

# Christian - Chagga Afterlife Beliefs: Pertinent Tensions

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**Resumen:** En la tarea de cumplir el mandato del Señor de anunciar el Evangelio a todo el mundo, el cristianismo se ha encontrado con otras culturas que poseen una concepción diferente de la creencia en la otra vida. El cristianismo tiene su propia antropología y escatología, con su comprensión propia de la realidad del más allá caracterizada por lo que le ocurre al individuo inmediatamente después de la muerte y lo que se refiere a la consumación comunitaria en la Parusía de Cristo. El autor de este artículo examina a los cristianos Chagga de Rombo que han recibido la fe cristiana, basada esta en el evento de Cristo, mientras que el pueblo Chagga se caracteriza por su creencia dominada por los antepasados y los muertos vivientes. El presente artículo abordará la cuestión de cómo conciliar estas dos creencias que parecen estar bien arraigadas en la vida espiritual del pueblo Chagga.

**Palabras clave:** Escatología, fe, Chagga, antropología, muerte, más allá, cultura, religión, África.

**Abstract:** In fulfilling the commandment of the Lord to share the Gospel to the entire world, Christianity has encountered other cultures with different comprehension regarding the afterlife belief. Christianity has its own anthropology and eschatology. It has different understanding of the afterlife reality characterized with it: that which occurs to the individual immediately after death and what is concerned with the communitarian consumation in the Parousia of Christ. The author of this paper is examining the Chagga Christians of Rombo who have received Christian faith with its own belief on the afterlife dominated by Christ event while the Chagga people have their belief dominated by the ancestors and the living-dead.

How to reconcile the two beliefs which seem to be well rooted in the spiritual life of the Chagga people is the key question of this paper.

**Key words:** Eschatology, faith, Chagga, anthropology, death, afterlife, culture, religion, Africa.

## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to examine how the Chagga Christians manage to live the Christian eschatology and that of the African Traditional Religion almost simultaneously. It will be a kind of comparative and synthetic study of the two beliefs. The term eschatology is used here to refer to the situation of the human being after this earthly life, while aware that the term has a long historical development in Christian theology with different conceptions and contents from what is found in African Traditional Religion's belief on the afterlife.

It will begin with a discussion on man and his relation to the different dimensions of time, followed by a brief presentation of the Chagga anthropology, for maybe in this aspect, is rooted the reason for their religious activities. From these anthropological presuppositions will follow a discussion on the Chagga religious perspectives especially those in tension with Christian eschatology. A brief and synthetic discussion on the possibility of reconciling the two eschatologies will follow dwelling on the theme of discontinuity and continuity, true conversion and that of the ultimate end of man. A discussion on the manner of communicating the Gospel (alternative for the Chagga people) will be presented because the way the Gospel has been communicated and accepted may affect the Chagga process of conversion to Christ. This paper will be concluded with a reflection on the foundation on which the Gospel is communicated as part and parcel of God's offer of salvation to all human beings, and at the same time recognizing that God elevates and facilitates this human being for the acceptance of his call while respecting his freedom.

### **1. Man and his Future**

The today of man is a magnitude unceasingly triggered by the tomorrow, a provocation which elicits the invocation of this tomorrow and the

tendency towards it<sup>1</sup>. Man is constitutively a being, which tends towards the future in such a way that it is not easy to find a normal human being who lives without self-questioning about his tomorrow or about the proximate future and about the distant future; and this about himself, his family, work, projects and aspirations<sup>2</sup>.

However, not all kinds of future understanding coincide with the genuine human future<sup>3</sup>. Ruiz de la Peña warns that two elements operating dialectically are necessary for having a genuine human future: that of continuity and novelty in order to avoid falling into regressive and bi-dimensional temporality<sup>4</sup>. It means that any authentic future must have some kind of continuity because a total discontinuity between the present and the future would eliminate the identity of the cases, resulting into a future totally alien and strange to the present<sup>5</sup>. The future then should be the total, realization of that which is virtually present, the hatching of that which is actually in gestation, the deployment of the dynamic potentiality included in the actual form of that which is real, and if it is not like this, that is not a human future<sup>6</sup>. This questioning becomes critical especially when death takes its toll touching the very close members: what will happen to them or is this event the end of everything or there is some kind of hope?<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, it is not possible not to find in the men of all epochs an attitude of considering death as an absurd interrupter of life, while at the same time finding the conviction that in the unity and totality formed by life and death, always it is life that results stronger. Due to this, there have been many ways of presenting the future hope in this afterlife using different images, symbols and signs. Different cultures and religions in the world have developed and elaborated their proper images of hope on the situation after this life<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. RUIZ DE LA PEÑA, Juan Luis, *La pascua de la creación. Escatología* (Madrid 1996), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio* (hence then FR) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. RUIZ DE LA PEÑA, Juan Luis, *La pascua*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. RUIZ DE LA PEÑA, Juan Luis, *La pascua*, 3; GRESHAKE, Gisbert, *Más fuertes que la muerte* (Santander 1981) 17.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. GRESHAKE, Gisbert, *Más fuertes que la muerte*, 85.

The question about the distant future or remote future cannot be separated from the human being and his life or in other words the present of man cannot be disconnected when speaking about his future<sup>9</sup>. When man formulates the question about the future is an indication that he maintains himself as a historical being, as someone who is not complete in himself alone, recognizing that he can achieve or not achieve his goal. Some are convinced that man would not initiate any task or any activity or conceive any project if in his inner most being, there were not to exist an orientation towards the future as something capable of producing satisfaction and gain sometimes and in other cases deceptions and loss<sup>10</sup>.

Generally, the question about what is to come touches the proximate future or that which is foreseeable; it does not embrace all the reality, rather only the determined sectors of life which are potentially attainable. The question becomes serious when the event of death is to be addressed because before this mystery, it is not only the question of proximate or distant future, rather fundamentally the question of the ultimate future, because the hoped future in this case is not in the manner of the ordinary proximate future regarding some aspects of human life to be tackled such as aspirations which may be satisfied or not within the limits of human's life<sup>11</sup>. The question of the ultimate future in relation to death is critical because it embraces the whole man's being and his destiny. This ultimate future embraces and completes all, and it is capable of giving sense and meaning even to those realities, which from man's point of view, do not have sense or any hope, including death itself. This ultimate future is capable of assuring fulfilment and full realization to all that has fragmentary or incomplete development and capable of conquering even death. Without this ultimate future hope the human life and even more concretely human history would have become absurd<sup>12</sup>.

About the question of the afterlife, different societies have tried to speak about it and provided different responses using different images to explain the reality of their afterlife expectations. Such images should not

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. RAHNER, Karl, *Foundations of Christian Faith. An introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York 1989) 432.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. GRESHAKE, Gisbert, *Más fuertes que la muerte*, 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *GS* 18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *FR* 1.

be interpreted and understood as if they give information about the future events dominating in the afterlife. It means that the one who hopes does not hope in things rather in a situation characterised with that ultimate future in which something better and immeasurable in comparison to the present world is expected<sup>13</sup>. For example, in the cultures which believe that their ultimate future lies in reuniting with their ancestors and their living dead forming their community in the afterlife is one way of giving meaning to their life in this present world and especially in responding to the enigma of death, because on this hope they will be empowered to move forward in their daily life<sup>14</sup>. Bujo describes this situation in some cases of Africa as follows:

Dying people therefore are conscious that they participate in the life-force of the ancestors. There is no question of despair in the face of death, and no sense that one is being deprived life. The dying African, especially one in authority, who is conscious that he or she has lived a life according to the traditional rules, sets out on the journey to the land of the ancestors in full confidence that he or she will be received into their community<sup>15</sup>.

It is the same manner for the Christian tradition whose ultimate future lies on the belief on a personal God who invites man to be in communion with Him through Christ in the Spirit<sup>16</sup>. Though it uses different concepts in elaborating this ultimate reality, what moves them is the hope that they will achieve the full realization of their aspirations, personally and communally in the love of God. Though immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body are in principle two images of hope which may seem to be totally different, surely they have helped in the Christian faith to express the hope that there is life beyond death<sup>17</sup>. For the Greeks, the principle which survives death is found in the proper human being; man has an immortal soul which overcomes death. For the Hebrews it is the contrary because the antidote against death is found outside man, in the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 22-30.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions Philosophy* (Nairobi, 1995), 25-27; LEMA, A.A., "Chagga Religion and Missionary Christianity on Kilimanjaro: The Initial Phase 189-1916", in: SPEAR, T. – KIMAMBO, I. N. (eds.), *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford 1999), 46.

<sup>15</sup> BUJO, B., *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi 1992), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hence then CCC) 1701-1709.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. CULLMANN, Oscar, *La inmortalidad del alma*, 5-73.

power of God to resurrect him. The two beliefs (immortality and resurrection) have become key elements in the Christian understanding of life-after-death because departing from the resurrection of Christ, man's body will be raised and this, once with its soul, the man will come before the presence of God for either eternal enjoyment with God or eternal missing of this divine enjoyment<sup>18</sup>.

In man there is a power that drives him toward the infinity as if he has been tied to it, the desire for happiness put in the heart of man by God with the aim of attracting him towards him<sup>19</sup>, but this does not remove the profound ambiguity of his experience for in one part there are signs indicating the provisional character of death and on the other side due to the senselessness of the death, man has to accept that he does not see clearly by his own power the possibilities he may have in order to overcome the power of death and to make real the drive which he experiences towards the infinity<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, emerges the necessity to search for a power capable of withdrawing man from falling into nothing, leading him to that which has been destined, a divine and creative power. This demand of a power capable of making real the experiences and aspirations of the finite being towards the infinite being finds its response in the Christian hope founded in the resurrection of Jesus or in general in the Christ event<sup>21</sup>.

Christian ultimate hope cannot be separated from the actual life. It is obvious that living by the power of love and sustained by hope has as its end communion with God, not only in a future heaven rather already in the present. The communion with God is inseparable from the communion with the brothers for we cannot say that we love God if we do not love our fellow men<sup>22</sup>. To love our neighbour is to desire their good and to work efficaciously for them<sup>23</sup>. So hope is called to make the people act in their vocation as responsible builders of the earthly city, and to sustain

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. GRESHAKE, Gisbert, *Más fuertes que la muerte*, 86-87.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, CCC 1718.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. GRESHAKE, Gisbert, *Más fuertes que la muerte*, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, CCC 1701.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. MOLERO, J.B., "La acción temporal en la esperanza de los bienes futuros": *TyC* 130/III (2014) 188-191.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Pope FRANCIS, *Christus vivit* (hence then CV) 7; MOLERO, J.B., "La acción temporal", 190.

such activities for the development of all in and for all the generations, aware that man lives his hope working for the kingdom not simply to make the world a better place, rather through it the works of God may be realized<sup>24</sup>.

This perspective is different from the response given by the Chagga people to the question about their ultimate hope or their afterlife whose answer is found in their belief that after this life their ultimate hope is to be with their ancestors and their living-dead forming the community of intermediaries between the living and God<sup>25</sup>. The question here is whether these two positions can be brought together in the same person and form part of his spiritual life<sup>26</sup>. We know that for the Christians, the ultimate hope has adapted the already mentioned two positions immortality of the soul<sup>27</sup> and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the fundamental of what they hope, knowing that they are not the end in themselves because resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul have as their end, the salvation of the entire man, in his being in communion with God<sup>28</sup>.

## 2. Chagga anthropological perspectives

Who is man for the Chagga? This study will dwell in the Chagga language usage alone in order to get their real conception of man without external influences. In the Chagga dialect of Rombo the term *mndu* refers to the human being. This *mndu* operates in the visible world because of *mó*. This *mó* is the one which leaves *mndu* at death and this *mndu* enters into another dimension known as *var'imu* or *warumu*. The proof of the existence of *mó* is through the heart beat, breath and body warmth and

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. MOLERO, J.B., "La acción temporal", 190-191.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 23-24; MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> Some authors would claim that it is not possible unless efforts are made to reconcile the two perspectives while others would prefer strict adherence to the African cultural forms as the case of THOMAS, D. E., *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World* (Jefferson <sup>2</sup>2015), 15, 19. The majority of the moderate authors opt for the inculturation of the Gospel in the context of Africa.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, CCC 1703: endowed with a spiritual and immortal soul, man from his conception is destined to eternal blessedness.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, GS 24.

this even when there is no sign of movement. *Mó* is the force that enables this *mndu* to be a living being in the sense of *bios*. This *mó* includes also *nafsi* which normally is the element that distinguishes the human beings from the brutes because it is associated with *uloosu* (intelligence or rationality). This *mó* is found in all creatures with life and not restricted to human beings but they know that the *mó* of the brutes does not have *uloosu*<sup>29</sup>. *Mó* should not be confused with *ngoo* (heart) though sometimes it can cause confusion because when one dies it is said “*mó sho ukaba se ku*” – “the heart is no longer beating”; which refers to the heartbeat normally realized through the heart but the force itself is not believed by them to be the heart (*ngoo*). But *ngoo* (heart) is closely associated with the *mó* for normally when the heart stops beating the *mó* is no longer there and the *mndu* is taken to be dead in the visible world. Once the *mó* leaves the *mndu*, a journey towards the invisible world began because the disappearance of *mó* does not mean that the *mndu* disappears rather this *mndu* continues with his history and qualities in the invisible world invisibly as *var’imu*. *Mndu* enters the dimension of the dead as *var’imu* who is an invisible dead *mndu* (with invisible body but representing the same *mndu* who lived in the visible world).

Even after death and even after the corruption of the physical body *mndu* has the ability to relate with its particular body (now invisible). Due to this, is the belief that having the remains of the dead *mndu* is to have the whole *mndu* because *mndu* is always linked with its body invisibly especially with the skull and this may be the reason for the Chagga people to keep always the skull in the shrines of the bones<sup>30</sup>. Hence *var’imu* has

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<sup>29</sup> Trying to use the Christian anthropology terms, we can say that *mó* consists of life (*bios*) and irrational soul for the brutes, while for the human beings *mó* consists of life (*bios*) and *uloosu* or rationality or call it rational soul, *nafsi* (person) or all the spiritual aspect of man which operates in the flesh of man. The Chagga do not distinguish *spirit*, *life* and *person*; all these are considered in man as *mó*. And these are the ones which leaves the visible body at death and join with it after the process of death and integration in the afterlife, but they will never refer to them as *mó* in the invisible world or after death, rather as *mndu efiye* that is a dead human being or *var’imu* (living-dead).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. HASU, P., “For Ancestors and God: Rituals of Sacrifice among the Chagga of Tanzania”: *Eth.* 48/III (2009) 195-213, 196; DUNDAS, C., *Kilimanjaro and its People. A History of the Wachagga, their Laws, Customs and Legends, together with some Accounts of the Highest Mountain in Africa* (London <sup>2</sup>1968), 193-195.



the same *mndu* as the one existed in the visible world that is why it is believed that it can appear and be recognized by the living members. The identity of the *mndu* continues to be maintained because of this invisible *mndu*, the result of the transformation occurred with death. It is from this reason they believe that the dead family members form a family in the afterlife and there they can enjoy the sacrifices and offerings of the living offered to them and are capable of influencing the life of the living positively and negatively.

Some beliefs give the impression that the visible *mndu* in some cases may join the world of the ancestors and the living-dead or in the afterlife without passing through the door of death. This claim can be substantiated by the belief on the reality of *ichondokya* (to submerge alive into the world of the ancestors or to pass into the afterlife without suffering death). The relation between the *mndu* and *mó* is believed to be so strong that some people are believed to enter the world of the ancestors entirely without passing through the door of death, without the decaying of the body. Of interest here is that this belief shows how these people think of the afterlife status which allows even physical bodies to be there and not only the transformed bodies after death as *var'imu* (living-dead). Even with this for the Chagga it is not found a belief that the *mndu* would exist as an autonomous pure spiritual element without associating it with a material element of identity though invisibly. There is always a belief that the invisible *mndu* after death represents the visible *mndu* before death.

If the Chagga are asked for their understanding of death they would answer that death moves one from this visible world to the invisible world of the ancestors and the living-dead. What happens with *mndu* at death? The *mó* leaves the visible *mndu* who now joins the invisible world as invisible *mndu*. After the burial the invisible *mndu* initiates the journey of integration in the invisible world as a *var'imu* or *warumu*. They do not think that at death everything disappears rather transformed into another reality invisible to the living but it can appear to them as *var'imu* in case of demanding of sacrifices or certain ceremonies required or correcting some misbehavior in the family. An evil *var'imu* is believed to be very dangerous for its living family members if its wishes are not fulfilled.

To simplify this then *mndu* operates in this body in the visible world through *mó*. When this *mó* is no longer there this *mndu* together with all

his spiritual activities leaves the body and initiates a journey towards the world of the ancestors which culminates in rejoining with its transformed invisible body and initiates a new existence as *var'imu* now together with the ancestors and the living-dead. That is why the rituals associated with the dead are taken seriously in order to make sure that the visible *mndu* continues in the invisible world harmoniously. Relying on the Chagga language we cannot speak of soul and body, or intellectual or rational soul. All these are included in the notion of *mndu*. *Mndu* has these qualities whether dead or alive only with the different that when alive he is visible and after death he possess them invisibly<sup>31</sup>.

The reason behind these may be found in the following words of Mbiti,

For the majority of the African peoples, the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form. This means that personalities are retained, social and political statuses are maintained, sex distinction is continued, human activities are reproduced in the hereafter, the wealth or poverty of the individual remains unchanged, and in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present life. Although the soul is separated from the body it is believed to retain most, if not all, of the physical-social characteristics of its human life<sup>32</sup>.

## 2.1. What is the relationship between *mndu* and God?

From their religious practices it can be said that God has a little place to play directly in their life because even the ceremonies and especially sacrifices and offerings are directed to the ancestors and the living-dead alone; they do not really have a direct cult to God<sup>33</sup>. Though God is be-

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<sup>31</sup> These reflections are the result of the author's research and study of the Chagga people. It is not easy to find the Chagga people dealing with these questions, rather they can be extracted from their religious practices and especially the way they administer the rituals and different ceremonies. For example, when the elders are asked the reason for celebrating the ceremony of bringing the dead person back from the maternal clan, the answers helped to understand their concept of man.

<sup>32</sup> MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> There are some scholars in African thought who maintain different position but my study of the Chagga of Rombo indicates that they do not offer sacrifice to God nor

lieved to be the origin of man, does not play a direct big role in their religious life because of the role played by the intermediaries in the figure of the ancestors and the living-dead who are believed to be the receiver and transmitter of life and who are believed to be the ultimate end of this life transmitted<sup>34</sup>. Man's vocation is not to be with God rather to be with the living-dead and the ancestors who are the ultimate end<sup>35</sup>.

The Chaga perspectives do not promise a better future world rather the world of the ancestors and since ancestors are of the past it means they resort to the good past. Man is called to live in the world according to the norms established by the ancestors and finally to join them in their community believed to be close to God and to continue with their role as intermediaries for the living. As it can be seen, this world view is anthropocentric but does not mean that God is not within it because the Chagga believes that when they honour their ancestors, they act implicitly somehow honoring God<sup>36</sup>.

Mbiti claims that the emphasis on the ancestors and the living-dead who form part of the past may make it difficult for the Chagga people as many other African people to entertain a glorious hope to which mankind may be destined<sup>37</sup>. It is even harder when things go well with the individual and community, for example when there is good harvest, the couples have children and when there is good health, because it means that they are in harmony with the ancestors and thus they have approached something of the original state, making them not bother with God rather concern themselves with the ancestors offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for their well-being<sup>38</sup>. It is only when things are not going well that they will generally turn to God and this after assuring themselves that the ancestors have failed<sup>39</sup>.

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really have a cult to God. All the religious spheres are associated with their living-dead. I could not find a place dedicated to God except the reverence rendered to Kibo as a holy place where God dwells but they do not have a particular cult to this God. I insist that this does not mean that God is not believed to be there but he has left all tasks to the ancestors and the living dead.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 41-45.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 22-23.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 98.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 45-46.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 98.

## 2.2. The Achilles tendon of the Chagga Traditional Religion

Mbiti sees behind this transient foretaste of the original state and bliss of man, the enticing and unattained gift of the resurrection, the loss of human immortality and the threat of death to be the place where the African traditional religion and philosophy have to admit inadequacy because they have not been able to provide solutions. For him, maybe it is in this point that we may find the greatest weakness and poverty of the traditional religions in Africa in comparison to the other world religions: it does not offer for mankind at large a way of escape or a message of redemption<sup>40</sup>.

Mbiti asks himself whether it is not in this very issue, that the other religions have made a universal appeal and won adherents from all mankind. He seems to be convinced, though indirectly through questioning, that religion becomes universal only when it has been able to abandon the cradle of looking towards the past with all its mythological riches and makes break-through towards the future with all the promises of redemption. This redemption for him involved the rescue from death, regaining immortality and attaining the gift of resurrection. For it is in this area that the world religions may hope to conquer African traditional religions and philosophy not so much by coercion rather by completing in adding this new element of future redemption to the two dimensional life and thinking of the African traditional religion<sup>41</sup>.

Mbiti may have reason in this case because the afterlife among the Chagga, as it is to some extent for the other African peoples, is almost characterized by the present realities, and is like its carbon copy<sup>42</sup>. The ancestors are believed to control both worlds, while it is known that many of the customary norms claimed to be placed by the ancestors are oppressive and unfair<sup>43</sup>. There is no new hope here, it is to move from the same world and enter in the same world, and the subjects are the same. It is easy for the Chagga people as well as the other Africans to be attracted with

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 80, 161.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. KIMAMBO, I.N., "The Impact of Christianity among the Zaramo", in: SPEAR – KIMAMBO (ed.), *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford 1999), 75-76.

the world religions especially Christianity<sup>44</sup>. For the Chagga this is even more attractive for they believe that Ruwa dwells up there in the sky; thus they seem to be comfortable to the presentation of Christianity about heavens, hell and purgatory, which are not found in their perspectives<sup>45</sup>. If they considered that Ruwa (God) dwells on the top of Mount Kilimanjaro<sup>46</sup>, it can be said that for them to be with that God is more consoling than being with the ancestors in their world which is almost similar to that of the living and may be with the same dissatisfactions. There is no fulfillment in the world of the ancestors for they rely on the living members to assure their continuity and their existence<sup>47</sup>. “The personal immortality of the living-dead is for all practical purposes dependent on his progenies”<sup>48</sup>.

Regarding the Chagga anthropological perspectives, we can say that the afterlife belief is strong among the Chagga people but it does not form or constitute a hope for a future and better life. They do not hope for a paradise or hell or purgatory. If we denote the invisible *mndu* as soul then we can affirm that it neither longs for spiritual redemption, nor for a closer contact with God in the world to come just as it is for African traditional religion in general<sup>49</sup>. We do not find in them the messianic hope or the apocalyptic visions in which God will step in at some future time to bring about the reverse of man’s actual history and thus to change the condition of life for the better<sup>50</sup>.

This understanding of man and his ultimate vocation according to the Chagga people can help in understanding their afterlife belief but especially their current religious practices and the place given to the ancestors and the living-dead in their life. It is of capital importance to recognize

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 99. Thomas maintained the opposite position from that of Mbiti regarding this because for him it is “Neither Christianity nor Islam has provided Africans with the security available to them within their own sacred traditions”. Also see THOMAS, *African Traditional Religion*, 111.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., “Chagga Religion”, 56-57.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. BAUR, J., *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa. An African History 62-1992* (Nairobi 1994), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. BURGOS, B., *Culturas africanas y desarrollo. Intentos africanos de renovación* (Madrid 2007), 317-322.

<sup>48</sup> MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 5, 165.

that the basic belief is there: that after death there is something that survives, and this is what should be tapped in the encounter with Christianity though it may take some time to be achieved fully<sup>51</sup>.

### 3. The unresolved and resolved tensions

The Chagga people seem not to be interested in searching for the exact moment in which human beings were created because they take it for granted that they are from God<sup>52</sup>. This can be seen especially in the moment of death when they affirm that “God has taken what is his” (*Ruva aira kyake*), implying that human beings are property of God and at death it is taken back by God, and this is because of their integral conception of man within his cultural milieu imbued with the belief that at the end it is God who controls everything<sup>53</sup>. Saying this does not mean that being taken by God would imply that man will have life with God. For a Chagga as many Africans, one joins his ancestors and the living dead after his death and this is the ultimate end, being with his foreparents who themselves are not with God<sup>54</sup>.

The Chagga people believed on the omnipotence of God: that God has the power to do all things freely; he does not change because as was of old so he is now, nor lies, what he says as he says he fulfills it<sup>55</sup>. God sees all evil done by man be it during the day or at night, and even when enemies surround a man they cannot harm him if God does not permit it. Even when a sick man visits the diviners and the medicine doctors and then offers sacrifice of many goats and oxen he will not be cured if God does not wish it<sup>56</sup>. The omnipotence and the omniscience of God are stressed obviously but God as the creator where everything has origin and end is not explicitly stressed by the Chagga. Even the few mythologies compiled show that the mysteriously Ruwa (God) merely liberated the

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., “Chaga Religion”, 55.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. DUNDAS, C., *Kilimanjaro*, 121.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 122.

first human beings from a mysterious vessel by bursting it<sup>57</sup>.

This manner of thinking whereby the origins are not given priority can be a major difference between the two conceptions of a life beyond death, -Christian and the Chagga- because for the Christian faith everything has been created by God and moving towards God who is the beginning and the end; the *alfa* and *omega*<sup>58</sup>. The world has a beginning in God and it will have an end in God. This conception encounters a conception which places omnipotence in God but it does not put emphasis on his role as the beginning and end of all the creation. Due to this their ultimate end is believed to be the union with the ancestors and the living dead: history begins from the ancestors and culminates in the ancestors. And here is where the Chagga religion and Christian faith regarding eschatology encounter complexity. It seems that for the Chagga religio-culture, history is moving towards itself circularly and not towards a new reality different and transformed by the power of God<sup>59</sup>.

It is enough to remember here that life though has its origin in God, it is transmitted through the ancestors and lived under their guidance and at death the individual will join the ancestors. In other words, if for Christianity all begins in God and ends in God through Christ and that salvation (eternal life) is to be with God; for the Chagga religion their ultimate end is to be with their ancestors and their living-dead. From a Christian theological point of view there cannot be two ultimate ends for man, and since here the concerned are Chagga Christians, then a theological response must be given in order that the Chagga Christians may live their faith healthily especially regarding the ultimate end of man,

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. DUNDAS, C., *Kilimanjaro*, 107-108. It is not found easily in the traditional Chagga religion the consideration of Ruwa as the creator of the universe and neither that the world has a beginning nor an end. Dundas maintains the position that for the Chagga Ruwa is not the creator of the universe and neither is really the creator of mankind as it is understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Lema affirms the opposite that they consider God to be the origin of the universe and man because they believe that everything has its origin in God. May be here one can associate with the claim that in the traditional Africa the concept of the world which has a beginning and end is not found easily as it is not easily found in the religions of nature. Cf. LEMA, A.A., *Chaga Religion*, 40-45; MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 163.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. VATICAN II COUNCIL, *Dei verbum* (hence then DV) 6.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 163.

which should be only one, and secondly is the fact that the ancestors are human beings who need also to be redeemed by the work of Christ.

The ceremonies are connected with the afterlife in such a way that the belief on the ancestors and the living-dead is the one that makes them establish and perform those ceremonies<sup>60</sup>. They believe that they have to fulfill the traditions of their foreparents if they are to live happily in this world and join them after this life<sup>61</sup>. They believe that God is good and does not harm human beings and he does not occupy himself with creatures for he has entrusted the direction of everything to the ancestors and the living-dead as his messengers<sup>62</sup>. Dundas gives a pictorial elaboration from the daily life experience of the Chagga people and their relationship with God and the ancestral spirits, according to the response received from a Chagga when asked the reason for them to fear and obey more the spirits than God<sup>63</sup>.

Now, this pre-eminent place granted to the ancestors and the living-dead in the Chagga religion –though does not eliminate the belief that they cannot receive anything or any favor from the ancestors if it is not from God for they regard him as fundamentally the originator of all the good in the world– still makes it difficult to see how they may accept another mediator, because such belief must be associated with fear of punishment from the ancestors and the living dead, in case of abandoning them<sup>64</sup>. For if God has given all the goods to man through the ancestors, then, it is man's duty to live under their guidance<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 49.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>63</sup> "When the Chief sends to demand something that is his due, and on that day you have naught to give, whom will you try to appease, the Chief or his messenger that he may speak well of you to the Chief and the Chief may have mercy on you? And if you give bad words to the spirit who is sent to you, or refuse him that which the diviner has counselled you to give (i.e. sacrifice), that spirit will go to Ruwa and accuse you, and Ruwa will be angered and will send another spirit, a foreign spirit who is not of your ancestry, to afflict you greatly and to kill you. For this reason, we honor the spirits more". Cf. DUNDAS, C., *Kilimanjaro*, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 46-47.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God of our Ancestors. An African Approach to the Incarnation* (Nairobi 1998), 55.



Boulaga sees this belief on the ancestors and the related features, to be fundamental in the religious perspective of an African, thus making a serious call to those who may not have conceived it rightly to review their thought, insisting that even the studies about the ancestors are to be put into practice in order to help in the process of evangelization without unnecessary interference<sup>66</sup>. He thinks it useful for African Traditional Religion with the important belief on the ancestors and the living-dead, be used in a practical way in the evangelizing task because it forms the base of the African religio-culture, that it should be allowed to be read just as an old testament for the people of Africa on which the Gospel would correct the deficiencies in the course of time<sup>67</sup>. This call of Boulaga can be useful if it can help the Chagga Christians to move towards the fulfillment of their afterlife belief in the person of Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises of God (Heb 1:1-2).

It is true that if the Chagga religio-cultural values are not well digested and assimilated by the Christian theology they may run the risk of disappearing and this may create a vacuum that can have negative repercussion on the African person and hence in his Christian faith because the religio-culture contains traditions and customs which are not cultic as such rather strictly cultural<sup>68</sup>. The process of conversion should be carried carefully so that it may not destroy the human subject who is the event of God's self-communication<sup>69</sup>. Pope John Paul II is right in emphasizing that "the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also faith, because a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not fully lived"<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Contretemps. L'enjeu de Dieu in Afrique* (Paris 1991) 78-80.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 71-74; F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Dieu en Afrique* (Tchad 1977) 79.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 56-57.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. RAHNER, K., *Foundations*, 119-120.

<sup>70</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 78; JUAN PABLO II, "Discurso a los Participantes en el Congreso Nacional del movimiento Eclesial del Compromiso Cultural, 16-1-1982", in: <https://w2.vatican.va> (10 January 2018).

### 3.1. Discrepancies regarding the afterlife belief

Practically, the Chagga afterlife belief as well as that of the other African people is different profoundly in comparison with the Christian eschatological affirmations. Christian faith maintains the destiny of the individual who is judged immediately in his soul, after death, because the soul survives death, either to heaven or purgatory for a transitory period of purification or eternally in hell. This conception is practically missing in the Chagga belief on afterlife as well as in other African groups<sup>71</sup>.

The question of judgment is not contemplated in this manner because one encounters his ancestors and there he will be allowed or not allowed to join them depending on how he had fulfilled the traditions put by these ancestors<sup>72</sup>. If it is spoken of a judgment, then it is a judgment by the ancestors and the living dead using the criteria of fulfilling the traditions established by them. Here God is not involved as such because they believe that he works through the ancestors<sup>73</sup>.

The Christian belief on the states of heaven, hell and purgatory are not found among the Chagga just as it is not found among other Africans<sup>74</sup>, though one may be tempted to make a theoretical interpretation saying that not being accepted by the ancestors may be considered as hell, and the ceremonies and rituals demanded to be performed to the dead family members in order to enable them to join the community of the ancestors could be considered as the situation of purgatory; and being with the ancestors as their “heaven and being saved” if we agree with Bujo that communion with the ancestors has both eschatological and soteriological dimension<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., “Chaga Religion”, 45-47.

<sup>73</sup> The Chagga believes that God has left all the mediation to the ancestors so he does not interfere in their task. This can be the origin of the claimed tendency in African Traditional Religion of God being far away from the life of the people. What is unobjectable easily is that the majority of the adherents of traditional religion in Africa do not have a direct cult to God.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 5: “There is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. The soul of man does not long for spiritual redemption, or for closer contact with God in the next world”.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 23.

It is even complicated regarding the question of hell because even those who are not accepted by the ancestors may be allowed once the requirements are fulfilled on their behalf by the living through sacrifices and other offerings. At the end, even the concept of hell as eternal condemnation is not found among the Chagga because no one is denied being with the ancestors if all the deficiencies have been cleared by the living. But this is pure theoretical speculation because the eschatology of the individual in Christianity has a long tradition of acceptance and theological elaboration and is based on revelational data directly and indirectly as has been in the fourth chapter. The double phase eschatological belief in Christianity is neither found among the Chagga. Once one dies and enters the world of the dead, the series of relations with the living through different rituals, sacrifices and prayers begin<sup>76</sup>. The positive thing with the Chagga belief is that it can be easy to permeate their conception of afterlife with the Christian eschatology because the seeds and the desire for eternity are found there also, for at least they believe that something survives after death which they identify it with the person who had lived among them<sup>77</sup>.

Though the Chagga people do not reflect much about the relation between the body and soul what is promising is that something survives at death though they may not explain how it survives or use the same terminology as used in the Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions<sup>78</sup>. There is something immaterial (invisible) which exists after death and so when it is spoken of the immortality of the soul that is to be judged immediately after death it can easily be captured and incorporated, but in their own understanding, to be judged by the ancestors and the living dead. For the Chagga, since death is transformation from the visible to the invisible, it seems that resurrection would be superfluous for them or not needed

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 45-46.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. VATICAN II COUNCIL, *GS* 18: "But a deep instinct leads him rightly to shrink from and reject the utter ruin and total loss of his personality".

<sup>78</sup> Arguing against those who attacked the concept of soul as alien to the Scripture and to Christian tradition, Ratzinger seems to move in the same direction that for the intermediate state between death and resurrection, the church affirms the survival of a spiritual element endowed with conscious and employs the term soul to designate it. The ground for employing this term is that something spiritual survives after our death. Cf. RATZINGER, *Escatología*, 294-295.

because the individual continues to live after the physical death though invisibly with the ancestors. After death the individual continues with his body invisibly, for his spirit will return to the buried body and initiate a new existence in the invisible world<sup>79</sup>. Here the universe is understood to be composed of the visible world of the living and the invisible world of the dead, thus implying that when one dies enters into the invisible world with an invisible personality<sup>80</sup>. To some extent they believe that the visible world and the invisible intermingle thus indicating a major difference between the Christian conception, which place the life-after-death with a linear perception of time and hence the eschatological realities are conceptually placed linearly beyond the present world, they do not intermingle<sup>81</sup>.

Moreover, the Chagga religion does not contemplate that there is a moment in which all will be judged, implying that the realities associated with the Second Coming of Christ do not form part of their belief because as already said before, for them all will culminate in their being with the ancestors and the living dead, and life there is more or less similar to that of the present world though it is not a return to the same life possessed before death<sup>82</sup>. There is no waiting for new world or new creation as it is seen in Christian faith. Practically this concept is missing and the ultimate hope is to enjoy with their dead departed family members in the manner of this present world, enjoying the sacrifices and prayers from their living family members.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 159.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 162.

<sup>81</sup> It can be said briefly that the debate among African scholars regarding the concept of time whereby some have claimed that the concept of time for the traditional religion believer is cyclic and thus to some extent reminding one of the myth of eternal return: that everything begins at one point and returns at the same point, different from that of Christianity, thanks to the novelty introduced by the biblical notion of creation which conceives the movement of time in a linear dimension, with a beginning and an end, with an alfa and an omega. The linear conception of time and the cyclic one may be considered to be one of the major causes of the differences regarding the Chagga belief on the life after death and the Christian faith on the afterlife because the way they understand the universe in terms of visibility and invisibility implies that it is almost moving around the actual world and thus there is no hope for a better world to come. Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 24, 75, 94, 99.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. MBITI, J., *African Religion*, 4.

Christian eschatology is Trinitarian: it has its ultimate end being with God and this is salvation. It is a faith built on the revelation of God through Jesus Christ who now is the beginning and the end of all. All eschatological declarations must be made departing from the Christ event. So in order to have healthy Chagga belief on the afterlife, it must be inserted with the dose of Christ and once they are full of Christ in their faith and life, they may claim to be Christians. This does not mean that they have to abandon their culture or their being; rather they have to open themselves to a God who has revealed himself as the beginning and end of all in Christ through the Holy Spirit. They have to believe in Christ because he is the perfect revealer of the Father and through him all men will join him in his Parousia when all will be put under the rule of his Father. The Chagga afterlife belief does not contemplate this aspect, or the associated eternal life full of Christ. So qualitatively and quantitatively this belief differs from that confessed in the Christian faith.

### 3.2. Christology and eschatology: African perspectives

In order to have a correct understanding of Christian faith on the afterlife, it is important to have proper understanding of Christ and his relationship with God<sup>83</sup>. African theology scholars have tried to associate the belief on the ancestors with their understanding of Christ in their effort to develop an African understanding of Christ: For example Nyamiti considers Jesus as our brother ancestor in fullness and from there he developed the ancestor Christology, which has become a point of departure of his thought and on which many other theologians have developed, improved and challenged<sup>84</sup>. Kabasele prefers to understand Jesus as an ancestor and elder brother for being the first and transmitter of the life received from God. As a human being, he is above all the ancestors for being at the origin of humankind and as God is the origin and giver of life, the mediator of all mediators<sup>85</sup>. Penoukou relying on the

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A., "Chaga Religion", 56-58.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. C. NYAMITI, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru 1984), 7-21; *Id.*, "African Christologies Today", in: R. J. SCHREITER (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (New York 1991) 3-23; NYAMITI, NYAMITI, "Some Moral Implications of African Ancestral Christology": *African Christian Studies* 8/III (1992), 37.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. F. KABASELE, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother", in: SCHREITER, *Faces of Jesus*, 119-126.

Ewe-Mina ethnical group considers Christ as a proto-ancestor signifying that Christ is a source of life and fulfillment of human life for he receives it first from God and transmits it to the living<sup>86</sup>. Pobee departing from a functional Christology, which he considers to fit the mentality of the Akan people to which he belongs, proposes to understand Christ as *Nana* or Greater Ancestor in Akan language<sup>87</sup>.

Bujo sees Jesus as a proto-ancestor, a unique ancestor who is the source of life and thus presenting the highest level of ancestorship<sup>88</sup>. This quality of man Jesus is the fruit of Incarnation and Easter in which Jesus the Only Begotten of God assumed in a certain way the whole humanity and became the First Born of many brothers and in the Head of his Body which is the church in the hierarchy after God. For Bujo the term ancestor can only applied to Jesus analogically or eminently, since to treat him otherwise would be to make of him only one founding ancestor among many that is why the title Proto ancestor is reserved to Jesus<sup>89</sup>.

The title ancestor when applied to Jesus must be examined critically regarding the life transmitted by the ancestors as intermediaries and that transmitted by Jesus, for such “lives” cannot be identified or put on equal levels because the life transmitted by Jesus is not of this world, it is life of God, God himself, which is fulfilled in the world to come. Jesus is salvation itself whose name means “Yahweh saves”<sup>90</sup>. Jesus does not only teach and promise that salvation, he is salvation itself<sup>91</sup>. While the ancestors do work in favor of their descendants<sup>92</sup>, Jesus works for all and that they do not communicate the divine life, which is accomplished only by Jesus Christ<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. E. J. PENOUKOU, “Christology in the Village”, in: SCHREITER, *Faces of Jesus*, 37-51.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. J. POBEE, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashville 1979) 81-98.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 74.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 74-75; Also see NYAMITI, “The Mass as Divine and Ancestral Encounter between the Living and the Dead”: *African Christian Studies* 1/I (1985) 28-48; R. MALONEY, “African Christology”: *Theological Studies* 48/III (1987) 505-515; STADLER, “Christological Approaches in Africa”, 219-222; MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 56-100.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, CCC, 430.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 432.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. CHENU, *Teologías cristianas de los terceros mundos* (Barcelona 1989), 180-187.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. B. SESBOÛE, *Jesucristo el único mediador* I (Salamanca 1990) 19-21.

The ancestors are only human beings while Jesus is also God and so this is something important and fundamental missing in the part of the ancestors to be compared with Jesus<sup>94</sup>.

For this reason Shorter warns that when one speaks of Christ as an ancestor could be ambiguous and misleading “if it is intended to convey more than that Christ is God, the ancestor and source of all life, and even this meaning requires further clarification in view of Christ’s relationship as Son to the Father”<sup>95</sup>.

The reflection on the different titles applied to Jesus in Africa is a good attempt to develop a theology rooted in the African thought. As Bujo said of the title proto-Ancestor that it should be applied analogically<sup>96</sup>, it can be said in the same way for all the other titles because Jesus Christ is different from the human ancestors due to his relationship to his Father<sup>97</sup>. It is also to be accepted that the understanding of Jesus using those concepts should not claim to be the only legitimate interpretation for understanding Jesus in Africa. Jesus surpasses all of them and no one can claim to exhaust the whole mystery of Christ<sup>98</sup>. They are ways to help in our understanding and approach the figure of Jesus, conscious that the mystery surrounding him cannot be exhausted by one category or concept<sup>99</sup>.

These observations are useful in order to avoid dichotomization of Jesus Christ for he was one person with two natures, human and divine<sup>100</sup>. Any attempt to separate the two may run the risk of falling into the ancient heresies<sup>101</sup>. The right interpretation and understanding of Jesus is fundamental for a healthy encounter of the Christian faith with any culture because the mystery of Christ is inseparably connected with that of the church and other disciplines<sup>102</sup>. Jesus Christ is the same today as

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. CHENU, *Teologías cristianas*, 180-187.

<sup>95</sup> SHORTER, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited”, 198.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 74.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. SHORTER, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited”, 198.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. KASPER, *Jesús, El Cristo*, 13-26.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, –POPE BENEDICTO XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret I. Desde el bautismo a la Transfiguración* (Madrid 2007) 50.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Concilio de Calcedonia (451): DH 301.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. B. SESBOÛE - J. WOLINSKI, *Historia de los Dogmas I. El Dios de la salvación* (Salamanca 2004) 188-221.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. G. O’COLLINS, *Para interpretar a Jesús* (Madrid 1986) 14.

yesterday and continues to be so forever (Heb 13:8); the African Christians cannot develop their own Christ independent of the Gospel and against the tradition of the church<sup>103</sup>.

If Christ is understood exaggerating either of the aspects of his person -he is both God and man- necessarily it will become difficulty for the Chagga people to develop a profound faith regarding the mystery of life and death. If Jesus is seen as mere ancestor no matter how analogical it can be applied he will be seen as one among them who cannot free them from sin because he is a man as the ancestors and if he is considered only God, the Chagga may feel to have nothing with him: Jesus must remain God and man so that the Chagga may walk with him towards the plenitude prepared by God the Father<sup>104</sup>.

The mystery of incarnation though brings Jesus Christ close to men it also makes him different from them qualitatively because now he is God-man. He cannot be separated in order to fit the African context. With faith in Jesus as the Son of God who has introduced into the history a new age, and that everything now is under his rule for he is the way, truth and life, the Chagga must put themselves under him in terms of their destiny because it is only him who assures them salvation after their death because he has lived it and died like them and then conquered death –through his resurrection– which is the major hindrance for the Chagga people making them to search refuge in the belief on the ancestors and the living-dead<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity*, 292-293.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *GS* 18.

<sup>105</sup> The majority of the ceremonies and rituals are born from this fear of what will happen after this life. The ancestors become like shock absorbers for the challenges brought by death and other misfortunes. They believe that without fulfilling the traditions of their ancestors they would not be able to be with them after death and thus becoming wandering spirits. It should not be forgotten that their ultimate end is to be with the ancestors. May be that is what seems to give the Africans a kind of courage in accepting death because the dying people “are conscious that they participate in the life-force of the ancestors. There is no question of despair in the face of death, and no sense that one is being deprived of his life” especially “the one who is conscious that he or she has lived a life according to traditional rules, sets out on the journey to the land of the ancestors in full confidence that he or she will be received into their community”. Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 114.



The evangelization of the Chagga people by the church has to find the point of contact between their religious search and the novelty of the Gospel, for example regarding their relationship with the ancestors<sup>106</sup>. In the liturgy and in the life of the Chagga Christians, their faith in Christ who will raise their bodies as he himself has risen must be reflected (Rm 6:8-9; 2Tim 2:8-13). This does not eliminate the ancestors and the living dead because they will also be raised at the Parousia of Christ and after the final judgment will either enjoy with God or condemned depending on how they have lived in this world (Mt 25:31-46).

We have already seen that the Chagga afterlife belief affirms that after this life one joins the ancestors or the living dead of their family forming a community of the dead in the hereafter<sup>107</sup>. The Chagga eschatology or their belief on the man's destiny after death should be conformed with what has been revealed by God in Jesus Christ, if really they are to be Christians, and this must be manifested in their life, for faith which is not lived in the practice is lifeless, it is dead as body without breath (Jas 2:14-26).

#### 4. Possibility of reconciliation?

How to reconcile the Chagga belief on life-after death centered on the ancestors with Christian eschatology centered on Christ? The Christocentric eschatology is plausible only from an understanding of man created in the image and likeness of God in Christ as we have presented in the first section of this paper. Man is created by God in his image and likeness and this man is called to be with God. Man's vocation is to be with God and not with the ancestors only. From the beginning God has created man and destined him to be with him in Christ through the Holy Spirit<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> Some have tried to use the Chagga traditional leadership perspective (*Mangi*) to develop an inculturated Christology and such efforts are still needed for other Chagga cultural categories. Cf. S. A. MAFIKIRI, *Christ as the Mangi: Ideal King of Christian Transformation. A Christology from Chagga Perspective*. Doctoral Dissertation (CUEA Press, Nairobi 2010).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Lema, A.A. "Chaga Religion", 60.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *CCC* 27-30.

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. The invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator<sup>109</sup>.

Since God is believed to work through the ancestors in his relation with the human beings, then Jesus who is also God works through the same ancestors for his power has been extended because of his incarnation<sup>110</sup> and thus he becomes the link between God and the humanity and here the ancestors included<sup>111</sup>. The mystery of incarnation makes it possible for the Chagga people to believe in Jesus as God-man, and since God is believed to be far away and leaving the treat with men to the mediators (ancestors and the living-dead), then Christ is to be placed in the same place as God and all the relations with him are those of human beings with God<sup>112</sup>. In this framework, Jesus cannot be restricted to the realm of ancestors because he overflows and assumes it through his incarnation. He is also God and neither should he be limited to the divine realm for he is also man because of his incarnation. The ancestors in this perspective should not remove or destroy the mediation of Christ; rather it is they who are strengthened by it, which is both divine and human while theirs is only human<sup>113</sup>.

According to the Chagga people, God uses ancestors as mediators. We Christians believe that Jesus is God and can participate in the work of his Father and also acts through ancestors. When they were in this world, the ancestors had to live the commandment of Jesus' love. In the history of evangelization, one of the great debates has been to distinguish Jesus' message from the cultural elements that carry it. Some conflicts were the result of considering elements of secondary importance as primary and essential elements of the Gospel, rather than considering them as cultural elements associated with the historical development of

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<sup>109</sup> Vatican II Council, GS 19.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. BEYER – Mphahlele, "Jesus Christ as Ancestor", 41.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. STINTON, *Jesus of Africa*, 140.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. DUNDAS, C., *Kilimanjaro*, 107-108.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 61.

Christianity. Although it is difficult to find a naked Gospel without a cultural matrix, an effort must be made not to cover it too much with what does not have much to do with the Good News of Jesus that is why the commandment of God's love and neighbor has to be considered as the best measure in cases of conflict<sup>114</sup>.

#### 4.1. Continuity and discontinuity

The continuity and discontinuity will be determined by the way the Chagga live according to the norms of their ancestors, believed to be given by God. If they need to have security for their future situation after their death, they have to fulfill the rules believed to be given by God through the ancestors and in order to be accepted by Jesus they have to live according to the Gospel of Jesus, but since Jesus is God and they believe that the norms given to them are from God through the ancestors, then there should not be conflict between the message of Christ with the rules and norms given by the ancestors because all are believed to come from the same God<sup>115</sup> unless it is affirmed that God the Father of Jesus is not the same God as the one believed by the Chagga. In case of conflict between the two norms, the greatest commandment of love should be the criterion<sup>116</sup> especially for the very clear religio-cultural elements, which

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A. "Chaga Religion", 52-61; RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 53-64; FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Hence then EG) 117-118.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Lema, A.A. "Chaga Religion", 60.

<sup>116</sup> The reason for this claim is from the fact that faith is not a system of truths rather a self-giving of God to a person. It is a personal encounter with a person (Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est* 1, 28). Christian faith, which is an encounter with Christ who is the image and likeness of God, demands a personal and communitarian commitment. To believe in God and to love the neighbour cannot be separated, that is why the commandment of love has been taken here as a measure not only because it is affirmed by Jesus, rather because it can be claimed to be a kind of universal value, which for one whose eyes are open and is humble would not be able to deny it. Also the theory takes the great commandment of love as a measure because it is simple to be understood though difficult to be put into practices, and it is in line with the other values which are found among the Chagga people and many other African peoples such as the importance of community and hospitality. When these are illumined with the commandment of love it would be possible to give birth to a healthy and reasonable Chagga Christian and ultimately African Christian morality and faith. Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro* 25; S. G. ACUÑA, "La moral: ¿Cómo vivir? Ra-

have nothing to do with the truth itself and especially with the Gospel of Jesus and which really impede achieving the plenitude of man in Christ<sup>117</sup>.

Even with the differences in origin and the long way, which the Gospel has passed, the commandment of love still remains intact as a means to remain in communion with God, a need for both Chagga religion and Christianity. The fundamental and privileged means to stay in communion with God is the great commandment of love because since the incarnation man has become the privileged place of encounter with God<sup>118</sup>. Loving the neighbor is nothing than loving the community in which one lives by fulfilling the norms of Christ and those of the proper community, but since the community for the Chagga is composed of the visible and invisible, then both communities must be taken into account in the moment of fulfilling the norms in the community, for now there are three references: Jesus, ancestors and the living community whereby Jesus is the supreme reference<sup>119</sup>.

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cionalidad o irracionalidad en el vivir la vida”, in: *Una ley de libertad para la vida del mundo* (Madrid 2007) 509-512; E. I. IFESIEN, “Vatican II and Traditional Religion”: *African Ecclesial Review* 25/IV (1983) 234; VATICAN II COUNCIL, *GS* 38.

<sup>117</sup> Practically after Vatican II Council, the church in Africa embarked on what has been finally known as inculturation, with the aim of making the Gospel be interpreted, understood and be lived in the context of African Culture. The theme of inculturation has been an object of discussion practically throughout the history of Christianity, but for the case of Africa it has begun strongly since the pontificate of Pope Paul VI in *Africae terrarum*, 13-14, though he did not mention the term inculturation, the vocabulary had this intention; the same in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, and more energetically during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II which can be seen in all his messages during his visit in Africa beginning with his message during the opening of the C.H.I.E.A, now CUEA on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1985, and then in *Redemptoris Missio* (hence then RM) (1990) where he dealt also with the issue of inculturation (RM 25; 52-54), and in a special way during the African Synod opened in 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1994 where the theme of inculturation was at the heart of the synod as it can be seen in the issued document *Ecclesia in Africa*. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 55-64; *Id.*, “The Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II”: *African Christian Studies* 1/II (1985) 10; BENEDICT XVI, *Africae Munus*, 36.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. LEMA, A.A. “Chagga Religion”, 55-57.

<sup>118</sup> MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 76.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Theology*, 18-26; BUJO, B., *The Ethical Dimension of Community. The African Model and the Dialogue between the North and South* (Nairobi 1998), 15-23; MBITI, J., *African Religions*, 142; MENKITI, “Person and Community”, 171-181; THOMAS, D.E., *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World* (Jefferson 2015), 21-22.

If we use an anthropomorphic language we can then say that because of his incarnation, death and resurrection, Jesus enters the ancestral world and from there brings all who believe in him to God, because he knows the way<sup>120</sup>. In case of fearing not fulfilling the ancestral traditions, here things are different because it is not enough to fulfill the norms of the ancestors who are only human beings rather the norms of Jesus because he has revealed to man what he should do to live well in the present world and what to do in order to please God as is well elaborated by the conciliar fathers in the following text.

Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most calling ... By suffering for us he not only gave us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps, but he also opened up a way. If we follow this path, life and death are made holy and acquire new meaning<sup>121</sup>.

#### **4.2. Authentic and true conversion to Christ**

Once Jesus Christ is accepted as the supreme measure of the entire Chagga existence, it would mean that the destiny of the Chagga people after this life would be Christ himself and this is what they confess in the Creed and what it means to have faith in Christ: to believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God and the one who sent him (Jn 6:29). Jesus teaches man to turn his gaze to the Father, entrusting himself to the Father's safe hands in the power of the spirit<sup>122</sup>. Believing in Christ does not allow one to have another destiny which is not the God who revealed himself in Him because after his coming the condition of the believers after their death is imbued by the mystery of Christ death and resurrection<sup>123</sup>. In this manner the Chagga beliefs and the practices associated with the ancestors cannot bring them salvation because salvation is only brought by Christ. The ancestors need also the salvation of Christ in order for them to be

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. BUJO, B., *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi 1990), 74-77.

<sup>121</sup> Vatican II Council, *GS* 22.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, *CV* 31.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *GS* 22.

raised in the Last Day, if they are conformed to the image of the Son who is the first born of many brothers<sup>124</sup>.

This theoretical analysis can enable one affirm that the Chagga Christians have to integrate Jesus within their eschatological belief built on their ancestors and the living-dead if they want to be followers of Christ or if an effective conversion is to be achieved. Their afterlife belief is limited to the ancestors who are only human beings and thus unable to achieve the true divinization, eternal life, which can only be achieved through Jesus<sup>125</sup>. In other words, the Chagga belief on afterlife ends in the midway between God and men, while Christian eschatology leads him towards the plenitude of his existence because Christ is from God and knows the way and the means (Jn 14:6). The Chagga Christians must have put their trust on Christ whose sacrifice has been done once and for all; all the other sacrifices pretended for the ancestors cannot redeem man, they are only human actions which belong to this world (Heb 10:5-9). Man cannot have two ultimate ends: ancestors and God in Christ<sup>126</sup>, rather the latter alone.

### 4.3. God, the plenitude of man

St Thomas Aquinas is of great help in this case especially his reflection on beatific vision which is for him the only ultimate end of man<sup>127</sup>; all the other intermediate ends are not the definitive good. The ultimate end that constitutes the happiness of man is the vision of God for it is impossible that the happiness of man be in created beings. Supreme happiness can only be found in perfect good, which completely calms desire. If there is still something to be desired, there is no full happiness. Now the object of human desire is the contemplation of God. It is from here that nothing satisfies or fulfils the human will, except for the universal good, which is not found in any creature, but only in God because all creatures have a participated good. Thus only God can satisfy man's desire for happiness<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The closeness of the God*, 71-72.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. SAYES, *Escatología* (Madrid 2006) 90-92.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST I/II Q. 1 a.4*.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, *Q. 1 a.8*.

The ultimate end of man is then the uncreated God, who will be enjoyed in heaven in the supernatural contemplative vision<sup>129</sup>. Man has the capacity for this ultimate end, not in the sense that by his own power could achieve it, rather because there is nothing of this world that can satisfy his desire, and so the will tends to the vision naturally<sup>130</sup>. There is in man a natural desire for the vision of God. Though Thomas never speaks of natural vision, he speaks of two perfections for man: the supernatural vision, which is the ultimate perfection, and the imperfect happiness which can be possessed by man in this life and which can be achieved by his natural capacity<sup>131</sup>.

In this manner of thinking, the ancestors cannot be the ultimate end of the Chagga people because they are created beings that cannot be the plenitude of their fellow created beings. It is found only in God and so the need to aim at this universal truth which is the gift of God to them in order to pursue the universal good. To see God as he is, is the ultimate goal to be desired, and not to be with the ancestors and the living-dead<sup>132</sup>.

## 5. Adequate proclamation of the Gospel

The communication of the Gospel in the different cultures and among the Chagga should be done diligently in order to be able to integrate in their life the fundamental aspects of Christian faith especially those pertained to the afterlife<sup>133</sup>. If the church has nothing to say about

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Q. 3 a.8.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 5 a.8 ad 2.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Q.5 a.5; I Q. 62 a.1; SAYÉS, *Escatología*, 80-89.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *CCC 27*; POZO, *Teología*, 86.

<sup>133</sup> It is to be remembered that the traditions and many practices practised by the Chagga of Rombo are the consequence of the belief on the life-after-death. If it is well addressed it means many of the traditions especially the bad ones may be eradicated. If their eschatology is well addressed by the message of Christ, it can be transformed and in this way the adherence to Christ through faith would be authentic because the essence of the Christian faith which is resurrection would take its course in their life, for finally they will recognize that the ancestors are human beings and mere human beings that cannot save their fellow human beings. It is only Jesus, God-man who is able to realize this. This does not mean that ancestors do not have sense in their life, rather their role remain in the

the afterlife to the Chagga people, it would be bankrupt<sup>134</sup>. That is why it is fundamentally important the way the Gospel is communicated to the man of today in the effort of the church to offer answers to the multitude of questions from this man<sup>135</sup>. The Christian faith on afterlife must be a real alternative to the Chagga people, so that they may be challenged by it regarding their traditional belief<sup>136</sup>.

The proclamation of the Gospel is realized within a concrete culture and the main subject of this proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died and rose on the third day and that through him is accomplished the full and authentic liberation of man<sup>137</sup>. It is through him that God bestows new life, which is divine and eternal<sup>138</sup>. This proclamation is directed to individuals and even to societies with their own cultural beliefs rooted in their life for a long time, forming practically the prism through which they see and understand the reality<sup>139</sup>. In the majority of the known historical cultures, religion has been an essential and determining factor and continues to be so today<sup>140</sup>. Religion can determine the structure of values and the inner ordering of these cultures<sup>141</sup>. Geertz understands religion as a cultural system, which is a product of history and also subject to the standards established historically in such a way that it can be questioned, disputed, affirmed, developed, formalized, contemplated and that it may vary from one people to the next<sup>142</sup>.

Seen from this perspective the communication of the Gospel or the sharing of the Christian faith with other cultures can be a hard task

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human realm and the relation they have with the living would be considered highly psychological.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. SAYÉS, *Escatología*, 10.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. POZO, *Teología*, 542.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. R. HORTON, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science II": *Africa* 37 (1967) 185-186.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RM* 44.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. SHORTER, *Christianity and the African Imagination. After the African Synod Resources for Inculturation* (Nairobi 1996), 16.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, Fe, *verdad y tolerancia. El cristianismo y las religiones del mundo* (Salamanca 2005), 54.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. C. GEERTZ, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York 1983) 73-93; also see STARKLOFF, "Inculturation and Cultural System I", 72-73.



because this message is carried within particular cultural matrix with long tradition accumulated throughout its history<sup>143</sup>. Now, Christian faith encounters cultures different from that which carries it, making the possibility of their encounter to rely on their readiness for a mutual openness and when the ground of their encounter is in their essences and not on the external properties<sup>144</sup>.

For Ratzinger there is a potential universality found in all cultures that is capable of becoming effective and this is the human essence<sup>145</sup>. In this human essence there is a common truth, that of being a human, who is always attracted to the truth and thus open to this truth<sup>146</sup>. In the communication of the Gospel to the cultures, this universality found in all cultures should be a fundamental presupposition<sup>147</sup>. Anything that excludes or impedes the openness and exchange between the different cultures should be considered their proper insufficiency and weakness, and in fact, the exclusion of the other is contrary to the essence of human being who is social by nature and open to new horizons<sup>148</sup>.

This openness is rooted in the nature of man who is capable of transcending himself, through reflection and contemplation, the man who desires the truth and normally tends to pursue it<sup>149</sup>, and the fact that in most cases culture involved a process of learning in the course of one's life giving the human being the capacity to learn and acquire new knowledge and new experiences from infancy and develop them throughout one's life, enabling him to relate cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally to the world, sharing his understanding in the community, receiving and filtering the new experiences coming during his life, so that he may consolidate his identity as a being that is always open and moves beyond itself<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 54.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>146</sup> VATICAN II COUNCIL, *GS* 15: "The intellectual nature of man finds at last its perfection, as it should, in wisdom, which gently draws human mind to look for and to love what is true and good. Filled with wisdom man is led through visible realities to those which cannot be seen".

<sup>147</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 55.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 55; also see VATICAN II COUNCIL, *Dignitatis humanae* (hence DiH) 3.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *DiH* 2.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. SHORTER, *Christianity and African Imagination*, 16.

The human being is the father and son of culture. Thus in contact with any new culture there is always a possibility of learning it and incorporating into one's proper culture something new from these encountered cultures<sup>151</sup>. Now depending on the degree of openness or closeness of a cultural subject or depending on the narrowness or their inner openness, one may achieve deepening and purification of the proper knowledge and values<sup>152</sup>. This movement can lead to a deep transformation of the proper concrete cultural forms, without necessarily being a suffered violence or alienation<sup>153</sup>. The self-opening together with self-transcendence can lead precisely to the opening up of the hidden alienations in man with respect to the truth and with respect to man himself that reside in different cultures, and thus giving birth to a new and better understanding regarding the fundamental elements of culture, which are the world, man and the divinity<sup>154</sup>.

In this perspective, Ratzinger is not comfortable with the term inculturation when used without proper understanding of its significance<sup>155</sup>. He would prefer to speak of encounter of cultures with a preferential use of the term "interculturality"<sup>156</sup>. The reason is that inculturation for him gives the impression or even presupposes that a faith culturally naked is moved into a culture religiously indifferent<sup>157</sup>. Such conception, for him, is artificial and unreal because there is no faith, which exists without cultural mediation and rightly he claims that culture without religion does not exist except in the modern technological civilization<sup>158</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, *EG* 122.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia* 58.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. AETTM, "Conclusiones del Encuentro de Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania) 5-12 agosto 1976", in: *Teología Africana* (Madrid 1978) 31-34.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 58.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>157</sup> Starkloff agrees with Ratzinger, that all the human phenomenon is affected and determined by some aspects of a cultural system, even the church with all the claim of being Catholic shares features of cultural systems, since her initial moment with the Jewish phenomenon, then achieving an act of transcendence from that system only to enter into other determinations in the Greek and Roman worlds, then the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon, all of which have deeply influenced its development. Cf. STARKLOFF, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems I", 73.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 58; PAUL VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, (hence EN), 20.

### 5.1. Inculturation (Gospel and Cultures)

The question of inculturation<sup>159</sup> can be of greater help in the process of sharing the Christian faith because a proper inculturation of the faith in a culture, and in our case among the Chagga, can help them in developing a proper belief on the afterlife and hence the reduction of the tensions, which may result from the two perspectives. Inculturation should be understood as a mutual process of purification and transformation in the encounter of Gospel or the Christian faith with the other cultures<sup>160</sup>. Inculturation has occupied the first place in the theological discourse in Africa in the years after independence till our days with improvement and better understanding of it, though in the protestant cycles the term contextualization is more commonly used<sup>161</sup>. The term inculturation

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<sup>159</sup> The word inculturation has been closely associated with the term enculturation whose first usage is attributed to J. M. Herskovits which meant a “cultural education of a person”. This term was borrowed by the Catholic theology and was given another significance connected with the Gospel and the cultures as a permanent dialogue between the two since the 1960s and hence the use of the term inculturation. According to Shorter, a Jesuit priest Fr. J. Mason seems to be the first one to give it a theological sense when he affirmed in 1962 that “today there is more urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated in a variety of forms”, but it was the Jesuit Superior Fr. Pedro Arrupe who tried to define it in his letter on Inculturation in 1978 after being directed by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus of 1974-1975. From then Arrupe has been taken as the first one to give the definition of inculturation. The word was used for the first time in an official document of the Church later by Pope John Paul II where he identifies inculturation with the concept of incarnation in explaining the dynamism of the Gospel which has to penetrate the heart of all cultures. It is important to note that the term at that moment was new but the idea and the practice was not new because in line with the understanding of the encounter of two cultures, always there is a kind of relationship which results into the penetration of some values in both cultural subjects. Cf. SHORTER, *The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document* (Nairobi 1991) 53-54; ID, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*, 10; P. ARRUPÉ, “Letter to the Society of Jesus on Inculturation, May 14, 1978”: *Jesuit Apostolates Today*, 171-181, the original Spanish text: P. ARRUPÉ, “Carta y Documento de trabajo sobre la Inculturación (14-V-78)”, in: *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu XVII* (1978) 229-255; C. F. STARKLOFF, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems, I”: *TS* 55 (1994) 66-81; J. M. HERSKOVITS, *Man and his Works, the Science of Cultural Anthropology* (New York 1948) 39-48; U. E. UMOREM, “Enculturation and Inculturation”, in: <https://sedosmission.org> (5 March 2018).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. MVENG, *Identidad africana y cristianismo. Palabra de un creyente* (Estella 1999), 119-149; C. MCGARRY (ed.), *What happened at African Synod?* (Nairobi 1995) 52; JOHN PAUL II, *RM* 52.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity*, 289.

should not be taken as an absolute independent concept because in working with it, one may not discard the other terms such as adaptation, indigenization, acculturation, enculturation, contextualization and incarnation<sup>162</sup> for they may help in the moment of analyzing and discerning the meaning of inculturation. We can associate the term inculturation strictly with the relation of the Gospel with cultures, and say that it is a theological term connected with the field of missiology<sup>163</sup> while acculturation is sociological process involving intercommunication with other cultures involving a kind of mutual understanding and sometimes tolerance, while enculturation is an anthropological term referring to the capacity of the individual to insert himself, especially through a cultural learning process in his context<sup>164</sup>. In principle it is not right to consider inculturation, enculturation and acculturation as terms with the same meaning though they are related<sup>165</sup>.

The word inculturation seems to appear for the first time in an official document of the church in *Catechesi tradendae*<sup>166</sup> and more elaborated in *Redemptoris Missio*<sup>167</sup>. From that moment on, the term has become a common terminology in the discourse on the relationship between the

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. UDOYE, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts*, 264.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. STARKLOFF, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems I", 70. The reason for such delimitation is that, it involves a conversation between two subjects: the Gospel and the cultural uniqueness of each context in which the message is transmitted. Also see HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works*, 310, 626; SHORTER, *Towards*, 5.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. A. A. ROEST CROLIUS, "What is so New about Inculturation", in: *Inculturation Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures V* (Rome 1984) 5-10.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. UDOYE, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts*, 264-270; SHORTER, *Towards*, 3-13.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, CT 53: "The term 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of incarnation". The Pope in this document did not develop the concept much as he would do later in *Redemptoris Missio*. The posterior distinction of acculturation from inculturation was not clearly seen in the mind of the Pontiff at that time. Udoye in line with Shorter attempted to establish the differences between the two terms making inculturation a theological term dealing strictly with encounter of Christian faith and culture while acculturation is more a socio-anthropological term where an interaction of cultures is more involved than faith and culture. Also see UDOYE, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts*, 270.

<sup>167</sup> In this document Pope John Paul II develops more the question of inculturation giving the general principles to guide the process of inculturation which are the compatibility with the Gospel and the communion with the universal church. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RM* 52, 54.

Gospel and cultures in the areas where the Gospel was brought for the first time especially in Africa and Asia<sup>168</sup>. Pope John Paul II defines inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures”<sup>169</sup> after recognizing that it has been a process that has marked the life of the church throughout her pilgrimage, but for the moment it has become an urgent task<sup>170</sup>. The church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into their own community through inculturation, by transmitting to them the Gospel values while taking the good elements that are found in those cultures and renewing them from within<sup>171</sup>.

## 5.2. Inculturation of the Chagga afterlife belief

It is through this process of inculturation that a concrete element of Christian faith, the faith on afterlife or Christian eschatology is to be inculturated among the Chagga people by integrating their afterlife belief with that of Christianity, purifying the incompatible elements from both and introducing the novelty of Christ in it. The process would rely on the theological understanding of the two beliefs: The Christian eschatology centered on the Triune God, and Chagga afterlife belief centered on the ancestors and the living-dead. Since the ultimate end for the Chagga Christians seems to be with the ancestors, an inculturation here would be an attempt to make them move beyond this and have this ultimate end in God who is the origin and end of all, the same God who has revealed in Jesus Christ<sup>172</sup>.

The change of the ultimate end of man or the understanding of salvation to that which is proper of God who revealed himself in Christ, may be the beginning of a true conversion because now there is only one ultimate end of man, which will require the Chagga people to fulfill certain

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. MCGARRY, *What happened*, 53-58.

<sup>169</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *RM 52*. The Pope here cites from the *Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, Final report, II, c, 6*.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *GS 22*.

norms which are in accordance to this end, that are universal and open to the truth, and not according to the norms believed to be established by the human beings, thus particular and individualistic because they concentrate on particular people and sometimes not easily open to the truth and to all<sup>173</sup>.

In my opinion the Chagga afterlife eschatology can be completed with the Christian eschatology in its healthiest form when God is believed to be the beginning and end of all, the one who is close and controls all, the ultimate desire of human being. As already said somewhere else, it is more convincing to have God as the destiny of man than having human beings as the ultimate end of other human beings. It is in this logic that Jesus Christ the God made man becomes fundamental in covering the gap that is left between the ancestors and God. Jesus by his incarnation is the only one who covers the gap between God and the ancestors by bringing all to God through his death and resurrection<sup>174</sup>. But in order to achieve this, a proper understanding of man and his relation to God would be necessary.

### **5.3. Man: An event of faith and culture**

The anthropological ground of the encounter of the Gospel and culture should not be put in the second place because man is the element which can freely respond to the call of God. All the other elements depend on him. In my opinion Ratzinger contributes to this dynamic theology of inculturation an important consideration, by indicating clearly that inculturation should not look at the Gospel as if it were to exist independent of culture or a faith without cultural mediation<sup>175</sup>, and in fact Christianity came to Africa clothed in western culture<sup>176</sup>.

The cultures of the world are peculiar and distinct from one another but all are open to one another and capable of mutual purification and transformation no matter how much they may claim to be self-sufficient and attempt to close in themselves<sup>177</sup>. Inculturation is possible because of

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. BURGOS, B., *Culturas africanas*, 310-322.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *CCC* 632-635.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 59.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. MCGARRY, *What happened*, 55.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. S. G. GONZÁLEZ, "Inculturación de la fe y evangelización", in: J. C. CARVAJAL BLANCO (cord.), *La misión de la iglesia. Apuntes para su estudio* (Madrid 2011) 203-204.

this possibility of openness or the encounter of cultures; or “interculturality” is possible because the human being in the midst of all the different cultures with their history is the same and the only essence<sup>178</sup>. This unique essence “human being” is touched in his innermost by the truth, and it is by this hidden, this mysterious fact that his souls is touched by the truth, that we can then explain the mutual openness of the cultures to all, as well as the essential concordances, which exist between the cultures that can be found to be even very different<sup>179</sup>.

That which can bring together the cultures is the common truth about man, God and the reality as a whole. The more human a culture is, the more elevated it is, and the possibility of moving towards the truth, which up to the moment has been hidden, and it would have the capacity to assimilate the truth and be assimilated by the truth itself<sup>180</sup>. Ratzinger sees in Christianity these qualities when it is in its best, when it is awake and uncorrupt, for it knows well that in its diverse cultural expressions, exist many human elements that need purification and openness but it knows, also with certainty, that in its nucleus, there is manifestation of truth itself and thus it is redemption<sup>181</sup>. For him, this is the elevated exigency with which the Christian faith presented itself to the world and this is derived from an inner obligation to bring all the people to the school of Jesus because he is the truth in person and he is the man’s way toward the truth, toward God<sup>182</sup>. We have seen already that the main subject of all the process of cultural encounter is the human being who is capable of learning and assimilating different realities and concretely, man is the maker or creator of culture<sup>183</sup>. This man is the addressee of the God’s self-communication and this man, capacitated by God, is capable of initiating the process of conversion to Christ adequately if this message is communicated appropriately<sup>184</sup>.

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<sup>178</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 59.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 59.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, *EN* 18-20; also see JOHN PAUL II, *RM* 54.

<sup>184</sup> The intention here is to concentrate on the Christian position and its effort to relate with the cultures. The disputes regarding the truth claims and legitimacy of Christianity to claim to have the nucleus of truth and a way of liberation does not form part of this

## 6. Novelty of Christ before the cultures

What is peculiar and proper of the Christian faith is that it is convinced that it conveys the truth about God, the world and man. It claims to be the true religion. This affirmation has its root in Christ himself who revealed that he is the truth: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14.6). It is from this ground that the missionary zeal to share with the entire world, this conviction as commanded by the Lord himself is born. It is in this way that the Christian faith affects all men because all men deserve to know the truth and embrace it. If Christian faith were to be one among the many religious experiences of men in the world still wrapped in their symbols and enclosed in itself, then Christianity should remain in its own culture and leave alone the others in their own way also<sup>185</sup>.

This truth claim by Christian faith does not imply that the other religions are useless in themselves rather they are to move towards the truth as revealed by Christ. When the other religions are profoundly rooted in that which is human, they carry with them the testimony of openness, towards the universal, towards the truth. In principle everyone likes to know the truth and to be told the truth. Which truth? It is the truth which has been revealed by truth itself, Jesus Christ.

When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being’s characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore, they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human. Insofar as cultures appeal to the values of older traditions, they point –implicitly but authentically– to the manifestation of God in nature<sup>186</sup>.

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argument but it can be said that from a Christian point of view, faith in Christ is the fundamental and point of departure and such claims should not necessarily mean violating the right of other religions, even if it were to recognize in them a hidden Christianity because such an attitude may even facilitate positive relations. Cf. RAHNER, *Escritos de teología* V, 135-156; RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 51-54.

<sup>185</sup> J. RATZINGER, “Fe, verdad y cultura: Reflexiones a propósito de la encíclica *Fides et Ratio*”: *RET* 60/2-4 (2000) 141-142.

<sup>186</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *FR* 70.



The cultures as an expression of the unique being of man are characterized by a human being who is capable of transcending the proper religious and cultural limits. This makes the cultures to be dynamic and open to change. Since they have the capacity to progress and transform themselves and even to deteriorate, they have to encounter each other for the possibility of mutual enrichment<sup>187</sup>. If the inner opening of man to God impregnates the cultures in as much as they are more genuine, makes them to carry in them the predisposition for the revelation of God<sup>188</sup>. Thus revelation is not alien to them; rather it refers to an inner expectation within the cultures themselves which pushes them towards the fulfilment<sup>189</sup>. Pope John Paul II is right regarding this inner expectation when he affirmed that “Lying deep in every culture, there appears this impulse towards a fulfilment. We may say, then, that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation”<sup>190</sup>. All the cultures are to direct themselves towards Christ as their fulfilment. The narrative of the apostles in the Acts may us help see how the testimony of faith in Christ is perceptible and communicable through all the languages (Acts 2:8-13)<sup>191</sup>. It means that in all the cultures which are expressed in language the human word becomes a carrier of a proper talk about God and his Son<sup>192</sup>.

Thus, the Gospel should not be seen as if going against the culture. The Gospel should not be taken to be contrary to cultures as if, by coming into contact with it, deprives them something of their own and forces them to adopt other people’s cultural forms. Instead it liberates them from the disorders introduced in them by men in the course of their life; it helps

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, “Fe, verdad y cultura”, 151.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. ABEJON, “Acontencimiento de Cristo y dialogo”, 452-553: When inserted into a culture, the human individual can transcend himself, joining a broader social subject whose intuitions and values he inherits, prolongs and develops. This social subject conceives and develops intuitions that exceed the capacity of the individual: pre-rational or supra-rational intuitions that go beyond sensible things, to the ultimate foundation of everything, the divine. In this sense, it refers to the wisdom of the old, to the primordial traditions, which have a certain character of revelation: that is to say, they do not come properly from human research, rather from divine communication.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, “Fe, verdad y cultura”, 151.

<sup>190</sup> John Paul II, *FR* 71.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, “Fe, verdad y cultura”, 151.

them purify their pretensions of truth. At the same time this Gospel becomes an answer to the most intimate questions of man's heart. It becomes the guiding principle in his search for the truth, the transcendence, and a call and incentive to move towards the full truth<sup>193</sup>.

The movement towards the truth believed to be revealed by God from the very beginning of the faith of Israel demands a kind of cultural renunciation in order that the individual conform to this truth<sup>194</sup>. This dynamic is seen with the people of Israel who had to dissociate themselves from their own cultural identity and incline itself to the totally other, the God who cannot be appropriated by man as a private property, God the creator of heaven and earth. The faith of the people of Israel implied a permanent self-separation from its own culture and moving towards the horizon of the common truth<sup>195</sup>. This faith once made fully universal, is no longer tied to any nationality. It belongs to all the nations that are also invited to join this process of transcending from that which is proper to one to that which belongs to all. It began with Israel and continues till all the nations are converted to the true God revealed in Jesus Christ<sup>196</sup>.

Ratzinger is convinced that salvation in the afterlife presupposes a corresponding life in the actual life. One should not ask only who goes to heaven while disregarding the question of heaven. The understanding of salvation in the afterlife should be reflected in a way of life that makes the actual man more human and thus, in conformity to the truth of man which is God himself. On the question of salvation, man has to look beyond religions themselves, and to that horizon, belong the rules of righteous and just life that cannot be relativized arbitrarily. Salvation begins with the right and just life of man in this world, which always encompasses the two poles of the individual and of the community<sup>197</sup>. There are forms of behaviour that can never make man righteous and just. There are others that belong always to the righteous and just being of man. This means that

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. ABEJON, "Acontecimiento de Cristo y dialogo", 456; JOHN PAUL II, FR 71.

<sup>194</sup> Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* presents the characteristics of truth: "Every truth —if it really is truth— presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole truth. If something is true, then it must be true for all people and at all times". JOHN PAUL II, FR 27.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, "Fe, verdad y cultura", 153.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 158.

salvation is not in religions as such, rather depends on the capacity of such religions to bring men, towards the good. It would depend on how they guide man in his search for God, the truth and the good. All in all, the question of salvation necessarily has to do with the good, truth, God and man<sup>198</sup>. Christian faith provides the way towards the true salvation because it struggles to walk towards the good and the ultimate truth as revealed by Jesus. The way towards the truth is an exodus towards the true God who created man and calls him to be with him<sup>199</sup>.

### **7. Faith as an exodus in the manner of Abraham**

As evidenced in Abraham, the father of faith for Jews, Christians and Muslims, the Christian faith demands an attitude of moving outside oneself and outside one's proper culture. Being Christian demands a break-up involving some cultural elements and even understandings; leaving aside some elements of one's previous history, to begin a new history of faith, which involves an unending journey toward God. So anyone who enters the church has to be aware of this kind of rupture in the sense that he is entering a proper cultural subject, with a proper interculturality born historically from many levels, with its traditions regarding moral life, liturgy and prayer. He is not entering into a cultureless subject and even strictly speaking he is entering into a subject with its proper culture<sup>200</sup>.

Without a kind of exodus, without a radical change one may not achieve being Christian<sup>201</sup>. Christian faith is not a private way to God rather it leads towards community with its history because God has linked himself with history. God has revealed himself in the history of faith<sup>202</sup> which is also his history and we cannot suppress or deny it because one would lose the foundations of this cultural subject<sup>203</sup>. For Ratzinger the

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 158.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 157-158.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 64.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. VATICAN II COUNCIL, *Dei verbum* (hence DV), 1.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Obras Completas XII* (Madrid 2014) 102-107.

encounter of cultures and the gradual fusion of the different historical spaces for the formation of a common history of humanity is something which has its base in man's essence because he needs traditions and wants to appreciate values that are sustained from his inner being<sup>204</sup>.

The figure of Abraham as presented in the Sacred Scripture is example of a person who believed to encounter God and decided to live according to his guidance<sup>205</sup>. The faith of Abraham began by the conviction and trust in a promise of descendants and land, two things desired by any person of that time context for they were the elements that assured future, richness and descendancy<sup>206</sup>. Trusting on this promise, he abandoned the world of his predecessors and migrated to the unknown, to the apparently uncertain, moved by the certitude that in this manner his future is assured. In this process, Abraham had to abandon that which was secure, that which was under his control, the known, in favor of the uncertain in obedient to the Word of God. He abandoned the present in favor of that which is to come, the future<sup>207</sup>. The true man's vocation is put clearly here: openness to all, to that which is unstopped by any limit, to that which makes self-questioning, self-transcending till reaches the heart of the things<sup>208</sup>.

That which constitutes the faith of Abraham and that which according to the Scripture is the fundamental form of all faith including ours refers essentially to the future, the promise, hope. It means that the future is put in the foreground of the present, it is the disposition to give up and let go the present in favor of the future<sup>209</sup>. It means to live in the spirit of trust, believing that God is the one who provides the future for man and really he is the ultimate future of man. One has to move outside oneself, move beyond the immediacy to that which is offered by God, that which lies beyond his present horizon. Abraham changed the center of his life from where he was the center itself and his history the determining factor, letting God who calls to take the reins and direct his life towards the absolute. Abraham realized a kind of Copernican revolution in his

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe, verdad y tolerancia*, 68-69.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 28-42.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. GUARDINI, *La existencia del cristiano* (Madrid 1976), 18.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 30-31.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 30.

life<sup>210</sup>. He found God and he did not hesitate placing his future in his hands, supported by God, he initiated that journey of faith, which becomes also ours<sup>211</sup>.

## 8. Application to the Chagga Christians

This kind of exodus is the one which should be initiated by the Chagga people by opening and submitting to the universal God, the one who loves all indiscriminately<sup>212</sup>. The Chagga religio-cultural elements must be placed in this perspective of a God who reveals to them through the participation in the history of faith initiated by Him and which achieves its fullness in Jesus Christ<sup>213</sup>. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Christ has to initiate the journey of faith following the example of Abraham. He has to get out of his “Ur of Chaldeans”<sup>214</sup>, of that which is proper to him, his presuppositions and the parameters of reference attempting to approach the novelty and the immensity that represents the being of God<sup>215</sup>.

In this encounter of Abraham with God, the human being plays an important role in the sense that God comes to men through men that is why God’s incarnation is indispensable for the salvation of man<sup>216</sup>. Ratzinger would even go beyond this saying that since God comes to men through men, in the same manner it can be said that men come to one another through God<sup>217</sup>. In this way we could interpret faith as being there for the other<sup>218</sup>. God created men in such way that they may relate among themselves and share the goods that God has revealed to them through

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. GUARDINI, *La existencia del cristiano*, 18-19; J. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro* (Salamanca 1973), 31-32.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 30.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. MADDOX, *African Theology*, 26-27.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>214</sup> The “Ur of the Chaldeans” is used here symbolically to refer to the Chagga religio-cultural elements, which should be discarded or inculturated.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. GUARDINI, *La existencia del cristiano*, 20.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 32-33.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Ser cristiano*, 39.

faith, hope and love<sup>219</sup>. Consequently, we come again to the great commandment of love: loving God and the neighbor that enables us affirm that the fundamental movement of Christianity is also a fundamental movement of love in which we participate in the creative love of God himself<sup>220</sup>.

Being Christian is something simple and however more revolutionary in as much as conversion is concerned. As said already, it is to realize a kind of Copernican revolution: leaving aside the consideration that the Chagga religio-cultural elements are the center of everything and recognizing that Jesus Christ is the center and the others revolve around him. He is the criterion of everything<sup>221</sup>. Instead of maintaining the journey around the ancestors they have to maintain it towards God through Christ, the ultimate end of man. Their religio-cultural values would form part of a man who is an event of God's self-communication demanding them to open themselves in order to be healed and elevated by it<sup>222</sup>.

## Conclusion

We believe that God freely revealed himself to all men in the history, which reaches its summit in his Son Jesus Christ. The history of salvation can be traced since creation because the first parents fell into sin in the very beginning of their existence in the history; thus God's plan to save man, after the breach of the first parents was initiated in the promise that the devil would be conquered (Gen 3:15). Christians believe that God the creator of the earth and heaven, the visible and invisible, from eternity after the fall of the parents did not abandon them. He established a plan to save them initiating himself the journey in the history of salvation<sup>223</sup>, strictly speaking, beginning with the call of Abraham<sup>224</sup>.

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 33.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Ser cristiano*, 45.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. RAHNER, *Foundations*, 116.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *DV* 3-4.

<sup>224</sup> Scripture presents to us the first stages in the history of faith and at the same time it gives a permanent model of this history in the person of Abraham. Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 27-28.

God freely communicates himself and this revelation is to be accepted by man freely. Within the dynamic of God's plan of salvation is the belief that God extends his offer of salvation to all people of all times and all places of the world<sup>225</sup>. They are all offered the salvation of God in as much as they open themselves to that grace of God as free children of God. This universal offer of salvation would have been useless if that creature of His were not disposed to be moved by God maintaining at the same time the gift of freedom offered to him by God as is well explained by the following words of the conciliar fathers.

By faith man freely commits his entire self to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals, and willingly assenting to the Revelation given by him. Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth. The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood<sup>226</sup>.

It is the duty and obligation of the Chagga to work on this gift of God. It is the will of God to share with man the divine benefits which entirely surpass the power of human mind to understand<sup>227</sup>. It is from this universal call of God to share this gift that the process of evangelization may be based upon. If God through the Holy Spirit does not open their heart and their knowledge so that they may transcend their finite reality, the human agents of evangelization would not be able to share their experience of the divine self-communication and thus bringing to life the offer promised by God to them<sup>228</sup>.

In the same way of thinking, if it is agreed that God has freely communicated in the history of the world and here it means the whole world without referring to any particular region, though in one moment of this history, a history of faith has been experienced in a particular

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *DV* 6-7.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL I (1879-1870), "Dei filius", chapter 2, on *Revelation*": DH 3005; VATICAN II COUNCIL, *DV* 5.

history of a particular people, then we can say that all that is good and human in a people is preparation for the reception of that revelation<sup>229</sup>. It becomes, for a Christian, a force that pushes him to work more in order to make the offer of God in Christ be realized by the different freedoms encountered and here the importance of evangelization in its broad sense<sup>230</sup>.

It should be allowed to affirm that the Chagga history in the long run will be transformed and purified, and in fact is being gradually transformed in its encounter with the Gospel because the hidden gifts of God communicated to all human beings, are being realized by making them participate in the fullness of the promise as has been consummated in Jesus Christ, the summit of God's revelation: in these last days he has spoken to us by a son and this after he had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets (Heb 1:1-4)<sup>231</sup>. The need to preach the Gospel of Jesus becomes serious because the implicit faith is demanded to be made explicit in order to bring into light the free acceptance of the primordial call of God to all for their salvation:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature<sup>232</sup>.

Thus effort should be made to discover the real continuity with the African religious past, which also shares the universal divine will, which is a call to all to be saved through Jesus, if the Africans are to feel that Christianity is their religion founded on their faith in Jesus Christ<sup>233</sup>. The advice of Pope Gregory the Great to the missionaries in Great Britain to purify and transform the cultural elements and use them as means of transmitting the message of Christ can be considered as an effort to imbue with Christ the cultural elements of a certain people in order to put them in the lane of Jesus<sup>234</sup>.

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<sup>229</sup> Cf. VATICAN II COUNCIL, *LG* 16; *Id*, *NA* 2; *Id*, *Ad Gentes* 3, 7.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *RM* 33-34; FRANCIS, *EG* 14.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *DV* 4.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. SHORTER, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (London 1977), 24-25.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. VENERABLE BEDE, *Ecclesiastical History of England* (London 1907), 64.



That the human being is a privileged place of the encounter with God<sup>235</sup>, is an important element in relationship to God's revelation because this self-communication is not a vague communication rather, it is directed to man in his concrete context and it challenges him to live the new experience<sup>236</sup>. The human being is the main addressee of that revelation of God and in fact it can be said in the history of faith, because revelation only in its notional aspect would not fulfill the plan of God to save the fallen man. God from the fullness of his love communicates with men as friends and moves among them in order to have them in his own company<sup>237</sup>.

The man's capacity to transcend himself and recognize the greatness of his finitude, can help him to open himself freely to the mystery of his existence and thus recognizing the presence of God even from the mysterious reality surrounding him because "God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world, by the natural light of human reason"<sup>238</sup>. It is especially the mystery of his own existence, and that capacity to move beyond himself discovering that the history as interpreted and presented by God through Jesus Christ is the unique and the only criterion for deciphering the mystery surrounding him and the world.

For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all men, to dwell among men and to tell them about the inner life of God. Hence, Jesus Christ, sent as a man among men, speaks the words of God (Jn. 3:34), and accomplishes the saving work which the Father gave him to do (Jn. 5:36; 17:14). As a result, he himself –to see whom is to see the Father (Jn. 14-9)– completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees<sup>239</sup>.

In this way the Chagga belief on the afterlife which is characterized by the conviction that the ancestors and the living dead are the ultimate end of their hope can easily be corrected because the Chagga would recognize that true salvation after this life is this God who has created

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<sup>235</sup> Cf. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God*, 76.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Fe y futuro*, 30-31.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Vatican II Council, *DV* 2.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>239</sup> VATICAN II COUNCIL, *DV* 4; also see *ID*, *GS* 22.

them in his image and likeness and who has invited all to be saved from the fears and evil spirits and evil in general, which are the major cause of their belief on the power of the ancestors and the living dead. They will recognize that the afterlife belief as revealed by God in Christ affects their destiny and thus guaranteeing them eternal life, which is divine in comparison to that promised by the ancestors who are only human beings, who cannot save their fellow human beings because being sinners they need the mercy and love of God in Christ in order to be affected by the salvific work of God through Christ.

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