoured as ancestors and to keep the community growing.

To ensure that women were not forced into marriages against their will and that converts married in the Christian convention, a one-month pre-marriage course was organized by the missionaries. A hostel was built in 1936 to house women engaged to be married. During the one month that they were in the mission, they were instructed on Christian marriage, health and domestic care. During that period their fiances visited them three times to supply them with food and also take some religious instructions themselves.

This programme of marriage instructions was not without its flaws. The economic base of the Dagaaba is farming where a man and his wife worked hand in hand on their farm during the

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[110] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.301.

rainy seasons. Due to weather vagaries such as unpredictable rain falls, the Dagao took advantage of every opportunity available, especially the first rains which were very important for sowing their crops. The rainy seasons were times when unmarried persons got engaged to be able to get assistance from the woman. Unfortunately, with the Christian marriage instructions program, the bride-to-be had to go to Jirapa for three weeks. A man without support from any source simply become frustrated of the prolonged absence of his bride-to-be for whom the dowry had been paid and who was expected to cohabit with him and help on the farm. It was not uncommon for men to abandon the Christian faith and take their brides home. Marriages were also falling apart before the knots could be tied.

The missionaries in Jirapa faced the common problems that plagued missionary activities all along. Despite the fact that many people were coming to the mission house and asking to be given Christian instructions, the labourers were few in the midst of the rich harvest. In October of 1931 alone, 2,200 catechumens were enroled with two Catholic priests working in the area.[111] Once in a while a missionary will arrive to replace one or the other of the first team of three. It was therefore incumbent on the missionaries to get assistants from among their catechumens. A school for catechists was founded in 1931 to train young men who would help in some of the outstations. The first candidates to the catechists school completed their course in two years instead of the three laid down by the Vatican, because of the high demand for more hands.[112] As more and more

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[111] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.245.

[112] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.301. This was not peculiar to the Northwestern section of the Navrongo prefecture. In Wiaga, where the catechists were trained for the Northeast mission stations, the course was completed in two years as well.

catechists graduated, the work load was lessened and the missionaries had the luxury of introducing a language course which increased the period of training from three years to four. Ten years after the arrival of the missionaries, statistics of the Church was as follows:

	PRIESTS	CATECHISTS	BAPTIZED	CATECHUMENS
JIRAPA	4	39	3,963	2,209
KALEO	5	23	1,616	437
NANDOM	4	31	6,880	3,563
	13	93	12,459	6,209[113]

At the same time some young men wishing to become priests were sent to Navrongo where a seminary was opened for the training of local priests. The seminary was later transferred to Tamale and in 1951 Peter Poreku Dery, was ordained as the first native priest from the region. With permits from the colonial government to open primary schools in the area, more and more people received formal education and entered the seminary to be trained as priests. Between 1951 and 1959, six indigenous priests were ordained. In 1963, a Junior Seminary was opened in the Dagaaba area (in Jirapa) which further facilitated the preparation and training of local priests.

Enrolments into the religious life as Brothers and Sisters also increased. Since the facilities were not available in the prefecture of Navrongo for training women entering the convent, they were sent to Pabre in Burkina Faso to be trained.[114] Later, an institution was built in Navrongo (1945) for the training of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate Conception. Another institution for the same purpose was later opened among the Dagaaba in Kaleo, to be moved to Daffiama in 1952. The

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[113] This chart has been adopted with modification from Dasaah, "The Evangelization of the Dagarti People," p.6.

[114] McCoy, Great Things Happen. p.194.

institute has since turned out over ninety-eight local Sisters. Some young men joined the vocation of Brotherhood and were soon to add more hands to the work of evangelising the Northwest of Ghana.

(C) Christianity and the Traditional Religious Practices During the Missionary Period

The early missionaries were cautious not to confuse Christianity with the traditional practices. They tried to avoid confrontation and compromise. This is demonstrated by the careful selection of Dagaare vocabulary in their translation process. As was the common practice among the White Fathers missionaries, the process of evangelization included the translation of the Christian doctrines into the vernacular of the people among whom they worked. Yet sight was not to be lost in avoiding whatever by their judgement was "pagan." We shall examine two concepts with which the early missionaries battled in their attempts to avoid confusing Christianity with the traditional religion.

According to the traditional beliefs, after the death of a person, the spirit of the deceased was judged by the ancestors as it travelled to the land of the dead. Those who had live morally acceptable lives joined the ancestors in Dapare while the evil ones went to a land which was kept permanently heated by the continuous burning of *kongdazug daare*. From the land of perpetual heat, the evil ones waited to be reborn to the earth where they are given another chance to live morally acceptable lives.

In order not to mix up the Christian ideas of Heaven and Hell with the Dagaaba beliefs in the hereafter, the missionaries tactfully referred to heaven as *Teng-vilaa* (literally meaning "Good

land") and Hell as *Teng-faa* (bad land) while avoiding the much more appropriate terms of *Dapare* and *Dazugu yuu*. The intention was to prevent their new converts from seeing Christianity as a twin-mate to the traditional religious practices. They also wanted to avoid playing into the hands of the traditional religious practitioners who considered *Dapare* a sacred term and used it sparingly.

Traditional sacrificial practices were forbidden and baptized Christians and catechumens alike were not expected to participate in them. They were not to provide the items for sacrifice, neither were they to eat of foods and animals offered to the ancestors and the gods. During the funerals of baptized Christians and catechumens, the missionaries did not allow sacrifices to be performed but allowed Christian participation in funeral rites that did not involve sacrifices.

Widowhood rite which is the traditional way of severing relationship between deceased persons and their spouses, were also forbidden. For the Dagao, a widow or widower as the case might be, had the moral responsibility of showing respect to the deceased partner by undergoing the ritual. A woman who was not faithful to her husband was not allowed to go through the rite and, more often than not, was subjected to ridicule by the other women in the family. On many occasions the victims were so humiliated, most preferred to abandon Christianity in order to perform the rite.

At baptism, new converts were given names from the Bibie, mostly those of the apostles and the authors of the gospels, in addition to the names they received at birth. Thus there was John (*Kyefondeme*), Peter (*Dery*), James (*Nyangwane*), Joseph (*Gbare*) and many others. Converts were also given names of European saints such as Remi (*Kabiri*), Oscar (*Gokyi*), George, Anne, and so on, and parishes and institutions were also named after saints. No African name was considered for

use by catechumens during baptism. The conception was that the Dagaaba need the "foreign" names to make them more Christian due to the element of "paganism" attached to the traditional names. It was also believed that the new name would signify their dying to their cultures and rising to the new faith. This was also probably for fear of confusing Christianity with the indigenous religion.

The missionaries also wrote a book of prayers and catechism for the followers of the new faith. The book for Christian instructions covered the Catholic doctrines and dogmas as the missionaries wanted them understood by the new converts. One catechesis concerned the aftermath of the final judgement:

Q. *Naangmen nang di o seree baare bong paa na e?*
(After God has judged the person, what then happens?).
A. *Naangmen nang di o seree baare, o subo na gaa la teng-vilaa bii teng-faa bii prigator.*
(After God has completed judgement, the person will go to either the good land or the bad land or purgatory).

This catechesis was to teach the catholic concepts of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, irrespective of the fact that the idea of purgatory may be absent in the Dagaare concept of life after death. Many more catechises were equally meaningless to the intended audience, thus failing to convey the desired messages.

By the close of the missionary era and with the growth of urban centres, the problems of the missionaries shifted from addressing "paganism" to what they called "neo-paganism."[115] By neo-paganism they meant a loss of the Christian faith among the educated elite. According to the missionaries, the loss of faith resulted from an "internal upheaval experienced by those emerging from a traditional cultural setting (the close-knit village atmosphere with its relatively clear-cut

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[115] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.231.

value system) to a modern one."[116] However, in our opinion, the problem of neo-paganism was probably that, when the educated were confronted with modernism and were prepared to live up to that, they were directly leaving behind their traditional values and indirectly, that of Christianity. The fact that the adherence to Christianity degenerated with the decline of the traditional religious values, in some way demonstrates the dependence of Christianity on the former. It therefore became the responsibility of the local priests to start a re-conversion process to win back to the fold the sheep that had drifted away as a result of development, and at the same time, continue where the missionaries left off.

This also raises some suspicion on the genuineness of the conversion made by the missionaries. It is possible that due to the inadequacy of staff, the Christian message was not properly presented to the people. The catechists who were the main carriers of the message were themselves not adequately trained, first because of the short period of training they went through in order to get them out into the field as soon as possible, and second, most of them were illiterates and could neither read nor write. What they were taught was committed to memory and their preaching was based on what they could remember.[117] As Dasaah put it,

> These volunteers were 'raw' men, simple illiterate peasants. The training consisted of minimum reading, writing vernacular, intense instruction in Christian doctrine and life. The methodology of question/answer was employed. In principle the training was of three years

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[116] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.231.

[117] There is an undocumented story among the people of Eremon, of one Bowo Dery who as a catechist told his congregation not to cultivate their lands but that any time they were hungry, they should bring their plates out into the open and pray with their hands to the sky and ask God for whatever food they desired and it will fall to them from the sky. When the converts later realised they could not feed themselves with food from heaven and it was also too late to cultivate their farms, they drove their catechist away. Though this story may have been embellished, it does demonstrate the inadequacies in the understanding of some of the catechists.

duration.[118]

Yet,

> Upon completion, the catechists were stationed in villages. There they were officially teachers of the faith. They led people in prayers and conducted para-liturgical services on Sundays. The scheme for such a Sunday service consisted of: catechism, Gospel and Epistle of the Sunday in the vernacular, commentary on the Gospel and Epistle, rosary and hymns and finally the angelus.[119]

It is even doubtful if the missionaries were that fluent in the language as they claimed to be.[120]

(D) Reasons for the Success of the Missionaries

In our opinion, the secret to the success of the missionaries was their respect for and use of the family as the base of evangelization. The heads of families were mainly men who had the ability to convince the rest of their families to go with them into the new faith. The missionaries paid much attention to elders and influential people in the communities since they could encourage or discourage relatives in their decisions to accept or reject Christianity.

Though they denounced polygamy, for a start, the missionaries did not want to be seen as attacking the bases of the household. They therefore allowed the individual catechumen to decide

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118 Dasaah, "The Evangelization of the Dagarti People," p.6.

119 Dasaah, "The Evangelization of the Dagarti People," p.6.

120 As late as 1951, the missionaries in Navrongo were still using the catechists and local Christians to help in the translation of passages into Kasem. According to Fr. Jacque Morin, the missionaries read the text in English/French and explained the intended message to the committee assisting in the translation which then provided the local equivalent. Morin admitted that in the end the native people sometime complained of the translation being "non-Kasem." This information was obtained from Fr. Jacque Morin during my interview with him held on the December 28, 1993, at his residence on Argyle Street, Ottawa.

when to divorce all but one wife.[121] The same religious tolerance was not extended to the catechists and those in training as they were expected to live exemplary lives by denouncing the traditional practices. Assistants to the missionaries who had to assume leadership roles in the society such as are associated with the family and the position of *tendaana*, were allowed to take on those roles. They however were not baptized until they were on their death-beds.[122] Baptism was administered much more liberally when it came to the dying. The missionaries realized that it would be disastrous to openly confront the traditional practices of the people. They were therefore careful in selecting what aspects to condemn. Their partial open-mindedness towards the traditional practices allowed the new converts to evaluate the two faiths and make their independent decisions (mostly after consultations with the family). In general, the aim of missionaries of the early twentieth century was to establish as many mission stations as possible, and the missionaries to the Dagaaba were apt to do just that; they would not embark on any policy that would jeopardize their plans. It should be pointed out that the initial attempts in 1906 to establish a mission in Navrongo were delayed due to the rapid revival of the traditional religious practices, perhaps as a reaction against the destructive approach of the missionaries.

Another reason for the missionary success was the involvement of women in the process of evangelization. Apart from individuals like Maria of Tebano who, as converts, propagated the faith in their communities,[123] the wives of catechists were given special instructions in health care and

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[121] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.95.

[122] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.96.

[123] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.86.

catechism and assigned to impart their knowledge to groups of women and children. It is a practical experience that among African families, children grow up around their mothers more than their fathers. It is therefore easier to get to children through their mothers than fathers who are out of the house for a greater part of the day.

A further reason for the success of the missionary activities among the Dagaaba is the receptiveness of their traditional practices. As discussed earlier, the traditional belief system places a gap between the Supreme Being and his worshippers, a gap which is bridged by the ancestors and lesser divinities. The position of the ancestors and lesser divinities is mediatory and failure on the part of any divinity could lead to its abandonment. The missionaries could not have picked a better time to arrive than the period when the region was undergoing severe drought as a consequence of which the people felt the gods had abandoned them. There was therefore a search for a new mediator and the "praying God" proved to be a possible, and in fact, the only candidate for the position. Gregory Kpiebaya attributed the mass conversion to "the love for security, mental and bodily wellbeing."[124] We would have to say that the receptiveness of the traditional religion made it possible for the Dagaaba to find that security in Christianity.

The social structure of the Dagaaba also contributed to the successful planting of Christianity in the area. Despite being a religion of individuals with baptism going to the individual, the collective responsibility among the Dagaaba made them approach and handle Christianity as a community gift. As the missionaries noted,

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[124] E.G. Kpiebaya, "Living The Christian Faith Today," p.19. Albert Kuuire had earlier on defined salvation for the Dagaaba in terms of security both now and in the hereafter; see Albert Kuuire, Dagaati Solidarity and Salvation in the Light of "Gaudium et Spes", 1976, p.90.

> Even though it (baptism) had been given to each one of them individually, they saw it as a community gift in which all had an equal share and all shared responsibility for protecting and nurturing it. If they saw someone among them failing to live up to his or her Christian commitment, they would consult the catechist who would advise them what to do about it.[125]

Most of the conversion was done by the people themselves. One person was converted and he/she carried the new faith like a contagious disease into his family. The Dagaaba community is built on each being a brother's keeper and, as seen earlier, any action that threatened the unity of the family and the community at large attracted punishment from the ancestors. Conversely, what ever stood for the unity of the community was the ultimate good. When missionary activities later extended to the Dagomba in Tamale the missionaries quickly observed that "the Christian presence would grow among the Dagomba, but by individual rather than group conversion."[126]

However, it should not be supposed that the conversion process of the Dagaaba was as smooth as it was narrated by McCoy and other pioneer missionaries to the area. In the first place the accounts of other missionaries outside the Dagaaba area cast doubts on the credibility of the accounts of the missionaries in the Dagaaba land. From the memoirs of the missionaries in the area, it appeared as if conversion was easy and "everyday was Sunday." In the 1934 mission diary of the area,[127] it was reported, for example, that on April 1, 600 rosaries were distributed, on May 20, 50 and on June 20, 200, bringing the total number of rosaries distributed to date at 2,300. On the other hand, the diary of 1933 recorded more catechumens being admitted than the distribution of rosaries. On January 21, 1933, "10,000 catechumens gathered in Jirapa," and by June 4 of the same year

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[125] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.143.

[126] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.206.

[127] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.250 & 251.

"more than 300 received the rosary."[128] We are told that Fr. Paquet opened the mission diary the day the missionaries arrived in Jirapa (November 30, 1929), from which they could make accurate reports to their superiors on the development of the mission in their designated region.[129] We would therefore suppose that it was constantly updated and kept as accurately as possible.

We are not able to tell if the figures provided were from Jirapa station alone or if they included all the stations in the area. What we are sure of is that since catechumens received medals of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first year of catechumenate and the rosary in the third year, if "more than 300" received the rosary in 1933 and 850 between April and June of 1934, we may suppose that the mission was expanding quite rapidly.

It therefore comes as a surprise to read elsewhere that Mgr. Morin, on his return to Navrongo in 1934 after his consecration as Bishop in Canada, "was sorry to hear of a certain slowing down of the conversion among the Dagaaba."[130] Mgr. Morin lamented that:

> The minds are purified now, it is sure that a certain number of people were following the crowd without knowing what they wanted. Some were even hoping that if they became `children of the fathers' they would no longer be under the tyranny of small chiefs and would not be obliged to the forced labour that always fell on the same people. The great crowds of two years ago have thinned. There are still enough to occupy the time of the missionaries, and what is to the good, the postulants and catechumens at present know what they are doing. In the three stations of Nandom, Jirapa and Kaleo there are 12,000 people following the catechism and there are new recruits daily.[131]

What may be deduced from the comment of Mgr. Morin is that most of the people who presented

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[128] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.250 & 251.

[129] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.17.

[130] Anonymous, "Founders of Navaro: April 1906," Petit Echo, The White Fathers (1982) 6-7.

[131] Anonymous, "Founders of Navaro: April 1906," 6-7.

themselves for baptism had ulterior motives for converting. The missionaries failed to differentiate between the curious and the faithful.

3. POST-MISSIONARY ERA

The beginning of the 1960s was also the beginning of the "euthanasia" of the mission of the Missionaries of Africa in the Northwest of Ghana. The concept of "euthanasia of missions" was put forth by Henry Venn[132] suggesting that once a missionary group got to an area, they were to teach the people to be self-governing, self-financing and self-propagating. While they were still in control of the area of evangelization, the missionaries were to train the indigenous people and gradually shift the administration of the parish or prefecture to the latter. They themselves then systematically moved to a new area to start another evangelization process. The Missionaries of Africa in the Wa Diocese were able to set up a self-governing and a self-propagating Diocese. As McCoy put it:

> The missionary presence, except in certain specialized areas of the apostolate such as seminary training, spiritual animation centres, inter-religious dialogue, and some social services, began to diminish. This was a kind of programmed obsolescence whose origin lay not so much in a conscious decision on the part of missionary institutes to withdraw at a given moment, as from the very nature of the missionary vocation itself. It is by now a trite statement, but no less true for being so, that missionaries exist to work themselves out of a job.[133]

Unfortunately, like most Christian missions in the developing worlds, Wa Diocese never attained the stage of self-financing which, as we shall see later, is a contributory factor to the retardation of

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[132] C.P. Groves, Planting of Christianity in Africa (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), Vol.II, p.217; Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1983), p.64.

[133] McCoy, Great Things Happen, p.231.

the process of inculturation in the area.

With the turn of the 1960s came the creation of a diocese and the election of the first local bishop to the area. The administration of the Church then lay in the hands of its own people. The schools were turning out young men and women who were willing to work in the development of the Church by way of becoming priests, Brothers and Sisters and catechists. The seminaries turned out many more native priests, most of whom where capable of running parishes of their own. The Brothers and Sisters had also trained enough local hands to take over most of the jobs available in the hospitals, clinics and parishes.

The clinic in Jirapa had become a hospital and an institution established to train qualified registered nurses to provide the much needed staff. A Junior seminary (St. Francis Xavier Junior Seminary) was also established in Jirapa which was later to be moved to Wa, with a native priest on the staff. This facilitated the grooming of young men for the priesthood. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA) also founded St. Anne's Vocational School in Nandom (for sewing and weaving), and the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception (F.I.C), a carpentry workshop in Wa and a secondary school in Nandom. By 1972, the Brothers were training youth in the newly established Nandom Practical Vocation Centre.

In 1975, Gregory Kpiebaya was elected the second native bishop to replace Bishop Dery who was then transferred to Tamale as archbishop, which indicate that the diocese was, from then on, capable of sending out missionaries of its own. The MSOLA also began handing over the administration of Nandom Hospital to the Sisters of Mary Immaculate Conception (SMI - native Sisters). The administration of the diocese had gradually been passed into the hands of Dagaaba

trained personnel.

After 1960, the propagation of the Christian faith still followed the old method of primary evangelization as there were many areas in the Diocese, even among the Dagaaba, that had not yet heard of the Christian faith. As Bishop Gregory put it,

> Primary Evangelisation is the initial preaching on Jesus Christ and his message to people who have not yet heard about him (kerygma). It is through primary evangelisation that new disciples are gained for Christ. It must be observed that though only a quarter of our people have been converted to Christ, organised primary evangelisation has come almost to a standstill. Many areas even among the Dagaare parishes are still primary evangelisation areas. When you move into the Sisaala area the situation becomes even more serious. Here the people are virtually untouched.[134]

Despite the mass conversion reported for the 1930s, in 1987 it could be written that "the bulk of the people of this area still practice the traditional religion."[135] This is supported by a figure of 96,132 Catholics out of a population of 450,000 (i.e. 21.36%).[136] With the number of Christians standing at approximately 25% of the total population of the area, we may suggest that either there was no mass conversion in the area at all or that the drop out rate was so high that within fifty years over 50% had returned to the old form of worship.

It also became evident that the practice of "mass conversion" in the early 1930s was detrimental to the individual's religious formation. Meditations and retreats were seen as the prerogatives of the priests and those in the religious vocations. As a result Fr. Dasaah described the Dagaaba Christians as people "who unfortunately lack commitment... A cross-section lacks maturity

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134 Quinquennial report of Wa Diocese - 1987, p.15.

135 Quinquennial report of Wa Diocese - 1987, p.5.

136 Quinquennial report of Wa Diocese - 1987, p.1.

in the faith... When prayers and devotions `fail' to obtain a healing, fertility or to alleviate infant mortality, some comfortably return to traditional fetish practices."[137]

When Bishop Dery took over the administration of the newly created diocese (from 1960-1975), as a native of the area, he knew how important the local communities were and their organization to ensure the corporality of the community. He therefore set about organizing the diocese in accordance with the structure of the Dagaaba community. His area of priority was the creation of small Christian communities.[138] Despite the growth in the number of local priests, he stressed evangelization through the lay apostolate. Seeing the role the laity played in the past in the evangelization of the Northwest, Dery tried to improve on that by establishing youth movements such as Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), the Young Christian Students (YCS), Altar Boys Association, the Boys Scouts and the Girl Guides.

The Christian youth movements were to organize the youth in the villages and schools to help them live their Christian lives effectively in the environments in which they found themselves. With the social activities that went on among the youth movements - the treks and picnics, games and competitions and the voluntary workforce that they constituted, it was difficult for the non-Christians living around these movements to resist being involved. Many young men and women were drawn to the Catholic Church through the activities of the Christian youth movements. The simple desire to wear the uniform that went with these youth movements or to serve mass and sit

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137 Dasaah, "The Evangelisation of the Dagarti People," p.9.

138 We are aware of the concept of small Christian Communities operating in Latin America. It should however be pointed out that the Dagaaba local clergy did not borrow the concept, rather it arose from the cultural setting of the Dagaaba clan system as discussed earlier on.

next to the priest were in themselves attractive to non-Christians. Most interested non-Christians registered for instruction in catechism and were baptized so that they could realize their dreams.

Adult organizations included the Knights of St. John and the Knights of Marshall, the Ladies Auxiliaries of St. John and the Ladies Auxiliaries of Marshall, mainly among the educated elite, Church Committees, Family Groups, Vincent de Paul movement, Church choirs, Legion of Mary, Catholic Action and many others at the village, parish and diocesan levels. By 1975, there were about thirty lay organizations altogether in the Diocese.[139]

As a successor to Bishop Dery, Gregory Kpiebaya continued to build on the foundation laid by his predecessor, by establishing in his people the awareness of their faith and of its implications for them in their daily lives. He also continued to emphasize evangelization through the lay apostolate. Bishop Kpiebaya established the Christian Community Animators Programme (CCAP) in the mid 1980s which brought under one umbrella all the lay organizations in the diocese, to be administered by the Diocesan Laity council. A new pastoral approach was then adapted to address the cultural needs of the Christians in the Diocese. This approach came to be known as "Building Christian Communities." We shall spend some time on it since it is the principal policy of evangelization during the post-missionary period.

The new evangelization approach of the diocese defined a Christian community as a community of Christians who on account of their common baptism in Christ, feel related to one another and work together so as to be a sign of God's love for men in a particular area or field.[140]

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[139] Quinquennial report of Wa Diocese - 1987, p.15.

[140] Dasuah, "The Evangelisation of the Dagarti People," p.10, quoting M.Ciraeff. The Document was not accessible to us.

The basic aim of the approach is to go back to the roots of communities and rebuild them such that they meet the Christian interests and needs of both the individual and the community at large, so as to compensate for the deficiencies of the missionary period and deepen the faith of the people.

To achieve its aim, the approach was to begin in the villages of the various parishes rather than at the Diocesan level. The advantage being that the villages constitute small communities that can be organized much more effectively. The first step was to find out some basic facts about the villages such as the area, the number of inhabitants, the activities, the clans as well as their difficulties and needs. The Christian communities were then to be formed, each with an elected leader.

Among the ministries established in each Christian community included the ministry for peace which was responsible for settling disputes within the local Church community, the ministry of the sick and needy which took care of health needs including arrangements to get the sick to hospitals and call in the priest to administer the Sacrament of the Sick if needed. There was also the ministry of liturgy charged with the responsibility of making the community a worshipping community. Other ministries included development, funerals and finance. The leaders of the village organizations met to elect parish animators who acted as liaisons between the villages in the parish. The final step was the appointment of priests as diocesan animators. The priests were in charge of co-ordinating the affairs of the communities.

It should be pointed out that despite the involvement of the lay apostolate during both periods of the Christian era, there were differences in emphasis. During the missionary era, the lay apostolate was used to supplement the inadequate staff, while during the period of the local

administrations, it was organized to set up a stronger Christian foundation with its basis in the community rather than the top hierarchy of the Church.

The methods of evangelization after 1960 also included more formal education and rural development. It should be mentioned that despite the improvement of medical service with the establishment of hospitals in Jirapa and Nandom, which the government supplemented with its own hospitals in Lawra, Tumu and Wa, the diocese was still inadequately taken care of. The government continued to ignore the needs of the area even after independence, making it necessary for the mission to continue to provide medical services wherever possible. To make the services accessible to many more people, clinics were established as affiliates to Jirapa hospital which provide the staff and the logistics. Areas including Eremon, Boo, Duori, Daffiama, to mention just a few, are beneficiaries of some of the clinics opened and operated by the Catholic Church.

4. THE MISSIONARY AND NATIVE CLERGY PERIODS: THEIR DIFFERENCES

Irrespective of who was in control of the propagation of the Christian faith, the relationship between Christianity and the traditional religious and social practices did not change for the better. One would have expected more tolerance during the period of the native administration, but rather, they widened the gap between the two cultures. The indigenous clergy modified some policies of their predecessors, more out of convenience than as steps towards improved tolerance. Some differences in attitude exist between the relationship of the expatriates and the native clergy towards the indigenous practices, which we shall take some time here to highlight. The discussion is

necessary as an insight to the ever-presence of the culture in the history of the Church and its persistence in the face of Christianity despite all attempts to suppress or ignore it. Our reiteration of the differences in attitude between the missionary and native clergy periods is to demonstrate that converts tend to be more legalistic than their converters. We also hope to point out that the evangelization approaches have always been influenced by the religious interests and goals of the clergy of the time rather than the drive to a Christian-cultural synthesis. It has been illustrated that whereas the missionaries were acting in ignorance in the face of determination to convert and keep hold of their converts, the native clergy received an established Church whose converts, of whom they themselves were a part, were divided between acquired faith and `innate faith.' They were expected to devise policies to unify the two faiths into one. However, while knowing both the culture and their congregation, internal and external factors contributed to their shying away from the appropriate evangelization process that will produce Christians who are also Dagaaba.

During the period of the native administration, the Church personnel was different from before. Numerically there were more workers in the field than ever, the majority of whom were products of the native culture and as such their thoughts were influenced by it. Naturally most of them were not unfamiliar with the culture. Some had even played active roles in the veneration of their ancestors, and were therefore familiar with the cult and its significance. The families of most Catholic priests were still surrounded by relatives many of whom were practising the traditional religion and continuing to offer sacrifices to the ancestors for the well-being of their families including the priests themselves. Subsequently, in the minds of the traditional religious devotees, the catholics (priests inclusive) were still receiving blessings and protection from the ancestors. On

the side of the Catholics, many converts continued to sympathize with the traditional practices but were only kept away from participating in them because of the taboos of the new faith. Christianity and culture continued to exist side-by-side, each as a force to be reckoned with, but no initiative was taken to synthesize them. As a result, the Dagaaba mentality was compartmentalized.

Within the Church, the trend of sermons shifted from those of exegetical and philosophical nature, to much more practical and vivacious sermons. The native priests exhorted the congregations in Christian morality using terms and expressions peculiar to the traditional religious sacrifices. They alluded to consequences of violating ancestral taboos as a way of making the congregation, which continued to conceptualize in terms of the traditional religion, envisage the effects of infringing against the will of the Christian God. Terminologies such as *Saakumine* (our ancestors/forebears), *Dapare Sore* (road to the land of the ancestors), *Yisong* (holy family) etc., became common vocabularies in sermons. Despite their theological training, they did not engage in exegesis with its complicated terminologies. The local clergy realized the fruitlessness of embarking on deep theological and philosophical discussions which did not form part of the religious expressions of the people. They addressed the day to day lives of the people while avoiding theoretical exhortations.

Soon it became evident that some terminologies used in the liturgy of the mass by the missionaries were inappropriate because of their "non-cultural" connotations. Most Latin words freely used by the missionaries were dropped in favour of their local equivalence. Subsequently, catechisms that did not mean much to the people were also recast to convey the desired messages.[141]

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[141] A new book of prayers and catechisms, Naangmen Sori Wulu Gan (France: l'Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1978), has been published to replace that of the missionaries.

Vocabularies of the traditional sacrificial system were constantly employed to refer to parts of the liturgy of the mass.

The local administrators continued to depend on stipends and financial support from foreign benefactors to administer the diocese and meet their personal needs. Subsequently, they could not be as generous toward the congregation as the missionaries were. In fact, rather than lavish the people with gifts, they would soon appeal to them for financial support. This means that those who stayed in the Church because of material gains would soon find the local clergy disappointing. The era of the "bible and gifts" was over, and with it the period of baiting people into the Church. Converts remained in the Church for reasons of faith, and further conversion depended on the presentation of the Christian message in a language understandable and appealing to non-Christians.

Many parishes were opened and outstations established to reach out more easily to the people. There was therefore no need for converts to travel over twenty miles to go to Jirapa. It was soon realized that though the number of priests in the diocese had increased, they were still not enough to provide religious services to the many outstations. Besides the towns in which priests resided, most outstations received a priest once a week - mostly Sundays. The rest of the six days were left to individual religious devotions. Now that there was no hope of getting nourishment if one travelled the distance to the mission house, most converts resigned to their villages and became once-a-week-church-goers. The Christian God has since always been left in the Church on Sundays and the ancestors are asked to guard and guide them for the rest of the week. As a result, the propensity to slip back into full-fledged traditional religious practitioners has since been great.

The native clergy at the same time drew a sharp line between traditional practices and

Christianity. The seminary in Tamale was run strictly according to Western structures. Invariably, studies in the traditional religion were not included.[142] The young priests continued to associate the traditional religious practices with "satanism," yet unconsciously, their innate sympathy for their culture drew them towards the latter. They have since been torn between the two worlds without any real grip on either. It is therefore not surprising that most policies of evangelization after 1960 have shown half-hearted devotion to the traditional religion as demonstrated in the setting up of parallel rites.[143]

Like their predecessors, the native clergy continued to denounce polygyny even more strictly. Unlike the missionaries who allowed those in polygamous marriages to continue to hold positions of authority in the Church while denying them baptism until their dying days, the native Church administrators did not continue with the same tolerance. Converts who entered into polygamous marriages were denied the sacraments and their children would also not to be baptized.

Christian marriages were enforced with modifications. Unlike previously when the bride-to-be was sent to Jirapa for instruction, the Church after 1960 found it expedient to let the couple take the instructions from home. The couple travelled to their parish once a week for three weeks - Thursdays for those working on farms and Saturdays for government employees. The couple were given marriage instructions for two hours during each visit, after which they went back home to

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142 It was not until the late 1970s that the topic was introduced more as a requirement toward the award of a Diploma in religious studies by the University of Ghana, than as a pastoral necessity.

143 Pope John XXIII foresaw this danger when he cautioned that "the formation to be given to this clergy (i.e. native clergy) must take into account the circumstances which obtain in different areas and nations ..." to enable them "gradually and prudently penetrate the mentality and feelings of the people. See: Pope John XXIII, "Princeps Pastorum (1959)," in: Claudia Carlen, (ed.) The Papal Encyclicals Vol.5 (Wilmington, North Corolina: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981), p.46 #16.

continue with their work. Through this method, not much inconvenience was incurred. However, before the final blessing could be given to the couple, the traditional customary practice of marriage had to be completed. A witness from the family of the bride went to the parish to confirm the completion of the rites according to the culture. The Church however has no authority in determining what was requested in dowry payment or what happened to the dowry once it was paid.

However, the Church did exercise its authority when it came to visiting the sins of one family member on the parents, just like in the traditional religion where the sins of a parent can be visited upon the children. If a woman went into marriage without the Christian marriage ceremony, both she and her parents were considered lapsed Catholics. They were banned from the sacraments, as would be the groom and his parents if they happened to be Christians.

Excursus: The Widowhood Rites and the Catholic Church

Many Catholics continue to live with their non-Catholic relatives who still practise the traditional religion. As a result, they are often torn between being faithful Christians and living up to the traditional religious expectations. According to the ancestral belief system, a man after death stays around the house for a while before departing for the land of the dead. The traditional practice expects a widow to show her faithfulness to her late husband and at the same time protect herself from his ghost which might wish to take her with him to the land of the dead. The widow is therefore expected to undergo some religious rites to ward off the ghost of her late husband.

A week after the burial of the deceased, pito is brewed and all the elders of the clan assemble. The widow is shaved of all hair and she gives up her clothes for white clay which is

smeared over her body. She may wear only the locally woven beads (*gammie*) to cover her nakedness. A sacrifice is performed to ward off the ghost of the husband. She is expected to observe some taboos such as abstaining from sex during the forty-day period of the rite and not remarrying during that time. She must also refrain from entering the granary to fetch grain for the preparation of food. The belief is that through the rite, the woman gradually severs the relationship that existed between husband and wife. It also demonstrates outwardly the loyalty and faithfulness of the woman towards her deceased spouse.

With the arrival of Christianity, converts were forbidden to undergo the widowhood rites on the grounds that it was "superstitious" and unhygienic as some women died through contracting pneumonia as a result of undergoing the rite. Women who refused to undergo the ceremony were subjects of ridicule by non-Christian women of the clan and were despised by the brothers and relatives of their late husbands. Such women lived the rest of their lives in shame and guilt, most often in solitude if they chose not to remarry. In the face of pressure from the traditional society, some women gave up their Christian faith to perform the rite. With the growth of Christianity, many more people became Christians and most homes then had more Christians than traditional practitioners, but the traditional widowhood rite did not die out and remains to haunt many women. It still did not matter whether the husband was a Christian or not.

In the early part of the 1980s, the local Catholic Church saw how unsurmountable the problem was and decided to establish a rite similar to that of the traditional religion. A widow, after the burial of her husband, can inform the local Church committee of her intention to "honour her husband" by "following the ancient path." A date is fixed and made public to the local Church

congregation. On the appointed day, if the woman had the means, she could brew the local beer, and in the morning of that day, she attends a mass said for the repose of her husband's soul and for the welfare of the family of the deceased. After the celebration of the mass, the widow is presented with a wooden crucifix (about fifteen centimetres in length). She is expected to carry the crucifix with her wherever she goes over an undefined period of time.

When the widow feels that she has emotionally and psychologically overcome the loss of her partner, she again informs her local Church of her intention to terminate the "rite." In a second mass said to mark the end of her mourning period, she officially hands over the crucifix and is blessed by the priest, and the Catholic "widowhood rite" is considered complete. The Christian principle behind this rite is not yet defined, but the rituals serve as a way of providing psychological comfort.

5. SUMMARY

To summarize our discussion, the interaction between Christianity and the Dagaaba traditional practices, particularly rites associated with the dead, was dictated by fear, not only during the missionary period, but also during the era of the native clergy. Despite the similarity in attitude toward the local traditions, distinct motives lie behind the positions taken by the expatriates and the native clergy. The missionaries were particularly interested in establishing as many mission stations as possible, and where it was necessary to avoid confrontation, they adopted a position of tolerance.

The native clergy on the other hand, despite understanding the rationale behind the

traditional practices of their own people, avoided inculturation and established parallel rites. Their reasons range from a lack of leadership courage, to the fear of being disciplined by the Vatican from which they draw financial support for the adminstration of the diocese. This point will be taken up again in the next chapter.

The modus operandi of the missionaries was fear of "syncretism." Though undeclared, the missionaries sought to be as faithful to the Christian doctrine as possible so as to keep the religion "pure." The fear of syncretism was a major factor behind their evangelization policies as well as their attitudes towards the cultural practices of the people. After their withdrawal, the local clergy inherited all legacies left behind by the missionaries, including the inordinate fear of syncretism. This unprofessed fear played no less a role in defining the theological methods of the diocese up to the present.[144] It is therefore appropriate to discuss the process of syncretism and to show that it is not a process that need to be feared, but should rather be approached as a background to inculturation.

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[144] The fear of syncretism finally surfaced in the "Working Document" of the Synod of African Catholic Bishops in their preparation towards a special assembly for Africa. In discussing the possible errors that might be committed during the process of inculturation, caution was sounded against the risk of syncretism. See: Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa: The Church in Africa and her Evangelising Mission towards the Year 2000 "You Shall be my Witnesses" (Acts 1:8), Instrumentum Laboris, Vatican City: 1991, 66. Question 20 of the Lineamenta Questions also expressed the ever-presence of the fear of syncretism when it was asked: "What are the fruits of your efforts in inculturation, judging them by the following criteria: a) Contribution to the glory of god, the Creator; b) Greater participation in the salvific action of the Redeemer; c) Better organization of the Christian life; d) Compatibility of local traditions and cultural mores with the Gospel; e) Communion with the universal Church?" See: "Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa Lineamenta Questions" African Ecclesial Review 32 (1990), p.324.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INCULTURATION PROCESS IN THE WA DIOCESE: AN UNEASY DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE NATIVE CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

1. THE QUESTION OF SYNCRETISM

When first encountered, the term syncretism for most people, immediately brings to mind negative connotations,[145] such as the introduction of unwanted elements into an established institution, or the dilution of a doctrine, leading to a departure from the normal and the ordinary. Such negative mentality is demonstrated in scholarly works even up to the twentieth century.[146] For most people, when the term is applied to the subject of religion, it suggests the incorporation of practices from one religion into another, causing the recipient religion to derail from its normal track.

Some scholars such as Leonardo Boff[147] have tried to salvage the term from negativity and to demonstrate that not only does it have a positive side, but also that syncretism is essential and necessary for any dynamic religion. We shall not be looking at the term exhaustively. Instead we will underline the positive connotations that it once had and emphasize its necessity in modern

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145 Anton Quack, "Inculturation: An Anthropologist's Perspective," Verbum SVD 34 (1993), p.10.

146 See: H. Kato Byang, Theological Pitfalls in Africa (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975); P. Austin Flannery, (ed.) Documents of Vatican Council II (New York: Guild Press, 1966) p.612-613; Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for African, The Church in Africa and Her Evangelising Mission Toward the Year 2000: "You Shall be my Witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Instrumentum Laboris. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1993.

147 Leonardo Boff, Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and Institutional Church (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985), p.89-107.

theological thinking. The discussion of the concept seeks to show that syncretism is a stage in the process of inculturation and not opposed to it.

In its historical development, the word "syncretism" was first used by Plutarch to describe the coming together of the Cretans to fight a common enemy even though they (the Cretans) were known to be at constant war with each other.[148] This initial usage gives the term the meaning of a loose merger of conflicting and opposing views for the purpose of achieving a temporary goal. From the Cretan experience, syncretism is not intended to be a lasting process and the component groups are expected to come out of the merger without each group having any lasting influence on the other. The process therefore presents itself as the immediate solution to a somewhat conflictual cultural encounter. The "mixture" is intended to supplement and improve upon the two cultures. The presupposition is that each party has what the other desires to complete its arsenal if the prevailing situation is to be tackled successfully. Each component part is also aware of its strengths and deficiencies as well as those of the other. The union of the two parties is analogous to an international trade transaction.

Syncretism was later used by Erasmus to refer to the uniting of the Protestant Reformers with the Humanists,[149] i.e. dissenters despite their theological difference.[150] The loose and temporary purpose of the unity is still eminent with the added emphasis on the obvious selectiveness of the two

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[148] James Moffatt, "Syncretism," in: James Hasting (ed), Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (Edinburgh: T & T. Clarke, 1921), vol. xii, p.155, quoting Moralia, vol.III, De fraterno amore, 490b.

[149] Boff, Church: Charism and Power, note 1, p.178, quoting Erasmus' writing to Melanchthon, Melanchthon, Corpus Reformatorum, 1, 78.

[150] Klemens Löffler, "Syncretism," in: G. Charles Herbermann et al, (eds.), The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrines, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), Vol.14, p.383.

component bodies as to what is desirable for each. Humanism, either as a religion or an ideology, looks to mankind as the solver of its own problems to the exclusion of any external force. God is seen as a projection of the inabilities of mankind and therefore as mankind's own creation. The Protestant Reformers were most probably not interested in this aspect of Humanism.

In the seventeenth century, syncretism was used to mean a mixture, things melted together, or a harmony created out of two distinct elements.[151] Here there is the suggestion of a longer lasting effect and the amalgam is expected to be more uniform, much better and much stronger. It is still inherent that the component parts each needs reinforcement from the other, but this time, once the unity has been formed, it is not easy to distinguish between the different elements of the components.

Up to this point, the component parts in a syncretistic situation acknowledge their inadequacies and the need to make up from others. They recognize the disadvantages with which they will have to live and how costly it might be without the benefits of relating to others. In the process, no one side of the partnership claims superiority over the other. To this point no pejorative implication is attached to the term but rather describes a necessary but otherwise unusual coalescence. Boff[152] outlined the different negative connotations the term "syncretism" has come to be associated with, some of which we shall reiterate here.

After the seventeenth century, the term syncretism came to be used to describe the correlations of different belief systems brought about by the worshippers or devotees involved.

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151 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, note 1, p.178.

152 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.90.

Syncretism has since been used to mean adding different beliefs, each with its own structure, rites and place of worship, to a developing religion. In the process, different and unrelated practices are not of interest to either parties in the process. Here, as Boff points out, syncretism lacks a specific identity and therefore gives a pejorative outlook.[153]

Syncretism is also used to mean accommodation. In this situation, the religion of a dominated people is adapted to the religion of those who dominate, for example, the native religious practices into colonial Catholicism. It does not imply the destruction of the original religious identity but involves the adaption of certain elements that may be incompatible with the ethos of the recipient religion. In most such situations, the process is initiated by the dominating people as an attempt to establish some peaceful co-existence between their religion and that of the colonized. The aspects of the native religion that are brought into the dominating religion are not necessarily intended to supplement any already existing belief system. Such a process sows the seeds of conflict and tension within the religious experience of the dominated peoples. The flaws in such a process include the external motive (e.g. establishing peace) rather than the motive of religion's development.

Syncretism may also refer to a harmony of different religions which believe that there is no one unique revelation in history but diverse paths for encountering the divine reality. It is considered that all formulations of truth and religious experience are inadequate expressions. The different religions harmonize their religious expressions as much as possible and thereby create a universal religion. Syncretism as an agreement overlooks the structure of each religion, their

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153 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.90.

experiences and identities and is concerned only with external levels. The harmonization of expressions also includes radical experiences.

In other cases, syncretism may refer to one religion using the categories, cultural expressions and traditions of another religion to communicate and translate its own essential messages. It also carries the connotation of adaptation in which case a religion is exposed to a different religious expression and then assimilates them, interprets them, and recasts them according to its own identity. It involves adaptation and conversion which often lead to periods of crisis and uncertainty as to whether the religion's true identity is being preserved or diluted. In this usage, syncretism involves the ability of the dominant religion to digest the acquired elements and make them its own.

All the above connotations associated with syncretism each represent a partial departure from the original meaning where the principle of *self-development* was prime. Syncretism is used to supplement one's inadequate religious beliefs from another religion which is much more developed in that aspect. The negative connotations now associated with the term were not part of the originally intended meaning and scholars such as Boff, should not see themselves as salvaging the term but restoring it to its original positive usage. What we are faced with is a problem of faithful or unfaithful usage of the term.

When one religion puts itself above the others, it subsequently becomes a judge in the process of syncretism and determines what religious aspects should be incorporated by others, irrespective of whether the aspects so incorporated will be detrimental to the development of the nurturing religion or not. Dominating religions tend to take the destinies of other religions into their hands. In cases of this nature, syncretism ceases to be a free and natural process and becomes one

that dances to the tune of others. Many religions, Christianity included, tend to look upon their own belief system as "perfect and absolute," while neglecting the fact that no one religion has the whole truth.[154] All other religions are then seen in comparison to their own and are therefore at best aspiring for perfection i.e., aspiring to be like them.[155] The ultimate conclusion is that a perfected religion is also a stagnated religion with no need to develop. With religious gradation comes the pejorative view of syncretism by the over protective. A process that "includes the other definitions of syncretism while, at the same time, going beyond them," in the opinion of Boff, is a valid syncretism.[156]

In our opinion, Boff[157] is probably right when he says that the value of syncretism depends on the view-point of the observer. He writes that, if an observer thinks of Catholicism as a "signed, sealed and delivered masterpiece," then such a person will view syncretism as undesirable. On the other hand, he continues, if the observer understands that in the world of reality people live their faith together with other religious expressions and further understands that Catholicism is a living reality and therefore open to other elements with the possibility of attempting to synthesize them, then syncretism will be seen as a normal and natural process.[158] The emphasis here is that

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154 Thomas Manikkam, "Mission as Inculturation," Journal of Dharma 6 (1981), p.191; Anton Quack, "The Ambivalent Relationship between Mission and Anthropology," Verbum SVD 27 (1986), p.223.

155 The theme of Catholic superiority is vividly portrayed in an encyclical of Pope Pius XII on the promotion of Catholic mission. The Pope sees the role of Catholicism to include the purifying and perfecting of "pagan" philosophies and culture. See: Pope Pius XII, "Evangelii Praecones (1959)," in: Claudia Carlen, (ed.) The Papal Encyclicals Vol.4 (Wilmington, North Corolina: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981), p.199, #58.

156 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.91.

157 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.89.

158 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.89.

Christianity is a cultural product and a human construct.

The great religions in history have been able to reach high levels of development as a result of an immense process of syncretism.[159] Judaism's traditional concept of life after death probably reached its final stage by syncretising with some beliefs and practices from the Persian religion. In the same wise, syncretism between Christianity and the Dagaaba culture is necessary due to the deep religious sensitivity and richness of religious expressions existing among the Dagaaba, particularly the ancestral cult. Pope Paul VI in Africae Terrarum, acknowledges the rich religious expression of the African when he writes:

> The constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life. Here we have more than the so called "animistic" tradition in the sense given this term in the history of religions at the end of the last century. We have a deeper, broader, and more universal concept which considers all living beings and visible nature itself as linked with the world of the invisible and the spirit. In particular it has never considered man as mere matter limited to earthly life, but recognizes in him the presence and power of another spiritual element in virtue of which human life is always related to the afterlife. In this spiritual concept, the most important element generally found is the idea of God, as the first or ultimate cause of all things. This concept, perceived rather than analyzed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in a very different way from one culture to another, but the fact remains that the presence of God permeates African life, as the presence of a higher being, personal and mysterious. People have recourse to Him at solemn and more critical moments of life, when they consider the intercession of every other intermediary unavailable. Nearly always fear of God's omnipotence is set aside and He is invoked as Father. Prayers made to Him, whether by individuals or by groups, are spontaneous and at times moving, while among the forms of sacrifice the sacrifice of first fruits stands out because of what it plainly signifies.[160]

African cultures provide both ritual and social practices which are distinct in their own setting and should be seen and used as they are. They also stand to benefit from Christian ethics and

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159 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.91.

160 Pope Paul VI, 1967, "Africae Terrarum," African Ecclesial Review 10 (1968), p.73.

morality thus creating a situation for a possible cultural reciprocity. Writing on Christian syncretism, Boff opined that syncretism achieves the concrete essence of the Church.

> The Christian faith expressed within a certain culture shares in that culture's destiny, its glories, its miseries, the dreams that are expressed as well as the limitations of the means by which those dreams are realised. On the other hand, faced with other cultures in which the Christian faith has yet to be made objective, and in order to make its mission understood while respecting the good that God himself has made possible within these cultures, the Church must develop new syncretisms and thus incarnate anew the Christian message.[161]

It is our view that the "new syncretisms" of Boff are now being discussed under a much more appropriate term - inculturation, which we shall examine shortly. Syncretism has always been a constituent part of the Catholic Church and will continue to play a role in steering the Church in its course of development. If up to this point the Church has not suffered any set-back because of syncretism, the plausibility of the process is confirmed and should dispel all fears associated with the process.

It is well known in the history of Christianity that the Christian message has incarnated to people through their cultures. As Frances Young put it, "it was because Christianity shared so much with paganism and could take on the values of traditional religions that it was able to replace its rivals."[162] She also observed that early Christianity "assimilated the old festivals, images and symbols to its own view of appropriate worship, and was able to use paganism's own fundamental

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[161] Boff, Church: Charism and Power, p.99.

[162] Frances Young, "Traditional Religious Cultures and the Christian Responses - II" Expository Times 95 (1984), 268. Adolf Harnack had earlier on described the syncretistic background of Christianity but with a contrary view that syncretism was an undesirable process; see Adolf Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries Vol.1 (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972, p.25-56.

perceptions to justify and effect this."[163] Hillman cited some examples of "pagan" influence on Christianity from the Mediterranean Basin. The choosing of the celebration of the birth of Jesus at the time of the traditional sun feast made it possible to apply to Jesus titles such as "Invincible light," "Warmth," "Comfort," "Renewal" and "Hope."[164]

While accepting the fact that Christianity down the centuries has assimilated many Western values, Patrick Moroney makes a distinction between Christianity and Christendom.[165] In his opinion, the amalgamation of the Gospel (i.e., the Gospel message) and the Greco-Roman culture constitutes Christendom, whereas Christianity "is the religion founded by the apostles, after the death of Jesus, on the basis of his teaching and life-style."[166] He therefore suggests that Christianity should not be confused with Christendom. To us, such a distinction seeks, and rightly so, to distinguish the core of the Christian message from culture, but as the vehicle of the Gospel, culture has influenced and will continue to influence the Christian message. If culture is understood as "the way a group of people *think and live*,"[167] Christianity and Christendom may therefore be seen as one and the same and may be used interchangeably to express the same meaning. Though the distinction in this regard turns out to be a fruitless exercise, it draws attention to the Christian message as the

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163 Frances Young, "Traditional Religious Cultures and the Christian Responses - II," 268.

164 Eugene Hillman, Toward an African Christianity: Inculturation Applied (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), p.36. Joseph Osei-Bonsu also put forth biblical supports for inculturation and concluded that "the process of appropriate evangelization involves finding points of contact in the given cultural context as points of departure to express the message of Christianity." See: Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," African Ecclesial Review 32 (1990), p.357.

165 Patrick Moroney, "Some Dangers of Inculturation," Verbum SVD 31 (1990), p.335.

166 Moroney, "Some Dangers of Inculturation," p.335.

167 Quack, "Inculturation," p.8-9 [the author's emphasis].

constant element in Christianity and culture as the variable, both of which together constitute Christianity in any given society.

The fact of the matter remains that as long as Christian syncretism is a process between Christianity and the cultures in which it seeks to plant itself, it has to be relative and not otherwise. The term Christian Syncretism by itself depicts a process relative to only Christianity as distinct from Buddhist Syncretism, Moslem Syncretism or Jewish Syncretism. In the Christian context therefore Christian syncretism is understood to be the interactive process that brings into the essential core of Christian faith, that which is embodied in the symbolic frame-work of another culture. It has to tolerate deviations that are unavoidable but which should be such that they do not adulterate Christian identity to such an extent that it is no longer discernible. Invariably, therefore, there will be a need to rethink the notion of the Church universal which carries with it the idea of some universal uniformity.

The flaws of syncretism which make it inadequate as a process of evangelization include the fact that the parties involved are not looking for a transaction that will benefit either sides. Despite being peaceful and involving some reciprocity, each party jealously guards its interests and positions and works to enhance or strengthen them without really being concerned with what the other party does with what has been borrowed from it. In fact, the borrowing may go unnoticed. To illustrate with an example already mentioned, Israel was not interested in other aspects of the Persian religion since those aspects were either of no significance or contravened developed religious principles within the Israelites religion. What was attractive was the Persian concept of life-after-death to enlighten and conclude the Israelite theology on the same concept, which, despite undergoing

several developments, remained bleak and problematic.

In syncretism, no synthesis is achieved even though the parties involved go away happy. What we have is one of mutual borrowing for individual rather than common good, making it irrelevant whether both sides gained through the contact or not. However, the results of syncretism is a permanent achievement for either parties. Once each party has received what is of interest to it, syncretism is complete and final. As we shall see, inculturation is a continuous process and looks to producing something new out of the two cultures and at the same time keep pace with the dynamism of culture.

Unlike syncretism which can be done without the knowledge of the other religion, inculturation requires a face to face dialogue between Christianity and the culture in which it seeks to plant itself. Syncretism also deals directly with the religious practices of different peoples whereas inculturation goes beyond that. By addressing culture directly, inculturation incapsuls both the religious and non-religious lives of the people since religion is only a part of culture. Sacrifice is involved as the two prepare to meet each other half way, each giving up some valuable aspects for the common good. The process of inculturation presupposes each party opening up to the other and that each is well informed about the other. Above all, inculturation calls for total commitment on the part of Christianity and the recipient culture.

2. INCULTURATION

(A) The Meaning of Inculturation

Some scholars have described inculturation as a process through which the Gospel penetrates the culture of the evangelized people, becomes one with it and eventually provokes (or creates) a new cultural synthesis.[168] Crollius has also defined it as:

> the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.[169]

Similarly Nkeramihigo observed that,

> What is really at stake in the phenomenon of inculturation, is the identity search of a people, to whom it has become clear that this identity cannot be found either in the importation of a foreign culture (acculturation), or the restoration of its past (tribalism, nationalism). Rather, it is to be sought in the acceptance of the present conflict resulting from two heterogeneous past situations whose meeting constitutes the beginning of a new phase of its history, seen in an attitude of reconciliation in a hope of two traditions which are presently clashing.[170]

Recently Shorter[171] described inculturation as "the ongoing dialogue between Gospel and Culture," and defined dialogue as a two-way process.

These definitions in one way or another fail to address the key aspects of the process of inculturation. The common weakness in these definitions is their passive and one-sidedness, as well

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168 Eugene Lapointe, Inculturation and Mission of the Church (Roma: Mazenod Printing House, 1985), p.6.

169 A. Roest Crollius, "What is so new about Inculturation: A concept and its implications." In: A. Roest Crollius, and T. Nkeramihigo, (eds.) What Is So New About Inculturation. Inculturation: Working papers on Living faith and culture, 5 (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1984), p.16.

170 T. Nkeramihigo, "Inculturation and the Specificity of Faith," in: A.R. Crollius and T. Nkeramihigo, (eds.), What is So New About Inculturation, p.21.

171 Aylward Shorter, The African Synod: A personal Response to the Outline Document (Kenya: St. Paul Publications - Africa, 1991), p.54.

as their understanding of inculturation in terms of the local church and its relation to the church universal. In the first instance, the assumption is that it is the Christian message which is the active agent while the culture into which the Gospel incarnates, remains dormant. The passiveness of such definitions can be likened to the earlier conception that children were made by the man while the woman was merely a carrier of the baby. A male and a female are needed to make a baby, each producing an essential and necessary element that the other partner lacks. The above definitions also fail to relate the gospel message to culture, which, in our opinion, is the central issue of inculturation. We shall take up this point again later.

The process of inculturation includes a dialogue with culture but the dialogue aspect does not constitute the totality of the process. Inculturation goes beyond the level of dialogue and reaches the level of implementation; it goes beyond the level of talks to include action, for inculturation limited to dialogues is no different from a drive toward ecumenism. The inclusion of dialogue in its operation makes inculturation a step ahead of syncretism which is all praxis and no dialogue.[172]

It is not to say that the definitions offered by the scholars mentioned above are wrong, rather, their definitions are some of the many possible ways of understanding the expression. The term has not yet been standardized and need to be guided carefully to its true meaning. When Pierre Charles first used the term in its anthropological context, he defined it as a process in which a new convert or a new Church has to go through in order to become a full member of the Church or the Church universal, as the case may be.[173] In other words, the individual tries to "insert" himself/herself

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[172] Quack, "Inculturation," p.12.

[173] Pierre Charles, "Missiologie et acculturation," Nouvelle Revue Theologique 75 (1953), p.19-21.

among the members of the local Church while the local Church tries to insert itself into the Church universal. Later, Joseph Masson[174] applied "inculturation" to culture, departing from the anthropological usage of Charles. In the cultural context in which Masson uses the term, it refers to the Christian message, which he identifies as already clothed in definite cultural dress, as taking root, growing, developing and taking shape in that culture. From his stand point, inculturation may be seen as the insertion of the Gospel message into a culture. Two distinct areas must therefore be identified when one speaks of inculturation: (1) individual converts in relation to the rest of the members of a local Church or a local Church in relation to the Church universal; and (2) the Christian message in relation to cultures. Inculturation may then be defined in relation to one or the other of the afore-mentioned categories, but not both. In our opinion, the latter case is more appropriate in defining inculturation while the former is more of acculturation than inculturation.

The term is suggested to be a contraction of the expression "insertion in a culture."[175] It denotes the process by which the Christian message becomes inserted in a given culture. In our opinion, inculturation may therefore be defined as an ongoing process whereby the Christian message goes into a society and enters into a "reaction" of reciprocity and critical interaction (to use the terms of Azevedo[176]) with the culture of the society, producing a new fruit that is a synthesis of both traditions without being controlled by either. By implication, neither the culture nor Christianity expects to be the same once the process begins. After the insertion, the Gospel has to

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[174] Joseph Masson, "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde," Nouvelle Revue Theologique 84 (1962), p.1038.

[175] Crollius, "What is new about Inculturation," p.4.

[176] C. Marcello Azevedo, Inculturation and the Challenge of Modernity (Inculturation: Working papers on Living Faith and Culture, 1; Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1982, p.11.

become accustomed to the basic pattern of the culture and of its people. It should also be able, in the long run, to acquire the ability to operate with their forms of thought and expression.

In the process, two active agents (the agents of the Gospel and the culture) are required, each willing to give and take from the other. The main principle behind the process of inculturation is the idea of reciprocity. The new religio-cultural synthesis cannot come about without the agency of the original culture. If culture remains dormant as the definitions of some scholars referred to above suggest, the result will be no different from that of a talented theology professor walking into a big hall of party-makers and without gaining their attention and cooperation, begins to explain to them the teleological argument for the existence of God. Without the cooperation of culture, the Gospel message will be like a dry leaf falling into a running river only to be swept away immediately.

The term "inculturation" is now becoming a popular term in Protestant Theology where the term "contextualization" had been preferred. David Bosch (a Protestant) sees the process of inculturation as a recent model of the process of contextualization. However, Bosch noted that it differs from its predecessors - the indigenization model, the socio-economic model, translation, evolutionary and revolutionary models and others, mainly in terms of its agents.[177] He observed that earlier models were one-sided mainly due to their concern with what Christianity may do with/to the cultures of its converts, and were also introduced and guided by missionaries, theologians and scholars, most of whom had Christian biases. The local communities merely followed decisions arrived at by these authorities after textbook-deliberations. The ultimate result, he continued, was

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[177] J. David Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p.453.

one of sharp distinction between the highly theoretical policies of the authorities and the practical life of the local community.[178] Most importantly, inculturation brings Christianity and culture together in a contractual form. Bosch noted that the emphasis of inculturation is on the *local* situation, i.e., on each particular Church, but the region in which the local Church finds itself (Africa, Asia, America etc), is of utmost importance in determining the trend and direction the process will follow.[179]

In the process of inculturation, the main initiator is the *local community, particularly the laity*.[180] As Schreiter pointed out, the community itself is sometimes made the prime author of theology due to the fact that local theology is seen as the reflections of the people upon their experience and the scriptures.[181] He therefore finds it important to distinguish between the role of the whole community of faith whose experience is the indispensable source of theology and whose acceptance of theology is an important guarantor of its authenticity, and the role of small groups within the community who usually give shape to that theology.[182]

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178 The present turmoil facing Christianity in the continents of Asia and Africa may partly be attributed to the wrong theological process being used in evangelization where the Gospel is expected to reshape and renew the cultures within which it seeks to grow, without first gaining the attention and cooperation of the latter. Robert Schreiter observed that "in some parts of the world that have been part of Christian history for centuries, Christianity had come close to dying out because its theological expressions and symbolic performances have not continued to listen to cultural change. The situation of Christianity in France, once heralded as the 'eldest daughter of the Church,' is a case in point." See: J. Robert Schreiter, Reconstructing Local Theologies (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), p.40.

179 Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.453.

180 Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.453; Also Quack, "Inculturation," p.5; Peter Schineller, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What Is the Real Issue?" International Bulletin of Missionary Research 16 N0 2 (April 1992), p.53.

181 Schreiter, Reconstructing Local Theologies, p.17.

182 Schreiter, Reconstructing Local Theologies, p.17.

Which group of people constitute the laity? In his discussion of the lay person, Karl Rahner describes a lay person, in the theological sense, as one of the people of God as distinct from those who have proper hierarchical powers in the Church, i.e., power of orders such as are of sacramental nature - power to absolve, confirm, ordain and consecrate.[183] In contrast to the lay person, Rahner also identified those with the "power of jurisdiction" - powers concerned with ruling and authoritative instructions and direction of the rest of the Church members. He therefore concludes that lay status in the Church means one does not have any of these powers.

> Anyone who is, in anyway, rightfully in *habitual* possession of any of liturgical or legal power (over and above the basic rights of every baptised members of the church), is no longer a *layman* in the proper sense, i.e. no longer belongs to the simple `people of God.'[184]

Rahner continued that the act of ordination is not the only distinguishing factor between lay persons and the clergy. In his opinion, a commissioned lay-catechist, a woman officially employed as a parochial helper, an official sacristan etc., though not ordained, are by their principal functions no longer lay persons.[185]

He distinguished the notion of lay person from that of the "religious" (i.e. members of a secular institute who also take the vows of the evangelical counsels). In his opinion, the vows of evangelical counsel gives the one who takes them a distinct status from the people of the Church in general and hence from the lay people.[186] Summarily, a lay person is not one of those who have

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183 Rahner, "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," p.319.

184 Karl Rahner, "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," in: Theological Investigations 2 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), p.320. Emphases are those of the author.

185 Rahner, "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," p.320.

186 Rahner, "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," p.322.

hierarchical powers or belong to the "religious." In a more positive description, Rahner identifies a lay person as a Christian who remains in the world, not in the sense of the profane, but in the sense that he/she must have a specific task towards the world and in the world which determines his "status" in the Church and not merely in civil life.[187]

The process of inculturation therefore belongs to those without any power in the Church to the exclusion of the catechists, the deacons, the priests, the bishops and the religious. Even though inculturation stands for the humanness and divinity of God, the former being best demonstrated in the lives of the ordinary people, it is our opinion that some religious authorities and other functionaries are, by their viewpoints bias, against the humanity of Christ. It cannot be denied that the Son of God received cultural elements such as ancestry, tribe and language, which implies that he was as much influenced by culture as his message was to influence culture later on. In the words of Richard Côté,

> The incarnation is not simply a once-upon-a-time event; it is even now an ongoing reality. In our insistence on the grace-full union of all people with Christ through the Incarnation, we might seem to be neglecting the Resurrection - and clearly a theology of redemption that did not include it would be unbalanced and impoverished. Our omission, however, is only apparent; for at the heart of all we are saying is the conviction that the resurrection of Christ did not withdraw him from the human personal order. It did not make his humanity into something less human that might be illusory and ultimately unreal. By being taken up into the glory of God, Christ's human nature did not simply become a dead trophy or a mere accessory; rather it was given its hitherto *unsuspected full human authenticity*. Since the risen Lord is everlastingly assuming his glorified humanness, the Resurrection does not bring the Incarnation to a close, but continues it.[188]

In other words, the humanness of Christ was as much a part of his message of salvation as his death

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[187] Rahner, "Notes on the Lay Apostolate," p.322.

[188] G. Richard Côté, Universal Grace: Myth or Reality (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p.34. Emphasis ours.

and resurrection. It is only when there is a balance between the divinity and humanity of Jesus that culture will be accorded an important role in the evangelization process. The priests and other religious functionaries therefore do not constitute ideal agents of the process. Through their role in the Church they prevent themselves from becoming the implementors of inculturation.

In the Dagaaba context, the process belongs to the Christians in the rural areas, majority of whom have no basic formal education. Inculturation belongs to the Dagaaba still cut off from modernity and who resort to the traditional socio-religious practices, including the veneration of their ancestors, to meet their religious and material needs. Their experiences stand out against those of the clergy who are removed from the rural society by their urban lifestyles and their being influenced by Western education and values as a result of which they have also lost touch with the traditional values.

However, those who by definition do not fall within the category of the laity are still important in the implementation of a successful inculturation process. Their knowledge and expertise is needed to assist in preparing the grounds for inculturation. Their participation may only be limited to their positions *as members of the community* and must retract themselves from situations that may influence the views of the people. Due to the high rate of illiteracy in the area, the Dagaaba have such respect for those with formal education, that they will uncritically accept opinions put forth by the clergy. The local priests are seen as symbols of religious knowledge and authority as is the case with the priests of the traditional religion, and their suggestions will invariably dominate discussions.

The knowledge of the priests, the theologians and the scholars constitute a gift to the

community but must be complemented by the experience of the local elders. Those with formal education have knowledge related to documents, but not to the oral traditions, which constitute the main source of knowledge for the elders. However, the illiterate elders must be convinced that they have wisdom which those with formal education lack, rather than feeling inferior to them. Those with formal education must develop a new style of dialogue in which they give their gifts without overpowering the knowledge of the elders. As true animators, the local clergy should be able to lead the elders to intellectual independence.

As Schineller rightly noted, an inculturation will be successful and Christian if it is faithful to the Christian message and tradition, is faithful to the positive and valid insights of a particular culture or tradition and can be lived out by the pastoral agent or agents and their communities of faith.[189] In our view, it is only those who are closely associated with a culture that will be able to identify the valid insights of that culture and be willing to live out what they themselves have constructed.

Theology is intended for the community and should proceed with the community itself asking questions and providing answers based on their past experiences. Though converted to Christianity, they "do not for all that cease to be citizens of their earthly fatherland."[190] The dialogue should be started by the laity and discussed among the laity. Specialists in the tradition should be involved to provide their expertise and experience in the actual shaping into words of the response in faith. Inculturation involves the entire cultural context of social, economic, political, religious

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[189] Schineller, "Inculturation and Syncretism," p.52.

[190] Pope Pius XII, "Evangelii Praecones," p.199, #60.

and educational sectors. It therefore has the added advantage over its predecessors for working its way up the Church's hierarchy from the rank-and-file.

Unlike the previous models, inculturation suggests a double movement. In the words of Bosch, "the gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon, while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the culture."[191] Inculturation is expected to offer cultures the knowledge of the divine mystery which include the humanness of Christ. While helping to bring forth their own living tradition, original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought, Christianity also takes on the aspects of the culture that are vital to that society. As stressed by Pope Paul VI,

> Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, in her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within.[192]

Bosch compared the process to the flowering of a seed planted into the soil of a particular culture and stressed the all-embracing quality of the process, as culture itself is.[193]

Inculturation does not allow Christianity the luxury of selecting cultural aspects; as a matter of necessity, it propels Christianity toward what is essential to the culture. It is certain that there is a difference between the Gospel values and cultural values.[194] However, as long as these different values are not incompatible, it is in these oppositions that inculturation triumphs. It is in the

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191 Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.454.

192 Acta Apostolicae Sedis (Roma: Polyglot Press, 1991), vol.83.

193 Bosch, Transforming Mission, p.454.

194 Moroney, "Some Dangers of Inculturation," p.335.

differences which are at the same time essential to both Christianity and culture that inculturation seeks to establish a synthesis. But since cultures are diversified, Christianity cannot therefore expect total uniformity. As Quack noted, on the organizational/human level, it may appear impossible to preserve the unity of the Church universal in the face of pluriformity of independent local Churches which bear the stamp of their various cultures. However, on the level of faith and theology, an examination of the history of the relationship between incarnation and inculturation have demonstrated that unity in diversity is possible.[195]

Some tautologous explanations have been offered for the double movement approach of inculturation. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments describes it as, first, the Gospel penetrating into a given cultural milieu, giving inner fruitfulness to the spiritual qualities and gifts proper to each people, strengthening these qualities, perfecting them and restoring them in Christ.[196] In the other direction, the Church assimilates the values of the evangelized people, "when they are compatible with the Gospel," to deepen understanding of Christ's message and give it more effective expression in the liturgy and in the many different aspects of the life of the community of believers.[197] In other words for the Congregation, the double movement approach of inculturation entails the Church christianizing culture and assimilating aspects of the culture that are "compatible with the Gospel."

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[195] Quack, "Inculturation," p.9-10.

[196] The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (hereafter referred to as C.D.W.D.S or the Congregation) on: The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation IV[TH] Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy, 1994, n.4.

[197] C.D.W.D.S, The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation IV[TH], n.4.

Shorter has a similar understanding of the double movement of inculturation as the Congregation. In his understanding, the two-way process of inculturation involves the conversion of a culture by the Gospel and the re-expression of the Gospel by the evangelized culture, with the Gospel taking the new cultural forms.[198] The double movement of the inculturation process in Africa is therefore summed up as the christianization of Africa and the Africanization of Christianity, and preferably, to follow one another in that respective order.[199]

It is our view that such an understanding is better viewed as the two-staged process rather than a two-way process of inculturation. Like a road that allows traffic to go in both directions concurrently, the two-way approach of inculturation entails both Christianity and culture each laying before the other the essentials that make it what it already is and the two traditions considering the good of both parties, synthesizing their essentials in such a way as to come out with a fruit that is a reflection of both but not dominated by either. The synthesis will call upon each party to give up something in order to gain another. The process of inculturation will not be successful if one party sets the standard for the other to follow. For a fruitful synthesis, each will have to give a precise definition of itself. Christianity will have to avoid confusing the cultures it has accumulated through history, with the Christian message (Gospel) which, is summarily described as the historical event of Jesus life, death and resurrection.[200] The evangelized culture on the other hand will have to avoid

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[198] Shorter, The African Synod, p.54.

[199] Shorter, The African Synod, p.67.

[200] Shorter, The African Synod, p.54.

folkloric elements not important in the traditional religious belief system.[201]

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the Christianization of Africa began with little understanding of the culture and without much interest in a synthesis. The ultimate result has been one of down-play on culture coupled with much misrepresentation. There never was a dialogue between the two traditions. If there has been any Christianization of African cultures at all, it has been a Christianization of misunderstood cultures. Subsequently, the Africanization of Christianity will be done from misconstrued cultures since those aspects of culture which have been supposedly Christianized will be the background of the Africanization policy. What one is left with is an unsound Christianization and an equally unsound Africanization. To build inculturation on a faulty ground is tantamount to embarking on a project which not only has no future but is outmoded from birth. In the African situation, inculturation must be founded on its own basis which will entail discarding all the method of evangelization used in the past and starting with a clean slate.

The concern of inculturation is for it to become a principle that activates, directs and unifies the two traditions of Christianity and culture, transforming them and making them so as to bring about a "new creation." The focus is on the new creation and the transformation of the old such that the end product is at the same time something fundamentally new when compared with the seed. The process is by nature tentative and is an ongoing process, not only because cultures are not static, but also because the Church is developing and should be prepared to accommodate new discoveries

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[201] It should be noted that inculturation is not a process that facilitates conversion or automatically makes the people of any culture accept Christianity as Patrick Moroney expects. See: Moroney Patrick, "Some Dangers of Inculturation," p.335. Inculturation is concerned with the Christian message synthesizing with, and using the essential categories of the culture of the evangelised to the benefit of Christianity, the culture and the Christian converts. It seeks to enable the communication of the Christian faith in a more indigenous way and to promote cultural consciousness in Christianity. If properly carried out, it may make the Christian message understandable and appealing to the non-converts with the added advantage of possible conversion.

in its belief system.

(B) Criteria for Inculturation

It has been suggested that cultures be presumed to be compatible with Christianity until proven otherwise.[202] Working from that presumption this research will demonstrate that ancestral practice is not incompatible with Christianity. The question now is not whether or to what extent the religious experience and moral behaviour of the Dagaaba either before or after the advent of Christian missionaries among them, is perfectly in accord with some religious and ethical ideals conceptualized by European theologians and labelled "Christian." The question concerns the extent to which Christianity can be understood, lived, expressed and celebrated by the Dagaaba in their own indigenous ways of being human and religious without having to rely massively and permanently upon imported cultural elements.

As much as possible a distinction is to be made between inculturation and externalism. By externalism we refer to the use of material culture such as local utensils, vestments, musical instruments, language, art and even the use of traditional gestures. These are pure decorative (to put it in the words of Pope Paul VI[203]) and inculturation means more than that.[204] Inculturation seeks to address the deeper and inner meanings of a culture and "reaches into all compartments of the life

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202 Lapointe, Toward an African Christianity, p.27.

203 Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," 1976, NO 18.

204 Afagbegee has earlier on stressed the inadequacy of gearing inculturation towards what we are here referring to as externalisms. In his article "Inculturation: African drums are not enough," he commended them as "laudable and must be encouraged by all, especially the African clergy and religious; but...they are not enough." See: Gabby-Lio Kagiso Afagbegee, "Inculturation: African Drums are not Enough!" African Ecclesial Review 26 (1984) 369.

of the people."[205] By going to the roots of a culture, inculturation is able to deal with issues of self-identity and of social and personal transformation.

In the opinion of David Nazar, all pre-Christian rites come out of and are grounded in a larger world of meaning. To endow any with a Christian meaning is to establish "a doubly confusing proposition since meaning implicates that whole cultural world."[206] He continued:

> Attempting to leave the original structure of the rite intact while changing `only' its meaning is tantamount to asking a Zulu warrior to continue wearing his traditional clothing and performing his traditional roles, but to think of himself as a Norwegian. The `pre-Christian' rite has meaning because the world in which it operates has meaning. `Endowing' the rite with Christian meaning requires `endowing' that whole world with Christian meaning.[207]

Similarly, it is our view that until they are properly synthesized to meet both the Christian and cultural needs, the parallel rites established by the Dagaaba clergy will remain meaningless in the Christian context except to make up for the cultural lack of the Dagaaba Catholics. The bearing of the cross by widowed catholics is an immediate example. The establishment of parallel rites have heightened the chances of converts taking the traditional significance of the rites as ultimate. In their mentality, Christianity is an under-dog and only stands to devalue the traditional rites.[208] This can eliminate all chances of co-operation between the two institutions.

Inculturation is also concerned with the internal transformation of a people in their culture.

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[205] Quack, "Inculturation," p.9.

[206] D. Nazar, Inculturation (Ottawa: St. Paul University, [Thesis Ph.D]), 1989), p.159.

[207] Nazar, Inculturation, p.159

[208] When the local clergy replaced the word Teng-vilaa (heaven) with Dapare, for the first month or so, any time the congregation in Eremon (where I attended church services), had cause to say the word (especially in the Lord's Prayer), more than half the congregation went silent and the word would only be heard from innocent children. The argument was that the term was too sacred to be mentioned without real cause.

It addresses questions on how the people of a culture relate to the teachings of the Gospel and how the culture expresses the faith of the people. Questions such as: who is God in their history and experience?; how do they communicate with this God?; who are the agents of mediation?; what is the relationship between the people and these intermediaries? In other words, how do the ancestors act as mediators in the traditional religion and how could they be used in the Christian liturgy? The aim of inculturation is not to localize or secularize a traditional Christian theology but to enable theological reflection to speak of God's transcendent power and immanence in their local situation.[209]

3. EVANGELIZATION POLICIES IN THE WA DIOCESE AND THE PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

In the light of the criteria necessary for a successful inculturation, we shall examine the evangelization process in the Wa Diocese, with particular reference to it relatedness to the cult of the ancestors. The inadequacies of the approach will be evaluated and the need for a proper evangelization method stressed.

The evangelization policies of the Diocese of Wa are principally conceived and executed by the local Church authorities consisting of the bishop, the priests, the religious and the catechists. The Basic Christian community which we examined as the main mode of evangelization in the Diocese, was introduced by the bishop and its implementation is supervised at both the parish and

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[209] Nazar, Inculturation, p.150.

diocesan levels by co-ordinating priests. Through this approach, the laity has become a *receiving body* rather than an *implementing body*. Their experiences which are necessary in determining the authenticity of the process, unfortunately, are not addressed and utilized. It may be suggested that the process is imposed on the laity by the Church leaders. In the light of genuine inculturation, the cart is being paraded before the horse. It should be mentioned that the local clergy carry out research among the Dagaaba, the results of which form the basis for their evangelization policies. There is however no denying of the fact that their research findings and conclusions are greatly influenced by their theological inclination.

Inculturation must involve on equal strength, both the culture and the Christian message, for the fruit of the synthesis should be a strong reflection of both. However, many African clergy do not put Christianity and the traditional practices on the same pedestal. The traditional religion is seen by them as an underdog that needs to be purified, with conversion being nothing more than the turning of people away from the "ways of satan" to the ways of God. The Dagaaba clergy in following with the previous evangelizers see Christianity as "signed and sealed," and a perfected religion that all others must aspire to, including their own cultural practices.

As a "perfected" religion in the eyes of the local clergy, Christianity among the Dagaaba is giving and selecting from the culture, aspects it is ready to work with, rather than addressing areas that are essential for a mutual synthesis between the culture and Christianity. The idea of give and take, loss and gain, which is an essential constituent of the process of inculturation, is absent. The two dimensional character of inculturation is non-existent, with the concern still being what Christianity may do to or with the Dagaaba culture, without itself willing to give up anything. In

the course of selecting from the traditional practices, notions that are at the bases of the Dagaaba religiosity and which by no means are incompatible with the Christian message, are neglected, as is the case with the veneration of ancestors. The process of inculturation is therefore not allowed to take its natural course.

The evangelization policies of the diocese are also concerned with the external features of the culture rather than the deep rooted meanings. On the bright side, the Scriptures are being translated into the local language, and the traditional gestures introduced into the liturgy. The traditional vestments and vessels are also brought into use, with a re-write of the catechism so that they be more meaningful to the mentality of the Dagaaba. Unfortunately, things have not gone beyond the superficial level. Some parallel rites have been established, but as indicated above, more as psychological satisfiers than evangelization procedures. The inclusion of external symbolism in the Catholic liturgy is evidently an attempt to establish a dialogue between a well developed catholicism and the external features of the very little understood Dagaaba culture. Invariably, the interlocutors are unevenly matched, analogous to a conversation between two friends one of whom is hearing-impaired. In this uneasy dialogue, the friends make every effort to interpret the signs and hand motions of each other. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation become dominant.

The uneasiness of the dialogue does not end at the level of interpreting the superficialities of the culture, it includes reservations between the agents, with the ultimate result that there is doubt and hesitation in the face of present and future dialogues, as well as accusations and counter-accusations. While Christianity among the Dagaaba treats most aspect of the culture as pagan and satanic, the culture sees Christianity as the source of social and religious corruption. The belief is

that the degeneration of morality in the society is due to the neglect of the ancestors.[210] Despite being evident that ancestral veneration is the over-riding medium of communication between the people and their object of worship, as well as a vivid expression of their faith, the practice is not yet being addressed appropriately. Inculturation cannot be successful in any local Church where the main mode of expressing the religious faith of the people is neglected.[211]

A survey carried out in 1975 by the Ghana Catholic Church revealed that there was a strong opinion among the catholics of that country, that ancestral practices should constitute a part of the liturgy of the Church. The survey addressed the relationship of catholics toward the traditional religion and their attitudes toward the ancestors. Among other things, one group of researchers came to the conclusion that:

> Ancestors have never been regarded as deities. Libation, which is the way to get into contact with them, is the African way of prayer. It should be admitted and christianized by first invoking God and then the ancestors, and perhaps including the Saints. It can be compared with the case of the herbalists whose real power for curing lies in the quality of the herbs they use, but who add some other stuff to impress the people, which however has no power of curing although the patient may think otherwise. The solution is to leave out the fetish part and keep the herbs. So it is in our veneration for the ancestors. It is a deeply rooted Ghanaian custom and the wholesale condemnation of it by the early missionaries was not based on a thorough study but on (European) aversion to African customs as such. People have somehow noticed this and have continued in spite of this condemnation. The African ministers (in Protestant Churches) who took over after the Europeans withdrew were so influenced by them that they took the same line. This applies also to the African Catholic clergy. The African priests through their studies have become estranged from their own

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210 We are not alone in this observation. Pula notes that the people of Lesotho also blame Christianity for destroying some aspects of the traditional practices. See: A.L. Pula, "Balimo [ancestor] veneration & Christianity" African Ecclesial Review 32 (1990) 330-345. Quack also cautioned that without proper inculturation Christian mission will continue to be accused of "nolens volens disturbing or even destroying autonomous, functioning cultural systems." See: Quack, "Inculturation," p.9.

211 Peter Schineller, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What is the real issue," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 16 (1992), p.52.

culture and do not have the courage to take another position. They are `brainwashed.' The fact remains that Christians in both Catholic and protestant churches have not given up ancestor `worship' and libation.[212]

A summary of the responses to the question whether ancestral practices should constitute a part of the liturgy of the Church are as follows:

Very strongly in favour:	58 were of that opinion i.e.		11.7%
strongly in favour	: 131 were of that opinion i.e.		26.4%
indifferent	: 94	"	18.9%
opposed	: 61	"	12.3%
strongly opposed	: 36	"	7.2%
no opinion	: 117	"	23.5%

TOTAL= 497.[213]

It is interesting that of the different categories of people interviewed, 20% of Brothers, 23.5% of priests and 50% of Sisters had no opinion, as against 17.3% of seminarians and 14% of lay persons. Among those in favour are two main expatriate groups, the priests and Sisters. Though the survey concerned Ghana as a whole and covered a small number of people, the regional distribution of the research reflected that of the national opinion with the northern sectors of the country where the Dagaaba are located displaying tremendous attachment to the ancestors.[214]

The research isolated the `no opinion' group while combining the `strongly' and the `very

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212 Survey of the Church in Ghana: Catholics and Traditional Religion, (Cape Coast, Ghana: 1975), p.28.

213 Taken from the Survey of the Church in Ghana: Catholics and Traditional Religion, 1975, p.29.

214 Survey of the Church in Ghana: Catholics and Traditional Religion, p.30.

strongly' into one category, arriving at a total of 189 for and 97 against the inclusion of ancestral practice in the liturgy of the Church. However, of the clergy in favour of the opinion, there were more expatriate Sisters and priests than their local counterparts but the majority of seminarians were in favour of the motion. Most lay persons interviewed in fact said they were practising it and saw nothing wrong in it. Yet, the surveyors concluded that:

> We can say that the balance of opinion is in favour of giving more attention to ancestor cult as a socio-religious institution, but it is not a strong balance and there is significant opposition or indifference. Those who were indifferent, opposed or had no opinion form the majority, i.e. 308 of the 497 respondents. Excluding the `no opinion' and the `indifferent' groups we are left with 189 in favour against 79 who are opposed. Why were so many indifferent (94) or had no opinion (117)? Is this not, once again, a sign that many are not acquainted with Ghanaian religious values or that the whole problem of integration is alien to their mentality. It does seem that many are not well equipped to deal with this issue.[215]

Since the laity in African Christianity have a still small voice, it is often not listened to by the religious authorities.

How alien was the concept of cultural integration to the people? The same research revealed that people of over 50 in age were conservative and not willing to see changes come into the Church. The belief among them is that Christianity was more appealing when a strict distinction was made between the traditional values and Christian principles. Some still lament the abolition of the Latin mass. The elderly have grown to believe that cultural element such as language, literature and the material culture that were brought along with Christianity constitutes the totality of that religion. There is however a second group of people - the youth, who are eager to see changes in the Church including a synthesis with the traditional religion.

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[215] Survey of the Church in Ghana: Catholics and Traditional Religion, p.30.

The evangelization approach of Wa Diocese is more in line with acculturation than inculturation and with the local clergy in control of affairs, the best results that can come from the diocese will be the products of acculturation. The process of acculturation in its simplest definition refers to a situation of cultural contact (an encounter between two cultures). In the Christian theological sense, it refers to contact between the culture of the people and that of Christianity. This process applies best to events of the missionary period and constitutes the starting point of inculturation. The distinguishing factor between acculturation and inculturation is the theological bias of the former and the mutual reciprocity of the latter. The picture is that the local clergy are merely modifying and re-establishing cultural contacts with Christianity. It also reflects thirty years of re-adorning and encircling over and over again, the initiatives of the first missionaries. It reminds one of Mollie the white mare in George Orwell's Animal Farm, who only learnt the six letters of the alphabets that spelt her name and would form them neatly out of twigs and would then decorate them with a flower or two and walk around them admiring them. There is a need to go beyond this stage.

4. SOME PROBLEMS IMPEDING INCULTURATION IN THE DIOCESE

At the risk of repeating ourselves, it will be appropriate to reiterate some missiological problems in the Wa diocese originating from the history of the development of the Church and the process of evangelization among the Dagaaba catholics. The discussion is necessary if the future of the Church is to be conceptualized and the importance of genuine inculturation appreciated. In

the light of the "two worlds" of the local clergy, the missiological problems will be put into two categories, external and internal problems, and those theological in perspective. By the first category we refer to problems arising from the mentality of the Church authorities and those peculiar to and defined by the culture. It will also include political manipulations from the catholic hierarchy.

The universal communion in the Catholic Church is made up of all the particular or local Churches which together, ensure the genuineness of the traditional faith, the authenticity of the sacraments and the validity of the Church's ministry.[216] This universal communion is overseen by a hierarchical structure consisting of the pope, bishops and councils. Decisions arrived at by each local Church are subject to strict scrutiny and approval by the structure of the hierarchy using the Canon law, which in itself, is structured after the legal systems of some cultures, as basis for approval or otherwise. Under the heading "Procedure to follow when making the adaptations[217] provided for in liturgical books," the Congregation stipulates:

> When the Episcopal Conference prepares its own edition of liturgical books, it decides about the translation and also the adaptations which are envisaged by the Law. The acts of the Conference, together with the final vote, are signed by the President and Secretary of the Conference and sent to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, along with two copies of the approved text. Moreover, along with the complete

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216 Shorter, The African Synod, p.56.

217 The Congregation is using the term adaptation interchangeably with inculturation, which in our opinion, is not acceptable. In Christian usage, the term adaptation means the gospel accommodates itself in a limited way to the demands of a cultural expression for the sake of the communication of the message. It differs from inculturation in that it assumes that culture is static and simple and at the same time is a one time process which takes place once and for all. See Schreiter, "Faith and Culture," 1989, p.743. Gerald Arbuckle also pointed to its pejorative usage and its association with "a dated theology and the missionary experiences of a Eurocentric Church." He sees the term as denoting a "one-way manipulation of cultures, not an openness to receive on the part of both parties in the dialogue." He therefore recommended that the term be dropped from theological and liturgical use. See: Gerald Arbuckle, "Inculturation not Adaptation: A time to Change Terminology," Worship 60 (1986), 518-519.

dossier should be sent:

a) a succinct and precise explanation of the reasons for the adaptations that have been introduced;

b) an indication as to which sections have been taken from other already approved liturgical books and which are newly composed.

After the recognition by the Apostolic See has been received, according to the law, the Episcopal Conference promulgates the Decree and determines the date when the next text come into force.[218]

It is obvious that inculturation policies proposed by African local Churches will be subjected to Western standards, leaving them with little or no chance at all of being approved. It is therefore only proper that the structure of communion in the Catholic Church should not be tied to a particular culture.[219]

Throughout the history of the development of the Church among the Dagaaba, the diocese has always relied on external sources to meet its financial requirements. Earlier on, the missionaries had appealed to charitable organizations and personal friends in their countries who were willing to offer the mission financial and logistic support. After their withdrawal, the local clergy also continued to rely on benefactors and charitable organizations, with Rome (Vatican) as the major donor. As a result of the economic dependence, the local administrators have to tow the lines of the Vatican in order to remain eligible for financial support. Despite its vocal pronouncements in favour of an African Christianity, the Vatican remains the sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of religious authorities under its jurisdiction, to make sure they remain as conservative and as close to the old doctrines as possible. Writing on the problems of inculturation among African

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218 C.D.W.D.S, The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation IV[TH], n.62.

219 Shorter, The African Synod, p.56-57. Azevedo expressed the same opinion when he wrote of the need for a change in attitude in the Church as a whole, and called on it to free itself internally in relations to its own historical development. See: Azevedo, Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity, p.26.

Churches, Buhlmann observed:

> Rome falls all over itself producing documents in favour of inculturation. But the moment it comes down to brass tacks - concrete consequences - it forbids this inculturation. Let a bishop attempt to undertake something for the enhancement of the laity as church, for ecumenism, for the Africanisation of the sacraments, and he forthwith receives an admonition through the papal legate. If that has no effect, Rome reduces its financial contribution. And if even that tactic fails, an auxiliary bishop is sent into the breach, someone absolutely loyal to the party line, to see that nothing further goes amiss. This reinforces Rome's identification of unity with uniformity, and cuts all concrete forms of inculturation off at the knees. Nor is it apostolic nuncios alone who keep watch over the maintenance of Roman doctrine and discipline. For some time now, in Abidjan, Kinshasa, and Nairobi, where theological institutions of higher learning are in full operation and have long been working to develop an African theology, Opus Dei centres have been established, like guard towers in a prison yard.[220]

Despite its pronouncements, Rome's interest in a universal uniformity supersedes praxis[221] and the Dagaaba clergy are faithfully abiding by that rule.[222] If inculturation is half-heartedly pursued in the Diocese of Wa, it is because political desires have been given priority over practical needs and personal interests over-shadow the call for a proper evangelization. Until an economic independence is reached and the acceptance of financial aids which come with strings terminated, the Dagaaba will only be able to begin and see the fruits of inculturation when Rome decides it is

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220 Walbert Buhlmann, With Eyes To See: Church and World in the Third Millennium, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p.81.

221 Quack also noted the "wide divergence between claim and reality, theory and praxis - at least as far as the upper levels of Church administration are concerned." See: Quack, "Inculturation," p.8.

222 The recurring theme in the Instrumentum Laboris (a reference point for the agenda for the Synod of African Bishops which was held in Rome in April of 1994) is in the words of John Paul II: "compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church." The discernment of the Vatican certainly stands out as the preferred determiner of what is compatible with the gospel and the African Synod of Bishops is viewing inculturation and their own cultures through the eyes of their Western authorities.

time to.[223] Buhlmann also expressed the same opinion when he wrote:

> ...African catholics should be encouraged to create openings, make daring experiments, come up with models of inculturation, even for the sake of the other continental Churches...As long as the official Catholic Church keeps harping on uniformity as the be-all and end-all, there is scant likelihood that Rome will ever accept an ecumenical model of greater breadth of tolerance for other Churches.[224]

Financial dependence has allowed external forces to control the trends of evangelization in the Dagaaba land.

Catholic priests of the Diocese, through their training have become more Roman than Rome. As Buhlmann puts it, they behave like "yuppies"[225] by attributing more importance to their European schooling and living standard. Our experience is that most never go back to their villages of birth and the few that do, do not stay there very long. They prefer the towns and cities where modern facilities are available. They easily point to the backwardness of the village environments, describing them as dirty with guinea-worm infested drinking waters. By staying away from the villages which constitute the cultural nest and oral wisdom, the local clergy are disadvantaged in that

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[223] At Lusaka in 1972, African theologians had raised the problem of financial moratorium as a means to allowing genuine contextualization (the Protestant Churches' version of the Catholics' inculturation). They were able to impress on the participants at the World Council of Churches meeting on mission and evangelism that a moratorium on mission and finance was good for the growth of African theology. It was believed that if Western missionaries withdrew from the continent it will not only help the African to assert his self-image, but also narrow down to the African soils, the problems of contextualising Christianity in that continent. Once the problems were internalised they could be tackled from within. The opinion of the African theologians is as true for inculturation (Catholic) as it is for contextualization (Protestant). See: M. Gabriel Setiloane, "Where are we in African Theology?" in: Appiah-Kubi Kofi and Torres Sergio, (eds), African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, Accra, Ghana (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 1979), p.59-60; AACC Bulletin 7 (1974), no.3.

[224] Buhlmann, With Eyes to See, p.84.

[225] Buhlmann, With Eyes to See, p.82.

regard.[226] As such they not only have no wish to fall back into the old ways of the culture, but see their own culture through the eyes of their Western trainers. There is therefore much negativity with regards to cultural matters. Most attempts at initiating cultural interest with Christianity therefore tend to be superficial and transient, and neither lead to genuine inculturation nor establish a genuine domestic Church of today and tomorrow where believers can feel at home.

Closely related to the above problems is the lack of courage among the religious authorities. There is the fear of falling out of favour with their superiors even when they are convinced that their opinions are right and necessary. As Buhlmann puts it,

> ... we are disappointed. The Church of Africa can point to a positive balance on many points: a dynamic growth; powerful, captivating liturgies in the city, in the countryside, and even in the many priestless parishes; the courage to persevere in the midst of the current politico-economic turmoil. But in matters of ecclesial inculturation, we look in vain for a genuine breakthrough. Once more the principle holds: talk is cheap, deeds are dear.[227]

There is also the fear of errors and the uncertainties of the process of inculturation. Even when research reveals the trends of shifting interests of the laity as in the case of their attitude toward ancestor veneration, an excuse is always found for the neglect. Above all, there is the fear of syncretism, but as demonstrated, syncretism is not necessarily evil, in fact, it is a starting point for inculturation. The real enemy to fear and stay away from, is the rating of Christianity as a perfected

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[226] Patrick Moloney however does not think that Ghanaian seminarians\clergy are less ignorant of their culture than their lay counterparts. In his opinion since culture is dynamic and is becoming much more modern as compared to yesterday's, the culture of today's seminarians is what they "have lived and experienced and imbibed from their own people." In that regard "the seminarians know their own culture very well indeed." See: Moroney, "Some Dangers of Inculturation," p.330. Despite being dynamic, our opinion is that there are certain elements that are central to every culture. It is these core elements of culture such as the procedures of doing things, the details in rituals, the potential to succeed and perform with optimum success the role of the traditional leaders, that the seminarians, and for that matter the youth, lack.

[227] Buhlmann Walbert, With Eyes to See, p.81.

religion which all other religions and cultures are expected to look up to. A better knowledge and understanding of the traditional practices may erase the prejudiced concept of Christian superiority.

There is also the problem of conservatism among both the laity and clergy. As mentioned earlier, the elderly members of the Catholic community in the area are adamant to change and prefer sticking to the ancient ways. Unfortunately much of the power of the local Church lie in their hands. They sit on both parish and diocesan councils and the organization of village communities is their prerogative. It is therefore difficult to effect changes until the youth who are eager for changes are in positions of being heard.

From the theological perspective, the Dagaaba approach to evangelization is more of parallelism and translation, than inculturation. Commenting on the Catholic liturgy of the Mass and Good Friday celebrations among the Dagaaba Catholics, Fr. Dasaah writes:

> Throughout Wa Diocese, the Eucharistic centres of the Christian people, residential stations and outstations, have always been the focal point of attraction especially on Sundays. The Eucharist is celebrated in `Dagaare,' the vernacular of the people - the lessons, Eucharistic prayers, common and proper of the Mass are all celebrated in Dagaare. The musical instruments and native hymns, psalm acclamations, the native genius of the people are employed in the praise and worship of Yahweh. The thorough and active participation of the faithful during the liturgy cannot be over-emphasized... So much has been done to incarnate Christianity among the Dagaaba. Apart from the `Dagaaba Mass' another striking feature of the liturgy is the Good Friday Liturgy, celebrated in the frame work of a Dagaaba funeral celebration. It appeals not only to Christians but to non-Christians, who themselves are active participants.[228]

Dasaah's observation is probably an accurate picture of Dagaaba Christian interaction with the culture, with Christianity "framing" itself after the culture of the people so as to appeal to both Christians and non-Christians.

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[228] Dasaah, "The Evangelization of the Dagarti People," p.8. We have replaced the authors spelling of 'Dagaaba' as 'Dagarti' for purposes of consistency.

The Good Friday Liturgy referred to by Fr. Dasaah takes after the structure of funeral celebrations among the traditional Dagaaba. The liturgy usually begins with a dramatization of the Passion Narrative until the death of Jesus on the cross is announced. Immediately the narrator ends his line with "*A baare la*" (it is finished), one of the elders of the Church, acting as the head of the immediate family of Jesus begins the mourning, calling on his "fathers" (ancestors) for help. The presupposition is that Jesus and the mourner belong with a common ancestral group and that the ancestors are aware of the fate of the deceased and may even be responsible for it. Death at the age of around forty is certainly not God's death according to the Dagaaba religiosity. It is significant to note that Jesus' funeral is not started or participated in by the priests who had, until recently, distinguished themselves as people who do not celebrate funerals.

The rest of the congregation joins in the funeral celebration, with drums and xylophones and funeral dirges. Money is cast on the "corpse" of Jesus to enable him pay his ferry toll and other monetary transactions necessary as one journeys to the Land of the Dead. Material donations such as food items and utensils are also made, and messages given to Jesus requesting him to greet all their ancestors in the land of the dead. The belief that life after death is a carbon copy of the present is certainly implied and Jesus must be well equipped with all that is needed for him to continue living on the other side.

Several inconsistencies are overlooked and go unquestioned because the congregation understands them in terms of the traditional religion rather than Christianity. The Jewish ancestral background of Jesus is different from that of any Dagao and, invariably, Jesus should not be able to communicate with "foreign" ancestors in the Land of the Dead. Jesus is also expected to travel

the road to the land of the ancestors according to the belief system of the Dagaaba. He will be expected to continue depending on the living for sustenance through sacrifices and will also be expected to react to evil committed in the family. In sum, the Christian rite identifies Jesus with the ancestors of the Dagaaba.

The feast of Easter is recognized as the greatest feast of the Catholic Church and most appropriately too, must be communicated to any group of people using their major mode of religious expression. The importance of the ancestors to the Dagaaba have already been demonstrated and has rightly been identified by the Catholic Church as of utmost religious influence. However, the process of translating it into Christianity has the detrimental consequences of assuming similarity of the two religions. The ultimate result is one of Christianity's confusing interpretation of the traditional religious beliefs. It certainly alludes to Jesus as an ancestor.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DAGAABA ANCESTORS, JESUS CHRIST AND THE SAINTS

1. PURGATORY AND PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

It would be appropriate at this stage to bring into our discussion the Catholic concepts of purgatory and prayers for the dead. While Catholicism is not favourably disposed towards the African ancestors and rites related to their departed, it has its own beliefs and practices concerning its departed souls. The discussion therefore becomes necessary as a preview of how the cult of the ancestors can illuminate the Christian rites associated with the dead, especially the cult of the saints.

According to Catholic doctrine, after death, the soul immediately goes to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory, depending on the nature of its relation with God at the time of death. If it was in a state of friendship with God, was entirely free from both venial and mortal sins, and had done enough penance for the sins committed after baptism, the soul is admitted into Heaven. On the other hand, if the relation between the soul and God at the moment of death is one of enmity, with the soul having one or more mortal unrepented sins, the soul is plunged into eternal damnation. Finally if the soul at the time of death is in a state of grace and friendship with God but is yet unworthy to be admitted into Heaven either because of unrepented venial sins and/or the lack of sufficient penance for both mortal and venial sins, a soul is admitted into a place of purification and expiation known as Purgatory.

As the three places to which a soul can go to are directly related to the relationship between the soul and God, Heaven and Hell are in direct opposition to each other, with their occupants being either eternal friends or enemies of God. The Catholic doctrine therefore speaks of a chasm between

Heaven and Hell, with no chance for a soul to cross from one realm to the other. The souls in Hell will never ask for God's forgiveness and God will never grant them forgiveness because they will never ask. The souls in Purgatory will eventually go to Heaven (but not Hell), after undergoing purification. However, they cannot do anything to help themselves and therefore look up to the Church Militant (faithful Christians on earth) and the Church Triumphant (those in Heaven) to alleviate their pain and shorten their stay in Purgatory.

The souls in Purgatory can be helped by the living faithful through the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, alms and other works of piety offered for the dead. Though the Catholic doctrine describes Heaven, Hell and Purgatory as *states*, they are *states* that cannot be localized.

2. THE SAINTS

The Catholic Church also has in her credo the belief in the Communion of Saints who play an important role in the liturgy of the Church. In the following, we will attempt to bring out the beliefs and practices held by the missionaries while they worked among the Dagaaba, and to illustrate that the African ancestors enjoy the same status in their communities as the saints in the Catholic Church.

The word "saint" was initially used in the early Church to apply to both people baptized into the Church and the faithful departed. During that period, it had no cultic implication and was used as an address among the early Christians, to distinguish them from the rest of the "pagan" world. The cult of the saints in all probability became institutionalized during the era of the Christian

persecution in the third century A.D., when the term came to be reserved for a special category of holy person i.e., the martyrs (those who had died because they refused to compromise with the Roman religion). Special shrines were built over the burial places of martyrs as memorials. The cults of the saints probably arose as a parallel rite to the pagan practice of according the dead with a tomb sometimes resembling a temple or an altar where the dead man's family could assemble on certain days to make libations and sacrifices and to celebrate funeral banquets.[229] The commemoration soon gave way to cults of miracle-working saints as the martyrs became a channel of communication between the Christians and God. The martyrs were appealed to for religious intercession and the physically incapacitated went to their shrines to seek cures.

The cults of the early martyrs which started as local institutions centred on the tombs containing their remains, soon took different forms. They ceased to be local and were spread through the distribution of their relics which included clothes. The relics were not seen as objects of worship but making ever-present the sanctified members of their communities. When Constantinople became the "home" of Christianity, the bodies of important martyrs were brought into that city since it had no martyrs of its own to match those of old Rome.

By the eighth century A.D., it was a requirement of the Church and reiterated by the Seventh General Council of Nicaea in 787 that every consecrated Church should have a relic placed in its altar.[230] The intention was to have the saints as close to them as possible, much as Jesus' presence

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[229] Clare Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.216.

[230] Stephen Wilson, Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History (London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.5.

was symbolized by the tabernacle. Relics became incorporated into formal worship and were not exclusively associated with the cult of saints, but with Christ and his mother as well.[231] It became an important part of worship to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the Holy land, where events of the Old Testament and the New Testament had taken place. In the East, from around the same century, relics devotion gave way to icons while the West developed statues as parallel to the icons of the East.[232]

When the persecution was over and Christianity was well established, new concepts of sainthood arose. Asceticism was assimilated to martyrdom and all ascetics were referred to as saints. Sainthood was by Christian faithfulness to the teachings of the gospel which were interpreted as advocating other-worldliness. The monasteries and deserts were seen as nests to which one could escape from the temptations of this world, and as providing the ideal atmosphere for Christian devotion. Ascetics and hermits were therefore the "holy" people or saints. Those who spread the gospel among the heathen, as well as those who governed the Church with piety, particularly the bishops were also recognized as saints. From the Middle Ages, sainthood was no longer limited to martyrs, ascetics or bishops but members of religious order. The process of designating saints also became formalized and was controlled by bishops and synods, and in the case of the West, the papacy as well. A saint therefore came to be understood as a person who is recognized as such by the Church in an official way (canonization) with the result that the person may be the legitimate object of liturgical *cultus* in the universal calender of the sanctoral cycle or *in the same cycle for a*

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231 Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, p.5.

232 Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, p.5.

particular region or religious order.[233]

Delooz Pierre has divided saints into two categories, "real" saints and "constructed" saints.[234] The term "real" saints is used to refer to saints about whom objective facts may be established: their sex, place of birth and of death, manner of death, age at death, time of death, civil status, religious community, etc. On the other hand, "constructed" saints have nothing of real origin left of them. They are legendary figures modelled in particular communities and given qualities representative of the members of that community.

Before 1234 A.D., saints were chosen by small groups who started new cults without holding an inquiry or a tribunal.[235] After the death of a person, when the community felt he/she had lived a good moral life worthy of emulation, it set up a cult for the person. Pressure was put on the bishop of the area to transfer the relics of the person and in so doing the bishop gave his mark of official approval. The Pope's approval was not required until 1234 A.D, when the Pope reserved for himself the right to canonize saints. The case was taken before a tribunal and a judicial machine was set up which was governed by rules finalized into the constitution of Urban VIII.[236] The main qualifications needed for being a saint include heroic virtues, martyrdom and miracles. Even then, the "popular" canonization of saints continued.[237]

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233 Lawrence Cunningham, "Current Theology - A Decade of Research on the Saints: 1980 - 1990," Theological Studies, 53 (1992), p.518. Emphasis ours.

234 Pierre Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," in: Stephen Wilson, (ed.), Saints and Their Cults, p.195.

235 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.191.

236 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.191.

237 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.191.

As Delooz noted,[238] no living person has ever been declared a saint which implies that sainthood is situated in recollection. Throughout its historical evolution, the process of canonization has depended on memories that people have retained of the past concerning the saints. Saints are made saints by other people, for an opinion must be strong enough to provoke a public cult.[239]

Broadly speaking then, saints are saints in the eyes of the whole community of the Church but in effect, are first and foremost, local saints. Originally, they were exclusively local; as a result, saints are saints for some people[240] and not for others. People have opposed the canonization of some saints, and the Church had excommunicated some people who later were canonized. Joan of Arc was condemned to death as a heretic by an ecclesiastical tribunal, and canonized four centuries later.[241] Some saints are also known to have had numerous devotees at one time and none or few later; for example, Martin of Tours was a popular saint at the end of the fourth century but his cult has now declined.

Saints play an important role in the religious life of individuals and the Christian community as a whole. They constitute the Church Triumphant because they have attained Heaven as a result of their lives, and they stand out as models to be emulated by the Church Militant, that is, those still alive and wishing to attain the same goal.[242] Saints exemplify the highest ideals of the believing

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238 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.194.

239 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.199.

240 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.197.

241 Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church," p.197.

242 P. Austin Flannery, (ed.), Documents of Vatican Council II (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p.412.

community, and are promoted to the highest position due to their moral and religious success.

The saints also play an intercessory role. The living can ask for forgiveness and blessings from God on their own behalf, and on behalf of the community at large, through the saints. Individuals and institutions take their names after saints, around whom they build a channel of communication for the purpose of intercession. Generally, constructed saints are more commonly seen as intercessors or emblematic figures while real saints are primarily seen as paradigmatic models who also function as intercessors and/or loci of power. It is against this Catholic theological background that the missionaries evangelized the Dagaaba.

To review briefly the discussion on the Dagaaba ancestors, they are recognized to be both human and divine. As humans, they were born into families and shared in the physical and psychological experiences of their communities. Through death, they attained superhuman powers that allow them to serve as a bridge between the sacred and the profane. The ancestors therefore play the role of socio-religious mediators and invisible elders of the community. They are symbols of life through their gratified lives in the here-after, and on earth through their offspring. They give and sustain life and are ever-present among their communities. As the living-dead they manifest themselves to their families through dreams, visions and reincarnations, and also through events of this world. The ancestors are also noted as figures of morality, for, not all who die are considered ancestors. Among the qualifications of being an ancestor include a virtuous life and community awareness. To die at a blessed age and with progeny, was a strong requirement since children are a sign of the individual's mediation with life. Ancestors are also typical of families but there might be national heroes who are remembered during national celebrations but who do not form part of

the individual's religious world except for the members of the family from where the heroes hailed.

Among the Catholic doctrines is the veneration of the communion of saints. As mentioned above, the Catholic saints are saints because the communities among which they lived had judged and found their lives to be comparable to one or the other virtues of Jesus Christ. In other communities saints were constructed and vested with such qualities as expected of Christians - qualities that are commonly attributed to Jesus. The saints in Catholicism are typical of and important only to the communities that made them saints and the continuous operation of their cults depend on the need for those virtues for which they were made saints and for which the community needs models to aspire to.

The Catholic Church also recognizes that there might have been some virtuous people within the Church who had lived unnoticed sanctified lives. Two categorize of people are believed to be in heaven: those whose faithful religious lives are officially recognized through canonization; and those (unproclaimed) who through their lives are believed to have earned religious salvation and co-dwell with God in heaven. The two categories of saints together form the communion of saints. The second category encompass a larger number of people than the first. With the recent realization that there is salvation outside the Church, the number is even larger and expands to include all who, despite their cultural background and their time in history, had lived according to the norms of their societies but who, through no fault of theirs, were either born into other faiths or were not given an opportunity to hear the Jesus message. Within this group, one is expected to find those who lived before Christ, Buddhists, Muslims, African and Amerindian traditional religious practitioners, that is, the ancestors, just to mention a few. In other words, in the Christian Heaven one is expected to

find co-dwelling with God, people of all faiths and practices who had lived according to the principles of their belief systems.

By establishing the Feast of All Saints on November 1, the Catholic Church brings under its auspices a conglomeration of people who had consciously or unconsciously, lived according to a universal standard, later summarized by Christendom in the personal life and teachings of Jesus. Through the establishment of the feast of All Saints, the Catholic Church acknowledges that there are many more unheralded heroes dwelling with God than canonized. This also goes to suggest that there is a higher standard for determining "sainthood" and sanctified lives than any one community or institution can establish, and that the Church's criteria for determining what action is morally acceptable is not the ultimate, but is guided by a universal standard (exemplified by the life of Jesus) which stands as the model for the Catholic world as well.[243] Implicitly, the Catholic doctrine on the veneration of saints is community based and Jesus as the *saint par excellence* in the universal Catholic community. It may therefore be suggested that Christianity (Catholicism for that matter) is Christo-centric, with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the pivot of the Gospel of salvation.

We have shown that the saints, otherwise called the Church Triumphant, are typical of particular localities where cults are set up for them and devotees make intercessions through them. The devotees living in the same locality and probably under similar conditions as the saint, appreciate his or her courageous and heroic life. It becomes all the more meaningful to the people of the environment because they understand what endurance and obstacles their model had to

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[243] Fergus King discussed the communion of saints in terms of their exaltation but also views their exaltation in relation to Christ. See: J. Fergus King, "Angels and Ancestors: A Basis for Christology?" Mission Studies 11 (1994), p.22.

overcome. If St. Martin of Tours was said to have shared his cloak with a beggar who was freezing in the cold,[244] the act becomes only intelligible to someone who has experienced cold winters and only then is the heroism appreciated. The use of European names by Africans defeats the purpose of upholding the saints as models, since they belong to a different cultural milieu.

The forefathers and for that matter ancestors of the Dagaaba prepared them through the traditions of the tribe to be moral, religious and sociable. They left their life-styles as examples to guide their descendants through the life on earth and made marks on them for identification in the land of the ancestors. Why should the Dagaaba now need the forefathers of people other than their own as models? As Jean-Marc Ela put it, the replacement of ancestors with the communion of saints would deprive converts of a major dimensions of their own culture.

> Anything that might make an African believe that the saints had become his ancestors and that he must henceforth venerate and pray to the saints would be no more than dangerous mystification.[245]

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[244] Benedictine Monks, The Book of Saints. A Dictionary of Servants of God canonized by the Catholic Church: Extracted from The Roman & other Martyrologies (London: A. & C. Black, Ltd, 1934), p.183.

[245] Jean-Marc Ela, "Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem," Concilium 102 (1977), 47.

3. THE DEBATE ON JESUS AS ANCESTOR

It is not popular among scholars to describe Jesus as an ancestor.[246] Sociological problems of applying the term to Jesus include the fact that he is likened to a deceased lineage head. The argument can further be made that such a connotation delimits Jesus to a single lineage with all the taboos and expectations typical of that lineage. Jesus will not only be divided among cultures but among lineages within each culture. The totality of Jesus will inevitably end in a contradiction within each local Church and the broader culture of the evangelized.

It is also problematic to think of Jesus as a progenitor in the sense attributed to African ancestors. To us, this will be tilting the balance more toward the humanity of Jesus than maintaining a balance between his humanity and divinity. Despite not being out of order, it certainly is Christologically inappropriate to have to refer to Jesus as father or grandfather.[247] Osei-Bonsu[248] also notes some theological problems with this approach. He points to the ancestors being regarded as human but "not as divine beings, even if they are believed to be more powerful in the other world, than they used to be on earth." In his opinion, to "regard Christ as an ancestor runs the risk of

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246 See: Robert Laroche, "Some Traditional African Religions and Christianity," in: C.G. Baëta, (ed.), Christianity in Tropical Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.289-307; François Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," in: Schreiter Robert, (ed.), Faith and Culture Series: Faces of Jesus in Africa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p.116-127.

247 When J.S. Pobee used the Akan term Nana (popularly used to address grandparents in that culture) to describe Jesus, he did not intend that it be understood as grandfather but as the illustrious ancestor. See: J.S. Pobee, Toward an African Theology (Abingdon-Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1979), p.167, N0.17.

248 Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," African Ecclesial Review 32 (1990), p.355.

falling into the heresy of subordinationism which would underrate his divinity."[249] Osei-Bonsu further points to the conflict that will arise between the rising and ascension of Christ into heaven and the habitat of the ancestors which is the "world of the dead.". Lastly, he opined that the mediatory role of the ancestors is not well defined in the African traditional religions, even though they are believed to be concerned about what took place on earth.[250]

The fears and objections of Osei-Bonsu are a revisitation of those of Robert Laroche expressed in the early 1960s. The ancestors may not be designated divine beings, but they are known to acquire powers that are superhuman, putting them in a closer interactive relation with the Supreme Being than humans. As the Dagaaba have it, they live in "God's country" (*Naangmen teng*), with all the privileges of co-dwelling with the Supreme Being. It therefore means that by putting Jesus in the category of the ancestors, his divinity is not underrated by any count, any more than his being put in the same category as the saints. It certainly is no subordinationism when Jesus is put in the same category as humans, and if the ancestors are not accorded divinity, then their humanity must be upheld. The Christian concept of heaven and the traditional African idea of the "world of the dead" must be viewed from their respective contexts and not from the Christian perspective. If translated into the Dagaaba's, and for that matter the African world-view, there is no conflict in Jesus rising to heaven because he goes to the "country of God" where the ancestors also go.

To summarize the objections against addressing Jesus as an ancestor, Shorter noted that if

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249 Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," p.355.

250 Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," p.355.

the theological exercise is to be valid, one must be true to the anthropological facts.

> It is obvious also that, in conformity with the Church's teaching, some elements can be detached from traditional `ancestor' veneration and proposed as Christological parallels, but the whole complex of beliefs and practices is inapplicable as such to the mystery of Christ and cannot develop or give expression to the doctrine of the Church. Much of the experience is, to say the least, Christologically unhelpful. But, whereas the `ancestor' concept does not illuminate or develop our understanding of the person and role of Christ, the person and role of Christ can and does illuminate and redeem the African understanding of the `ancestor.'[251]

In Shorter's opinion, it could be misleading to speak of "Christ our ancestor," if it is intended to convey more than that Christ is God, the ancestor and source of all life.[252]

Some scholars[253] have tried to prove the appropriateness of referring to Christ as an ancestor by linking him to the African lineage through the imagery of a pact. A pact can be entered into by two people of different clans through which one of the two covenanters gain admission into the other's clan and thus qualify for roles and benefits in the clan as those born into it. Titles which address Jesus as an elder brother are probably derivations from the blood-brother concept.[254] Others have distinguished different kinds of ancestors,[255] which in our opinion, is forcing some close analogies with Christ. Therefore, terms like `elder brother' and `brother-ancestor' are used as

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251 Aylward Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," African Ecclesial Review 25 (1983), p.202.

252 Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," p.198.

253 See: Damian Lwasa, "Traditional and Christian Community in Africa," in: Aylward Shorter, (ed.), African Christian Spirituality (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), p.141-150;

254 Joseph Healey G, "Inculturation of Liturgy and Worship in Africa," Worship 60 (1986), p.418. Kabasélé also used the term "eldest brother" as an imagery of Jesus as the only Son of God and in the context of the Bantu traditional practices, his "taking responsibility for our wrongs in performing expiation for us." See: Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.122.

255 Charles Nyamiti, Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), p.16.

imagery for Christ but which to us, are not analogous to the underlying connotations for the Dagaaba ancestors.

Jesus as an ancestor would probably best be understood in the context of Judeao-Christian traditions. Though he is divine, he took on human flesh and was born into the family of David. Jesus therefore shared in the characteristics of men which include an ancestry. Much work has already been done on the humanity of Jesus and it is therefore unnecessary to repeat the discussion here. We shall however rediscover the ancestry of Jesus for the purpose of this research.

Though both Matthew (Mt.1:1-17) and Luke (Lk.3:23-38) had different theological purposes behind the genealogy of Jesus, they both agreed that he was of Jewish descent and was from the family of David, the ideal king of Israel. It is also recorded that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, in the Matthean theology, to emphasize his Jewish lineage, while the Lucan theology goes beyond Abraham to Adam, to show the common descent of Jesus and the rest of humanity.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (the son of Jacob), as patriarchs of the Israelites were not only remembered for being the first known historical figures of the Jewish community but mainly for their socio-religious roles. Abraham, for example, lived a virtuous life, faithful to his god even to the point of willing to offer his only son in sacrifice to that deity. He acted as a mediator between his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot (Gen.13:8ff) and also between the people of Sodom and the heavenly visitors (Gen.18:22-33). The life of Abraham was regulated by the community in which he lived and his actions evaluated according to the standard laid down by that community.

The Jews have always looked upon the patriarchs as people who had lived in accordance with the socio-religious life of their time, an ideal to which every Jew aspired. With the transition

from nomadic to sedentary life, as depicted by the Bible, there developed some differences in social and religious expectations. These included a socio-religious life governed by the "Mosaic" laws. The virtuous person was one who strictly abided by the laws as stipulated in the final edition of the Pentateuch. The lifestyle of the Jews during Jesus' time was certainly different from that of the patriarchs, yet the latter continued to be models and sources of inspiration to the former.

It is certain that not every Jew who died was recognized as an ancestor. Those who through their activities did not promote the growth of the covenanted people or who betrayed the goals of the community were expelled from the community of Yahweh's people. The belief was that rebels whose deeds were hidden from the eye of the community were exposed by the deity through sicknesses such as leprosy. Lepers were therefore separated and cast outside the community. There were other people who despite living dubious lives or even coming from non-Jewish descent were recognized as ancestors and ancestresses because of their roles in preserving the Israelite community. The Matthean genealogy took note of personalities such as Bathsheba (2 Sam.11:-12:24 - the wife of Uriah the Hittite who was seduced and married by David and who later became the mother of Solomon), Tamar (Gen.38:6-24 - the widow of Judah's son who was denied the right of levirate marriage and under the guise of a prostitute seduced Judah. She was later found to be more righteous than Judah himself for insisting on the law of levirate marriage which Judah tried to circumvent), Rahab (Jos.3:1-3 - the prostitute from Canaan who protected the men sent by Joshua to spy on Jericho. She assisted in the capture of the city). The Jewish ancestry was therefore community oriented despite being religio-centric but could include any outsider who stood for the same principles as the covenant stipulations. It is in this cultural complex that Jesus was born at a

definite time (2000 years ago) in a definite place and became integrated into a definite culture.[256]

By the standard of the majority of the Jews, Jesus did not qualify to be an ancestor, for nothing in his life was seen worthy of emulation. They saw him to have lived a life contrary to the Jewish religious laws: he mingled with the social outcasts and made disciples out of the *am-ha-ares* (people of the land), the rabble-that-knew-no-law. He was also accused of violating the sabbath laws and consenting to Roman rule. However, like later Catholic saints who were rejected by one community only to be canonized by another, Jesus was recognized as a model by the community that believed in his words and deeds. He therefore stands as an "ancestor" to that conglomeration of believers.

Shorter defined an "ancestor" in the African context as a deceased blood relative who in life was responsible in the lineage for the continuation of the descent group, and who, in death, continues to exercise this responsibility in a new way, in solidarity with other deceased blood relatives.[257] The main concern is the continuous growth of the lineage in communion with the dead. The totality of the lineage strives towards harmony with the rest of the cosmos, the main concern being the continuity of the lineage. Members of a lineage traced their descent down to a common ancestor, but it was also possible to bring outsiders into the fold of the lineage through pacts, as mentioned above, and also through enslavement.

It is therefore possible for the living to venerate non-descendants, provided the individuals have lifestyles which are consistent with that of the lineage and have established some links with

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256 Quack, "Inculturation," p.5; Azevedo, Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity, p.25.

257 Aylward Shorter, "Ancestor Veneration Revisited," African Ecclesial Review 25 (1983), p.198.

it. Pacts and covenants have been used in the past to bring people of different cultural settings to live by a common ideology with a common goal. Religious ideologies have also arisen out of a common pact between people with different cultural backgrounds but a common religious eschatology and expectation, as is the case with Judaism and even Christianity. It will therefore not be abnormal for any cultural group to establish links with outsiders through pacts of some sort.

Through the sacrament of Baptism, converts to Christianity are in reality agreeing to be part of the universal community of Christians which began with a conglomeration of people united by their common "idolization" of Jesus. Through the same Baptism, the new converts appropriate to themselves all the expectations that come with being members of the community that canonized Jesus as "saint." In our context, Baptism may be regarded as an initiation into the family of heterogeneous believers who accepted Jesus as a model worthy of being an ancestor that would inspire their lives. The sacrament brings people of different categories into a group that has the same mind as Christ Jesus and that has found it relevant to canonize the same person whom an earlier community (the Jews) did not find qualified to be sanctified.

Through their baptism, the Dagaaba converts unconsciously incorporated themselves into a multi-cultural group of people which, much in the same way as the Dagaaba look up to their ancestors for guidance and leadership, look up to Jesus as a model for both social and religious elevation. The "Jesus message" will therefore be better understood by the Dagaaba if centred on the "Jesus-model" rather than Christology. After all, up to this point their socio-religious conceptualization has been centred on the "family model" with the triumphant ones as leaders.

Since any evangelized group of people in accepting baptism does not identify themselves

with the cultures of the members of the Church universal but with the principles and ideologies in the Jesus-message, the Dagaaba, as the case is, either could get lost in the universal community of believers to which they form a part, or establish their identity and at the same time, hold on to the principles for which they joined the universal communion. Up to this point they have been left to float around without any possibility of being part of any of the cultures within the universal communion and at the risk of losing their self-identity. They constitute children of two worlds, one real and the other abstract, and are also holding on to two belief systems, one of which is also real and the other abstract. In rediscovering themselves, they will return to their country clinging to their model, and this time, they will be at ease in their old dispensation and will not be holding on to "alien models" i.e., models that are wrapped in foreign cultures and which the Dagaaba in ignorance accepted as one and the same as the Jesus-message. The "Jesus-model" that is brought home is a mere symbolism but through the faith of the believers and by the logical conclusion that Jesus is a universal model, acquires another reality over and above the long established ancestors. Christ then becomes an *ancestor par excellence* because of his universal nature over that of the Dagaaba ancestors whose jurisdiction is limited to a parish.[258] They will then be able to say much more meaningfully, "Jesus our ancestor" which will be supported by anthropological facts.

The phrase "Jesus our ancestor" will then be given the understanding that Jesus becomes a lineage member through a pact and that he has the same mind as the Dagaaba ancestors (because

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[258] Our description of Jesus as "ancestor par excellence" is not in conformity with Bujo's term "proto-ancestor" by which he meant Jesus as a unique ancestor, unique in the sense that he assumes in himself the whole of human history, as well as the "legitimate aspiration of our ancestors." See Benevet Bujo, "A Christocentric ethics for black Africa," Theology Digest 30 (1982), p.143-146. Such an opinion is clearly biased against the equal salvific ability of all religions.

they pre-dated his earthly existence), then together with the latter, the evangelized Dagaaba will meaningfully look up to him in communion with the rest of their ancestors, for socio-religious satisfaction. It is only in this context that the phrase "Jesus our ancestor" will have value in the Dagaaba Christian theology, without raising questions. Jesus will then be understood in the same centrifugal role as the ancestors of the Dagaaba.

Despite the opposition to describing Jesus as an ancestor, his ancestral status among the Dagaaba Christians may be seen from two complementary angles. On the one hand, as an imagery, as distinct from reality, Jesus as an "ancestor" may only be limited to its metaphorical usage but will still carry the same conceptualization as the biological ancestors. On the other hand, through a pact in Baptism, and through a careful description of the cultural settings, the term may be justified in the Dagaaba socio-cultural level. The baptismal act makes real the otherwise metaphorical usage of the phrase.[259] Jesus acknowledged his social and religious oneness with his followers when he taught them to call God "Our Father."[260] Since the Dagaaba Christians through baptism have entered into the family of Jesus and his followers, the ancestorship of Jesus in relation to them becomes all the more appropriate.

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[259] Writing on inculturation of liturgy and worship in Africa, Joseph Healey observed that in the Baptismal Ritual in Burkina Faso, "Emphasis on the vital element - life being at the center of the African perception of the universe - demands that the process of being born into the Christian community and of participating in Christ's life should highlight the role of the family or lineage (ecclesial community) and of parents (godparents). The link with the family ancestors (the saints) is stressed - the chief ancestor and the key person in the ceremony being Christ himself." See: Joseph Healey, "Inculturation of Liturgy and Worship in Africa," p.417.

[260] Matthew 6:9.

4. JESUS, THE DAGAABA ANCESTORS AND THE SAINTS

Jesus is to Christianity what the ancestors are to the Dagaaba traditional religion. Both command authority in their respective religions and most religious activities revolve around them. Subsequently, to the converted Dagao who once practised the traditional religion, the role of Jesus is first conceptualized in terms of the duties of the ancestors before being applied to Christianity. In other words, the "memory bank" of the Dagaaba and for that matter any evangelized people, is filled with that of their cultural practices and any other foreign culture is understood in terms of their own. Consciously or unconsciously, in their minds, Jesus has to be an ancestor of some sort. By their mentality, he has something to do with the ancestors and the ancestors have some relationship with him.

However, putting Christ and the ancestors in the presence of one another does not mean an identification. *Jesus is not the ancestor*. Jesus remains Jesus and the ancestors remain the ancestors. In the whole question of inculturation, one must avoid thinking in terms of the same. Otherwise, in the short term, this will reduce Christianity to traditional religion or vice versa, and in the long run, may result in the disappearance of one or the other. Christianity has come to bring the good news of Jesus and not to suppress the traditional African religious practices.

Placed among the ancestors, Jesus does not disappear nor does his mediation, because in term of the traditional religion, Jesus' mediation is different from that of the ancestors in terms of space and time, and does not compete with it. With the universality[261] of Jesus and the localization

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[261] Damian Lwasa also argued for the universality of Jesus' ancestry by relating the importance of blood-bond among the Ganda of Uganda to the Blood of Jesus as the source of the life of the Mystical Body and as the new Adam and

of the Dagaaba ancestors, the mediatory roles of Jesus and the ancestors may be seen in term of universal and regional, but the details are quite similar with the major difference being the redemptive role of Jesus. The mediation of the ancestors is not just imagined or dreamt about, it is real.

Three major categories of things that come to the Dagaaba from the Supreme Being through the real mediation of the ancestors include life, the land and culture. These three things form the totality of the Dagao - his religiosity, his psyche, his society and his being. For the Dagaaba, religion is the harmonization of these items with the supervision of the ancestors and spirits as is pleasing to the Supreme Being. The social structure of the tribe may be surmised as designed to supervise and maintain their life, land and culture.

First, each Dagao is truly linked to the Supreme Being from whom life comes to them through the mediation of a long ancestral line. Topping the list of petitions made by both individuals and community at large is the request for children and the continuous protection of the living in the community. Most petitionary prayers revolve around the sustenance and extension of life. Blessings are counted in terms of the multiplicity of lives brought into the community through procreation. Longevity is considered a blessing upon the individual and individuals become ancestors due to their role in bringing life into this world and sustaining it. After attaining superhuman powers, the ancestors continue to perform the duties they carried out while on earth, this time in association with other ancestors, and with the approval of the Supreme Being.

Because the Supreme Being is the originator of life, life is considered sacred and must be

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new head of the human race. See: D. Lwasa, "Traditional and Christian Community in Africa," p.142.

protected and preserved. It is in this light that suicide is condemned and any other activity that poses a threat to life is abhorred. Laziness, tail-bearing, pride, envy, anger, greediness, rape, just to mention a few, are some human inclinations which the Dagaaba society detest because of their life-threatening potential. The protection of life lies in the hands of both the visible and invisible members of the society, a duty that may even lead to the destruction of one life in order to protect and preserve those of many. Lynching and execution of notorious criminals among the Dagaaba must be seen and appreciated in the context of the sacredness of life. The only life worth living is the decent life (as assessed by their traditional standard of morality) and one life may be taken away either by the living or the ancestors, so that others may continue to have life.

Secondly, the land on which the Dagaaba depend as living creatures of the Supreme Being has in fact been conquered, cultivated and rendered habitable by their ancestors who have bequeathed it to them. Without the land, the Dagaaba would have been a nomadic community with the risk of fading out of existence, or probably with a culture different from the present. The land is the main source through which the life that is received through the ancestors may be sustained. Bequeathed pieces of land must therefore be maintained and preserved since they serve as "identity cards" for community members. A loss of one's land implies a loss of one's identity and by the same token the confiscation of family land by the *tendaana* implies an excommunication of the family concerned from the community. The land also serves as a material link between the living members of the community and their ancestors. Land prohibitions are therefore intended to ensure the potential of life sustenance for each member of the society and to preserve the link with the ancestors.

Finally, the culture of the Dagaaba has been transmitted to them by their ancestors who created and invented it in order to give meaning to their life. The land, life and culture are of utmost importance to most Africans and the ancestors' role of mediation in these areas is undeniable. Their mediatory role in African cultures therefore need no better definition, as Joseph Osei-Bonsu will want it,[262] than is demonstrated by the belief and practice.

The case of the Dagaaba is that Jesus has no intention of substituting himself for this three-fold mediation, for he himself is truly human like one of the Dagaaba. He himself received life from God his father, through a long ancestral line. He lived on and from Israel's soil and was of a particular culture and religion namely Jewish. Moreover, he himself offered thanksgiving to God his father through the mediation of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob his ancestors. It is therefore right that every person, Christian or not, should do what is fundamentally logical and *true*, that is, to communicate with God, through the real mediation of ancestors for the life, the earth and the culture.

Whatever may be the reality of the life of the ancestors, from an objective point of view, there is nevertheless a subjective aspect of their life which is in the opinion of the Dagaaba, verifiable: they inhabit the psyche of their descendants and for that reason they too must form a part of the process of evangelization. To avoid announcing the good news of Jesus through these ancestors under whatever pretext (for example, their incompatibility with Jesus because they belong to a pagan religion) is, in the context of the Dagaaba culture, tantamount to renouncing evangelization and therefore to not stimulating the depths of the psyche of the living.

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[262] Osei-Bonsu, "Biblically/Theologically Based Inculturation," p.355.

However, in bringing Jesus into the fold of the ancestors, some problems will arise based on differences in Christian doctrines and the world-view of the Dagaaba. Through the synthesis, not only will Jesus be one among many, but also the Christian doctrine which sees Jesus as the second person in the Godhead will conflict with the African practice of distinguishing the ancestors from the Supreme Being. However, since Jesus will be having the same role in the new environment as he does in non-African Christian traditions, the conflict tends to be negligible. If the ancestral mediation of Jesus is closely linked to and even rooted in the mystery of the Trinity because he was sent to the world by the Father,[263] the problem becomes more insignificant.

The role of the ancestors in their communities makes it easy to link them up with the communion of saints. Just as the memory of those in heaven (the communion of saints) is cherished in order to strengthen the fraternal charity between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant,[264] the African veneration of their ancestors seeks to establish a bond between members of the family who make no distinction between the living and the dead. The African practice of taking names after their ancestors will continue to feature in their Christian life with all the significance that go with that practice.[265]

However, like Jesus and the ancestors, the ancestors and the saints of Christianity must be kept separate and not put together, for that will lead to the disappearance of one or the other. The

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263 Charles Nyamiti, "Ancestor-based Ecclesiology and Ministry," in: Spearhead (AMECEA, Gaba Publications, 1991), No. 115, p.33.

264 Flannery (ed.), Documents of Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium, 50.

265 In other parts of the continent such as Zaire, Africans are already being baptised with their traditional African names - names which include those taken after ancestors, while less and less are getting baptised using foreign saints.

spiritual lives of the saints are stressed over and above their family lives, in fact, the families of the saints are not important to their veneration. On the other hand, the family life of the ancestors of the Dagaaba is stressed over their spirituality. It follows that if the saints and ancestors are brought together, the danger remains that either one or the other i.e, the family ties or spiritual life, will be stressed. In the case of the former, which will be the most probable thing among the Dagaaba Christians, the saints will disappear, while in the case of the latter, the ancestors.

François Kabasélé does not however think it appropriate to "paint" over African ancestors as saints to deserve veneration. Writing from the experience of the Bantu ancestors, he sketched out the main areas of applying the Bantu ancestors to Jesus Christ. He noted that the role of the Bantu ancestors in transmitting and safeguarding life is applicable to Christ who came to give life and to give it in abundance. Also, the ever-presence of the Bantu ancestors can be applied to Christ who said, "and behold, I am with you always (Mt.28:20b)." He also found Christ as fitting the category of the ancestors because "he is the synthesis of all mediation (Heb.8)." However, in a concluding remark, Kabasélé notes that such an equation would be:

> too facile an attempt at the rehabilitation of our Bantu Ancestors, proceeding from a good intention - that of reconciling salvation by Christ and the goodness of the Creator, who cannot reject those molded by the divine hands and stamped with the divine image of the simple `ill luck' that has befallen them of not having encountered God's son.[266]

In his opinion, one could manage to reconcile the Bantu Ancestors and the saints "without forcing the notion of `saints' in the Church and in taking care not to enclose Christ in structures, even when the latter have become Christian structures," for,

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[266] Kabasélé. "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.125.

> in the Christian Church, it is the martyrs who are the first objects of the devotion to the saints. The notion of *exemplarity for perseverance in faith in Christ*, then, is primary. The Christian saints are *witnesses* to the happiness experienced by the human being in being attached to Jesus Christ.[267]

He continued to argue that since the Bantu Ancestors have not known or experienced faith in Jesus Christ they cannot perform the role of witnesses or exemplarity for attachment to Christ.[268] In other words, the African ancestors cannot play the role of saints because they did not know Jesus and did not experience faith in him. "They can, however," he asserted, "perform the role of exemplarity for values which, while not originally Christian, can become Christian, somewhat as a latecomer to the dining room takes a vacant seat - the one reserved for this late arrival."[269] In his opinion, as new cultures encounter Jesus, various "vacant seats" in Christianity will be taken.

Kabasélé acknowledged that certain Bantu values such as those related to ancestor veneration will become Christian, by the fact that they will be experienced by Bantu Christians in synthesis that breaks neither with the Bantu nor with Christ, a synthesis over which the criterion of an unconditional, absolute love for God and their siblings ought to preside. He therefore sees no need in painting the Bantu Ancestors as saints to deserve veneration. Better to leave them as they are - founders of the society and reconcilers of human beings. They are intermediaries of the daily life of the people and they are on the way to fulfilment.[270]

This is a relic of the old conception that Christianity was at the centre of the world religions,

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267 Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.125 (emphasis made by the author).

268 Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.125.

269 Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.125.

270 Kabasélé, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p.125.

with all other religions revolving around it. It is this traditional way of seeing other religions that allow Kabasélé to erroneously consider the ancestors as "latecomers" to the divine banquet, for some ancestors predated some saints who are now occupying "regular" seats. Christianity did not abolish the old Jewish culture as portrayed by the Old Testament but went on to build on that. In the same way, Christianity could continue to survive in its new environments by building on the cultures of those societies.

The African values for which the Bantu ancestors can perform the role of exemplarity, though not originally Christian, can become Christian, not simply because the Bantu have become Christians, but because those values are accepted to be *compatible* with Christianity. They are no different from the values for which saints were and are canonized. In using the criterion of an unconditional, absolute love for God and their children as the synthesis that can cause Bantu values to become Christian, Kabasélé is in fact asserting that sainthood is not determined by witnessing to Christ but witnessing to and loving of one's community members. The love of God and one's neighbours is the fundamental principle behind all Christian values.[271]

By bringing the saints into the fold of the Dagaaba ancestors, Christianity receives an enhanced medium of communication between the Church Militant and God through the mediatorship of the ancestors who are by no means legendary. Rather than use the communion of Catholic saints who are "fictional" characters in the minds of the Dagaaba, thereby making Christianity as a whole an abstract religion, the medium of the communion of ancestors transforms Christianity in the minds of the evangelized, from an abstract to a concretely experienced religion.

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[271] Lk.10:27.

It is, for example, much more realistic for one to make petitions through an ancestor by the name Dapila who is a real figure and with whom one shares some experiences, than a saint called Bartholomew who, *it is told*,[272] once lived and was martyred. Christianity in the African continent will have only one faith to contend with - that of the Catholic creed - to the elimination of faith and trust in the personalities of the evangelizers and what they have to say on the communion of saints as models for Christian life. Bringing Christ into the communion of ancestors does not affect Christian ideals but rather support the argument that outside the Church there is salvation rather than the absolute and traditional opinion, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.[273]

Despite the abandonment of the concept that Christianity is at the centre of all religions, the shift has not yet been made in Christendom from Christo-centricism to theo-centricism. A proper inculturation process can complete the shift to the belief in all religions (African Traditional Religions included) revolving around the "wholly other"[274] or ultimate reality, rather than Christianity.

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272 Benedictine Monks, The Book of Saints, p.39.

273 See: Hans Küng, On Being a Christian (London: Collins, 1977), p.87-116; John Hick, God and the Universe of Faith: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1973), p.120-132; Kwesi Dickson, Theology in Africa (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), p.39-46.

274 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.25

5. DOES IT MEAN THE ANCESTOR FIGURES MAY BE KEPT?

In an earlier discussion, we attested to the carving of anthropomorphic figures during the final funeral rites of one deemed qualified to be an ancestor. The figure is often added to the general family collection and stored in a room in the house. Each morning and evening, the family head pours libation before the figures, asking for blessings and protection. There are also the occasional sacrifices to give thanks to the ancestors collectively for blessings and protection received over the years. Blood from sacrificial victims is poured on these wooden structures and feathers and fur stacked on them.

It is therefore not surprising that when the missionaries arrived in the area, they saw these figures, first as gods that are worshipped in their own right, and later with a better understanding, as habitats for the spirits of deceased persons. Both interpretations were seen as elements of polytheism and animism, deserving condemnation. As late as 1965, at a symposium organized by the University of Ghana, R. Laroche[275] in a five-point argument, vehemently argued that African ancestral veneration is entirely unacceptable to Christianity. In his opinion, (1) Africans credit the ancestors with powers which they do not possess; (2) the practice presupposes that the spirits of the dead intervene at will in human life - doing good or harm; (3) ancestor veneration relegates God to the background, even when the dead are regarded as intermediaries between men and the Supreme Being; (4) the souls of the departed are wholly dissociated with their living descendants and have no means of habitual relationship with them; finally, (5) the veneration of the ancestors give the

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[275] Robert Laroche, "Some Traditional African Religions and Christianity," p.289-307.

traditional religion an anthropocentric character, focused on this world and upon the personal interests of the living who judge spiritual beings in terms of whether they can do good or harm to human beings. Converts were called upon to destroy all figures made for their ancestors as a sign of turning away from "paganism." The argument for these figures as deities appears strong when the head of the family is seen as acquiring a typical priestly function by virtue of which he acts as a mediator. In the light of much more tolerant papal pronouncements,[276] coupled with the light shed on the veneration of ancestors by anthropologists and ethnologists, the above question becomes all the more pertinent in the Christianity of today.

From the Dagaaba point of view, the answer to our question is directly related to Rome's proclamations and decisions including the honouring of Confucius and the Chinese ancestral rites in December 8, 1939, the Japanese rites (May 26, 1936) and the Malabar rites (April 9, 1940). These rites were debated for a long time by the Catholic Church, and what ensued leading to their tolerance by the Church may well have been battles won not only for those specific cultures, but all other cultures with similar practices, such as that of the Dagaaba. It is important to mention that the fears that prevailed with regards to all the rites mentioned above were those of maintaining the purity of the Catholic faith.

Before the arrival of missionaries in China in the sixteenth century there was a practice of venerating the ancestors which consisted of an attempt to maintain and harmonize relation with nature, with humanity and with fellow humans, with the major emphasis being placed on the

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[276] See: Pope Paul VI, Africae Terrarum, 1968, #10-14;

harmonious regulation of relations between humans.[277] It has been noted that the Chinese society

> ... is governed by five fundamental relations: sovereign and subject, parents and child, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, friend and friend. There is harmony and order in society when the reciprocal duties which spring out of these relationships are observed. Neglect of these duties wounds the social organism, destroys the harmony of the universe, and thus does violence to the moral order.[278]

Dunne singled out the parent-child relationship as the most important of the five. This latter relation is governed by filial piety and was the fundamental factor upon which the stability and continuity of the society depended.

Filial piety could operate toward the living in the form of actual services rendered, but toward the dead, the virtue could operate only in the form of ceremonial acts symbolizing the abiding will to render such services. Wooden plaques (ancestral tablets) bearing the names of the ancestors substituted the place of respect to the living and to these ancestral tablets were directed expressions of respect and reverence. Foods offered to the ancestors on prescribed days of rituals were in the end consumed in a family banquet. Despite the apparent religious values of the ritual, as Dunne notes, the rite was nothing more than a civil exercise, much the same as the burning of incense and offering of food to the living.[279] It was also a social act of respect to kneel and bow profoundly till the forehead touched the floor. It was observed that even the neo-Confucianists who denied the survival of any human soul were most insistent upon the faithful observation of the

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277 George Dunne, Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the last Decades of the Ming Dynasty (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), p.287.

278 Dunne, Generation of Giants, 1962, p.287-288.

279 Dunne, Generation of Giants, p.290.

ancestral rites.[280]

For over three centuries, the Catholic Church debated over the Chinese ancestral rites, with the issue getting support and condemnation down the years. The rites were, for instance banned on November 20, 1704 by Pope Alexander VII, reaffirmed by Clement XI in 1715 and banned again in 1742 by Benedict XIV.[281] In 1939, when the Chinese government declared the ceremonies honouring Confucius as mere civil ceremonies, the Holy See was persuaded that the rites could be tolerated without endangering the purity of the faith. In the decree of December 8, 1939, the Vatican allowed Christians to participate in ceremonies honouring Confucius.

> Since the Chinese Government has several times openly declared that all are free to profess whatever religion they choose, and that it is far from their mind to issue laws or orders about religious matters; and that consequently the ceremonies in honour of Confucius which are either performed or ordered by the public authorities, are done not with view of offering religious worship, but solely in order to encourage and manifest due honour towards a great man and due observance toward ancient traditions: it is permitted to Catholics to be present at ceremonies of honor which are performed before an image or tablet of Confucius in Confucian temples or in schools. It is therefore, not to be considered forbidden to erect an image of Confucius or even a tablet inscribed with his name, in Catholic schools, ... or to bow the head to such image or tablet. If at any time there is danger of scandal, the right intention of Catholics in performing these acts should be declared.[282]

As the declaration indicates, a distinction is made between actions which are intended as a religious cult and those intended to honour the illustrious. A difference had to be made between the cult which is the expression of a religion and a homage which may be looked on as purely civil.

It will not be easy to classify the Dagaaba relation with their ancestors as either purely

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280 Dunne, Generation of Giants, p.290.

281 Dunne, Generation of Giants, p.299.

282 T. Lincoln Bouscaren, The Canon Law Digest: Officially Published Documents Affecting the Code of Canon Law, 1933-1942 (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1934), p.371.

religious or purely civil. In fact, it will be against that culture to attempt a classification since the culture itself does not know of a distinction. Similarly, debates on whether the ancestral figures are habitats for the spirits of the dead or gods in themselves do not serve any useful purpose to the African since the debate only establishes categories where there are none. Unlike Europeans who are strict in categorizing acts into worship/veneration, civil/religious, the African does not make a distinction.

Aside from the fact that the Chinese situation is distinct from that of the Dagaaba both in time and space, there are several factors in the socio-religious practices of the Dagaaba which argue against the ancestral figures being objects of worship and habitats for the spirits of the departed. As indicated earlier, the anthropologist Jack Goody[283] observed that among the Dagaaba, some ancestral figures that are destroyed may not be rebuilt if the persons for whom they were established cannot be recollected. He also acknowledged that occasional sacrifices are performed for all ancestors which undoubtedly include those whose figures are no more available to the living.

In our view, the two practices significantly point to the non-importance of the figures and probably weaken any interpretation which associate them with deities and habitats for the spirits of the dead. The general observation is that when the shrine of a deity is not rebuilt after destruction, the most probable indication is that either that deity has been failing in its duties as an intermediary or that its devotees have relocated and the present inhabitants of the area have no need for it. Such a deity may never receive sacrifices or be included in the chain of petition transmitters. It is therefore our opinion that the figures carved for the ancestor are neither habitats for the spirits of

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283 Goody, Death Property and the Ancestor, p.389.

the dead nor gods. Though a passer-by who sees a Dagao performing a sacrifice by the ancestral shrine may get the impression that the figures are being addressed directly and therefore see the practice as some form of worship of the figures, when one considers that the figures are not needed in order for rites associated with the ancestors to continue, their religious role become less important.[284]

From a religious perspective, the figures are best seen as symbolic representation of the ancestors rather than habitats of the spirits of deceased persons. The Dagaaba address the ancestors as they would speak to the living. They accuse the ancestors of unfair treatment and may question the appropriateness of their punishments. A frustrated patient may ask, "*Bong Ka eng e ye*?" (What have I done to you?). Unlike with the Supreme Being, communication between the living and the ancestors is more informal but at the same time, the latter are accorded great respect both through posture and speech. Prayers are not offered to the ancestors but through them. As conversation with the ancestors is one that lacks formality, there should be some tangible object present in which the living can envisage the ancestor concerned. The figures therefore are objects to which the family can direct their minds, and which the family can address as if the specified ancestors were themselves present. The figures symbolize the ever-presence of the ancestors and narrow the distance between the living and the dead while creating a union between those here and those in the here-after. The ancestor figures are crude "visual aids" for the Dagaaba, playing much the same role as the statue of St. Francis Xavier (or any other saint) erected in the campus of the Junior Seminary

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[284] The language of the Dagaaba reflects their world view and is dominated by figures of speech - common among which are metaphors. Their religious expressions must therefore be treated with caution when English terminologies such as deity, divinity, god/goddess etc., are used to interpret that religion and their objects of devotions.

of the Wa Diocese which gets adorned with flowers every December 3 when the students celebrate their patron's day.

In most religions of the world, there are icons that are used as focal-points to help the devotees in their religious concentration. The psychologist, Heije Faber interpreted a child's attachment to such things as teddy bears as an attempt to make the mother present. On the same level, he sees the use of images in religion as making God present for the believer.

> In religion the image is also an 'intermediate or transitional object.' Rationally speaking, the image can be seen as a representation. But even superficial observation shows that the emotional side is much more important. The *image makes the deity present* ... In the same way the Virgin Mary is represented by a statue or picture. It is carried about, it is decorated with flowers, candles are placed in front of it. And there are innumerable accounts of statues of the Virgin which have allegedly spoken. The icons of the Russian church too are the representations of a different reality. The believer uses them in prayer.[285]

Catholicism has the crucifix of Jesus and statues for Marian Devotion and for saints. On special occasions worshippers show their devotion to the personality concerned by either kissing or hugging his or her statue. During the Good Friday celebrations, Catholics kiss and hug the crucifix of Jesus and at the annual *acies* of the Legion of Mary, members approach the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with similar gestures. Individuals venerate their patron saints addressing them as if they where an end in themselves. It is difficult for an outsider to distinguish veneration from worship in most cases.

The Catholic Church professes that neither the crucifix nor the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints are habitats of the spirits of the personalities they portray. While accepting

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[285] Heije Faber, Psychology of Religion (London: SCM Press, 1976), p.166, (emphasis ours). Bernard Lonergan also thinks of images as real or imaginary objects that provoke feelings or are provoked by feelings. See: Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p.64.

extremes, the Catholic Church rejects any argument that the statues in that religion are ever worshipped, and the religion for that matter is not idolatrous. From as early as the time of St. Augustine of Hippo, a distinction was made between the worship of God and the veneration of saints. Proper worship due to God alone was referred to as *latria*, the saints received only veneration and were to be venerated not in themselves but only as possible channels of grace from God, *dulia*, while the honouring of the Blessed Virgin Mary was referred to as *hyperdulia*.[286] Accusations of idolatry from sister Protestant Churches have not forced the Catholic Church into abandoning the statues of Jesus and the saints. Most of the so-called "great" religions of the world will subscribe to the same position as the Catholic Church in relation to their icons.

In answer to the question under discussion, it will only take a prejudiced opinion and a contradiction of her own pronouncements for Catholicism to respond in the negative. To associate the African figures with meanings other than one holds of one's religious icons will be to approach the African traditional practices with some biases and a prejudiced mind. The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda[287] affirmed that a cultural phenomenon, even if it is religious in origin, does not constitute a fundamental obstacle to purity of faith, whereas an essentially religious rite may be incompatible with the demands of the Gospel. It therefore declared as wrong any proscription, in the name of faith, of customs which are characteristic of a civilization and which in fact have

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[286] Wilson, Saints and their Cults, p.4. The Catholics' use of the word 'worship' is therefore relative while that of the Protestants is absolute and is used strictly of God alone.

[287] Propaganda Fide, Collectanea Sacred Congr. de Propaganda Fide, Vol.1, NO 135 (1659), p.42.

nothing to do with religious life.[288]

On civil grounds, practices in Africa which seem like cults are also translations of their sociological structures and symbolisms. Writing from the experience of the highlanders of Northern Cameroon, Jean-Marc Ela writes:

> It is enough to emphasize one point: in black Africa belief in the ancestors is too linked with multiple factors of the traditional form of society for its abandonment to do anything other than trigger off an overall crisis in social structure .... Moreover, a Christian who abruptly breaks with sacrifice to the ancestor would run the risk of compromising the unity of the tribe. He must therefore take account of the `others' who do not follow the word of God. In particular, he must respect his lineage chief. He cannot cut himself off abruptly from his brothers in the clan and renounce his bonds of kinship.[289]

This observation is equally true of the Dagaaba society. The ancestors were social beings before they attained a religious status and the ancestral figures may well be derived from the context of their socio-political activities. The Dagaaba prefer a face to face communication with each other and it is not uncommon for somebody to make repeated trips to the house of an elder till he meets and sits down with him for a discussion. To leave behind a message of appreciation or thanksgiving is in fact not to be thankful for services received.

Ancestor figures are therefore in consonance with the Dagaaba psycho-social system. A family member needs the visible sign of the presence of the ancestors to make sure that his or her intended appreciation does not turn out to be one of inappreciation. Services rendered apparently to the piece of art will certainly imply that the family members expect reciprocity. However, since

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[288] Pope John XXIII reiterates this view when he writes: "Wherever artistic and philosophical values exist which are capable of enriching the culture of the human race, the Church fosters and supports these labors of the spirit." See: Pope John XXIII, "Princeps Pastorum (1959)," p.47, #19.

[289] Ela, "Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem," p.45.

the icon is obviously not able to provide any service, the action must therefore be seen as being rendered to powers beyond the piece of wood, to personalities with the ability to reciprocate.

To answer the question in the affirmative is not to introduce into Christianity elements foreign to that religion and thereby endanger its purity.[290] Rather, the communion of ancestors have much to enrich the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints: the gulf between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant will be narrowed to one of informal relationship and expand petitions to include the material needs of the devotees. Prayers will be honest and will be concerned with the well-being of the people, their survival and their health.[291] The civil aspect of the communion of saints will also come into play. The traditional belief on the role that the ancestors play in the life of the people can be used to emphasize participation of the whole Church in the celebration of the Eucharist.[292]

In the other direction, the Dagaaba traditional practice which does not have a well developed concept of eschatology will be streamlined. There will be an avenue to pray for those deceased family members who for one reason or the other are not expected to reach the land of the living. The traditional concept which describes them as "wandering-ghosts" who will die again after some time and be reborn so as to have a second chance to live lives worthy of admittance into the land

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290 Karl Müller sees such an initiative in the process of inculturation as a "concretization without which the word of God cannot become 'human.'" See: Karl Müller, "Inculturation and Evangelization," Indian Missiological Review 12 (1990), p.30.

291 K. David Glenday, "Acholi Ancestor-Veneration and the Communion of Saints," African Ecclesial Review 18 (1976), p.230.

292 Joseph Healey noted that among some tribes in Kenya, the canonized saints are Christian ancestors, and great importance is given to the clan and family ancestors. See: Joseph Healey, "Inculturation of Liturgy and Worship in Africa," 1986, p.418.

of the living, will be developed by the Catholic concept of purgatory.

From the history of Christianity in China, Dunne pointed out that the main reason for discouraging Christian association with the Chinese ancestral rites was that Christians interpreted them in superstitious sense. When the rite was banned by the papal Bull Ex quo singulari, he noted that "the Church was forced to assume a posture that seemed hostile to the Chinese environment. Instead of leaven Christianity became a foreign substance in the body of Chinese social culture. It meant the effective ending of the policy of cultural adaptation."[293] The synthesis of the Dagaaba ancestral rites will eliminate hostilities and suspicion between Christianity and the traditional practices, and allow for a genuine inculturation.

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[293] Dunne, Generation of Giants, p.300.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis was to examine one particular area of interaction between traditional African religion and the, for Africa, new religion of Catholic Christianity, and to suggest a course through which the two traditions can arrive at a point where the new converts to Christianity can be both truly Christian and truly African. The area chosen for the study was ancestor veneration as it was and is practised by the Dagaaba of Upper West Ghana.

In order to circumscribe the cultural context of the Dagaaba, the thesis began with a description of their geographical and historical background. This was followed by an account of the religious dimensions of their world view and some of their social activities.

The discussion of the meeting and interaction between Christianity and Dagaaba religion focused on the missionary activities in the area. Two periods are distinguishable. The first period was the time when foreign missionaries were in control of the propagation of the Christian faith; the second, the time when native clergy became responsible for the missions. The foreign missionaries tried to be diplomatic in their approach in order to avoid confrontation, although they were uncompromising in the face of certain customary practices of their new converts. However, the native missionaries evinced even stronger opposition to traditional religion for a variety of reasons. Among them were above all the training which they had received from foreign missionaries during their studies in the seminary, their fear of "losing face" with their congregations if they tolerated traditional practices that had been rejected by the foreign missionaries, and their financial dependence on the Vatican.

As in other periods and places, it has become clear now in Africa that traditional methods of evangelization frequently do not lead to genuine conversion. The Catholic Church is aware of

this and has tried to take it into account in its research and official pronouncements. The new way of interaction between the Church and indigenous African cultures is termed "inculturation." The meaning and implications of the latter were discussed on the basis of ecclesiastical documents and published research.

An analysis of the ways in which the Diocese of Wa tried to "inculturate" Christianity in the traditional population showed that its attempts were largely unsuccessful. The reason for this was the unwillingness on the part of the clergy to take into account the fundamental elements that centre around the ancestors and the rites connected with them. The discussion of the Dagaaba's beliefs and practices related to their ancestors showed, on the one hand, the centrality of the latter in the life of the Dagaaba, and, on the other, important similarities with Christian attitudes towards the saints. Both Dagaaba ancestors and Christian saints are community heroes that were "sanctified" by the group from which they hailed. They are models for the members of the respective communities. The images of the ancestors and saints are meant to establish a lasting memory of the heroes and make them ever-present. Both the Dagaaba sculptures and their ancestors and the statues of Christian saints are placed in locations where they are easily accessible, i.e. either the house or the church.

As a result of this analysis it can confidently be stated that the integration of Dagaaba ancestor veneration with the Christian cult of the saints would be a vital step towards inculturation. If the Church were to allow the ancestors to play the role which in Christianity traditionally is played by the saints, Dagaaba Christians would become fully Christian and at the same time they would not feel that they have to abandon their African roots. The elements that play a vital part here

are the naming of children after Dagaaba ancestors rather than European saints to whom the Africans have no relationship; the saying of prayers that include the ancestors; the celebration of the Eucharist in the consciousness that living and dead form the community of the faithful; and the performing of family rituals that involve past and present members.

To adopt this course of action would not be a radical break with what the Church has introduced in other countries and on other continents. In such Latin America countries as Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador, for instance, the synthesis has already taken place and the veneration of the ancestors plays an integral role in the liturgy of the Church.

From my own experience I know that the co-existence of the veneration of the ancestors among the Dagaaba with the Christian cult of the saints would readily be accepted if it were introduced. As at now many African Christians observe ancestor rites and do not see it as inconsistent with their Christian beliefs. However, this is not to say that there would be no opposition to such a move, especially from older members of the Christian community. But gradually the congregations would realize that the adoption of the new practices is bound to result in a Christianity that is not foreign to the Dagaaba but one in which they can feel at home.

The Synod of African Bishops rightly has called for more research into African cultural practices. Some of the areas in need of deeper exploration have been mentioned in this thesis because they are closely related to, although different from the question of ancestor veneration. They are the mediatory role of the lesser divinities, the inter-relationship between the worshippers of the Supreme Being, and the religious dimensions of many of the African social activities.

The local clergy must be exposed to the findings of this research. Some members of the

African clergy know little about their own culture and are therefore in no position to foster true inculturation. If the traditional rites are properly understood, parallel rites become unnecessary. In many cases the parallel rites in fact misrepresent the intended meaning of the traditional rites. The study of African religions must become part of the seminary training. The current avoidance of things traditional only widens the gap between the clergy and the members of their congregations who are much more knowledgeable in the African traditions than the clergy. Together clergy and lay persons must embark on the road towards inculturation. The process itself must be informed by thorough research into the genuine meaning of the beliefs and practices of Africans in view of the teachings of Christianity. It is hoped that the present thesis has made a contribution towards this goal in the crucial area of the veneration of ancestors.

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