

PRONOUNCEMENT

Initiation Schools & Ceremonies



COMPILED BY JAPIE LA POORTA

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language Learners Definition of initiation

The process of being formally accepted as a member of a group or organization: The process of being initiated: A ceremony or series of actions that makes a person a member of a group or organization: The act of starting something: The beginning of something.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary Definition

- The act or an instance of **initiating**.
- The process of being **initiated**.
- The rites, ceremonies, ordeals, or instructions with which one is made a member of a sect or society or is invested with a particular function or status.
- The condition of being initiated into some experience or sphere of activity: **KNOWLEDGEABLENESS**.

1.1. CULTURAL ASPECTS

In some of the African groups in South Africa initiation is seen and practiced as a cultural phenomenon. This cultural right of passage is predominantly experienced as a patriarchal right of passage to manhood. These cultural practices encompassed aspects that are both compatible and incompatible with the Pentecostal understanding of Scripture. For this reason, it creates a dilemma for pastors and parents because they will have to choose between loyalty to their culture and their understanding of Scripture.

Several encounters with groups within the church who are affected by this dilemma has unearthed various difficult issues that were not adequately resolved.

1.1.1. WHITE AFRIKAANS COMMUNITIES RITE OF PASSAGE

In the previous discussions the need and practice for a right of passage within the Afrikaans community emerged. The discussion revolved around a vacuum that evolved as a result of the discontinuation of the military conscription, the gap year that was occupied with the youth groups such as M28, Disciples, Acts, to mention but a few.

1.2. SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In some of the communities in the country the right of passage had a sociological aspect. It revolved around the formation of gangsters with its own rules and culture.

This sub-culture operates on all levels of society and it includes, the commission of crime and substance abuse which is not restricted to life in poor neighbourhoods, because it even permeates the prison populations.

1.3. RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

Examples of initiation ceremonies might include Hindu diksha, Christian baptism or confirmation, **Jewish** bar or bat mitzvah, acceptance into a fraternal organization, secret society or religious order, or graduation from school or recruit training.

1.3.1 JEWISH RITE OF PASSAGE

According to **Jewish** law, when **Jewish** boys become 13 years old, they become accountable for their actions and become a bar mitzvah. ... The bar or bat mitzvah ceremony is usually held on the first Shabbat after a boy's thirteenth and a girl's twelfth or thirteenth birthday.

1.3.2. CHRISTIAN RITE OF PASSAGE

“Christian initiation” refers to the ritual process employed by various churches in forming new Christian converts through catechesis (instruction) during the “catechumenate” to baptism, postbaptismal rites (including hand-laying and anointing, sometimes called “confirmation”), culminating in First Communion, and leading to the further integration of these newly initiated members into ongoing Christian life through “mystagogy.” Christian initiation is the story of diversity and change as the biblical images of initiation lead toward a rich variety of early Christian practices and theological interpretations, eventually coming to focus on Christian baptism as “new birth” or the “washing of regeneration” in water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5 and Titus 3:5) in early Syria and Egypt and baptism as participation in the death and burial of Christ (Rom. 6) in North Africa and other places in the West.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, after Christianity emerged as a cultus publicus, the rites of Christian initiation underwent a certain standardization and cross-fertilization as various churches borrowed from one another to construct rites that display a remarkable degree of homogeneity. These rites include a decided preference for celebrating Christian initiation at Easter, after a period of final catechetical preparation in Lent; pre-baptismal rites with an exorcistic focus; an almost universal (Rom. 6) theological interpretation of baptism; and postbaptismal hand-layings or anointings associated explicitly with the gift or “seal” of the Holy Spirit, still leading to First Communion within a unitive and integral process. Another characteristic, thanks to the controversies faced by Augustine with Pelagianism, was the development of a new theological rationale for the initiation of infants, which focused on the inheritance of “original sin” from Adam. This would have far-reaching consequences for subsequent centuries as infant baptism became the norm for practice and theology.

If the Eastern rites underwent little further development in the Middle Ages, the West experienced what many have been called a sacramental dissolution, disintegration, and separation. Gradually, the postbaptismal rites of hand-laying and anointing, associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit and now with the physical presence of the bishop, became separated from infant baptism and were given at a later point. Similarly, the reception of First Communion also became separated and was often postponed until the canonical age of seven. This process was inherited by the adherents of the Protestant and Catholic reformations of the 16th century. Little was done to restore the unitive and integral process of Christian initiation from the earlier centuries and confirmation itself developed among the reformers largely into a catechetical exercise or rite with First Communion either prior to or after confirmation.

In the early 21st century, thanks to the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and similar rites in other churches, the unitary and integral process of initiation has been restored. What remains to be done, however, is the full integration of infants and children into this process, although in several Anglican and Lutheran contexts infants now are again recipients of the full rites of initiation, including First Communion.

1.3.3. AFM (PENTECOSTAL) RITE OF PASSAGE

Within the AFM of SA the rite of passage is not considered within the context of cultural or sociological aspects, because these rites are assumed to be taking place within the confines of the household and or family. Within the arena of the religious practices this rite of passage is done in multiple manners within the confines of the local assemblies, where a person is converted, baptized, trained for membership and allowed as members of these assemblies even though that person is allowed to participate in the Holy Communion. Further equipping of their members to continue within the confines of the local assembly that will assist the person that has become an assembly member to advance within the ministry and hierarchical structures of the assembly.

1.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

What seems to be a glaring omission is a rite of passage within the AFM that would assist the members to be comprehensively initiated in all aspects of life, given the inadequate resolution of the cultural and sociological rites of passage that are compatible with the Scriptural understanding of the AFM of SA. In the twenty first century it seem that every aspect of human life in a democratic society has been relativized and all the absolute values have been compromised by the Constitution of the country that is purported to be the final authority of human existence within the country. This is further exacerbated by the disintegration of family life and structures that are been branded as patriarchal and therefore old fashion and in dire need of change.

With reference to the cultural aspects the situation remains unresolved and the choice is left in the context of the family and or cultural grouping. A heavy emphasis on loyalty to Scripture is assumed on the don't ask don't tell basis for those groups who continue their cultural rite of passage as was the case in the past. The gap that has been created by the termination of compulsory conscription for a certain group still creates a void that needs to be filled. Therefore, on a small scale some people within the Christian community are finding creative ways to address this need, while others in the same group are distancing themselves from these practices, because in their mind it is a sign of unwillingness to change.

As far as the sociological aspect is concerned the gangster initiation is viewed and treated as a pathological phenomenon from which those who are involved must be delivered.

However, when everything is said and done the challenges posed by the active practice of the rites of passage whether it be cultural or sociological aspects, remains an issue of major concern/importance. Given the negative results of the absence of a cultural and sociological rite of passage, I am of the opinion that the AFM of SA must find ways and means to creatively integrate all aspects of the rite of passage from a biblical-theological point of departure. One of the contributing factors to the joining of gangsters is the absence of a sense of belonging together with the non existing father figure within the household and the failure of assemblies to address this need in their midst.

This in my understanding is where the National Women's and Men's Fellowships can play a significant role in applying their minds and utilized their resources to come up with a solution to deal with the sociological aspect. On a national level they need to conscientize and guide their members towards seeing the challenges on this level and to do something about what they see.

THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA

National Office

Building no. 14, Central Office Park, 257 Jean Ave.
Centurion, Gauteng, South Africa
P.O. Box 9450, Centurion, 0046
Tel: +27 12 644 0490 | Fax: +27 12 644 0732/4
www.afm-ags.org



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