

The Christianization of Akpéma and Kondona Initiation Rites and Their Desecration by the Catholic Church in the Prefecture of Kozah in Northern Togo

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Abstract: The objective of this research is to examine the impact of the celebration of akpéma and kondona rites in church on their sacredness. The survey covered 80 people, including 25 catholic priests and 55 guarantors of Kabyè habits and customs, through to purposive sampling. Direct observation, individual interview and documentary research are the data collection techniques used. The data collected was subject to content analysis. The results indicate that upon entering the church, the akpéma and kondona rites were remodeled, losing everything that founded their sacredness: the eponymous ancestor, the sacred place, the mythical time, the founding myths, the bloody sacrifices, the person of the celebrant (*cojo*) and his verbal words. However, some new landmarks allow us to note an attempt at their resacralization by the church.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Christianization, Desacralization, Initiatory Rites, Sacred.

A. Introduction

The arrival of the first missionaries -especially those of the Society of Missions African countries (SMA) -in the Kabyè environment in northern Togo took place from 1926 (Banassim, 2019 and Napala, 2007). As everywhere else on the African continent, this cross of men and culture took place in a context where the missionaries had a condescending view of the legacy of indigenous societies. They claimed that the people found there did not have a religion or culture worthy of the name. To eradicate the first belief system and abolish existing customs, the missionaries carry out the destruction of places and objects of rites, prohibit neophytes from participating in family ceremonies, initiatory rites (Napala, 2014). Today, we can say that the long-awaited erasure of identity in this part of the country is a failure. Because, after a little more than three decades of hostile evangelization, the catholic church had to back down on its position, granting a place to the initiation or passage rites of akpéma and kondona in the liturgy, under the label of inculturation.

Certainly, in a country like Togo where the political power has, at a moment in its history, made the return to authenticity one of the priorities, the celebration of initiation rites in the church cannot be the subject of debate. However, what deserves particular attention is the mark that this Christianization leaves on the essence of the rites (their sacredness). In fact, it would be pretentious, even crude, to want to find the sacred in all the individual or collective manifestations of men. But we agree with Ries (2083), that in all societies where religious practices are present, the man believes in an absolute reality which transcends this physical world and which manifests itself there as a power of a completely different order than the order of natural forces. This absolute reality in which he believes is nothing other than the sacred; that which, according to Durkheim (2005a), is set apart, set aside and placed outside of profane and ordinary things and which requires the execution of acts of a special kind. For Kabyè in general, initiation rites are sacred institutions. It is unacceptable for them to be celebrated anywhere, anytime, by anyone or in any way.

The objective of this article is to examine the impact of the celebration of akpéma and kondona rites in church on their sacredness. To do this, the article begins with a synthesis which makes the sacred a social reality inseparable from certain rites. Then, it shows how a rite can be considered sacred or not. Finally, he poses inculturation as an important analytical entry for understanding the desecration that the catholic church inflicts on initiatory rites.

B. Methods

Physical Framework of the Research

The physical setting of this work is the Kozah prefecture. Located in the north of Togo, between the parallels 9°30 and 9°45 of north latitude and the meridians 1° and 1°15 of east longitude, the Kozah prefecture, capital of the Kara region, covers an area of 1034.9 km². It represents 1.8% of the total area of Togo. Kozah is limited to the north by the prefecture of Doufelgou, to the south by the prefecture of Assoli, to the east by the prefecture of Binah and the Republic of Benin and to the west by the prefectures of Bassar and Dankpen.

Nature of the Research, Target Groups and Sampling

This research is qualitative in nature, supported by some statistical figure. Two (02) main target groups are concerned: the diocesan clergy and the guardians of Kabyè habits and customs. Unable to systematically interview all individuals belonging to defined target groups, purposive sampling made it possible to approach resource people.

The reasoned choice technique involves a controlled selection of informants. Its advantage is to offer the researcher the opportunity to choose the informants on the

basis of a certain number of practical criteria. Indeed, the *cojona* (priests of the Kabyè tradition), the *sosa* (wise men) and the *akpadia* (old men and women) that brings together the group of guardians of habits and customs are those to whom society has entrusted the major role of officer the rites (for the first) and to teach the values of initiations to the youngest (for the last two). They are all immediately repositories of knowledge on these initiatory rites. On this basis of trust, they were identified, approached and listened to in each canton of the Kozah prefecture.

The same technique made it possible to question catholic priests. The reason for this choice is simple. They are the leaders of the Christianization of the *akpéma* and *kondona* rites, after the church fought them for decades. They supervise and officiate them, deciding which parts of rituals to keep, what must be reinterpreted according to the Christian spirit and what must be pure and simple rejected. On Christianized rites, there is no better source than these priests. In total, 80 actors are interviewed, including 25 catholic leaders and 55 guardians of Kabyè habits and customs.

Data Collection

Direct observation was favored in this research. It made it possible to record (using a grid) the similarities and differences observed between Christianized rites and those celebrated in lineage sanctuaries. The individual interview was also useful. Two (02) guides have been designed, one addressed to the primary leaders of the catholic church and another to the guarantors of habits and customs. Finally, documentary research made it possible to account for what the sacred is.

In black Africa where orality still has an important place, maxims, proverbs, parables, in short figurative meaning, abound. In this context, the use of terms is rarely innocent. They often reflect a codified agenda. Thus, to make the speeches intelligible, the data collected was subjected to content analysis. This is the place to specify that a closed question was asked to all the catholic priests interviewed, then made it possible to generate a statistical result using the SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0).

C. Results and Discussion

Allow us to begin the presentation of the results obtained in this research with a short theoretical account. This theoretical synthesis allows us to situate ourselves both on what the sacred is and on its relationship to the rite in general.

What the Sacred Is or Is Not

According to Crémoux (2004), the notion of the sacred comes from an adjective *sacer* or *sacris*, which designates what is dedicated to a divinity. By amplification, the same adjective also defines everything which designates absolute respect, or even everything which has a character of absolute value. This etymological meaning allows

us to understand that it is from ancient origins that the link has been established between the sacred and the religious. According to Bryon-Portet (2014), the temptation to considering the “sacred” and the “religious” as synonyms would come from the very fact that both evoke a transcendent dimension.

For some like Durkheim (2005a), the sacred is this reality antinomic to the profane; sacred things are those that prohibitions protect and isolate, while profane things would be those to which prohibitions apply and which must remain outside of sacred things. Caillois (1939) also places the sacred in opposition to the profane and elevates it as the category on which religious thought is based. He considers the profane as a world where the faithful goes freely about his occupations, exercises an activity without consequences for his salvation, a world where he can act without anxiety or trembling, finally, where his action only involves his superficial person; while the sacred is a domain where fear and hope paralyze him in turn, whereas on the edge of an abyss, the slightest deviation in the slightest gesture can irremediably destroy him.

Crémoux (2004) rejects the thesis of a categorical and irreducible opposition between sacred and profane. For him, conceiving the sacred through this system of opposition is demonstrating a “topography whose existence is absolutely not pasturable a priori” (Crémoux, 2004). For his part, Ries (2019) also objects to this thesis, because in his opinion it offers a simplistic and minimalist function to the sacred by simply opposing it to the profane. As if to further explain, Caillois (1939) emphasizes that on the one hand, the rites (of consecration in this case) make it possible to introduce a profane being or thing into the world of the sacred; on the other, the rites (of desacralization, or of expiation) return an object pure or impure to the profane world.

The position of Van Gennep (2014) is also sufficiently clear. He considers that the sacred is not an absolute and fixed value. For him, he has this characteristic that he is alternative. The author illustrates this pivoting of the sacred through an example that can be understood by everyone. Indeed, he says, in certain communities, any congenitally impure woman is sacred in relation to all adult men. If she becomes pregnant, she also becomes sacred to the other women of the clan, except her close relatives; and it is these other women who now constitute a profane world in relation to her, including children and adult men.

Ultimately, after this litany of definitions and characterizations, it is appropriate to conclude that the sacred and the profane are two different realities. Opposite or not, it is in reference to the second that the first takes on meaning.

The rite as a Resource for Experiencing the Sacred

Through its power to establish a gap between the visible world and the invisible world, religion is often seen as the only field where humans experience the sacred. This is all the more apparently true since the experience of worship is the behavior

which determines the deep gaze and the global dialectic that homo religious establishes between its ambient environment and the entire universe. However, the symbolic resources that man needs to actualize “the all-encompassing presence of the sacred” (Vergote, 1966) are not restrictive. This is the example of the rite. It is on this same register that Hubert and Mauss (2002) place sacrifice, considering it as a process which “consists of establishing communication between the sacred world and the profane world through the intermediary of a victim”. The ritual act is placed within a symbolic expression or a hierophantic whole linked to the mediated experience of the supernatural (Ries, 2019). It is linked to a symbolic structure through which the passage from signifier to signified, from imagination to ontological reality, from sign to being takes place (Ries, 2019). Through the rite, the divine manifests itself in a being, in a space or in an object that it invests with sacredness. So, without the rite, the sacred heads straight towards obsolescence.

The Rite as an Essential Resource for the Institutionnalisation of the Sacred

The sacred is certainly a supernatural reality, endowed with a power of coercion, ambivalent because it is attractive and repulsive, arousing both fascination and fear. But it is not a reality that man discovers ready-made, obvious and sovereignly autonomous. This thesis recalls the words of Durkheim (2002b) when he speaks of the “invention of God” and the “transfiguration of his figure” by men. For him, “(...) the idea of mystery has nothing original. It is not given to man, but it is man who forged it with his own hands” (Durkheim, 2002b). The sacred is obtained at the end of a ritual which projects a sacred image onto a reality that is initially familiar and profane. Having understood this process of sacralization, Hatzfeld (1993) states that “the gods did not come down from the sky: they were born from the actions of men”.

Indeed, for an object, a thing, a portion of land, ..., to become sacred, it must have been the subject of a “primary ritual” which consecrates it, distinguishes it and even detaches it, elevates him above the profane. The primary ritual elaboration transforms the numinous principle into a sacred principle, whose symbols and manifestations will no longer be immanent, but transcendent¹. The following example, taken from funeral rites, allows Cazeneuve (1996) to better understand this position. Indeed, he says, after the period during which the corpse is simply numinous, it is through the rite that the dead, which for immediate perception is an impure object, becomes a tutelary ancestor, therefore sacred or transformed into beneficent genius.

If necessary, we have understood that the rite and the sacred maintain a relationship of reciprocally nourishing dependence. First, the rite allows us to establish the transcendence of the sacred in what is given in nature. Second, ritual updating is necessary to maintain the sacred separated from the profane. Third, the relationship of the rite to the sacred makes it itself sacred.

¹CAZENEUVE Jean, nd, “The sacred and religion”, on <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/rites/4-le-sacre-et-la-religion/>, accessed October 13, 2022.

At this stage of the development where we know what the sacred is and its relationship to the initiatory rite, we believe that we have gathered the theoretical elements necessary to pronounce on the sacredness of the akpéma and kondona rites and on what remains of them due to their celebration in the church.

The Akpéma and Kondona Rites in Their Authentic Expression

The kabyè constitute a society subdivided into age groups. Initiation is the only way for the individual to move from one class to another. The young girl is subjected to a single rite (akpema); the young man has two (evala and kondona). Initiation to the akpéma rite concerns pubescent girls, aged 17-18 years old. It takes place every year in July and marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. She gives girls all the basics to run a household and become responsible women. Kondona is the second male initiation. It takes place every five years called *waah* and takes place between the end of August and the beginning of September. It gives access to the adult men's class. This initiation is so important that in Kabyè country, the measurement of historical time is carried out in relation to *waah* (Napala, 2014). They are two distinct rites by their targets and the mythical times during which they are performed. However, they take place almost in the same format, composed of successive phases.

The preparatory phase: whether it is one or the other of the rites, the father announces his intention to initiate his daughter or his son to his brother-in-law, who happens to be the maternal uncle of the child. While waiting for the parade of the grand *cojo* (priest in kabyè's traditions) which announces the opening of the rites, the mother prepares everything needed for the feast. The fiancé of the candidate for the akpéma rite contributes to the research of the ritual emblems which will be used on the day of the official release of his sweetheart: pyrograved stick (*dooka*), leather bracelets (*cangbalaa*), black string that the akpen will wear on her waist on the day of the official release (*kpénan*), sheep or goat's mane, usually with white coat (*kpem*) which she puts on her feet and on her arm. The search for the emblems used by the future kondo falls to his father. He must look for: a raffia helmet topped with long bird feathers (*cilikah plu. cilikassi*), animal skin, the main band, an iron gong or a cymbal made of two discs (*nkpandè*), the shield (*kpaiiw, plu. kpayin*), an ax (*coniyè, plu. cona*), iron bells (*sèlitu*), a piece of spiral iron (*kpaliw plu. kpalin*), the iron necklace (*likpadè, plu. likpala*), the bracelet (*cangbalaa*), the antelope horns fixed on a small basket.

The initiation phase itself: It begins with a one-week retreat during which the girls receive, from their teachers or godmothers of initiation (*kpankpamin*) education on the meaning of the rite and on how to run a home. Future kondona are taught by their immediate elders in initiation (*agolè*) on values such as the protection of the *tetu* (village), solidarity, mutual aid, ... The retreat ends with the ritual of presenting the candidates (females and males) to the family ancestors (accompanied by prayers and blood sacrifices addressed to the ancestors, the communion meal. Then comes the time of adornment and the solemn demonstration marked by a procession from the house

to the sanctuary, the reception of the candidates at the sanctuary, followed by their presentation to *agolmie* (eponymous ancestor). In the meantime, and for the girls, it should be noted the ritual of the free choice of the future husband at the entrance to the sanctuary, the verification of the virginity through *milla pie* (the stone of the fornicators). Climbing a goal of approximately five meters is a physical ordeal which concerns exclusively the kondona candidates.

The post-ritual phase: it concerns girls much more. This phase is crowned with *cimu* (farewell ballet, since the girls will soon get married and put an end to the sandy games) and *kiyéna* (yam festival, evening of popular rejoicing which ends with the final welcome of the *akpéma* in the respective houses of their fiancés: it is marriage.

It is these symbolic rites that the catholic church has chosen to inculturate under the label of inculturation. She carried out this project by mending the rites as she wished, making them lose all sacred substance.

The Main Points of Desecration of Initiatory Rites by the Catholic Church

By following the christianized rites from start to finish, important innovations are noted. But, here, the emphasis is just on those which have a link with the desacralization of rites.

The Sidelining of Agolmie: the Occultation of the Archetype

According to Ries (2019), all creation of sacred reality in humanity is done by reference to an archetype. Visible reality is often considered as a function of a celestial archetype which confers power and effectiveness to human action. In Mesopotamia, the tiger has its model in the star Anunît; in Egypt, the names of the nomes come from the celestial fields; in the Zervanite religious tradition in Iran, each terrestrial phenomenon is only the correspondent of a celestial phenomenon; in the Bible, the church of Jerusalem is built on a celestial plane (Exodus 25:1-9). The archetype presents itself as a primordial model whose origin is found in the supernatural world. Man realizes this model on earth thanks to the rite. By placing an object, a temple, a statue in perfect harmony with the archetype, he gives strength and effectiveness to its realization, to which he gives a sacred dimension which is a dimension of completion. Thus, in Pharaonic Egypt, the life of nature is linked to the primordial action of Osiris who becomes the archetype of fertility. It is also through the primordial action of Osiris entering into survival that each human being will be able to enter into survival. Indeed, there was an initial act: the reconstitution of the body of Osiris. This act must be repeated. All embalming and funeral rituals in Pharaonic Egypt are linked to this Osirian myth.

Concerning the initiation rites, the archetype is indeed *agolmie*, the eponymous ancestor of the Kabyè ethnic group, whom the founding myths present as created by

God from the sky and descended on a rock at Lama-Saoudè². The history of initiation rites dates back to this legendary hero. He instituted them from his own genius, executed them first and recommended them to his descendants. And since he is the initiator, the commemoration of the rites must be undertaken scrupulously with a pious thought to his glory so that a sacredness and an energetic bubbling are preserved in the celebrant and the candidate who receives his initiation. This is evidenced by the invitation addressed to him in lineage sanctuaries by the *cojona*, asking him to guarantee the smooth running of the rite, to bless and protect the candidates (females and males) for initiation. For no reason whatever, it is not possible to replace him by Jesus Christ without violating the essence of the rites or without dereferencing them. But this is what the church has done with the *akpéma* and *kondona* rites which it incultures.

Certainly, Jesus Christ is an emblematic figure in the Christian tradition. Whenever the faithful organize the stations of the cross or commemorate the crucifix, the holy scene, ..., they do it with reference to "Son of Man", who died on the cross to appease the wrath of the father and to obtain the remix of the sins of humanity (Romans: 5 and 6). They believe they are acting in accordance with his recommendation, even in his presence. Better still, it is this reference which gives a sacred character to the entire commemoration. However, Jesus Christ is foreign to the *akpéma* and *kondona* rites. His figure has no connection, no historical-symbolic significance for the ritualized staging of initiations. The qualities that make *agolmie* the archetype of the rites and to whom humans, in this case the *cojona* (priests in *kabyè*'s traditions), address is not common to him with other ancestors. He owns them. Consequently, replacing this mythological model that the reproduction of ritual gestures recalls as an ideal, with Jesus, that is a conscious aggression which forces the psychology of a people to abandon his markings maintained according to his experiences and its sensitivities in order, ultimately, accept the improbable; it is seeking to kill a mythology and its spirituality; it is to dereference and desacralize the initiation rites.

The Substitution of the Sanctuary by the Parish: the Disintegration of the Sacred Place

The different spaces where *homo religiosus* conducts his activities are not homogeneous or arranged in the same way. Each activity has its requirements. Thus, he arranges each piece of space according to the activity to be carried out there and above all according to the symbolism contained in this activity. Sometimes, it is the space which reveals itself and imposes itself to humans, by presenting an exceptionally fascinating or frightening content or even an element of relief of a certain importance, with which a representation is associated, oriented either towards good or towards evil or even ambiguous and ambivalent. The rehierophany "makes a territory of the cosmic environment qualitatively different, determining an opposition of sacred space/formless expanse" (Bertin, 2014). It gives special energy and qualities to an

²A village located in the mountains, in the canton of Lassa, where there are human footprints on a rock, supposed to belong to *agolmie* (the eponymous ancestor).

object, an individual, a space, ..., and completely changes the mode of relationship, communication and physical contact with it.

In terms of ritual processes, space is arranged with a spirit: it must promote the consecration, spiritual elevation, transcendence of the officiant. It must also participate in psychologically triggering in the candidate for initiation a state of life which is not accessible anywhere. The initiatory space must represent, according to Chelbi (1989), a place of manufacturing concepts, of establishing a relationship with metaphysics and/or of ascent towards spirituality and of communication with elsewhere. It must be able to make possible the break, momentarily, with the realities of the world of the sensibly sensible. This place "is at a distance from other places of ordinary life due to its sacred charge. If it is not separated, this space changes its nature during its realization" (Erhel, 2018). This is why the spaces set up for rituals always contain, according to Panu-Mbendele (2005), a materialization of an invisible universe (ancestors for example) and the visible mark of the mediations of this other universe (sanctuary, statuette, altar).

The sanctuary is the sacred place where initiation rites take place among the Kabyè. It includes symbols (hemicycle of stones, sacred stone, ...) and is the place where *agolmie* had his first experiences of life on earth, a hospitable planet, but on which man rubs shoulders with other forces sometimes opposed to his prosperity. It was on this original site that he conceived and carried out, for the first time, the initiation rites which became both a legacy and a duty of memory for all his descendants. His spirit remains there. For the people, the descent to the sanctuary has a triple meaning: living in the presence of *agolmie*; repeat his gesture in a place where he performed it for the first time as a sign of fidelity to tradition; finally, to renew the positive energies necessary for the life of individuals and the group. On this place, the candidate for initiation discovers himself in a universe that surpasses him on every side (Eliade, 1976). As a result, this site provides the feeling of the sacred, which the temple does not provide on the day of the rite.

The Rearrangement of Sacred Time: the Disintegration of Mythical Time

Just like the sacred place, the choice of moments (dawn, noon sharp, sunset, dark night, month or some specific period of the year) does not happen at random in the context of the rite. Starting from the Australian labora, Ries (2019[4]) demonstrates that for *homo religiosus*, ritual is the repetition of the founding gestures of divine Beings; which implies the re-actualization of the event accomplished "at that time". By this fact, these gestures are sacred and their periodic reiteration regenerates the entire religious life of the community. Sacred time is a re-actualization of the time of origins that we reach through rites. Man leaves present historical time to enter in the contemporary time of creation. Through the celebrated rite, affirms Ries (2019[4]), man participates in the "fullness of time", the mythical time during which the gestures and operations were carried out by the founders of the ceremonies.

The ideal time to carry out the initiation rites according to the Kabyè is during the period from the beginning of June to the end of September. During this liturgical period, a whole host of rites are performed, including akpéma and kondona. Everything is accomplished and follows a well-determined order of passage. Respect for this order is necessary so that each rite intervenes with more or less precision in its own temporality, that during which it was accomplished by *agolmie*.

However, it can be seen that the akpéma and kondona rites organized at the church are undergoing a calendar rearrangement. The Christianized rites take place later, one to two weeks after the events in the sanctuaries. The diocese affirms that it intends to maintain this discrepancy, for two reasons. First, bar the way for all those who, for one reason or another, harbor the ambition of receiving initiation twice (at the sanctuary and at the church). Indeed, knowing that anyone who received his initiation at the sanctuary has the obligation to shave his head, the church waits for the ceremonies in this sacred place to end, to be certain that this sign has not appeared on the head of the Christians waiting to be initiated. If she noticed this, she would have to investigate those concerned to be sure that they are not trying to trick people into obeying two contradictory traditions. As a second reason, this time gap is due to the church's desire to avoid the rites overlapping with the end-of-school-year exams.

Nevertheless, the measure caused a slight time lag between the holding of the rites at the sanctuary and their taking place in the church. This means that mythical time is no longer respected accurately. Although legitimate because it allows Christian initiations not to coincide with important school activities, it is not without consequences on the sacredness of the rite. Still, until now, nothing prevents Catholics from pursuing initiatives of this order for other reasons.

The Suppression of Sacrifices and the Reinterpretation of Myths

In the church, the priests removed from the circuit of rites all blood sacrifices and libations in honor of the ancestors, whether they were eponymous, lineage, clan or close, considering that Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross on Mount Golgotha.

The founding myths which confer an element of sacredness to the rites are deconstructed and/or reconstructed by means of the analogies found in the Bible and in the Christian tradition as a whole. The creation myth of *agolmie* and his descent to earth are no longer valid. It's that of Adam and Eve in the Garden that is worth it. Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause (2003) tell anyone who will listen that without the founding myths, the rites have no effectiveness. They essentially assert that our rituals are relative to something. They tell stories, and these stories give them meaning and strength. Stories designed to measure the sagacity of the human mind are essential for the ritual to be effective. They are what Helias (2014) calls "meaning-making modalities", chosen and shaped to meet specific cultural needs. Going in the same

idea, Cathelin (2014) declares that human action must undeniably be considered as caught in an interlocking “field of imagination” which govern its self-organization: unconscious psychobiological intimations, the collective unconscious, the cultural cradle and fields attached to other groups and subgroups of common culture. The first field, made up of unconscious psychobiological intimations, is not only more general, but also responsible for several constants: in the structuring of instinctive behaviors, in the immediate and intuitive perception of reality, in the unconscious orientation of behaviors emanating from the religious instinct, in the definition of the processes of mythification and the sense of the sacred. The other fields outline the links that structure social organizations (political, economic, religious, emotional links). They guide habits and cultural choices. They give shape and meaning to social practices and representations. They give their specificity to the symbols, myths and norms specific to each culture. Constitutive of networks of conscious and unconscious transmission of collective history, they maintain the memory of the past with its share of joys and pains, victories, defeats and traumas, and prepare the forms to come.

In essence, removing myths from the performance of rites is subjecting ritual celebrations to immoderate fancies.

The Substitution of Cojona by Catholic Priest

To speak of the rite is to speak of the master of initiation having to transmit knowledge and know-how to a candidate. Indeed, the conservation and transmission of the essence of the rite requires appropriate personnel. In Kabyè culture, no one officiates the initiation who wants, but rather an already-initiated who, on the basis of his charisma and his discretion, has been designated by the *sosaa* (the wise), captured and invested *cojo* on proposal diviners, then consecrated by *Eso*, that is to say God (Verdier, 1982[22]). It is in this way that somebody can become *cojo*, a priest to whom society entrust the major role of ensuring permanent contact, on behalf of all, between the profane and the sacred, - to the extent that the common mortals only have direct contact with the sacred on a periodic, punctual basis. The state of life, dignity, person-institution and symbolic figure to which the *cojona* access after this investiture is not accessible to other members of the community. However, the *cojona* are not associated with any celebration of initiation rites in the church. Their tasks are carried out by catholic priests who replace them.

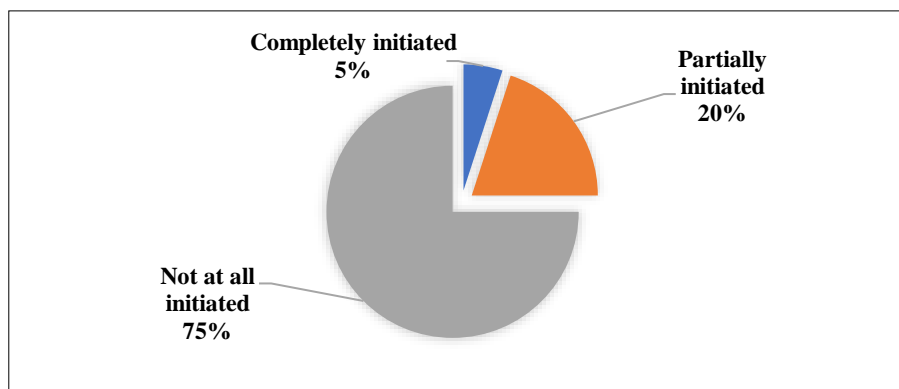


Figure 1. Distribution of priests taking part in the celebration of inculturated rites, according to whether they themselves received initiation or not

Source: Field survey, July-August 2022

According to graph no. 1, only 05% of catholic priests have received all the rites required of a man (being male), notably evala and kondona; 20% of them only received the first initiation (evala). What borders on even more astonishment is that in addition to not being *cojona*, 75% of the priests who participate in officiating the celebrations have not been initiated into any of these rites. In certain parishes, we see aspirants playing important roles in the organization of the rites. Can a man be able to transmit when he himself have not received? If yes, with what consistency of teaching? This attitude of priests, let us say, is like an intrusion into a sphere which is completely foreign to them, since their status as priest does not constitute a discharge for action. Through an example taken from a very ancient but current civilization, Van Gennep (2014[9]) teaches us what sacredness is and especially how the intrusion of a layman into a reserved space is a serious violation. Indeed, he writes: Although as a general rule the territory occupied by a “semi-civilized” tribe is defined only by natural accidents, its inhabitants and their neighbors know very well within what territorial limits their rights and prerogatives extend. (...). Often the boundary is marked by an object, post, portico, standing stone (landmark, term, etc.) which have been placed in this place with the accompaniment of consecration rites. The protection of the ban can be immediate or mediated (border deities, represented for example on Babylonian kudurru; Hermes, Priapus, ..., boundary deities; ...). By the ceremonial laying or fixing of boundaries or limits (plough, animal skin cut into strips, ditch, ...), a specific space of the ground is appropriated by a specific group in such a way that entering, being a stranger, into this reserved space is to commit sacrilege in the same way as to enter, being profane, into a sacred grove, a temple, (Van Gennep, 2014).

If we must agree that the simple entry of a stranger into a sacred space is equal to a crime elevated to the rank of sacrilege, then what happens when profane people arrogate to themselves the right to officiate rites?

The Attempt to Reposition New Markers of Sacredness

A rite without the slightest sacredness is a routine, a vulgar event which can be easily abandoned depending on circumstances and the interests of several orders. The comparative description of the akpéma and kondona rites has made possible to establish that the church has pushed out of its space all the classical benchmarks which make initiations sacred. But it is important to remember that the objective of the church is not only to fight against initiations in their first form, but also to offer its public a new formula which will last generations. It will not succeed in doing so if what it proposes contains absolutely nothing psychologically influential, hence the interest in associating with the rite the figures of Jesus Christ and Mary, that of the priest and the temple, the crucifix and statement of belief.

The Figure of Jesus Christ, the Cross and the Crucifix

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the only son of God (John 3: 16), who give himself up to die to obtain from the father, absolution for the sins of humanity (Ephesian 1: 7). Whoever wants to go to the father must go through him. He has many other attributes, but these few that we have just highlighted are enough to show how sacred his figure is. His image has flooded books, films, ... His portrait carved in wood, steel, concrete, marble, gold and many other materials is visible everywhere. Like the Redeemer who overlooks the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the statue of the Savior is present in the corners of houses, at the gate, in the courtyard, on the study table, in the living room... This statue is not a simple work of art for the Christian; it is the effective presence of Jesus Christ, who sends back evil spirits and bad spells for the happiness of the people who live in the surrounding area.

The crucifix designates the cross supporting the statuette of Jesus Christ in the posture of crucifixion, while the cross alone is bare. But both belong to the same family of sacred symbols, just like the statue of Christ itself. Either has the same attributes as the statues.

Moreover, wanting to associate such symbols with pre-Christian rites whose admission to the church first required the removal of their sacral references is to seek new ones for them. In other words, we seek to ensure that these rites do not appear to be simple scenarios.

The Figure of Mary and the Use of the Verb

According to the Bible, Mary is the virgin who gave birth to Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26 and 27). Among Catholics, it benefits from adoration in the literal sense of the term. Some pray in front of his statue; others live in his presence everywhere and at all times through the rosary that they say to accompany the "Hail Mary"; still others keep its image stuck on their vehicles or doors in the hope that it

will ward off any danger during the journey or in their environment. All these practices prove that the figure of Mary is neither the least known nor the least sacred in the Christian space. However, during the Christian rites, candidates for initiation are asked to make an audible declaration indicating that they choose her as their guide and protector in all circumstances.

In any case, words are not sounds produced in vain. Nor are they produced to satisfy communication needs alone. Words also have a power that is set in motion when they are spoken. If not, why would God himself have used the word to bring forth light? (Genesis 1:3-4). And how would the inauguration of Heads of State and the taking up of service in certain institutions always be accompanied by the taking of an oath? Finally, isn't it through words that we bless or curse?

During the christened rites, every candidate of akpema must publicly declare that they deliver and consecrate in all submission and love, their body and soul, their interior and exterior goods and the very value of their past, present and future good deeds to Mary, leaving her a complete and full right to dispose of them and everything that belongs to them without exception according to her good pleasure, to the greater glory of God, in time and place. eternity.

Let us therefore imagine what can happen in the subconscious of girls who make these declarations. At least a little thrill will pass through the one who engages in this exercise while being well concentrated. All these measures are taken to restore a basis of sacredness to the rites after *agolmie* and the *hatatina* are no longer invoked.

The Temple (Churche)

Tent where the ark of the covenant rested during the Israelites' stay in the desert - until the time when the temple of Jerusalem was built - the temple never had the image of a simple building. For example, every time a catholic want to go through the door of a parish, he instinctively makes the sign of the cross... He has been taught since his first moments of catechism that the tabernacle is a sacred place. It must also be said that the relics of the saints buried there are also likely to reinforce this belief. In all cases, by defining the temple as the space where initiatory ceremonies take place, although they are removed from the sanctuary, the clergy expects them to have a sacred resonance.

The Figure of the Priest

The priest is the one who has received the order of the priesthood, by virtue of which he has the power to say mass and administer the sacraments. In other words, the functions of the priest cannot be carried out by an ordinary person. But, would this extend its ministry to pre-Christian initiatory rites? Before answering this question, it is necessary to imagine what the Christian akpéma and kondona rites would be, if the

catholic priests play no role in it, knowing that the *cojona* are in upstream away from the track. They would be completely stuffed; or at least, they would become vulgar events to which many converts will not give credence. However, neither the church nor the faithful have any interest in these ceremonies resembling any other event. Because, if there is no sacredness, christianization will not be able to relieve the fear of those who submit to it. Nor can it retain the faithful who harbor the desire to return to their old world.

In short, the image of Christ, Mary, the temple and that of the priest, the use of the crucifix, the cross and the prayers are all references by which the catholic church tries to reposition the sacredness of initiatory rites Christianized. This reconsideration of new figures, especially that of Jesus Christ, obeys the expectations of theologians such as de Meester de Ravestein (1980), who believe that the contextualization of Christianity presupposes above all the safeguarding of a "hard core": Jesus Christ who is able to integrate all cultures. It turns out that this Christ embodying all revelation is completely incompatible with deified ancestors and bloody rituals. This is also what dissatisfies the detractors of the pastoral of inculturation.

D. Conclusion

At the end of this development, we will have sufficiently understood that the archetype, the sacred place, the primordial time, the sacrifices and the founding myths of the *tetu* (the city) as well as the person of the officiants are decisive for maintaining the sacredness of the rites. Referring to what constitutes the emotional content of the numinous according to Otto (1995), it is important to say that the Christianized ceremonies of rites are not capable of reminding man of the feeling of creatureliness, of smallness, of fragility which defines them. They have nothing *mysterium tremendum* ("mystery which makes one shiver", which terrorizes), nor the power of *majestas* (something which escapes an individual and which surpasses him), even less an energy, a vitalism, an exuberance of life. It is no longer an exciting, astonishing, fascinating experience in the face of a mysterious "completely other"; Since in there, there is almost nothing that does preserve the emotional strength of the links between individuals and the rite.

For non-Christians, it is a truism to affirm that the celebration of pre-Christian rites in church is a parody, a valorization of scenarios, which in turn lead to their real disarticulation and desecration. To say the least doubtful, it is difficult to make: 1. a complete break with the ancestors (*agolmie* and *hatatina*), the sacred place, blood sacrifices and libations, 2. a corruption of the historically professed founding myths, 3. a pure and simple substitution of *cojona* by catholic priests, and 4. to a certain extent a rearrangement of mythical time "without impoverishing (...) the mythological sap that must be mobilized for practices to be put in place and maintained" (Baudry, 2006).

Because, above all, it is not our opinion to consider the rite, as Segalen (2017) did, as a “pure activity, without meaning or purpose”. On the contrary, we subscribed to the point of view of Erhel (2018), who considers that the rite refers to belief systems, responding to a hope, an ideal for which the answers are pending. If it is not possible for the eucharist to be celebrated outside of church, by a non-consecrated person without losing its meaning, nor can the rites of passage be exported from the sanctuary and officiated by prelates in parishes, under the banner of inculturation without affecting their sacredness. So much does the eucharist need the story which establishes it and the dogma of transubstantiation so that the bread is no longer seen as bread, but as the body of Christ, and so that the wine is no longer seen as vain, but as the blood of Christ, as the initiatory rites need to be fertilized and illuminated by the sanctuary (home of the elders and memory of the Kabyè people), the action and verbal prayer of the *cojona*, ..., so that their celebration creates an intensive unleashing affects, a kind of catharsis. It is on this condition that rites can truly serve as a “joining of the world”, a “door of communication of the individual and the group with the sacred” (Tourneret, 1995).

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