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NEW PERSPECTIVES OF CHRISTIANITY

IN THE CONTEXT OF

THE MODERN COLONIAL ENTERPRISE IN EAST AFRICA

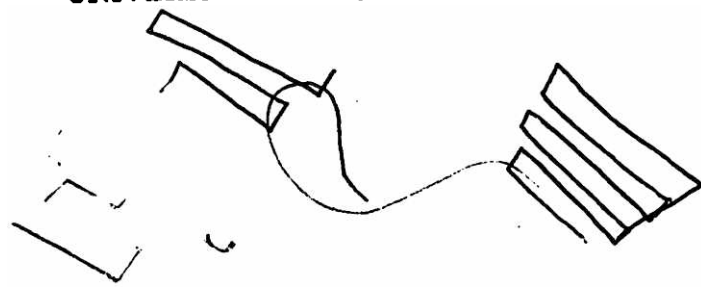
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KENYA

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A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University
of Nairobi

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ABSTRACT

This study has shown (a) the theological misconception of the modern missionary movement, (b) the Africans' theological appropriation of the Christian faith to their cultural and religious heritage in the context of the modern missionary background, and (c) the levels of contemporary African critiques of Christianity to which African Christian theological reflection must respond. It has also shown (d) that at both the cultural and ideational levels the modern missionary enterprise introduced practices and ideas which were new to African culture and thought, but that in spite of the shortcomings of the modern missionary process Christianity has become established among African individuals and peoples.

The African responses of acceptance and rejection of the Christian faith are closely associated with the way in which Christianity was introduced in East Africa through the modern missionary movement that gained momentum in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The African understanding of Christianity was greatly influenced, in some cases positively and in others negatively, by the missionary enterprise through which African individuals and communities became exposed to the Christian faith.

The modern missionary movement, in both its Protestant and Catholic forms, based its major objective of spreading Christianity from Europe to countries abroad, on

assumptions which are both historically and theologically questionable. Historically, the movement was often, though not always, in apparent alliance with the colonial administration, to the extent that missionary organizations and individuals operating in Africa sought the protection of those colonizing countries from which they were sent. Sometimes the missionaries from different colonizing powers clashed in the 'mission field' - Africa - not only because of doctrinal disagreement, but also because of their countries of origin. Thus the missionaries working in Africa regarded themselves as not only Christian, but also as English, Scottish, Irish, French, German, Italian and so on. Their missionary activity consisted not only in teaching Africans the essential proclamation of the Christian faith, but also in imparting their respective cultures to African peoples, thereby destructively undermining the African cultural and religious heritage.

This historical development thrived on a theological assumption which was scripturally erroneous - that Western culture was part-and-parcel of Christianity, and that therefore the spreading of the Christian faith to non-European peoples automatically meant also imparting Western 'civilization' to them. That assumption was strengthened by the belief in 'progress' which at that time was anchored in the advances of modern science and in the developments of modern nationalism in the western world.

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That theological assumption was a deviation from the theological insight agreed upon at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts ch. 15, Galatians ch. 2), which became the cornerstone of missionary principles during the first three centuries of Church history - until Constantine. That insight, which St. Paul often repeated (Romans chs. 2-3; 1 Corinthians ch. 9; Galatians chs. 2-3; Colossians ch. 3:5-11) was that in Christianity there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:11). It is ironical that this insight was completely overlooked by most missionaries who introduced and worked to establish Christianity in East Africa, in spite of their pietistic orientation and sustained insistence on scriptural justifications for their missionary calling. Rather than follow this insight, they maintained the attitude of superiority which was dominant in the western world during the nineteenth century, that African peoples were culturally 'primitive' and religiously depraved.

The Council of Jerusalem recommended that Christian missionary activity should be constructively critical of, rather than destructively prejudiced against, the cultural and religious heritage of the peoples to whom Christianity was to be introduced. Following the approach endorsed at that Council, Christianity became readily and critically adapted to the cultural, religious and philosophical setting of the Graeco-Roman world within the first three centuries of Church history. Hence

the General Councils of the Church in that period, which met from time to time to distinguish between heresy and catholicity of Christian doctrine. In contrast, in East Africa and indeed in other parts of Africa south of the Sahara most Christian missionaries operated following the approach of quasi-cultural proselytization, in which they demanded of their African converts to denounce and abandon totally, the African heritage and adopt the culture of the missionary masters as a pre-condition of conversion. Such was the approach of the Judaisers in the early Church, who demanded that Gentiles must undergo circumcision and other Old Testament customs as a pre-condition of admission into the Church. This approach of proselytization was rejected at the Council of Jerusalem.

The legacy of 'Christendom' which developed in the medieval period still lingered on after the Reformation, and became pronounced among both Protestants and Catholics during the modern missionary movement. Some African Christians accepted its erroneous theological assumptions, but they did not, as their missionary masters expected and demanded, completely detach themselves from the basic elements of African culture, religious beliefs and intellectual frame of reference. So they theoretically and outwardly accepted and echoed the Church discipline established by their missionary teachers, while internally and practically they retained their African cultural and religious identity. Such African converts remained faithful adherents of the Churches that grew directly within the activities of the various denominational missionary societies.

Other African Christians openly challenged the theological assumption that an African must first abandon or disclaim his cultural heritage and adopt the western way of life as a pre-condition of conversion to Christianity. They did not consider acculturation as a pre-requisite of conversion. Having the Bible (or parts of it) as the basis of their interpretative authority, they established their own Churches, which the missionary authorities did not at first respect. Most missionaries considered such Churches as ignorant distortions of the Christian faith. But those Africans who joined them could also see the open rivalries in the interpretation of the Christian faith among the various western denominations, and could not therefore accept the validity of such criticism. These African-led and African-founded Churches represent another African perspective of Christianity, which adds to the denominational proliferation and complexity in East Africa, especially in Kenya.

Still other Africans outrightly rejected the missionary imposition of a new culture and a new religion, especially when such imposition was clearly strengthening colonial domination. This African perspective of Christianity was based on the argument that if Christianity was a religion which supported human degradation, political oppression, cultural domination and economic exploitation, then it was not a religion worthy for an African to follow, unless he wanted to endorse his own dehumanization. It was because of the initial erroneous

theological assumption, and the missionary approaches following from it, that this resentment developed among Africans. However, their negative response to the modern missionary enterprise was not a rejection of the Christian faith as such, but of that particular presentation of it. For, if Christianity is the 'Good News' that comes so that man might 'have life and have it abundantly' (John 10:10), it could not essentially be in favour of anything that dehumanizes the human individual or community.

African Christian theologians are beginning to analyse and articulate academically, the relevance and implications of the Christian faith in the context of contemporary Africa. The quest for an African Christian theology has become a significant trend of Christian theological thinking, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. The development of a theological tradition is a long process, and in most parts of Africa this process has only just begun, Christianity having been established there for only about a century. It is therefore too early to determine definitely, what will constitute the direction of African Christian theological reflection. What can be done, and has been done in one chapter of this study, is to identify some of the major concerns which African theologians have found to be of importance in the context of their contemporary experience, training and interests. Such concerns may form the foundations

of what might later be categorized and studied as the African Christian theological tradition.

At the same time, academic critiques of Christianity have been articulated and portrayed especially in creative writing - in novels, plays and poetry. This study has shown that such critiques could be considered as raising two levels of criticism - cultural-historical and intellectual-philosophical. At the cultural-historical level Christianity in Africa is criticised in the context of the modern missionary enterprise, because during the colonial period many missionaries were not outspoken in favour of the African resistance to colonial rule and cultural domination. By their acquiescence they facilitated the development of colonialism and made the impression that Christianity was the religion of the oppressors - which was in fact a wrong and unfortunate association. At the intellectual-philosophical level the Christian faith has been portrayed as having been incompatible with the religious ideas and intellectual orientation of African peoples. African Christian theologians will in the future need to address themselves to these two levels of criticism, if they are to succeed in showing that to Africans Christianity is intellectually satisfying, socially relevant, practically effective, culturally flexible, historically adaptable and doctrinally consistent.

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PREFACEObjective

The objective of this interpretative study is to examine the missionary background of the introduction of Christianity into East African cultural and religious contexts, and the African expressions of Christianity resulting from that background. The study consists of an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion.

The Study

In the Introduction a consideration is made of the concept of Mission in the New Testament as a response to the 'great commission'. An outline is then made of the implementation of Christian mission in the Graeco-Roman world, noting some contrasts between early missionary activity and the modern missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through which Christianity reached the interior of East Africa.

The first chapter proceeds with a study of the modern missionary background which gave momentum to the introduction of the Christian faith in East Africa. It examines the missionaries' interpretation of the 'great commission',

their policies, objectives and approaches in their missionary work. The lag of almost twenty centuries between the beginning of the Church and the arrival of Christianity in East Africa is also examined.

Having provided this missionary background in the first chapter, the second one examines the teachings of this new religion in relation to the African cultural heritage, presenting some aspects of Christian life as they were introduced by various missionary societies, and considering how those aspects were interpreted by African Christians in the contexts of their traditional culture. The third chapter continues this consideration with regard to some Christian beliefs as they were understood by African converts in the context of traditional African religious life. What was new in the beliefs which Christianity introduced? How were these beliefs accommodated into the religious thinking of African converts?

The fourth chapter outlines the various strands of Christianity which have resulted from missionary efforts in East Africa. A consideration is made of both the African Churches which grew directly through the modern missionary movement following denominational traditions that originated in Europe and North America, and the 'Independent' Churches which are another form of African response to, and expression of, Christianity.

In the fifth chapter a study is made of the quest for an African Christian theology, presenting some emerging themes in modern African Christian theological reflection. The sixth chapter examines modern African criticism of Christianity, and the impact of that criticism on Christian missionary assumptions and approaches through which Christianity was introduced and established in East Africa. These six chapters are followed by a brief conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

In the New Testament mission is understood as 'going out' to all the world. The Church's missionary activities derived motivation from the 'great commission' of Jesus Christ to all his followers, to go out and proclaim his Gospel (Mark 16:15). The Gospel message was that the Kingdom (reign) of God was within the reach of everyone who would begin to live in accordance with the new insights which Jesus had taught and exemplified in his ministry, death and resurrection. The new life in the Kingdom of God would come through faith and repentance on the part of the believer, and forgiveness on the part of God.

Transmitting the Gospel from one culture to another raised many challenges. For example, during the apostolic period there arose basic questions regarding the relationship between the Old Testament customs and traditions on the one hand, and the Gospel on the other. There were also questions as to what should be the relationship between the Gospel and the cultural and religious heritage of the Graeco-Roman peoples. Saint Paul spent much time and effort elaborating these relationships, and his epistles in the New Testament exemplify his contributions to the discussions on those issues.

In response to the 'great commission' missionary activity in the early Church spread Christianity as a new religion apart from Judaism - a religion which spread beyond Palestine to the whole Graeco-Roman world, with converts among both Jews and Gentiles. Paul emphasised the universality of the Christian faith: in Christ there should be 'neither Jew nor Greek..., neither male nor female..., neither slave nor free...' (Gal. 3:27-29). Instead of proselytization as practised in Judaism (in which the Gentiles wishing to be converted to Judaism had to adopt the Jewish culture), evangelization became the Christian approach to win converts. Every Christian convert was challenged to become an apostle of Jesus Christ, and live as a loving brother or sister of all others.

Some of the people who had become converted from Judaism to Christianity were not quick to realize the discontinuity between their former religious life and the new Christian faith. For example, they thought that in order for Gentiles to be admitted in the Christian Church it was necessary first to be initiated into the Jewish traditions and customs, such as the rite of circumcision which all Jews practised and all proselytes into Judaism had to adopt. Others, such as Paul and Barnabas, considered that

faith in Jesus Christ was adequate for all Christians. The polarization of these views was expressed by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, in which he insisted that it was unnecessary for the Gentile converts to undergo the Jewish rite of circumcision since faith in Jesus Christ had set everyone free from the Old Testament law. He criticized Peter and James for demanding that Gentiles should adopt Jewish cultural practices, and for segregating themselves as Jews, from the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-21).

This debate on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was settled in the Council of Jerusalem (Acts ch. 15) which was attended by such missionary leaders as Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James, Silas and Judas (Barsabbas). Paul's view prevailed at the council. In support of it, Peter convincingly expressed the conviction that in the Christian mission to the Graeco-Roman world, the Holy Spirit was active among the Gentiles just as he was among the Jews, and therefore there should be no boasting within the Church (Acts 15:6-11). The view that it was inappropriate to subject non-Jewish converts to Jewish culture, did not imply that the Church should be uncritical of Graeco-Roman cultures and religions. Rather, it meant that the Gospel should challenge the shortcomings of all people and their cultures, both Jewish and Gentile. Hence Christians became unpopular among, and were persecuted by both the Jewish and Graeco-

Roman traditionalists. The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts ch. 6-7) and the unpopularity of Paul and his missionary team in various cities (for example, Acts ch. 17-18), illustrate this fact.

The missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century which introduced Christianity to the interior of East Africa faced a similar problem. For example, it had to deal with the relationship between Christianity and the African cultural and religious heritage. It had also to deal with the relationship between the missionary societies and the African Christian Churches which became established. In view of the New Testament concept of mission as response to the 'great commission' and considering the insights drawn from the missionary activity of the early Church as shown, for example, by the resolution of the Council of Jerusalem discussed above, remarkable contrasts are observable between the setting and approach of the missionary movement of the early Church on the one hand, and that of the nineteenth century missionary movement through which Christianity reached East Africa on the other. A few such contrasts are outlined below, as a prologue to the study which follows.¹

The spreading of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world was carried out by people who had become accul-

turated into the Graeco-Roman culture. Many of them, such as Saint Paul, were Jews who had accepted Christianity. Others were Gentiles who, prior to their acceptance of Christianity, were acquainted with Judaism, through proselytization or other contacts in the Graeco-Roman cities. For example, Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother, and was circumcised according to Jewish custom (Acts 16: 1-3). Hence missionary activity among the Greek and Roman peoples had a familiar cultural background. In contrast, Christianity was introduced into East Africa by missionaries who were sent from other continents, mainly Europe and America, to cultural and religious environments to which they were totally new and unfamiliar. On arrival the missionaries had to begin by acquainting themselves with the new cultures, religions and languages of the African peoples whom they had come to evangelize.²

During the first century the Christian Gospel was first proclaimed in synagogues to Jews and proselytes who, being familiar with the Old Testament messianic prophecy, were expected by the evangelists to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as Christ, the Messiah, to accept his teaching and become his followers. The modern missionary movement in East Africa did not have such a familiar religious starting point. African religious heritage was not written in

scriptures to which the foreign missionaries might refer, and the missionaries saw no connection between the Gospel and the religious backgrounds of the peoples to whom they had come. Hence Christianity was introduced as an entirely new faith and way of life, discontinuous with the African cultural and religious heritage. African converts acknowledged the novelty of Christianity, but they did not abandon completely their traditional basic beliefs and cultural values. This point is elaborated in chapters two and three below.

For the first four centuries of its existence in the Roman empire, the Church was a persecuted minority. Christians had to meet in secret in private houses, and evangelize at the risk of martyrdom. In contrast with this missionary situation in the early Church, Christian missionary activity in East Africa had the protection of colonial powers, although the objectives of missionary societies and those of colonial authorities did not always coincide. For example, missionaries and colonial authorities claimed to have a common objective as far as 'civilizing' African peoples was concerned, but beyond that, missionaries were also interested in spreading the message of 'Salvation', which was not a concern of colonial administration. Missionaries hoped to prepare their African converts for the individualist 'salvation' of 'souls' in heaven, to 'save' them from damnation in hell. The colonial administration,

was primarily interested in entrenching colonial political power abroad, and hence, facilitating exploitation of the resources in the colonies for the benefit of the colonial powers at home. Thus the colonial administration provided protection for Christian missionary activity, as long as that activity was seen to be a factor furthering, rather than hindering, the fulfilment of that primary colonial interest.³ From the beginning of missionary activity in East Africa, schools, churches and mission stations were built, and African conversion to Christianity was not as threatened by colonial administrators who played the role of protectors, as Christians were persecuted by Roman authorities in the early Church.

It may be added that, it is questionable whether in fact colonialism was based on a genuine interest on the part of the colonizers, to 'civilize' African peoples, although this objective was widely claimed. For instance, Placide Tempels, in Bantu Philosophy (1945, Eng. ed., 1959) wrote : 'It has been said that our civilizing mission alone can justify our occupation of the lands of uncivilized peoples. All our writings, lectures and broadcasts repeat...our wish to civilize the African peoples...'^{3a} In that reference, Tempels argued that western powers had concentrated too much on technical progress, and on amelioration of material conditions, but they had neglected 'progress in human personality', which

he considered to be the highest aspect of civilization. In his view, industrialization, introduction of an European economy, permanent raising of production - all that was not necessarily a measure of civilization. On the contrary, it might lead to the destruction of civilization, unless sufficient account was taken of man, of human personality. He concluded: 'We see more clearly every day that the European civilization imported to the Bantu is a mere superficial garb which has no deep impact upon their souls.'^{3b} George W. Carpenter in his book The Way in Africa (1959) commented: 'Despite high-sounding talk about "the white man's burden" few Europeans had any interest in Africans as people. To a great many government officials they (Africans) were subjects to be dealt with en masse; to company officers they were "hands" to be put to work'.^{3c}

Bernard Delfgaauw, in Twentieth Century Philosophy, (1969), explained this background as follows:

The predominant idea of the nineteenth century... continued to be that theory and practice should be kept distinct from each other. Man understood in philosophy and science, but he acted in the social and political forms which he gave to the world. The leading circles in Europe imposed their own forms on European society and went on to impose them on the whole of the world. Imperialism and

colonialism did not look for any theoretical justification for their actions - although they tried sometimes to justify them afterwards in bad faith - and they were generally accepted as a matter of course simply because the superiority of Western man was taken for granted.^{3d}

Thus the motives of exploiting the resources in the colonies and establishing political prestige by expanding empires, were the primary driving interests of colonialism. The supremacy of European powers over colonized peoples was presupposed, hence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the leading circles in Europe did not concentrate their attention on theoretical (or theological) justifications for colonialism. Such justifications followed, rather than preceded, the development of colonialism and imperialism.^{3e}

The missionary situation changed in the Roman empire after A.D. 313 when, following the conversion of emperor Constantine, Christianity became the popular religion of the empire. The Church then assumed authority, to the extent that heretics and 'pagans' were very harshly treated as the Church entrenched its position. Conformity with the

expectations of the established Church became common practice.⁴ In East Africa, Christianity never became established to such a degree. Furthermore, the organization of missionary activity through numerous missionary societies with different denominational sponsorships, did not facilitate the development of such unified ecclesiastical authority as was possible in the Graeco-Roman world from the fifth century onwards.

Missionary activity in the Graeco-Roman world was an urban phenomenon. The book of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament narrates missionary journeys from town to town, and many of Paul's epistles were written to Christian communities in towns, for example, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica and Colossea. Evangelization in East Africa was mainly a rural phenomenon. Most of the African population is still rural and the majority of Christians live in rural areas. In Kenya for example, more than ninety percent of the population is rural, and most Christians are rural dwellers.⁵ Whereas Latin and Greek sufficed in the urbanized Graeco-Roman world, in East Africa many languages are spoken, and the translation of the Bible into these African languages became a very important aspect of missionary activity in Africa. Out of about one thousand African languages, the Bible has been translated, partly or in full, into about six hundred versions. The work of translation and revision of older

versions, is still in process.⁶

In the Graeco-Roman world, Christianity was the only religion that made a unique claim to universality, with missionary proclamation centred on the belief that in Jesus Christ God had made his will known to mankind once and for all. In the East African context, Christianity is not the only religion which has been introduced claiming universality. Islam, which also holds this claim, has been established in some parts of Africa, including East Africa, for many centuries. The Baha'i faith also holds this claim, and has at least thirty thousand adherents in Kenya.^{6a}

Missionary activity in the early Church was carried out in a setting where there was only one recognized imperial authority, with the Roman emperor as its head. In Africa, especially after the Berlin Conference (1884-5), Christian missionary activity was organized under competing European imperial powers.

Although there were such remarkable contrasts between the missionary situation in the Graeco-Roman world and that of nineteenth century East Africa, the faith which Christian missionary activity was proclaiming in both situations

was one, centred in Jesus Christ and motivated by his 'great commission' for all his followers to proclaim the coming of the 'Kingdom of God'.

Within the first century of the Christian era the Church spread rapidly from Jerusalem to other towns in the Roman empire, becoming a religion mainly of non-Jews. In the Gentile setting it became necessary for the Church to show the relevance and link between the Gospel and hellenistic thought. The following are two examples of in which this was done.

The writer of the gospel according to Saint John opened his portrayal of Jesus Christ by establishing a link between the Greek philosophical concept of Logos and the Hebrew belief in YHWH as the Creator of the world. The cosmos, according to an important trend in Greek metaphysics, was held together into one coherent system by a rational principle, Logos. The author of that gospel identified this principle YHWH, who in Judaism was believed to be the originator of all things (John 1:1-5). At the same time, the author proclaimed Jesus to be the Word of God, in the sense that through the Incarnation God in Jesus Christ had come to dwell with mankind, so that through him, mankind might have eternal life (John 1:9-18), (John 3:16-21). In the hellenistic setting, Jesus was portrayed as Christ and Lord, and in the

Hebrew setting, as Messiah and great Rabbi. Thus from the beginning of missionary activity in the Graeco-Roman world, efforts were made to establish critically, a positive relevance of Christianity to its Hebrew background, and to hellenistic thought.⁷

Paul in his missionary journeys through various parts of the Roman empire, related the new teaching of Christianity to what his audience knew, thought, believed and experienced. For example, at Athens he debated with Stoics and Epicureans, and even defended his faith at the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-21). To the Jews he began with the Hebrew prophetic tradition and related it to the Gospel (for example, Acts 22:1-22).

This approach of relating the Gospel to the religious, philosophical and cultural backgrounds of the peoples being evangelized, was generally not followed in the nineteenth century missionary movement which introduced Christianity to the East African interior. Early missionaries to East Africa presented Christianity as a religion and way of life having no link or relevance to traditional African thought and life.^{7a} Whereas Christian missionary activity in the early Church sought to show, critically, the relevance of the Gospel to the thought and culture of the peoples being

evangelized, most early Christian missionary teaching in East Africa followed the prejudiced approach of proclaiming the irrelevance of the African philosophical, religious and cultural backgrounds, to the Christian faith and to western civilization of which the missionaries were propagators. Hence the derogatory and prejudiced view propounded by some European writers, such as J.C. Carothers, that traditional African thought was the product of retarded consciousness, which made African adults think and act like children.⁸

In spite of the failure of early Christian missionaries to relate the Gospel positively to the African background, Christianity was accepted by some African converts, who made their own interpretations of what they saw, read and heard in the process of missionary activity. The process of defining and articulating this positive African response to Christianity has already begun, and some of the emerging themes of African Christian theological reflection are elaborated in chapter five below. At the same time however, there was continuous African resistance to the missionary presentation of Christianity, which portrayed Christianity as part-and-parcel of western civilization. In the African resistance against colonialism, the missionary brands of Christianity were perceived as one of those aspects of western civilization which had been imposed on African peoples, and which must be rejected along with the political, economic and cultural

aspects of colonial domination. It should be noted that this African response to the experience of colonialism did not necessarily imply African rejection of Christianity as such. This observation is attested, for example, by the establishment of African Christian Churches independent from missionary control in various parts of Africa.⁹ From this historical background, some African criticism of the missionary presentations of Christian faith has continued. While within the African Churches there is a growing trend towards the development of an African Christian theology, outside the Church there is also a corresponding development of modern African criticism of Christianity. This is elaborated in chapter six.

The attempt to divide the early Church, for instance, between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile converts, was rejected, as early as in the Council of Jerusalem, and Paul emphasised the concept of the Church as the indivisible 'Body of Christ' (Eph. 2:11-22, Rom. 12:3-21, 1 Cor. ch. 12). In the nineteenth century missionary activity, distinction was made, with prejudice, between the missionaries from abroad who believed themselves to be 'civilized' and 'christian', and therefore, materially and spiritually superior, and the African peoples whom they considered 'uncivilized', 'primitive', 'heathen', and therefore materially and spiritually depraved. This prejudiced and

unappreciative approach was a failure, on the part of the modern missionary movement, to follow the missionary insights of the early Church.¹⁰ It is from the fact of this failure that this study proceeds, by first examining the coming of Christianity to East Africa, and the missionaries' objectives and approaches as they worked to introduce the new faith.

INTRODUCTION

REFERENCE NOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY TO EAST AFRICA
AND THE MISSIONARY UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

1.1 THE MISSION LAG

Although the 'Great Commission' was a basic scriptural motivation of the missionary outreach of the Church during the first three centuries, Christianity did not reach the interior of East Africa till the nineteenth century. There was a 'mission lag' from the beginning of the fourth to the end of the eighteenth centuries. During that period the Church became established and integrated in the life of the continent of Europe, but its expansion in other continents waited until the rise of the modern missionary movement.¹ There were several factors contributing to this lag in missionary outreach, some of which are pointed out below.

The conversion of emperor Constantine to Christianity and the edict of Milan in A.D. 313, made Christianity a fashionable religion in the Roman empire. Christianity was officially tolerated and accepted, and this tended to slow down the pace of missionary activity in the Church. Nominal

Christianity became a feature of the Church, in the sense that many people considered it fashionable and respectable to be regarded as Christians. During the first three centuries Christianity was a persecuted religion, and tended to be accepted only by those who became fully committed to the Gospel and were willing to persevere the derisions, persecutions and martyrdom. In the pre-Constantine period the Church was a persecuted minority conscious of its calling as a missionary community. Fashionable, nominal Christianity in the post-Constantine period raised numbers in Church membership, but reduced the earlier missionary fervour of the Church. The monastic movement,² rather than missionary outreach, was the significant response to that development.³

There was some missionary activity during the medieval period, but this was carried out by a few individuals who took Christianity to the ends of the Roman world.⁴ The Church during the first century was characterized by missionary movement, whereas in the medieval period it was more involved in consolidating its position. It was during this period, that the concept of 'Christendom' developed, as Christianity became integrated and entrenched in the cultures of Europe.⁵ In view of the development of the missionary process outlined in the introduction Christians of this period thought more about consolidation than about expansion as illustrated below.

The Church was greatly challenged by doctrinal controversies especially during the fourth and fifth centuries, during which time its great creeds were settled upon in the great ecumenical councils.⁶ Those doctrinal controversies tended to reduce the missionary outreach of the Church, in the sense that the Church's efforts were spent mainly in resolving the controversies and establishing the catholic faith over and against the various heresies. Thus the persecution of heretics became a remarkable feature of the Church during the medieval period.

Furthermore from the eighth century onwards Islam became a new challenge to the Church especially in southern Europe. Hence the Church's efforts were directed to the defence of the Christian faith against the spread of this new religion. The Crusades were a culmination of that endeavour, which cost many lives and much bitterness. The preoccupation of the Church at that time with the consolidation and defence of its faith also contributed to the reduction of its missionary fervour. Christianity in north Africa survived those trying times, but did not have missionary outreach to other parts of the continent. However, it had links with the Church in Ethiopia, whose foundation is traced to the fourth century.

Geographical factors also contributed to this missionary lag. For example, it was difficult to travel from north Africa southwards, owing to the cataracts on the Nile, and although there were trade routes across the Sahara Desert to western Africa, such a link with East Africa was established much later.¹⁰

Thus Christianity reached East Africa through the sea route round the southern cape, which Vasco da Gama had pioneered in his search for a sea passage to the far East. It is noted that although the Portuguese voyages in the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries had Christian crews and called at ports along the African coast, Christianity did not become established among the pepples around such ports.¹¹ Effective evangelization waited until a later period.

One of the reasons for the failure to achieve effective evangelization during that period of discovery and mercantilism, was that missionaries went out with the chief aim of 'saving' souls, and not establishing local Christian communities. Hence they baptized large numbers of people, without training local clergy to minister to them. On this view of mission, A. Hastings has remarked:

The traditional missionary motivation was most commonly a fairly simple one - to go overseas to pagan peoples to bring 'salvation' to those who would otherwise inevitably, or almost inevitably, be damned. Salvation was above all something for 'souls', it was related to the next world and it required as a minimum baptism, some degree of faith and conversion of heart expressed through acceptance of the formulas and instruction of the catechism, some provision for subsequent penitence and arrival at a holy death.¹²

Consequently, large numbers of people were baptized, but for leadership they had to depend on priests, bishops and other missionary personnel from abroad. Thus the contact between East Africa and Portugal did not leave a lasting local Christian community, although in 1564 an Augustinian monastery was established at Mombasa, and in 1597 the Augustinian friars claimed six hundred converts there.^{12a}

The Renaissance included, among other things, the new dimensions in scientific and philosophical thought. Philosophy and science challenged the presuppositions which the Church had hitherto held to be unquestionable. For example, Descartes emphasised the importance of rational reflection as the centre of existence, in contrast with Christian tradition which had emphasised faith and ecclesiastical authority, as the bases of individual and social life.

Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and others in their scientific investigations and experiments challenged the presuppositions of Christian teaching of the time. For example, the view that the earth was flat was challenged by the new scientific understanding of the solar system.¹³ Hence the Church at that time was faced with the crisis of responding to the new ideas which had come with the Renaissance, and the Reformation. Faced with those challenges, it could not concentrate its attention on missionary outreach, which was left to the initiatives of interested individuals. But the Church was on the brink of a new period, sparked by the Reformation, which became the background of the modern missionary movement.

1.2 THE RISE OF THE MODERN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

The Reformation brought a new crisis in the life of the Church. The Reformers called for a new questioning about the meaning of the Church in the world with regard to its basic doctrines, ecclesial structures, and its authority in the context of the new ideas which had come with the Renaissance.¹⁴

The invention and development of printing, and the revived interest in Biblical studies, meant that the Gospel was more widely read than at any other time previously.¹⁵

Later, industrialization and urbanization resulting from the new scientific developments, and other factors such as non-conformism, meant that some Christians felt greatly uncomfortable. The colonies, especially in America, provided an outlet for some Christian groups, who sailed abroad and settled there. Thus Christianity began again to spread.¹⁶

The evangelical revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was an important factor contributing to the rise of the modern missionary movement. Within it there was a revival of mission as a response to the 'Great Commission', and many evangelists sailed abroad to proclaim the Gospel. Towards the end of the eighteenth century several missionary societies were founded, and these sent missionaries to various parts of the world.¹⁷

One of the presuppositions underlying this urge for missionary activity was that outside the Church there was no salvation. It was a non-orthodox view (see Romans ch. 2 and 3), and yet very widely spread. Contacts with the peoples

of Asia, America and Africa had led to a greater awareness of religions other than Christianity, which offered different interpretations of the world, man, his nature and destiny. The prevailing attitude towards these peoples, their cultures and religions, added fervour to the missionary movement. For example, John Calvin had expressed the view that outside the Christian faith there was no salvation, since the revelation of the true God was recorded in the Bible and proclaimed by the Church. He had set out his view from the assumption that naturally, the human mind has a sense of divinity, and God had manifested Himself in the world He created. However, in spite of the clarity of this natural revelation, man in his insensibility had failed to worship the true God, inventing other gods instead. Man could reach full knowledge of the true God only through God's own self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, and this would be possible only within the Church, which was vested with the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel. In the context of East Africa, this point has been raised by F.B. Welbourn in his book, East African Christian, in which he has contrasted the gods of African religions with the Christian God.¹⁸

Evolutionism in the nineteenth century strengthened this attitude, in the sense that those peoples to whom Christian Mission was directed, were regarded as not only outside of

God's salvation, but also in the primitive stages of cultural and religious evolution. Hence missionary activity aimed at not only bringing the 'heathen' peoples individually to the fold of salvation, but also uplifting them from 'primitivity' to 'civilization'.

Furthermore, the evangelicals experienced frustration in their own culture owing to the decline of pietism in the wake of scientific success, and in missionary activity they sought to preserve abroad, what they were losing at home.

Except for a few interdenominational and non-denominational missionary societies such as the Africa Inland Mission and the Gospel missionary Society, the modern missionary movement was organized denominationally. The main Protestant denominations sponsored each its own society.¹⁹ In the Catholic Church there were several societies, some of which had been founded before the modern missionary movement gained momentum. All the missionary societies of the Catholic Church were co-ordinated in Rome and therefore, though they were separately organized, could be regarded as representing one missionary effort.²⁰

The multiplicity of Christian denominations since the Reformation was reflected in the multiplicity of missionary societies, each of which strove for the expansion of its sponsoring denomination. Hence Christianity came to East Africa via a large number of missionary societies and the resultant Church had many denominational strands.²¹ This point is considered further in chapter four below.

1.3 MISSIONARIES' UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

Although the 'Great Commission' formed the theological catchword of the modern missionary movement in the implementation of its obligation each missionary society had its own policies and objectives. Just as the various denominations had each its own doctrinal emphasis, so in their missionary activity did the societies have each its understanding of how the Great Commission should be carried out, in the interests of the respective sponsoring denominations. Some of the main expectations in the missionary activity are outlined below.

One of the main expectations in both Protestant and Catholic missionary activity, was to convert the peoples of the mission fields from 'heathenism' to Christianity. It has been noted that one of the dominant presuppositions of the

missionary movement was that outside of the Church there would be no salvation for anyone. Hence the peoples to whom missionary activity was directed, were presumed to be damned and doomed to hell, unless they were converted to Christianity. Conversion was the only way, according to this view, which would assure these peoples of eternal life.

Alec Vidler considered this evangelical concern to have been the main motive of missions in the nineteenth century, in both Protestant and Catholic societies. Their main aim, according to him, was that of 'rescuing as many of the heathen as possible from the everlasting damnation which otherwise awaited them. The grand object was to save as many souls as possible for eternal life in the next world.²²

With regard to missionary activity in East Africa, this understanding of mission was held, for example, by Dr. Krapf, whose hope was to evangelize the Galla people, and who later envisaged a chain of mission stations stretching from Mombasa to the west African coast. The pioneer missionaries at Rabai, beginning with Krapf and Rebmann, understood mission in this way. For them, the preaching of the Gospel was the primary objective to which all other activity was to be subjected. Doctors and craftsmen could

become engaged in mission, provided that they would regard their skills as necessary aids to that main task of proclaiming the Gospel for the salvation of the heathen from sin, to eternal life.²³

Mission was also understood in terms of 'civilizing' those peoples who were considered to be in primitive stages of development. It was taken for granted that the western world represented the highest form of civilization, and that this civilization was a Christian one. Some missionaries therefore considered it their primary responsibility to extend this high civilization to the peoples with low cultures or none.

According to this understanding of Christian mission, evangelization and civilization were inseparable, and conversion to Christianity would involve not only an acceptance of the Gospel, but also the adopting of the culture, which such missionaries endeavoured to introduce. The converts would be expected to abandon their traditional ways of life, and pattern their new Christian existence in accordance with norms which they would learn from the mission station.

This view was held, for example, by Placide Tempels, who considered the main objective of Christian missionary activity to be the civilization of Africans

according to Christian Principles.²⁴ To achieve this objective, he thought it necessary for the missionaries to understand African philosophical thought, as a prerequisite in the civilizing mission. In his view, Africans were incapable of articulating their philosophy and culture, and it was the missionary's responsibility to articulate it for them. Having done so, the missionary could then proceed to lead them towards the higher civilization which he represented.²⁵

Another view of mission was as an endeavour to improve the economic life of African peoples, in the process of teaching them about Christianity. It was thought that Christianity would not take root until the people learned new methods of trade, agriculture and industrial skills. The slave trade, for instance, was considered by the missionaries to be a great hinderance to the propagation of Christianity, and also as a very inhuman practice.

David Livingstone for example, strongly supported this view of mission, and urged that both commerce and Christianity should be introduced to Africa as an integrated endeavour. He recommended that the converts should be taught 'better' principles of life, which would include a replacement of the slave trade with 'legitimate' trade, and modern farming to produce more food for consumption and for sale. In his

view, conversion was the direct result of missions, and the 'wide diffusion of better principles' the indirect. The indirect result was much more important than direct conversions, and he emphasised that aspect of missionary activity, although he was aware that it would take a much longer time to achieve.²⁶

The presupposition underlying this view of mission was that if the African peoples were trained in new methods of trade and agriculture they would find it easier to accept the Gospel, having experienced the alleviation of some of their major material handicaps. The acceptance or rejection of the Gospel was considered to be dependent on the possibility of the new way of life to improve the material welfare of the prospective converts.

Still another view of mission closely related to that of conversion, was to teach the people in the mission field about God. This was a later development of the earlier concern for converting the 'heathen' to Christianity. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there developed in Europe a great interest in the study of African religions and cultures. The previous view that African peoples did not have any religion or culture was modified in that development, so that early in the twentieth century the popular view was that African peoples had their own religions and knew

something about God. However, these religions were considered to be in the primitive stages of evolution, and the objective of Christian missionary activity would be to erase the religious understanding of those peoples and replace it with the highest religion which was thought to have been attained in Christianity.

In support of this view, some anthropologists such as Edward Tylor at the end of the nineteenth century described African religions as animism, thinking that the characteristic feature of these religions was the worship of spirits which were believed to inhabit the whole environment.²⁷ The main task of Christian missions was therefore considered to be to teach African peoples about God of whom they were supposed to be vaguely aware.

A later and modified version of this view, was that African peoples had some ideas about God, but that African religions regarded God to be too remote to be interesting in human affairs. Christian mission would therefore be understood in terms of replacing this belief, which was thought to be mistaken. African peoples would be taught of the immanence of God as understood in Christianity. This view was held by missionaries such as Edwin Smith, who thought that God in African religious belief was not only remote, but also almost unknown.²⁸ Thus Christianity was considered

in this view as the religion which would enlighten the African mind about the God whom African peoples had been seeking to know without success.

Missionary activity was also supported with the understanding that it was aimed at helping African peoples who were suffering. Prosperous philanthropists were prepared to contribute to the missionary societies not merely because of their evangelical interest, but also because they thought of missions as agencies which would extend philanthropic services abroad.

Roland Oliver has noted that prior to the appeal of Dr. Livingstone for the help of the victims of the East African slave trade, missionary activity had been understood mainly in terms of the conversion of the heathen. After that appeal, the emphasis changed, and the objective of missions was directed to rescuing and caring for the slaves.²⁹

The carrying out of missionary activity following this objective, led to the establishment of several mission stations whose major concern was the rehabilitation of freed slaves. Such stations were located, for example, at Frere Town and at Bagamoyo.³⁰

Livingstone considered the African peoples to be in pitiable condition because not only of the threat of being captured as slaves, but also because of their poverty. He therefore appealed to the public at home to extend their concerns to the problems he had witnessed. The appeal was not heard by missionaries only. Hence the concern to end the slave trade, was followed up by Christians and also by other groups who had other interests in Africa. Livingstone's view of mission as the endeavour to diffuse commerce and Christianity, for example, was followed up with the establishment of mission stations as well as trading facilities, and the latter were not always or necessarily controlled by the missionary societies.³¹ Nevertheless, whatever the ulterior motives of the philanthropists may have been, they supported missionary activity as an endeavour to rescue the perishing and care for the dying, in response to the appeals they had received.³²

1.4 VARIETY OF MISSIONARY APPROACHES

Just as there were several missionary objectives, so were there various approaches and methods of missionary activity to achieve those objectives. The main ones are outlined below.

For those among whom the 'Great Commission' was interpreted primarily as the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching was a basic approach. One of the prerequisites of this approach was the competent mastery of the language of the people to whom the Word was to be proclaimed. This was not an easy endeavour, especially because many western Christian concepts and beliefs were new to African religious thought and life. For example, the distinction between flesh and spirit, and the preference of the 'fruits of the spirit' over the 'lust of the flesh', was a new teaching about man and his relationship with the divine.³³

The work of preaching was carried out more by the local evangelists than by the missionaries themselves. The first groups of converts would be sent out to win more converts, and the process of conversion would continue spreading outwards from the mission station where the missionary would be based. The understanding of the Gospel by the prospective converts depended very much on that of the local evangelist, who in turn would have received instruction either from a missionary or from another evangelist or catechist. Intensive and long theological training was not considered as important as the full acceptance of the Gospel and the willingness to respond to the 'great commission'. Preaching in the first phase of missionary activity would

be conducted by itinerant evangelists, but later on, as the congregation of converts grew in number, a church would be constructed in which regular preaching would be done as part of regular Sunday worship.³⁴

The Bible was a basic necessity for the evangelists, and one of the first tasks of the missionaries was to make the scriptures available in the language which the people could understand. The work of translation was also very challenging, demanding a thorough understanding of both the language structure and the whole background of the people's religious and philosophical thought. It is remarkable that sections of the Bible were translated often within a few years after a missionary arrived in an area. However, it may be added that the hurry in which the work of translation was done in the pioneer period sometimes did not allow adequate time for the translators to learn and understand the conceptual background of the new language.³⁵

Translating the Bible was facilitated greatly by the formation and development of Bible societies. These societies worked in co-operation with the missionary societies, having as their objective, the providing of the Bible in languages which all peoples could understand, and at prices which they could afford.³⁶

In facilitating the translation and printing of the Bible, the Bible societies continued to support the work of the missionary societies, and their role continues to be valued by the Church in co-ordinating revisions and supporting the translation and publication of the Scriptures in new languages and versions. This point was emphasised by J.M. Mbogori, in a contribution entitled 'How the Bible is used in Africa', in African Challenge.^{36a}

In addition to the proclamation of the Gospel, missionary activity also included the instruction of prospective converts, to guide them towards understanding the basic doctrines of the Church. Catechetical instruction was denominational, in the sense that each denominational missionary society organized the instruction of the converts according to its sponsoring denomination.

Courses of catechetical instruction were translated also, and became the handbooks for the local evangelists and catechists.³⁷ The catechism was the frame of reference for preparing the possible converts for baptism and confirmation. They would also be taught new hymns and the order of liturgy for the respective denominations.

African catechists contributed a great deal to this missionary approach. Having received their initial instruction at the mission station, they would go back to their home areas and begin classes for the instruction of new converts. This would sometimes be the beginning of a new school, since the learners would need to be literate in order to read the catechism for themselves.³⁸

This approach in the missionary process continues in the Church, being one of the ways in which new converts are prepared and guided towards the understanding of what it means to become a Christian and belong to a particular Church.

One of the most important aspects of missionary activity was the establishment of schools in which literacy was taught. Basic learning in the schools included reading, writing, arithmetic and Christian instruction.

The basis of this approach was the view that since Christianity was a scriptural religion, it would help the prospective converts very much if they would learn to read the scriptures for themselves. The knowledge and skills of literacy became very useful in terms both of the evangelical purpose and the possibilities for employment in secular organizations.³⁹

As in preaching and catechetical instruction, the teaching in schools was carried out mostly by African teachers who received initial instruction in the mission stations. The schools provided training facilities for possible future teachers, and as the demand for literacy increased, the missionary societies continued to boost this aspect of missionary activity. Hence, during the colonial period, most of the primary schools were under the management of the various missionary societies which considered this approach to be useful for achieving their objectives.⁴⁰

Industrial training was an approach very much linked with the understanding of mission as a civilizing endeavour. It was based on the presupposition that in addition to the Gospel message the African converts needed to be equipped with new skills which would enable them to begin an entirely new life inspired by Christian principles.

The phrase 'industrial training' in the context of early missionary activity included all the basic skills which converts would acquire at the mission station, such as carpentry, masonry, agriculture. Some mission stations following up Livingstone's understanding of missionary objectives, developed farms on which such skills might be learnt and tried. Not only new methods of farming were learnt, but also

new crops were introduced.⁴¹

The mission stations where these skills were learnt, became new centres for the diffusion of the new culture. Literacy was a basic necessity for skills such as carpentry and masonry, and the centre would therefore include this aspect of missionary work in its programme. The trainees, in the process of acquiring the skills, were expected to contribute their labour to keep the centres running. Hence some of the converts would settle at the centres. Roland Oliver has noted that missionary approaches did not differ in character before and after the partition of East Africa.⁴² The same approaches were used, but after the partition more stations and centres were opened. Industrial training which had initially been provided to the victims of the slave trade was extended to communities further into the interior, even after the abolition, although the industrial approach was often unsuccessful owing to lack of adequate funds. This point is discussed by W.B. Anderson in his essay, 'A History of the Church in Kenya'.^{42a}

Another significant aspect of missionary activity was that of medical services. Some missionaries were medical doctors who came to apply their knowledge and skill in Africa, in the context of the missionary societies. The importance

of medical care for missionary work could be seen from both the missionary and the African points of view. From the missionary perspective, missionary societies in their pioneer period had lost several missionaries whose death was caused by tropical diseases such as malaria.⁴³ It was necessary therefore for medical precautions to be taken to reduce such losses. The fruits of medical research in tropical diseases became useful not only for the missionaries coming to Africa but also for Africans in the mission field. However, it is worthwhile to note a comment by Naomi Mitchison (1970) regarding this point: 'Public health is comparatively recent; it is certain that if it had not been for the necessity of keeping Europeans healthy, most of the early work on malaria, yellow fever, ... would not have been done... Later doctors and scientists have tackled the African problems not from a racial angle but out of a universal concern and, increasingly with African colleagues'.^{43a}

From the African perspective, the new methods of treatment and the drugs which doctors and their assistants used were all a new experience. The effectiveness of this new treatment at the mission dispensary or hospital, became a means of attracting possible converts. For example, this was the case at Kigari, Embu.^{43b}

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This approach was linked with several others discussed above. For example, those who came to provide medical care were at the same time furthering Christian witness in the areas where they worked. Some were evangelists at the same time. Their medical work was also seen in terms of civilization, in the sense that the new methods of treatment were presented as being superior to the traditional methods of healing.⁴⁴

Education

In another approach, some missionary organizations identified some special needs within African society, and then developed projects to meet those needs. One early example of this approach was the rehabilitation of freed slaves. Later, more such services were provided, for example, in caring for the blind, the deaf, the physically handicapped, establishing special villages for lepers.

The Salvation Army, for instance, has been running schools and technical institutions for the blind, and several students have passed through those facilities to become usefully employed. Some such students have become teachers, while others have been trained to become experts in leathercraft.⁴⁵ A significant example of this approach is the

Thika School for the Blind, Kenya.

In this approach Christian Mission was understood as service - caring and providing for the needy. The contribution made by missionary activity in this service to society is remarkable and highly commendable.

In terms of evangelization this approach may not have won many converts, but the dedication of those who committed and devoted themselves to that service in the name of the Gospel, highlighted a dimension of Christianity which might otherwise have not been made clear in any other way: that Christianity is concerned with the physical and spiritual welfare of all people in society, be they normal or handicapped.

The presence of a missionary resident at a mission station had an important impact on the prospective converts. Apart from following his teaching, they would also observe how he himself applied the Gospel in his daily life. Thus the observable character of the missionary, evangelist, catechist or pastor was always very important in determining how Christianity would be received in a particular area.⁴⁶

For those to whom mission meant the introduction of a totally new way of life, the presence of missionaries at the mission station would be considered as a great necessity, to provide the cultural guidance which the converts were supposed to need.

Even those who thought of mission in terms of winning converts through evangelism, considered their presence at their mission station as a necessity, to lead their local assistants in their training for evangelical work. Clement Scott exerted such an influence around Kikuyu.^{46a}

Looking at the introduction of Christianity in East Africa from the perspectives of African Christians, the pioneer missionary in an area was greatly respected as the bringer of the new faith and way of life. At the mission station he would be a 'jack of all trades', and this would further increase the reverence his converts would have towards him.⁴⁷ Though the converts would not imitate everything that he did, they would mould their new character on the basis of what they learned and observed.

Although these various approaches have been outlined separately in this chapter, most missionary societies followed

a combination of several approaches, so that a mission station became a complex in which several activities were conducted. For example, R. Macpherson (1970) described the early development of the Church of Scotland Mission station at Kikuyu, as follows:

By May (1908) detailed estimates had been drawn up for the ensuing three years for Kikuyu and a contemplated new station to be opened in the Mt. Kenya area, regular Presbyterian services of worship had been begun in Nairobi, (conducted by Henry Scott, who cycled there on Sunday afternoons after completing his rota of services at Kikuyu), preparations for the building of St. Andrew's Church were going ahead, language regulations for missionaries had been worked out in detail and plans laid for an inter-mission language board to establish standards of translation, the lines of future policy had been determined - including the rationalisation of the agricultural development programme, the institution of an apprentice system for masons, carpenters, gardeners, teachers and hospital dressers, and agreement had been reached with other missions regarding expansion.⁴⁸

Thus the mission stations became centres for teaching Africans the new culture and religion which the missionaries had brought, generating influences which contributed greatly to the continuing changes in the social and religious life of African peoples. Further consideration of this point is continued in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

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- 22 Alec Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the present Day, Penguin, p. 252. See also, A. Hastings, Church and Ministry, Kampala, Gaba Publications, 1972, ch. 1.
- 23 M. Langley and T. Kiggins, A Serving People, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 23.
- 24 Placide Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, Paris, Presence Africaine, Eng. trans. 1959.
- 25 Tempels, op.cit., pp. 167-89.
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- 28 This view was elaborated in E.W. Smith, ed.,
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House Press, 3rd ed., esp. pp. 33, 133. The views
of Edwin Smith have been analysed by M. McVeigh,
God in Africa, Cape Cod, Mass., Claude Stark, 1974.
- 29 Oliver, op.cit., p. 34.
- 30 Oliver, op.cit., p. 50-63.
- 31 ibid., p. 35.
- 32 One of the popular missionary hymns expressed
this call, and began with the words: 'Rescue the
Perishing, care for the dying'.
- 33 So was the concept of Logos discussed in the
Introduction above.
- 34 Hastings, op.cit., pp. 81, 162. For a study of
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facing out, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1977, E. Wanyoike,
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- 35 Furthermore, the early translations were done mainly
by the missionaries themselves, and a misunderstanding
of a people's culture and religious concepts would
inevitably lead to a misrepresentation of the Biblical
message in the new translations. See S.C. Neill,
op.cit., p 313, for example.
- 36 Margaret Markwell, The Bible Society Story, London,
British and Foreign Bible Society, cir., 1970, p. 6.
- 36a J.M. Mbogori, 'How the Bible is Used in Africa', in
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Publishers, 1975, pp. 111-118.

- 37 Brian Holmes, ed., Educational Policy and the Mission Schools, London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1967, pp. 26-27. In this context, 'catechists' and 'evangelists' could be used interchangeably, since these African converts undertook both responsibilities.
- 38 Holmes, op.cit., pp. 26-27.
- 39 Oliver, op.cit., pp. 282-3.
- 40 ibid., pp. 231-292.
- 41 Such as Coffee and Cotton. See Oliver, op.cit., p. 177.
- 42 Oliver, op.cit., p. 176. Exception is made of Uganda, where the situation was more complex.
- 42a W.B. Anderson, 'A History of the Church in Kenya', in Occasional Research Papers, Vol. 10, Makerere, 1973, p. 22.
- 43 For example, the wife and child of Dr. Krapf died shortly after arrival on the East African Coast. see Langley and Kiggins, op.cit., p. 20.
- 43a Naomi Mitchison, The Africans, London, Panther Books, 1970, p. 163.
- 43b Anderson, op.cit., p. 12.
- 44 For a discussion of this point see F.B. Welbourn, East African Christian, Nairobi, Oxford U.P., 1965, ch. 8.
- 45 Most Churches have continued this aspect of missionary service, both denominationally and in collective effort. For example, the Rural Development projects of the National Christian Council of Kenya, and of the Catholic Secretariat, Kenya.

- 46 Oliver, op.cit., p. 67.
- 46a R. Macpherson, The Presbyterian Church in Kenya,
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CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIANITY AND THE AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

2.1 CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Christianity is a religion which, from its beginning, sought to transcend particular cultures, in the sense that the Gospel, though related to the Old Testament background, was not tied to the Hebrew cultural heritage. Jesus called for a new way of life in which all social barriers would be transcended, so that all people would regard each other as brothers and sisters and treat each other as such (e.g. Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; Matt. 25:31-46). This teaching was, and is, universally relevant.¹

At the same time, however, Christianity throughout its history has been accepted and expressed within the cultural heritage of its followers in various parts of the world. In chapter one above, it has been noted that as early as the medieval period Christianity became so integrated in the European cultural heritage that the concept of 'Christendom' developed.

The modern missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which introduced Christianity to

the interior of East Africa, grew within that background in which the Christian religion and the western culture were incorporated to form a 'Christian civilization'.² Thus when Christianity reached East Africa the distinction was not obvious, both to missionaries and their converts, between the Gospel as a message with a universal challenge, and the particularly European cultural response to that challenge.

This chapter considers Christianity as it reached East Africa rooted in the European cultural heritage, and examines the ways in which African converts responded to the Gospel and Christian theology in the context of their own cultural background. In the establishment of Christianity there have been at least three significant aspects worth noting. The first is the Gospel message, whose core is the teaching of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels and passed on in the tradition of the Church. The second is western culture, in which the Gospel was expressed for a long time before the rise of the modern missionary movement, and the spreading of which, formed part of missionary activity in Africa. The third aspect is the African heritage, in the totality of which the African converts lived before their encounter with Christianity. This third aspect includes the African religious beliefs, which embodied the African traditional understanding of physical and metaphysical reality. This third

aspect is dealt with in chapter three below. This chapter is more concerned with the first two aspects as they relate to the missionary spreading of Christianity among African communities.

The term 'culture' is used in its broadest sense, referring to 'that part of the total repertoire of human action and its products, which is socially, as opposed to genetically, transmitted'.³ Only some aspects of culture are considered below.

2.2 EDUCATION

Christianity is a scriptural religion. The Bible is central as the basis of Christian doctrine. Reading it and interpreting its message are central aspects of Christian worship. In the introduction of the faith to Africa, it became necessary to teach the converts to read and write, so that they might be able to read the Bible for themselves. The liturgies were also written, and the converts needed to be able to follow them in worship. Hence literary education became a very important aspect of missionary activity in Africa.⁴

Schools were built in which prospective converts were taught to read and write, and having acquired these skills they would be introduced to the Bible. From these schools the

first generation of catechists, teachers, pastors and evangelists were trained. In these schools also basic skills were taught which would enable the converts to become carpenters, masons, better farmers, dressers and so on.⁵

This form of education was characteristically different from traditional African education.⁶ The school became an institution to which interested Africans went in order to acquire literacy and the new skills which had become necessary in the new situation. At first the school did not attract much interest because it was seen as a distraction from the traditional way of life. As it became more clear that the traditional life could not go on unchanged, the school became more and more popular.⁷

Traditionally there had been no institution equivalent to the school. Children would receive their basic instruction and training at home from their parents, grandparents and other relatives. At puberty they would be given further social education in the process of the ceremonies which they would undergo in connection with initiation. After marriage the councils of elders would provide means by which men and women would increase their wisdom and experience, while participating in the decision-making processes for the welfare of their community.⁸

do you know the meaning of an institution?
- Traditionally there were no institutions as schools - children were taught at home - Yes

Often the school preceded the Church-building. Classrooms would be used as initial meeting places for worship, until the congregation was large enough to necessitate the construction of a larger and more special place of worship. Hence the school became a very important institution for the recruitment of converts during the early part of missionary activity.⁹

This development led to the impression, among Africans, that becoming a Christian was synonymous with acquiring the skills of literacy.¹⁰ This was the case to begin with. Later on, however, the need for literacy grew beyond the urge for conversion to Christianity. It was soon realized that the new employment opportunities needed basic literacy skills. These could be acquired in the school, and most of the schools were provided and managed by the missionary societies in their programmes of evangelization.

The interests of the denominational school and those of the school-goer or his parents were not necessarily congruent. For example, as far as the missionary societies which managed the schools were concerned, the school was an institution for both Christian instruction and the preparation of African pupils for new employment opportunities. The main interest of the school-goer, or his parents, was to obtain

the latter. This point is illustrated for example by the fact that as the demand for school education grew, Africans did not mind to which denominational school they or their children went, provided that they would receive effective tuition to enable them to pass examinations which would qualify them for better-paid jobs. Hence it was not unusual for Protestant parents to take their children to Catholic schools if they were convinced that better tuition was available there. On the other hand, every pupil was expected to follow, at least outwardly, the denominational traditions of the school to which he went, irrespective of his previous religious background. The pupil having tuition, the passing of examinations and employment as his priorities, would have to follow these traditions and give a good impression to the missionary managers, even though he might not be religiously committed to them.

The African catechists and evangelists, who occupied a central role in the early development of education in denominational schools, served the respective missionary society responsible. If a catechist or evangelist were dismissed from the services of one denomination, he could transfer his allegiance and services to another, taking advantage of the competitive attitude which was a main feature of early missionary activity.

These two points illustrate that from the view of African converts, denominational persuasion was not of paramount importance as far as school education was concerned. What mattered most was good tuition and training as means to a good job. For the missionaries what mattered beyond general tuition and training was 'good' Christian instruction to increase the number of converts to their respective denominations.

Reading and writing were not part of the cultural heritage of the peoples in the interior of East Africa. The introduction of Christianity was accompanied by the introduction of literacy.

✓ The African cultural and religious heritage were passed on orally from generation to generation, and the wisdom of the ancestors was conserved not in written books, but in songs and oral traditions.¹¹ Hence the coming of Christianity as a 'Religion of the Book' was both a new religious experience, as well as a new cultural innovation.

The skills of reading and writing which were learned at the mission station and the mission school became useful not only for the new religious purposes, but also for the general adaptation to the new cultural situation which had developed. Although not everyone could read and write, ~~the~~

the literate Africans were able to learn from books other than the Bible, especially when they had become proficient in languages such as English, French, Latin. Their acquired knowledge, in addition to that which they had received in their traditional upbringing, enabled them to become leaders in the cultural changes that were already taking place.¹²

Literacy has continued to be an important felt need in Africa, as one of the basic tools that are necessary for development. In view of this fact literacy, though it came with Christianity and was at first provided mainly by missionary societies as a means of evangelization, became a distinct factor worth to be considered on its own with regard to cultural change in Africa. Those who could read the Bible and the catechism could also read other books. Those who could write sermons could also write other things, and those who could count the number of converts they had made, could also utilize their arithmetical knowledge in other spheres of life.

2.3 CHURCH AND FAMILY

Christianity came with the teaching that the Church is to be understood as a new family whose head and centre is Jesus Christ. This new family is not based on kinship,

clans or ethnic identity. Neither is it based on racial origins or social status. Primarily, it is founded upon faith in Jesus Christ, and its cohesion is maintained within the Church, whose individual members are expected to live according to the new relationships as proclaimed by the Gospel.¹³

The early missionaries first recruited to the mission station young unmarried individuals and instructed them according to the traditional missionary emphasis of the individual salvation of souls. A problem arose when these unmarried converts felt a need to get married. If they could not get Christian spouses, what were they to do? The most feasible solution was for the missionaries to develop the concept of the 'Christian home', and urge the converts to urge their spouses to become Christians if they were not already converted.¹⁴

Marriage was, and continues to be, regarded as a very important aspect in the development of the Church, in the sense that the socialization of children in the life of the Church would begin at home. Hence the concept of a 'Christian home' became a new idea in the African cultural life. Christian homes were to become the nuclei of the new wider family, the Church. This did not always work, because the children of the converts would have to choose when they

grew up. whether or not to follow the faith of their parents. Marriage in Christianity came to be understood as neo-local, so that the wedded couple would set up a new home, leaving the household of their parents.¹⁷ The basic family unit became the husband, his one wife, and their children if any were born.

In the African cultural heritage, the marriage between two individuals was understood as a means of initiating or cementing the union of the households and clans from which the couple belonged. Hence the individual man and woman intending to marry needed the approval of their respective parents. and relatives. The established family sanctions regarding marriage had to be observed. if a marriage was to be allowed to take place. For example, no man or woman belonging to an exogamous clan would be allowed to marry within his own clan, no matter how distant the blood-relationship might be, and no matter how strong the affection might be.¹⁸

The transactions of marriage were carried out at two levels, first between the couple, and then between the households. Relatives and agemates wanted to feel that they were participating at the second level of the marriage transactions. Moreover, marriage was understood as a process.

which would take many years to complete. The relationship between the man's household and that of his wife or wives was expected to continue without end in normal circumstances which included the birth of children.¹⁹

Among African Christians, the two concepts of 'family' are maintained. At one level they belong to the ecclesial family which cuts across kinship ties and unites people of varied backgrounds in one faith and common ecclesial life. At another level and at the same time, they belong to their kinship groups, although the social links in the extended family may not be as strong as they used to be. Kinship ties if they are known, are acknowledged irrespective of whether the relatives are Christians or not. Thus it is recognized that kinship relations are a social fact²⁰ out of which a person cannot opt, whereas one becomes a member of the ecclesial family through his option to become a Christian.

The concept of monogamous Christian homes as the nuclei of the ecclesial family raised significant challenges for African Churches. Although not all marriages were polygamous, the Churches had to decide whether or not the men and women living in polygamous union would be allowed to become members of the Church. The common rule was that the husband

should abandon all wives except the first one. This would mean that the future welfare of the wives and children that might be abandoned would be shaken. There was no easy solution to this problem. This issue has continued to be discussed in the Churches, as an important pastoral challenge.²¹ It should be noted, however, that the question of admitting into Church membership converts living in polygamous families, is a distinct issue from the suggestion that polygamy be an acceptable general principle.

2.4 RITES OF PASSAGE

2.4.1 Birth

The rites of passage were the communal ceremonies that were performed as an individual passed from one stage to another: at birth, adolescence, adulthood and at death. They were expressions of the understanding and expectations of African communities, regarding the role of the individual in society.

In the African heritage there were rituals of thanks-giving and welcoming the new-born child. The child would be named according to the established custom of the community. For example, a child might be named after an important event that had taken place around the time of its birth, after the season or time of the day in which it was

born. Also, a child might be named after a relative in the family of its father or mother. Among the communities in which the latter custom was followed, there were some guidelines to indicate which of the relatives would be named, and in what order the children would be given the names of such relatives.²²

The birth of a child was a great joy to the whole family and the whole clan. Relatives and friends would come to visit the mother and child for many months after delivery, and there would be much feasting to express that joy, congratulate the mother and help to restore her health by bringing food and drinks, and temporarily relieving her of the work at home.²³

The traditional rituals concerning the birth of a child were culturally different from those which came with Christianity. Prayers of thanksgiving, for example, would include reference to the deity, spirits and ancestors.

The ancestors would be beseeched to keep the child healthy and remove any curses which might negatively affect his life. They would be requested to bless the child and guide him to grow in wisdom, courage, generosity, and in any other values which were cherished by the community.

Christianity introduced new rituals concerning the growth of the individual in the context of the Church, from birth to death. With regard to birth, Christian parents would be expected to take their new-born child to the Church for thanksgiving.²⁴ The ceremony of thanksgiving was an expression of appreciation to God for the gift of the child, for its safe delivery and the healthy condition of its mother. In the ceremony the child and its parents would be committed to God's care and guidance. Prayers would be made that the child might grow up to be a faithful Christian who would become an active member of the Church. Unlike the traditional thanksgiving which was spontaneous and extempore, the Christian liturgy would be normally written and the parents would be guided through it by the priest. Their responses during the service would be indicated in the liturgy. This ceremony continues to be an aspect of the life of the Church and in some denominations it is linked with the practice of infant baptism.

Infant baptism is practised as an expression of the wish of the parents of the child that he will grow up within the setting of the Church. A 'god-parent' is chosen, who becomes the sponsor of the child at the ceremony, and takes the vows of initiation into the Church on the child's behalf. The 'god-parent' is expected to ensure that the child

whom he has sponsored for baptism will be brought up in Christian instruction, and that when the child grows up he will learn the catechism of the Church and be confirmed as a full member. Baptism as a Christian sacrament is more than what has been stated above. According to the Anglican catechism for example, the god-parents make three promises to God on behalf of the infant being baptized: that while growing up the child will renounce the devil and fight against evil; that he will believe and hold fast the Christian faith and put his whole trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour; and that he will obediently keep God's commandments and serve Him faithfully, all the days of the child's life. At confirmation, the child is expected to express that same ready acceptance publicly before the Church.²⁵

This ceremony of infant baptism is also associated with the giving of new names. In the beginning, the names given at baptism were normally those of Biblical characters and saints such as Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, Paul, Augustine, Anthony, Anselm. The idea behind this practice was that those who were baptised would be frequently reminded to order their lives in a Christian way, following the example of the characters whose names they had been given. Later on, however, this principle of choosing such names was not rigidly followed, and normally European names were allowed. The popular

consequence of this practice has been that baptism is often understood more as a re-naming ceremony than as a central sacrament of the Church. The concept of 'Christian Names' seems to have added to the overshadowing of the sacramental significance of baptism in the sense that the acquisition of a noticeably new name came to be popularly understood as a mark of becoming a Christian.²⁶

Some of the customs concerning birth have continued as part of the life of African Christians. The naming of children, as discussed above is an illustrative example of such continuation. A child born of Christian parents may have two names one of which will have been chosen according to the traditional custom, and the second given at baptism.

2.4.2 Initiation

Adolescence, marked outwardly by the physical changes of puberty, was another stage at which a rite of passage would be performed. The community would prepare the adolescent socially, psychologically and religiously for the next stage of growth in the life of the community - adulthood.

In the initiation into adulthood, the adolescent would be guided through a series of experiences contrived

for that purpose, to learn the implications of the puberty changes. He was expected by the community to conduct himself responsibly, without degrading himself and his family.

The rite would include a physical ordeal, through which the adolescent was expected to go courageously, as proof of his readiness to leave childhood behind and enter adulthood with maturity. In some communities, for example, circumcision was practised as part of the initiation rite.²⁷

The fundamental significance of initiation for the total African cultural life was not fully realized by early missionaries. For some of them, these practices were considered to be unnecessary ordeals, causing great suffering to the adolescents. In African traditional life, however, the education and training which was given at this stage was vital for the community's maintenance of its self-understanding, and for providing every individual with the opportunity to learn what the community expected of him.²⁸

Initiation was understood differently in Christianity, in the sense that the admission into full membership of the Church did not involve any physical ordeals, although there were catechetical procedures for the preparation of converts towards maturity in the Christian faith. The test for

readiness for confirmation in the Church was the extent to which the converts understood the doctrines outlined in the catechism, and their willingness to conduct themselves according to the expectations of the Church. Thus, whereas initiation in the African cultural heritage was an inevitable stage in the social development of the individual, in Christianity it would be undergone only by those who in the opinion of the catechist and the priest were doctrinally prepared. The preparation in Christianity involved mainly the recitation of the doctrines stated in the catechism.

Adult baptism and confirmation came to be the Christian rituals through which the convert would be progressively initiated into the full membership of the Church.²⁹ In the main protestant denominations, only after confirmation would the convert be welcome to participate in the Holy Communion. The principle behind this rule was that only after going through the catechetical instructions of baptism and confirmation would the converts have the possibility of comprehending the meaning of the Eucharist - the mystery of the suffering of Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind and the benefits accruing from it.

In traditional life initiation was a long process involving the whole community and lasting, at least, several weeks. It was an integral part of the life of the community.

The youth of a particular age group would be initiated into adulthood together. Although this traditional process of initiation was not adopted into the life of African Churches, African Christians have continued to appreciate the importance of preparing their children for responsible and mature adulthood. However, social change and the development of modern education in which parents can be with their school children for only a quarter of a year during the school holidays, are factors that make the counselling of adolescents, both in school and at home, a great challenge.³⁰ This is elaborated in chapter five below.

2.4.3. Marriage

In the African cultural heritage marriage was one of the most important marks of social adulthood. A man or woman would not be socially recognized as a grown-up without being married, no matter how old he or she might be chronologically.³¹ As mentioned above, marriage was a social concern in which the kin of the two bonding families were fully involved.

The process of marriage was characterized by rites and transactions through which the marrying individuals were welcomed into social adulthood. Tokens in kind (dowry) were exchanged as part of these marriage transactions, to

cement the social relationships and seal the union. Such goods were at first mistakenly considered by some missionaries and anthropologists to be 'bride-price', implying that African marriage involved the 'buying' of individuals. Marriage in African tradition was very different from slavery. The importance of marriage as a rite of passage supports this statement.³²

Procreation was very important in the African concept of marriage. A marriage in which children were not born was considered to be problematic, and sometimes a bride might be returned to her parents for such a reason. Polygamy was potentially allowed by custom, especially if earlier marriage did not produce children, or if the children born in earlier marriage were only girls. The birth of boys was considered to be very important, both for inheritance, and for the defence of the community. It was also important as the means to perpetuate and expand family and clan.³³ Sometimes polygamy was practised simply because a man could afford it.

Christianity came with a new understanding of marriage. There were three main purposes of marriage according to Christian teaching. Procreation was one of them. Secondly, marriage was understood as the accepted means of establishing basic companionship between adults of the two sexes. Basing this teaching on the account of Creation

in the book of Genesis (chapters one and two), Christianity emphasized that in the beginning God created man and woman to be companions and helpers of one another, and to avoid loneliness. Thirdly, marriage was understood in Christianity as a means of avoiding sin. Adultery was forbidden in Christian teaching, and to make provision for the avoidance of this sin, monogamous marriage was instituted.³⁴

The first purpose of marriage mentioned above, that is, procreation, was considered to be subsidiary to the other two according to Christian teaching. Thus childlessness was not considered to be a ground for dissolving a marriage, nor was polygamy allowed on the ground of an earlier marriage being childless. In contrast, the African cultural heritage placed great importance to children, and this was an important factor on which the success of a marriage would depend.

The Christian wedding was introduced as a new experience in African cultural and religious life. It was performed in the Church, following a liturgy that was new to African religious practice. In the Catholic Church matrimony was understood as one of the seven sacraments of the Church.³⁵

African Christians accepted the Christian teaching about marriage and celebrated Christian weddings as the climax of the social marriage rite. At the same time, however, they did not entirely abandon the traditional understanding of marriage. There were some reasons for this, a few of which are pointed out below. A Christian convert who wanted to get married to a woman or man belonging to a non-Christian family, would be expected to go through all the traditional process of marriage transactions. For example, a man would be expected to contribute goods in kind (dowry) such as honey and livestock to seal the marriage. If he was determined to marry, he would have no option but to comply with the custom, although his Christian instruction might have taught him that such customs were heathen.³⁶ Furthermore, African Christians, though recognizing themselves as members of the Church, did not, and could not, entirely sever their ties with their kin. Considering that not all the kith and kin of African Christians embraced Christianity, a Christian wanting to get married peacefully needed to gain the approval of his relatives as well as that of the Church.

Consequently, the Christian wedding came to be only one aspect of the African marriage rite. The second aspect was the traditional one, in which the kith and kin of the marrying couple would celebrate the inaugurated relationship. irrespective of whether or not the wedding

Christians would participate in this aspect of the wedding.

This dual celebration of the marriage rite is an illustrative instance of the African Christians' adaptation of their understanding of the Gospel to their cultural heritage. In this way they realize their double faithfulness - to their kith and kin, and to the unity of mankind as embodied in Christianity - in the Church centred on Jesus Christ.

Consummation after the Christian wedding was taught to be the completion of the marriage contract. A marriage that had not been consummated could be nullified, but once consummation had taken place, divorce was not possible, since such an allowance, according to Christian teaching, would reduce the couple to fornicators, or to adulterers if any of them chose to marry again.³⁷ Moreover, the Christian wedding came as a new cultural experience, in which the bridal party wore new clothes indicative of the new culture, and new foods and drinks were served at the celebration, such as wedding cakes (and baked bread), rice, tea.

On the basis of the observations made above regarding the marriage rite, it follows that even without the contemporary emphasis on the indigenization of Christianity,³⁸ African Christians had already initiated ways of dealing with the problem of accepting the new religion in the context of

their culture. Christian doctrines and worship were accepted, but at the same time, some of the aspects of African culture which African Christians considered necessary were maintained in their new way of life.

2.4.4 Death

Both in Christianity and in the African cultural heritage the death of an individual causes great concern to the community of which he has been a member, and in which he has been living. This is especially so if the deceased had favourable relationships with the members of his community. Rituals are organized for the expression of this concern.

In the African tradition the death of an elderly popular individual was felt to be a great loss to the community. Funeral rituals expressed this feeling of sorrow and loss and emphasized that the physical death was not the end of the deceased's existence. It was believed that the dead person would continue to influence the lives of his living relatives. In accordance with this belief, it was considered essential that those who were physically alive should continue to conduct themselves in such a way as to maintain peaceful and healthy relationships with one another and with the departed ones. The latter relationship would be maintained by observing

strictly the established customs of the community, pouring libation in remembrance of the departed, singing praises to them and naming children after them. The departed would be consulted occasionally, through the elders and the diviners, to find out their will for the living community. It was feared that any offence to the departed would bring suffering and misfortune to the relatives and to the community as a whole.³⁹

If a deceased person had many children and had been living according to the established customs of the community, there was also an expression of joy because he had not departed without leaving some descendants. The continuation of the family lineage was felt to be very necessary, hence marriage and procreation were a primary responsibility which must be fulfilled before a person reached old age. The death of an unmarried person was not regarded to be as great a loss as that of one who had fulfilled this obligation.

Thus the rituals concerned with the death of accepted members of the community were a mixture of sorrow and joy - sorrow that the community would miss physically one of its members, and joy that the deceased had fulfilled his obligations to the community according to custom.⁴⁰

Christianity came with new rituals for the burial of Christians. The liturgy for burial reflected the Christian beliefs in eternal life, resurrection and the communion of saints, as stated in the Apostles' Creed. The Christian funeral was a new cultural experience in Africa in which texts from the Bible were read and new hymns sung. A new theological understanding of the destiny of man and articulated, expressing the conviction that after physical death a faithful Christian would enter the Kingdom of God to live with Him eternally while the unfaithful would be condemned to eternal suffering in hell.

In African Christian life there is an overlap of the African cultural heritage and Christian teaching. The death of a Christian is felt to be a loss to the Church, and the congregation expresses this feeling at the Christian funeral. There is also the affirmation of the Christian belief that physical death is not the end of man's existence, since God in Jesus Christ has promised eternal life to mankind. At the same time, however, the relatives of the deceased and the community of which he has been a member, feel the loss caused by the death. They feel it both as Christians and as members of his family and community. Although some African Christians may not conduct the traditional death rituals, such as ritual cleansing, all continue to feel the presence

of the deceased long after physical death.

2.5 CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN SYMBOLISM

Christianity came with new symbols⁴¹ which embodied its basic doctrines and theology. In this section several of these are considered, in the light of their theological significance in Christianity, and what they may mean in the context of the Church in Africa.

2.5.1. The Cross

This is one of the most significant Christian symbols in the life of the Church, being a visible sign to remind Christians and other people, of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity.⁴² This symbol embodies the Christian belief that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, so that through Him the estranged relationship between God and man might be restored. God took the initiative to re-establish that relationship which man through the sin of disobedience, had broken. The cross is also a constant reminder that Jesus conquered death, and in the resurrection, mankind became assured of eternal life for all those who believe the Gospel and become followers of its way, as exemplified by Jesus Christ.

The cross embodies also the Christian belief in God's gracious forgiveness, which is freely extended to all those who repent and believe the Gospel. The Kingdom of God, as a present experience and an eternal promise, is open to all those who choose to follow the way of the cross. Since the apostolic period Christians have been called people of the Way - of the Cross - (Mark 8:34-38; Acts 9:2, 19:9, 24:14).

Thus the cross is a very loaded theological symbol in the life of the Church. It embodies the Christian belief in the triune God, whose presence is experienced by the believer through the inspiration^{SP} of the Holy Spirit.

For many centuries, it has been a Christian tradition to place a cross on Church buildings, at the altar, at the pulpit and other conspicuous places. In many denominations it is part of the clerical dress. Hence it is one of the most common symbols in all the various strands of Christianity.

Before the coming of Christianity the cross was not a religiously significant symbol among African communities.⁴³ Hence the widespread use of it in the Church made the cross one of the most visible distinguishing characteristics of the presence of Christianity in Africa. Wherever the Church has been established, one may notice its presence without necessarily being told about it, by observing the use of this

symbol on Church buildings, clerical dress and on Christian graves.

The cross continues to be a mark of identity for Christian Churches all over the world. Although its cultural origin was not in Africa, it has come to be accepted by African Christians for the deep theological meaning which it embodies.

2.5.2 Bread and Wine

The Eucharist is one of the central sacraments of the Church.⁴⁴ In it the Christian community enacts the Last Supper which Jesus Christ had with His disciples just before His imminent crucifixion. During that occasion Jesus, pointing to His death and resurrection, offered Himself as the Bread of Life. The bread in that meal signified His body which was tortured and broken for the salvation of mankind. The wine signified His blood which was shed for the same purpose. He commanded His disciples to enact that event as the central ritual of the Christian community.⁴⁵ Hence the Eucharist came to signify and embody the new Covenant which inaugurated a new era of faith and life, unified in Jesus Christ. Thus bread and wine which were elements basic to the subsistence of the people in Palestine at that time, came to have a special symbolic significance for the early Christian

community, and for the Church through its history to the present time.

This sacrament (sometimes called the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, Holy Communion) also reminded Christians that animal sacrifices or any other offerings to God were no longer necessary for the restoration of estranged relations between God and man, since Jesus Christ had offered Himself for that purpose, once and for all. In His crucifixion followed by his resurrection, humanity had received freely the gift of salvation, and become reunited with God.⁴⁶

For the Churches that give prominence to apostolic tradition, the Eucharist is the centre of Christian worship, expressing the experienced reality of the Incarnation, and constantly reminding Christians of God's immanent presence among His people. It is the climax of the Church's corporate life.

The use of bread and wine in the Eucharist came as a new cultural and religious experience among African peoples. In their traditional life, Africans made animal sacrifices and other offerings to the deity, spirits and ancestors. There was no teaching about a personal saviour, nor was there a belief in personal salvation such as taught in Christianity.⁴⁷

African Christians in the Churches that grew directly out of the modern missionary movement, accepted the teaching about the Eucharist, and adopted bread and wine as the elements with which to enact the central sacrament of the Church. Whereas in the apostolic period bread and wine were a common diet, in African Christianity these elements came as a new cultural experience so that some Christians would taste bread and wine only at Holy Communion.

2.5.3 Water

The ritual of baptism was another new cultural and religious experience in Africa. Baptism as conducted by John the Baptist and by the apostles in the early Church was by total immersion. It was a very significant ritual, symbolizing publicly the ceremonial washing of the penitent sinner in the clean water of the river Jordan which, rising in the lofty mountains of Lebanon, drained in the Dead Sea. As the river flowed to that sea without outlet, its water would symbolically wash the old life out of those being baptized, and then they would begin to live according to the new teaching.⁴⁸

Jesus was baptized by John in that river, and from that example His followers continued the practice of baptism.

He advised Nicodemus that unless a person was 'born again' with water and the spirit he could not enter the Kingdom of God.⁴⁹

As the Church continued to mould its theology, baptism became a central sacrament, and the ritual by which converts would be initiated into the life and membership of the Church. Some Churches today practise the baptism of total immersion as in the early Church, while others sprinkle water over the head of the convert and then declare him baptized in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Whatever procedure of baptism is followed, water is an important symbol in the life of the Church.

In traditional African life there was ritual washing in which water, was accorded ritual significance. For example, a person who touched a corpse would have to be ritually cleansed before he could rejoin the normal life of the community.⁵⁰ Water was considered to be a very important element essential to the life of the individual and the community, and also for the life of the livestock. It was against custom to deny a thirsty person some water to drink.⁵¹

African Christians, especially during the early period of missionary activity, understood baptism to be very significant in their lives. They were prepared to go through several years of catechetical instruction in order to be baptized, and become members of the Church.⁵²

This ritual was also linked with the giving of new names, especially those of biblical characters and of saints.

Thus water was accorded a new symbolic significance when Christianity was introduced in Africa. The ritual of baptism was considered to be so dramatic that a baptized convert was expected to be washed of all his old existence, and therefore to abandon many of the traditional customs of his community. It has been noted, however, that this missionary expectation was not fully realized because African Christians continued to hold some of the traditional ideas although they would not publicly participate in traditional ritual.⁵³

2.5.4 Blood

According to the teaching of Christianity, the blood of Jesus Christ was shed in the only one and final sacrifice for the salvation of all sinners. The coming of Christianity to East Africa thus brought a new way of re-establishing relationship between God and man. An illustrative example of the acceptance of this new teaching by African Christians is a chorus which is very popular within the East African Revival movement. The chorus expresses the joy of a Christian when he has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus was referred to as the 'Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29-30)'. His blood became the 'Blood of the new covenant (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20)'. In the Old Testament, the blood of the sacrificial lamb symbolized the Old Covenant between God and His people, and this understanding remained central to the Old Testament religion since the exodus from Egypt. The Incarnation became the New Covenant in which animal, human or any other forms of sacrifice became no longer necessary.

To Africans, the practice of offering sacrifices was not new; what was new was the teaching that Jesus had shed his own blood making the last and only necessary sacrifice for man's salvation.

2.6 CONVERSION AND ACCULTURATION

In view of the observations made in this chapter, the establishment of Christianity in the interior of East Africa can be considered to have been a double-sided process. On the one hand there was conversion in which some individuals, having encountered Christianity, chose to follow its new teaching and adopt a new way of life. Catechetical instruction was the main means by which the converts were prepared for initiation into the fellowship of the new faith. They were

taught new doctrines, and after being tested to ensure that they could at least recite them, the converts would be admitted into the full membership of the Church. In this sense they were converted from their African religious heritage to Christianity.

On the other hand, the acceptance of the new doctrines in conversion implied the adoption of a new way of life, which would correspond to these beliefs. The translation of Christian teaching into practical living could not be done without cultural reference, and cultural interaction. It has been observed above that while African Christians accepted the basic Christian teachings almost without debate,⁵⁵ they did not necessarily abandon their basic traditional values and ideas. Although they may publicly have detached themselves from the traditional rituals and practices, the positive values and ideas embodied in those expressions remained part of the African Christian experience. The establishment of Christianity in East Africa was also a process of acculturation⁵⁶ in the sense that African Christians, through encounter and interaction with the new religion which was already expressed in terms of another culture, acquired and developed a new way of life which was distinct from, but also related to, both the old and the new cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER TWO

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- 2 Herbert Muller, op.cit. pp. 235-49; S.C. Neill, op.cit. pp. 61-139.
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- 4 Oliver, op.cit., pp. 184-5, Allan J. Gottneid, ed., Church and Education in Tanzania, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1975.
- 5 E. Muga, African Response to the Western Christian Religion, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1974, pp. 88.
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- 7 R.W. Mutua, Development of Education in Kenya: some administrative aspects, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1975, p. 8f.
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- 9 The missionary societies were concerned that the pupils admitted in the mission schools should belong to the sponsoring denominations. This situation has changed since Independence. See F.B. Welbourn, East African Christian, p. 84.
- 10 For a discussion of this point see for example, J.V. Taylor, The Growth of the Church in Buganda. London, S.C.M. Press, 1958, pp. 155-168.
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- 17 Genesis 2:24, Matt. 19:5, Mark 10:7. This passage is often quoted on wedding invitation cards.
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- 19 *ibid.*, p. 46. For a study of the interaction between traditional African Marriage Customs and marriage practices among Christian Revivalists (brethren) see Derrick Stenning, 'Salvation in Ankole', in M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, African Systems of Thought, London/N.York, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 273.
- 20 For a discussion on social fact, G.D. Mitchell, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
- 21 For example, A. Hastings, *op.cit.*, 1973. See also. E. Muga, *op.cit.* p. 102, M. Likimani, They Chastised, Nairobi, 1974, pp. 155-162.
- 22 Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, *op.cit.*, p. 266.
- Also J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy,

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- 23 Birth as a rite of passage is discussed in
J.S. Mbiti, op.cit. pp. 112-18.
- 24 In the Anglican Book of Common Prayer this ceremony is
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- 25 The god-parent serves an educative role similar to that
of a sponsor in the initiation rite, guiding the child
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- 26 This situation may be attributed to the lack of
adequate theological education among the laity. For
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- 27 The importance of such practices is continually
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missionaries of African initiation rites is portrayed
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- 30 For example, this problem was one of the primary
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pp. 167-72.
- 33 Mbiti, op.cit., pp. 142-3.
- 34 A.Hastings, op.cit., pp. 63-5.
- 35 ibid., pp. 83-6.
- 36 For further discussion, F.B. Welbourn, op.cit.,
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- 40 ibid., p. 84.
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- 43 Mbiti, op.cit., p. 90 has noted that the Gikuyu shaved children in the form of a 'cross' during rituals designed to keep off malicious spirits. (This symbolism was not connected with Christianity. Among the Embu, the emphasis in this custom, was on the incompleteness of the shaving, rather than on the design made on the scalp.) Mbiti's suggestion to link this custom with Christianity has been criticised by Prof. Ali Mazrui, in African Religions in Western Scholarship 'epilogue' (p. 126).
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- 45 Luke 22:20.
- 46 For fuller discussion, J.S. Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background, pp. 101-105.
- 47 Mbiti, 'Some African concepts of Christology' in Vicedom, op.cit., p. 60.
- 48 For the symbolic significance of water in the Bible, see, for example, J.A. Motyer, 'Baptism' and J.B. Taylor, 'Water', both in J.D. Douglas, op.cit., 1962.
- 49 John, 3:1-13.
- 50 For example, among the Vugusu - G. Wagner, The Bantu of Western Kenya, with special Reference to the Vugusu and Logoli, Vol. I, London/New York, Oxford University Press, 1949, 1970, p. 485.

- 51 This custom prevailed in many cultures, even non-African ones. For example, Jesus referred to it in His teaching, Matt. 25:35.
- 52 For example, the Akamba Christians, in Mbiti, op.cit., pp. 108-113.
- 53 J.V. Taylor, The Primal Vision, London, S.C.M. Press, 1963, p. 24.
- 54 One version of that chorus in English has the following words: "Glory, Glory alleluyia, Glory, Glory to the Lamb; Oh the cleansing blood of Jesus; Glory, Glory to the Lamb". This is sung in many East African Languages.
- 55 Contrasting the modern missionary movement's activity in Africa with the spreading of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world (see Introduction), the establishment of the Church in the 19th and 20th centuries was characterized by cultural, rather than theological and philosophical controversies in East Africa.
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CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

3.1 WORLD VIEWS

Prior to the coming of Christianity and western ideas, African peoples lived and understood their existence mainly in terms of the beliefs and ideas of the communities to which each belonged. Although each ethnic community had its own beliefs about humanity and the world around it, anthropological and ethnological studies have made it possible to make some general remarks about those ideas and beliefs, thus pointing out what may be called the African world view. A few of such general remarks are outlined below.

In traditional African thought and belief, the world was flat. The sun revolved round the earth, in a regular rhythm which was unchangeable. As the sun rose in the east and set in the west, time was marked in days and nights. In this unchangeable rhythm daily time was reckoned according to the common daily activities of the community, such as waking up in the morning, taking the livestock out for grazing in mid-morning, resting at mid-day, return of the livestock to graze in the mid afternoon, milking in the evening, dusk at

the beginning of night. The moon marked the lunar months, and the seasons were reckoned in terms of the rainy and dry periods. The months would be named according to the common activities of the community, such as cultivation, planting, weeding, harvesting.²

The world was thought and believed to be one, consisting of the earth on which humanity lived, and the sky from which the moon and stars shone at night and across which the sun passed each day. There was no commonly held belief that this world would ever change or come to an end.³

Furthermore, the world was believed to be inhabited by beings both visible and invisible, and by inanimate objects all of which existed in a balance of relationships within the context of the natural rhythm and cycle of life as outlined above. Among the living visible beings and things were human beings, animals both domestic and wild, and plants both valuable for human life and dangerous (poisonous). Among the inanimate objects were significant mountains, rocks, caves, rivers, and so on. The living invisible beings included the deity, spirits, ancestors and the children about to be born.⁴

If the cycle of the seasons and the rhythm of life in the community was interrupted by such occurrences as

prolonged rain or drought, epidemics or earthquakes, it was believed that someone in the community had caused a breakdown of the balance of relationships, thereby offending the deity, ancestors or the spirits. Diviners would therefore be consulted to investigate who among the members of the community had caused this breakdown, and how it had been caused. The diviners would also be expected to indicate what remedies the community would have to conduct in order to restore the balance of relationships and resume the normal cycle and rhythm.

Appropriate offerings and sacrifices would have to be made according to the advice of the diviners, to please the offended spirits. The diviners also gave advice on what punishments would be imposed on those people responsible for the breakdown of relationships.⁵

To African peoples in traditional life the world was a religious reality, to the extent that no aspect of existence could be considered without reference to the comprehensive balance of relationships outlined above. It is in this sense that religion has been said to permeate all spheres of traditional African life.⁶

By the time Christianity reached the interior of

East Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century, the accepted western world-view that came with Christianity was that the earth was spherical, and revolved round the sun as part of the solar system. This view had been established in the west less than three centuries before, and with great difficulty when Copernicus made public his discovery that in spite of all the achievements of western civilization, the previous view that the earth was flat and that the sun revolved round the earth, was a distorted one.⁷

In the mission schools the prospective African converts to Christianity learnt this new world-view in Geography lessons, and a new method of reckoning time was introduced. A day according to the new method of reckoning time began in the middle of the night at midnight, so that by dawn six hours of the day would have already passed. Although the concept of minutes and hours as units of reckoning time became part of African thinking, for most people in East Africa the day is still considered to begin at dawn rather than at midnight.⁸

The world-view that came with Christianity was a three-fold one, in which there was the present world, a 'heaven' for those who would accept Christianity, and a 'hell' for those who were damned for their lack of salvation

in Christianity. It has been pointed out in chapter one above that one of the motivations of some missionaries was the conviction that African peoples were destined to hell unless they were brought to the 'light' of the Gospel. This new world-view stressed that the present human existence was transitory, in expectation of another existence in heaven. The belief was expressed for example in a Christian song whose first words were: 'This world is not my home, I am just passing through'. This was a new idea introduced into the African understanding of the world.⁹

Christian teaching, drawing authority from the account of Creation in the book of Genesis, further stressed that man was the highest of all God's creatures, and had been given power to subdue and manage the rest of creation. Hence the early missionaries considered as superstition the traditional African view that the world and all therein, being a religious reality, could not be haphazardly tampered with.¹⁰

3.2 THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

In chapter two above it has been observed that new symbolism came with Christianity. Symbols are bound up with the cultures in which they have been produced and given meaning. Likewise, language is a cultural product, and is

developed for the communication and expression of the experiences of the culture that has produced it.

The term 'religion' in this section is used with reference to the totality of that aspect of individual and corporate life in human society, which expresses in words and actions, that society's beliefs about the origin, meaning and destiny of existence in this world, in relation to the society's concepts of transcendent reality. The term 'theology' is used with reference to the systematic reflection and the discourse following from that reflection, about the perfect (and imperfect) relationships between man as a social being and the transcendent reality, as contained in the beliefs of a particular religion.

Within any culture, language is used in religion and theology in a special analogical way - similar to the way in which symbols are used. The ordinary vocabulary in a language is accorded special religious meaning in order to express a people's thoughts about, and experiences of, metaphysical reality. Hence religious language, like symbolism, is bound up with the culture in which it has been produced and developed.¹¹

It follows, therefore, that the translation of

religious ideas and beliefs developed in one culture into the language developed in another culture, is a very problematic endeavour, and requires not only a thorough knowledge of the new language, but also a comprehensive understanding of the culture that has produced that language. Attempts to conduct such translations without first meeting these basic requirements may lead to a mutual misunderstanding which would be difficult to reconcile.¹²

The coming of Christianity to Africa required such a translation, noting that the culture and world-view of the missionaries were different from those of the African peoples whom they had come to evangelize and civilize. As pointed out in the Introduction, missionary activity in the early Church had the major advantage that there were a common language and a common culture with which most peoples of the Graeco-Roman world were familiar. Even among the Jewish community which had conserved its identity for many centuries and survived possible extinction by several powerful empires, there were, during the apostolic period, Hellenists who had assimilated Greek culture and become proficient in the Greek language. At the same time, there were many Gentiles who had become attracted to the Jewish cultural and religious identity, to the extent of becoming proselytes into Judaism. The Hellenists and proselytes provided a possible starting point

for missionary activity in the apostolic period. Such an advantage was not available for the modern missionary movement in Africa.

The rest of this chapter considers a few religious concepts, to examine how they were presented in the process of Christian missionary activity, how the concepts were understood in traditional African religious thought and belief, and then, how African Christians accommodated the new faith within the context of their religious background.

Before entering into a consideration of particular concepts, it is worth noting that the method of articulating theology which came with Christianity, was characteristically different from the one that African peoples had developed and passed on orally in their heritage. The Christian theologian in the western Church tradition was in most cases an academic who would draw on the literary resources of former theologians like him, criticizing, praising, or amplifying, what they had said, on the basis of his understanding of the Christian Scriptures and his experience in the life of the Church. Christian theological discourse was preserved and carried on in treatises and handbooks which later preachers and theologians could use for reference in their work and meditation.

In contrast, theology in the African heritage was articulated not in treatises and manuals, but in descriptive names and phrases, myths of origin, blessings and curses, greetings and expressions of gratitude, rituals, prayers, informal religious sayings, and in ordinary comments and explanations.¹³ Oral tradition was the basic means of transmitting ideas from generation to generation. It is no surprise, therefore, that some early missionaries should have got the impression that African peoples had no religion and no theology. It is no surprise, either, that some later missionaries, such as Placide Tempels, should have maintained that African peoples were incapable of articulating their religious beliefs and philosophical ideas, and that therefore the missionary should articulate these beliefs and ideas on behalf of Africans.¹⁴ Nevertheless, African peoples, as indicated above, had their own method of articulating their theological and philosophical insights.¹⁵

3.3 GOD

This term and its translations in various European languages has been the subject of theological and philosophical reflection throughout the history of the Church. From the apostolic period to the present time Christian theologians and philosophers have continued to reflect and argue

on the meaning of this term. It has been a subject of concern among both theists and atheists, empiricists and metaphysicians, gnostics and Christians. Among western thinkers there is so far no agreed concensus on the meaning of the term 'God'. None of the various views is commonly agreed to be satisfactory, so that any one school of thought emphasises aspects which are rejected by others, and no school is comprehensive.¹⁶ This section is concerned with the term as it has been used in Christianity, and applied in relation to the African concepts of deity.

In view of the foregoing paragraph, the term 'God' in this section is used with reference to the personal deity who is believed to be the originator (creator) and sustainer of mankind and all its environment, as understood in Christianity. In the various African translations of the term God, this Christian concept was introduced into African thinking and merged with traditional African concepts of deity. African peoples had each its name for deity, and sometimes one community had several descriptive names and phrases expressing the various qualities that were attributed to the deity.¹⁷

Although the name for deity used in any one African ethnic community was normally part of the vocabulary of that community, a common traditional African belief was that such names referred to a being whose power extended beyond any

ethnic territory to the whole world. Thus it was possible for Africans from different ethnic communities to understand one another as far as basic religious beliefs were concerned. To this extent there was a basic generality in traditional African religious thought, in spite of the particularities of cultural-religious identity among various African peoples. For instance, the deity in whom Africans of a particular ethnic community believed, was conceived by that community to be the same deity whom other peoples believed in, although the name by which he was called differed from one people to another (Okot p'Bitek in Religion of the Central Luo Chapter 3 maintains that the concept of monotheism was alien to Acoli religious thought and was introduced there through Christian missionary influence. If this is true, the Acoli were an exception to the observations made above).¹⁸

A common name for deity might be used by two or more neighbouring communities. However, the particular details of the concept to which that common name referred in each community, were an integral part of the cultural and religious heritage of that community. The question as to which community adopted a name for deity from its neighbour is not basic here. What is basic, is the observation that in adopting a word from one language, new meanings are added to that word when it becomes part of the vocabulary of the language into which the word has been adopted.

Such a process took place when Christianity was introduced among African peoples. The first generation of missionaries, ignorant of the cultural and religious background of the communities they had come to evangelize, formed the superficial impression that African peoples had no concept of deity. That impression was propounded by such anthropologists as Edward Tylor, who theorised about African religious beliefs without any field experience among African peoples.¹⁹ The second generation of missionaries, notably Edwin Smith, corrected the earlier impression through their field experience as they carried out their missionary work, and proposed that African peoples had vague notions of deity, but God was too remote to be interested and involved in the affairs of man. Christianity therefore, according to this view, had come to teach the African peoples that God was knowable, and immanent. In the Incarnation God had come to dwell with men.²⁰

While Christianity continued to spread, inter-ethnic contacts among African converts and among missionaries working in different parts of Africa (such as the symposium published in African Ideas of God, 1950), confirmed the view that many religious ideas were common among African peoples. Some missionaries thought that African concepts of deity fell far short of the Christian doctrines of God. Nevertheless, in translating the Bible, liturgical literature and Christian

teaching, such missionaries had to adopt the traditional African names of deity, in order to communicate the new ideas to African peoples.²¹

In a symposium on African ideas of God, Edwin Smith indexed the names of deity of as many African peoples as he could get information about, and proposed that the best argument for convincing Africans about the value of Christianity, was that the new religion had come to introduce them to the knowledge of the God who was loving, immanent, and concerned with the welfare of man, in contrast with the traditional view which, he thought, was short of these attributes.²²

Recent studies by African scholars have rejected both the earlier view which considered African religious beliefs as 'animism', and the later one which considered them to be vague, deficient or incomplete. In a study of nearly three hundred ethnic communities in Africa, Professor J.S. Mbiti found that it was possible to make some general remarks about the African ideas of deity. African peoples, he found, believed God to be both transcendent and immanent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent.²³ His use of these terms of Greek origin was with the awareness of the difficulty discussed above - that of translating religious ideas developed and expressed in one cultural and linguistic background, into

another language, without distorting the ideas and beliefs being translated.²⁴ In that study he showed that African religious beliefs could not rightly be described as animism, and that the African religious heritage included beliefs in and worship of God.

In another study on 'The Kikuyu concept of God, its continuity into the Christian era and the question it raises for the Christian idea of Revelation',²⁵ Dr. S.G. Kibicho found that among the community he had studied there was certainly a set of concepts of deity, and that those in that community who became Christians carried forward the basic traditional concepts into their new faith. The same word they had used for deity in traditional religious belief was the same one they continued to use with reference to God in Christianity. Hence many people, he found, believed that the God they worshipped in Christianity was the same God who had been known and worshipped traditionally.

In a third study on the relationship between God and the sun in the religious beliefs of the Meru of Tanzania, Dr. Raimo Harjula²⁶ disproved the early missionaries and anthropologists who thought that the Meru worshipped the sun, because the name for the sun was the same as that of the deity, to whom the Meru addressed their worship. He showed that

although the name was the same, when used in reference to the deity it was a personal proper noun, whereas it was a common noun for an object when it was used with reference to the sun. Hence he concluded that the Meru were not sun-worshippers. In his study he correlated the concept of deity among the Meru with those of other communities which had been studied in connection with this aspect of religious beliefs. He cautioned against incorrect sweeping generalizations, such as that 'East African communities were sun-worshippers'.

In the rest of this section the term 'God' is used for both the African and the Christian concepts of deity, following from the observation made above, that African Christians used traditional names with reference to the concepts of deity in both these religious backgrounds.

According to traditional African belief, God was conceived as a person concerned and interested in the affairs of man. He was conceived as a spirit, whose will could be known by ordinary members of the community mainly through diviners. Sometimes He might make His will known through the ancestors, who would be offended if any member of the community failed to conduct his life according to the will of God. African peoples accorded God the highest rank of authority and wisdom, and believed that He was not to be bothered as long as things in the community went on smoothly. This attitude was

consistent with African social life. For example, in ordinary life a highly respected elder was not to be bothered with petty and unimportant matters, although the community felt free to consult him for advice in cases of any serious difficulties.²⁷

It has been noted at the beginning of this chapter that African peoples believed the world to be inhabited by beings both visible and invisible, who must live in a peaceful balance of relationships. There was therefore no contradiction or paradox in the concept of God as a person, and as invisible. The strong belief in the maintenance of the balance of relationships, also implied that any action leading to the breakdown of harmony - between God and man, spirits and man, ancestors and man, and between man and man within the physically living community - was considered to be at the same time an offence against all those beings who formed this network of relationships.

There was no equivalent of Satan in African religious belief.²⁸ If anything went wrong in the community or the individual to the extent that misfortune was experienced, the members of the community did not attribute such calamities to such a being as Satan. Rather, they would investigate, through the diviners, who within the community had offended

God, the spirits, or the ancestors, by breaking the established customs and prohibitions of the family and the community as a whole.

Furthermore, there was no expectation of a Judgment Day when all wrong-doers would be punished and all right-doers rewarded. Rather, people were punished and rewarded within the continual rhythm of life as outlined at the beginning of this chapter.²⁹ It can be deduced from African traditional belief that man was thought to be essentially good. Even in the myths that explained the finitude of man and the origin of life and death, it was not man's sin or wickedness that led to his mortal nature, but rather, because of the slowness or dull-wittedness of some other creatures - such as chameleon, tortoise, hyena - which failed to convey the quality of immortality from God to man.³⁰

Christianity came with the emphasis that all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Man must therefore repent in order to come back to God's glory. To enable man to do this, God in His mercifulness had become incarnate in Jesus Christ so that through Him man might be saved. The Christian doctrine of salvation understood in this sense was a new teaching in Africa.

Moreover, in Christianity God was presented as the eternal Judge who on Doomsday would condemn all those who failed to do His will and reward the faithful with eternal glory, so that they might dwell with Him for ever. Hence good conduct was to be observed in order to win God's favour, attain eternal life, and avoid condemnation to hell on the judgement day. Since man was a fallen creature, God's forgiveness was possible only because of His grace. He had freely offered Himself to save man, His creature.³¹

Without elaborating further the pietistic emphasis of early missionary teaching, it may be noted that African Christians received this aspect of the missionary message, and this is attested for example by the strong emphasis on salvation, and on futurist eschatology.³² At the same time, however, they did not lose their traditional beliefs about God and the world. Rather, these served as the background on Marta which they received the new faith. The new teachings were superimposed upon the old, with the result that African Christians found a new identity in Christianity, establishing fellowships of faith which were distinct from both the traditional African community and the missionary society, but related to both.

Therefore, the situation that developed in which

the 'Foreign Mission' became distinct and separate from the 'African Church', could be attributed to the fact that both the African Churches and the missionary societies experienced that separation and took it for granted. From the point of view of the missionary societies, this was the result of a distorted concept of mission which had deviated from the apostolic understanding of the Great Commission as outlined in the introductory chapter. They thought the separation to be normal, also in accordance with the prevalent attitude during the period, that African peoples, being 'primitive', had to be civilized and taught to be responsible before they could be fully accepted as mature brothers and partners even in the Church. From the perspective of African Christians, the separation was experienced and challenged. Although Christianity did not detach them completely from their traditional beliefs and community life and although they responded to the missionaries as people from a different culture which had been presented as superior to the African heritage, they saw no reason for missionaries to assume superiority.

The availability of the Bible in African languages was an important factor which contributed to the African challenge of the relationship between African Churches and the missionary societies. This challenge led to African initiatives to correct the relationships both within and out of the mission-founded Churches.³³

3.4 SPIRITS AND ANGELS

According to traditional African religious belief, the world was believed to be inhabited by spiritual beings with whom peaceful and harmonious relationship must be maintained at all times. These beings were believed to affect the daily life of the community positively or negatively, depending on whether or not the members of the community had managed to observe that obligation.

The details of the beliefs in spirits varied from community to community. For example among some peoples especially in west Africa there were pantheons of divinities and large numbers of spirits.³⁴ Within the category of spirits in general were included those that were once human (ancestral spirits) and those that were never human. Beliefs in the former are dealt with in the next section of this chapter. This section considers the beliefs in spirits in general.

A spirit might enter the life of an individual, causing him or her to behave in an extra-ordinary or abnormal manner. If such behaviour were noticed, the suffering individual would be taken to a diviner to have the suffering diagnosed. The diviner might advise that the patient was possessed by a certain spirit, and for recovery to be regained

the spirit would have to come out. The diviner might attribute the spirit-possession to the failure on the part of the patient or his relatives, to maintain a harmonious relationship between the living and the dead. To restore health, the vicious circle would have to be broken by restoring the damaged relationships.

Among communities in which belief in spirit possession was strong, there was an established cult of spirit-mediumship, which specialized in the removal of, and communication with, the spirits. Such a cult has been reported, for example, among the Banyoro, Segeju, Lugbara, Sukuma, Alur, Ankole.³⁵ The cult of spirit-mediumship was a central feature of social life among communities in which it was practised. A medium would enter into an intimate relationship with the patient or his representative through ecstatic experiences, and then, with dancing and participation of the relatives and the neighbours the ceremony of driving out the spirit would be conducted in some cases lasting several days. Among the Segeju, for example it would last for seven days.³⁶

Spirits were believed to be potentially harmful to the life of the community unless the members kept them happy and at peace. Although God was believed to be invisible, there was a distinction between Him and other spirits.

Into this general background Christianity came with a new teaching about spirits. The rest of this section will consider the beliefs in spirits as they came with the new religion, and some of the ways in which African Christians responded to those beliefs in view of that background.

Christianity came with the teaching that 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth'.³⁷ At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah, affirming that the 'Spirit of the Lord' was upon Him to proclaim the Gospel (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18).

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Christian Trinitarian theology was a new teaching which, though it had its background in the Old Testament, was developed in the early Church within the Graeco-Roman intellectual setting. For example, Neo-Platonism had a great influence in the early development of Christian theology in general.³⁸ As pointed out earlier in this study, Christian missionary activity in Africa did not have the advantage of such a link, and many, (though not all) missionaries had to devise ways of introducing the new teaching with the presupposition that this new teaching had no common starting point with African religious beliefs.^{38a}

Since Trinitarian theology was introduced as an entirely new way of thinking and believing in God, the concept of Holy Spirit was difficult to translate into East African languages. Among many of them the Kiswahili word 'Roho' was adopted to represent this concept.³⁹ Another reason was that African words which could have been adopted were associated with evil. Hence African Christians did not readily associate the concept of the Holy Spirit with the concept of spirits in their own traditional backgrounds. Spirits as believed in within the African religious heritage were considered in Christianity as evil, and missionary teaching expected African converts to Christianity to abandon all beliefs concerning those spirits. This is one of the aspects of religious belief in which there was complete discontinuity between Christian teaching and African concepts.

The widespread emphasis on possession by the Holy Spirit in African expressions of the Christian faith may therefore be attributed largely to the fact that the traditional beliefs in spirits were completely replaced by the new Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis is found within the Churches that grew directly through the modern missionary movement, within those that grew indirectly from it, and also within the more recently established Pentecostal Churches. In the first strand of Christianity the emphasis is expressed in the East African Revival movement in which conversion and salvation mean that a convert accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour. Having thus accepted

Him, the convert's life is ordered by the Holy Spirit, and his activities become the fruits of the Spirit. In the movement the Spirit is contrasted with the Flesh, and the former is preferred to the latter.⁴⁰

In the second strand of Christianity, the emphasis of the Holy Spirit is a main concern of the Independent Church movement. The emphasis is expressed in terms of faith healing in which the Holy Spirit works through the faith of the believing community, the faith healer and the patient, for the restoration of health. The Holy Spirit is believed to be dynamically present in the worshipping life of most of these Churches, to the extent that spontaneity in worship is one of their most common features.⁴¹

In addition to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, another teaching that came with Christianity was the belief in angels. Although this belief was not explicitly included in the Apostles' Creed, the New Testament indicates that angels had a role in the divine revelation of God to man.⁴² In the nativity of Jesus Christ for example, an 'angel of the Lord' spoke to Joseph (Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19) and to the shepherds (Luke 2:9). The birth of Jesus Christ was hailed by 'a multitude of the heavenly host' (Luke 2:13-15). When the apostles were arrested and put in the common prison,

'an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out' (Acts 5:19). An angel also spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26). Thus in Christianity, heaven, the abode of God, was presented as being inhabited by angels. The Christmas carols which were translated into African languages included reference to this belief.⁴³ Since in the African religious heritage there was no belief in angels, the Kiswahili word 'malaika' was adopted in some African translations of the Bible and hymns.⁴⁴

In this section it has been observed that both in Christianity and African religious tradition there were beliefs in spirits, but that the Christian teaching concerning the Holy Spirit and angels was new to African thinking.

3.5 ANCESTORS AND SAINTS

In the traditional African world-view, ancestors were another category of beings who were believed to inhabit the world. Physical death was not the end of existence. After death a person changed his mode of existence and became a spirit (ghost). It was believed that the spirits of people who had physically died continued to influence the life of the community, positively or negatively, depending on the conduct of those in the community who were physically alive. For

example, failure to observe any of the established 'taboos' might arouse the wrath of the ancestors, causing them to punish individuals or the community as a whole by inflicting illness, childlessness and sometimes even death.

If anything went wrong in the community, the diviner would be consulted, and if he attributed the misfortune to a breach of positive relations between the community and the ancestors, offerings would have to be made to appease and please them. Relations with the ancestors were maintained through such practises as pouring libation and offering some food at the beginning of meals, referring to them during all rituals and naming newborn children after the ancestors according to established customs.

Any offence against the ancestors was at the same time an offence against God since, as observed earlier in this chapter, the network of relations was totally integrated. Breaking relations within the physically living community would offend the ancestors, and offending the ancestors would arouse the wrath of God.

In the New Testament, especially in the epistles, Abraham was referred to as the father of the Hebrew people, and of Old Testament religion. The point stressed in this

reference was that Christianity had fulfilled and transcended the precepts of the Old Testament law and prophetic teaching. According to one of the gospels, Jesus had said: 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58). Paul argued with his fellow Jews that although Abraham was their ancestor, his significance in Jewish religion was mainly because he had been faithful and obedient to God. Therefore, the true 'children of God' were those who would live according to His will, as exemplified by Jesus Christ.

The term 'saint' in Church tradition was used with reference to those whom the Church recognized as 'the faithful'.⁴⁵ With the understanding of the Church as a family or household of faith, the term 'father' was used with reference to the leaders of the early Church. This tradition has continued to the present time in the Catholic and Orthodox strands of Christianity, so that a priest is referred to as 'Father'.^{45a}

In the Apostles' Creed belief in the communion of saints is included. This credal statement expresses the Christian expectation of the resurrection, when all the faithful will experience the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

In chapter two above it has been observed that the Church was from its beginning understood as a family, whose identity was based not on biological relations, but on faith in Jesus Christ. In the epistles of Saint Paul, for example, the Church was described as 'the household of God', Ephesians 2:19; 'the household of faith', Galatians 6:10; and believers were described as adopted sons, Romans 8:15-17. Hence in Christianity, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church in a very different sense from that in which the ancestors of traditional African communities are heads of such communities. It was observed in the previous chapter. also that African Christians, while accepting Christianity, did not necessarily forget their ancestral descent. However, the role of ancestors in religious life was diminished. so believers looked to Jesus Christ for all their needs in worship and prayer.⁴⁶

There was no reference to African ancestors in Christian worship, partly because early missionary teaching did not recognize the religious heritage of African peoples, and partly because African Christians themselves found in Jesus Christ, someone much greater than and incomparable with the ancestors.⁴⁷

The widely held African belief in ancestors as

mediators between God and man, and between man and man, was replaced in the African expression of Christianity, by faith in Jesus Christ, by belief in the communion of saints, and by belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. In Christianity, the communion of saints was believed to consist of all those who belonged to the Christian household of faith, and this 'household' was a universal communion stretching across and beyond racial, and national backgrounds.⁴⁸

Canonization of saints was not one of the practices in the Protestant strand of Christianity, although Protestant theology recognized some aspects of the pre-Reformation Church traditions, notably the Trinitarian doctrine. In the Catholic Church, however, some African Christians were canonized into 'sainthood' as recently as 1964, for their strong commitment to the Christian faith to the point of martyrdom.⁴⁹ The criteria for determining as to who should be called a saint is not the concern of this study. The relevant point here is that Christianity introduced a new concept of relations between the living and the 'departed'.

Christianity, with its doctrine of Resurrection, maintains that physical death is not the end of human existence. However, the relationship between 'departed' saints and the Christians who are physically alive, is distinct from that

between African ancestors and their living descendants.⁵⁰ For example, one important distinction is that ancestors are biological progenitors of African communities, and they occupy an elevated status in the network of social relationships. An elder in African tradition progresses through the rites of passage into the spiritual mode of existence, following those who have gone before him in the lineage of his family. In the lineage, a son is junior to his father, and that father, in turn, is junior to his father, and this relationship is traced through the lineage to the first ancestor of the clan or ethnic community.⁵¹ In Christianity, all the saints form a communion as the 'children of God'. In the Christian expectation of the resurrection and consummation of the Kingdom of God, all the faithful will rejoice in the glory of God. There will be neither male nor female, neither husband nor wife - all the social categories of the earthly existence will be transcended in the 'New Creation'.

Thus the coming of Christianity introduced a new concept of existence after death, in which the belief in the communion of saints was superimposed upon the traditional veneration of ancestors. Rituals of ancestor veneration were replaced by the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian worship. The early missionary attitude of underrating the importance of ancestors in African traditional life aroused some uneasiness among some Africans with regard to the brand of

Christianity that had been introduced to them, and the failure to appreciate the African cultural and religious heritage has been noted as one of the explanations for the rise of the 'Independent Church' movement. However, many Churches that grew within that movement have expanded membership beyond their ethnic origins, and the belief in the communion of saints is part of their doctrines.

3.6 SYNCRETISM AND SYNTHESIS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Syncretism is a dirty word in Christian theology, when it is understood as the mixing up of basic Christian doctrines with 'pagan' ideas.⁵³ Throughout the history of the Church there has been a tension between conservatism and change. In the Introduction it was observed that the apostolic Church had to deal with this kind of tension, when Christianity began to spread from Palestine into the Graeco-Roman world. Some Jewish Christians thought that purity of the Christian faith would be maintained only if the Gentile Christians adopted the Jewish cultural heritage. Others, such as Saint Paul, maintained that the Gospel transcended all cultures, and should challenge every cultural heritage including the Jewish one.

Chapters one, two and three of this study have shown that the same kind of tension developed when Christianity

reached the interior of East Africa. On one hand the missionaries felt committed to spread the Christian faith as they understood it without dilution, even if it meant that the African converts would have to abandon their own cultural and religious heritage. On the other hand, African Christians, while accepting the Christian faith, could not, and did not detach themselves entirely from their cultural and religious background. For Christianity to make sense and be relevant to the African converts, it had to be viewed in the context of that background.

African Christians accepted Christianity because they realized in it a new way of life which, in their understanding, was qualitatively better than their traditional existence (for example, their hope for eternal life, new forms of worship, literacy). From the study in Chapters two and three, it can be concluded that although African converts to Christianity thought of themselves as people who had become followers of an entirely new way of life, in practice they were participants in two cultural traditions - their own heritage, and that which had been introduced by the missionary enterprise. Their acceptance of the Gospel was a synthesis between Christianity as they had learnt it from missionary agencies and the Scriptures on the one hand, and their traditional existence on the other. Whatever may have been the assessment of missionaries regarding the quality of Christian life among African converts, African

Christians consciously or subconsciously have continued to consider their new faith in relation to their past existence, as individuals in contemporary society and as corporate members of their ethnic communities.

Furthermore, the establishment of Christianity in East Africa was largely the result of the initiatives of African converts, although the role of the missionary societies in introducing Christianity is not overlooked.⁵⁴ In their initiatives, some African Christians emphasised the relationship between Christianity and their cultural and religious heritage more than others did. The overt emphasis on this relationship partly contributed to the formation of 'Independent Churches'. However, even within the Churches that grew directly through the agency of the missionary societies, there were initiatives to synthesize some aspects of the African heritage with African understanding of Christianity.^{54a}

It may be added that syncretism is a danger to Christianity, if that term is used to mean a process and way of thinking in which the essential message of the Gospel is so mixed up with other ideas that the teaching of Jesus Christ is no longer central.⁵⁵ Thus the Church will continue in its

mission to face the great challenge of allowing cultural syntheses to take place, without losing its identity and fervour in syncretism. The analogy of the roots and branches given to Roman Christians (Romans 11:13-24) is relevant here. No one has any reason to boast, but those who have accepted the Gospel, irrespective of their background, are challenged to remain steadfast in their faith.

CHAPTER THREE

REFERENCE NOTES

- 1 It is noted that some African scholars emphasise the danger of making sweeping generalizations about the religion and philosophy of African peoples: for example, Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1970, pp. 98-100, Interview with him, 4th and 5th Feb. 1976.
- 2 On African world-view, J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, pp. 15-28, J.V. Taylor, The Primal Vision, passim;
- 3 Mbiti, op.cit., p. 24.
- 4 ibid., p. 16.
- 5 ibid., p. 177.
- 6 ibid., pp. 1-2, Also in 'African Concept of Time', Africa Theological Journal, Makumira, No. 1, Feb. 1968, p. 8.
- 7 J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, The Western Intellectual Tradition, Pelican, 1963, 1970, pp. 139-42; Giorgio Santillana, The Age of Adventure, New York, New American Library, 1956, pp. 157-66.

8 For example, the first hour of the day in Kiswahili corresponds to the seventh in English (i.e., seven o'clock). In English the day is divided into A.M. and P.M., in African reckoning it is divided simply into day and night.

9 This idea was expressed in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, which was translated into some African languages. The over-emphasis that this world was transitory and the anticipation of a better world in heaven led some converts to ignore the necessity to improve this world: J.S. Mbiti, 'African Concept of Time', in Africa Theological Journal, No. 1, Feb. 1968, p. 20. This point has been portrayed, for example, by Ngugi wa Thion'go in his books, especially, The Black Hermit, Heinemann, 1968, A Grain of Wheat, Heinemann, 1967, Homecoming, Heinemann, 1972, p. 33; Interview with him, 4th Nov. 1975. Welbourn, op.cit., pp. 37-41.

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11 This point is discussed, for example, by I.T. Ramsay, Religious Language, S.C.M., 1957.

12 For example, in the translation of the Bible into Acholi: Okot p'Bitek, op.cit., pp. 59-60. Also in Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1971, ch. 3.

- 13 Raimo Harjula, God and the Sun in Meru Thought, Helsinki, The Finnish Society for Missiology and Ecumenics, 1969, pp. 16-21; J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p. 29.
- 14 This was his main objective in writing Bantu Philosophy. Paris, Presence Africaine, Eng. Trans. 1959.
- 15 See for example, Joseph Mawinza, The Human Soul: Life and Soul Concept in an East African Mentality, Based on Luguru, Rome, 1963, A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Philosophy, Pontifical Urbanian University.
- 16 For some views concerning the discussions about God in the western world, see for example, David Jenkins, Guide to the Debate about God, London, Lutterworth, 1966.
- 17 The difficulty of translating and interpreting the concepts of African deities has been discussed by Okot p'Bitek, in Religion of the Central Luo, 1971, pp. 41-57.
- 18 See, for example, Okot p'Bitek, op.cit., ch. 3, African Religions in Western Scholarship, pp. 74-76, Also in the Index of names of African deities in J.S. Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa, London, S.P.C.K., 1970, Edwin Smith, ed., African Ideas of God, London, 1961, Index of African deities.

- 19 Edmund Leach has observed that social anthropologists are of two types: those who theorized about what they called, 'primitive' peoples, without conducting field research and being acquainted with such peoples, such as James Frazer and E. Tylor; and those who spent much time in the field among such peoples collecting data which formed the basis of their theories. Malinowski and Claude Levi-Strauss belong to the second tradition. See E. Leach, Levi-Strauss, Fontana Modern Masters, 1970, p. 7; also, Joan Brothers, Religious Institutions, London, Longman, 1971, ch. 1, J. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, ch. 2.
- 20 The views of Edwin Smith have been studied by M. McVeigh, God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity, Cape Cod, Mass., Claude Stark, 1974. See also, E. Smith, ed., African Ideas of God, London, Edinburgh House Press, 3rd ed. pp. 33, 133.
- 21 This was the most realistic way of dealing with the problem: introduction of new vocabulary would have been even more confusing, as observed by Okot p'Bitek, *op.cit.*, pp. 60, 62.
- 22 See reference note 20 above.
- 23 J.S. Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa, London, S.P.C.K., 1970, African Religions and Philosophy, ch. 4. This view is criticized by Okot p'Bitek, *e.g.* *op.cit.*, p. 88.

- 24 Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa, pp. xiv-xv, interview with him, 5th to 6th Dec. 1975.
- 25 S.G. Kibicho, Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1972. Also in: 'The Interaction of the Kikuyu Concept of God with the Biblical Concept', in Cahiers des Religions Africaine, Vol. 2 No. 4, June-July 1963, pp. 223-37, 'African Traditional Religion and Christianity', in A New Look at Christianity in Africa, Geneva, W.S.C.F. Books, Vol. II, No. 2, 1972, pp. 14-21.
- 26 Raimo Harjula, God and the Sun in Meru Thought. Helsinki, 1969, p. 76. Dr. Harjula obtained data through field research by students of Makumira Theological College and some African evangelists (op.cit., pp. 14-16), and therefore, though he is not an African, his publication could be considered in the context of this chapter.
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p. 73; for further discussion, Idowu, African
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- 37 John 4:24.
- 38 Neill, op.cit., pp. 46-47.
- 38a See for example, G.W. Dymond and E.W. Smith in African Ideas of God, pp. 153-161.
- 39 For a polyglot glossary of religious terminology in Kenya see Kenya Churches Handbook, pp. 336-7.
- 40 Further discussion on the East African Revival Movement is in ch. 4 below.
- 41 J. Omoyajowo, 'Christian Expression in African Indigenous Churches', in Presence, Special Issue on African Theology, Nairobi, Vol. V, No. 3, 1972, pp. 9-12. For a detailed study of one of these churches, H.W. Turner, African Independent Church. London, 1967. See also, E. Muga, African Response to Western Christian Religion, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1975, ch. 5.
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- 43 For example, the carol, 'While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night'.
- 44 The word has a Hebrew origin, (R.A. Stewart, 'Angel', in New Bible Dictionary, 1962); some of the African languages in which the word is used are Kikuyu, Kamba, Kiswahili, Luo, Luhya).

- 45 Prof. J.G. Donders has commented on the incompleteness of this western traditional concept of 'saint': 'Celebrating Our Ancestors', A meditation in Target, No. 238, Fortnight ending 28th June, 1977, p. 10.
- 45a For more details see 'Family' in J. Hastings, ed., Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. V, London 1912; 'Father' in W. Addis and T. Arnold, eds., A Catholic Dictionary, London, 1970; 'Father' in Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, London, 1970.
- 46 Mbiti, op.cit., p. 143.
- 47 Early converts to Christianity experienced in the newly introduced religion a new way of life, culturally different from African traditional existence. To openly link Christian worship with traditional rituals would destroy the novelty of their experience and cause conflict with missionaries. (Interviews with J. Kamau, June 1976, Paulo Gatema, Dec. 1976, Johana Muturi, April, 1977). It is noted that some missionaries made experiments to 'indigenize' some Christian rituals, but were opposed by Some African Converts: for further discussion, Langley and Kiggins, A Serving Church, Nairobi, Oxford, 1975, ch. 10.
- 48 J.G. Donders, art. cit., p. 10. Also, Mary Potts, Ancestor in Christ, Kampala, Gaba Publications, 1970.

- 49 J.S. Mbiti, 'African Indigenous Culture in Relation to Evangelism and Church Development', in R.P. Beaver, op.cit., p. 80. The martyrs are commemorated on 3rd June each year. See also J.F. Faupel, African Holocaust: The Story of the Uganda Martyrs. London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1965. On the canonization of the 22 Catholic martyrs, on Mission Sunday, 18th Oct. 1964, see Faupel, op.cit., pp. 223-6.
- 50 Mbiti, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background, p. 143.
- 51 A Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, eds., African Systems of Kinship and Marriage. Oxford, 1950, pp. 28-29.
- 52 Daniel Von Allmen, 'The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the Dynamic Element in the Formation of New Testament Theology', in International Review of Mission, Vol. LXIV, No. 253, Jan. 1975, p. 37.
- 54 A Hastings, Church and Ministry. p. 29.
- 54a See D.B. Barrett, ed., African Initiatives in Religion. Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971.
- 55 However, a Church ceases to be one when or if it abandons, or sweeps aside, the affirmation of Jesus Christ as its Centre and Head, and the proclamation of the Gospel as its main concern.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRANDS OF CHRISTIANITY IN EAST AFRICA

4.1 THE MULTI-RELIGIOUS SITUATION

While considering the various strands of Christianity in East Africa, it is recognized that this is not the only religion with adherents in the region. Within the whole continent of Africa there are three main religions, namely, the traditional African religion, Christianity and Islam.¹ The proportion of the population adhering to each of these religions varies from region to region, from country to country, and also from one ethnic community to another. For example, northern Africa is predominately muslim, whereas in some West African countries the proportion of the population adhering to Islam is fifty per cent or more.² In East Africa Islam has followers especially along the coast and in towns and cities in the interior of the region. The proportion of the population following this religion in eastern Africa is varied.³ It is difficult to collect accurate statistics on religious adherence regarding any religion, although such an endeavour was tried in Kenya, resulting in the publication of the Kenya Churches Handbook in 1973.⁴

The African cultural and religious background continues to be an integral part of religious life in Africa south of the Sahara, even among those people who have become followers of Islam and Christianity. Social change, rural development, modern education and the influence of these two new religions continue to contribute towards the transformation of the traditional African cultural and religious life, so that adherence to African customs is strongest where these factors have had the least impact, as for example among the Maasai, and in northern Kenya.⁵

In East Africa there are also adherents to other religions such as Sikhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, especially among descendants of communities that emigrated from India towards the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries. These religions are practised in the urban centres where those communities live, and do not have a following among the indigenous African peoples. The Bahai faith also has adherents in East Africa, numbering about thirty thousand in Kenya, many of whom are Africans.⁶

Of all these new religions, it is Christianity which has had the greatest impact on the rural indigenous peoples of East Africa. The main reason for this situation is that Christian missionary activity, as observed in chapter one

above, was from the beginning directed to the rural communities in the interior of East Africa, although it started at the coast and towns became centres from which this activity was directed.

4.2 THE MULTI-DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER OF EAST AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

In chapter one above it has been observed that the introduction of Christianity in the interior of East Africa was initiated by many missionary societies, each with its sponsors, policies, objectives and approaches. In 1916, for example, there were as many as fourteen different missionary societies working in Kenya and running schools.⁷ The denominational orientation of those societies formed the doctrinal and organizational background of the various strands of Christianity that became established in East Africa. For example, the Church Missionary Society formed the background of Anglicanism in Kenya and Uganda; the Church of Scotland Mission formed that of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the African Inland Mission, that of the African Inland Church, and so on. Although a few Protestant missionary societies exercised limited co-operation for the purpose of evangelization, there were formed in East Africa almost as many Protestant denominations as there were societies. An example of such denominational co-operation was in the establishment

in 1955, of Saint Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, for the training of African clergy, for the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Kenya. Later on, more churches began to send students to that institution; namely, the Reformed Church of East Africa, African Christian Church and Schools, African Brotherhood Church and Church of the Holy Spirit.⁸

The situation as regards the Catholic Church was different, in the sense that although there were many Catholic missionary societies, all of them considered themselves as working within the one Catholic Church, no matter how varied their policies and approaches might be.

The African Churches which grew directly through the efforts of those missionary societies have remained in fellowship with the Churches that had initially sponsored the respective missionary societies, so that these fellowships are recognized as confessional families by the World Council of Churches. The three provinces of the Anglican Church in East Africa, for example, are part of the Anglican Communion, and the Lutheran Church in Tanzania is a member of the Lutheran World Federation. The Catholic Church in East Africa is an integral part of the universal Catholic Church, with the Pope as its spiritual head.⁹

There are other Churches which arose indirectly from the efforts of the missionary societies. Different terminologies have been used to describe these Churches, such as 'Separatist Sects', 'Zionist Churches', 'Syncretistic Churches', 'Indigenous Churches' and 'Independent Churches'. None of these terminologies is appropriate to describe these Churches today. The term 'Independent Churches' is the one most widely used, but it is also inappropriate because of its implications.¹⁰ It implies, for example, that other Churches are 'dependent', a negative implication which is unacceptable in the other Churches. Although the Churches that grew directly through the missionary societies remain in fellowship with the Churches which had sponsored those societies, and although such African Churches request aid in terms of personnel and funds, they are autonomous in decision making.

Furthermore, the term 'Independent Churches' implies a denial on the part of these Churches, of the catholicity of Christianity, and of the universal relevance of the Christian faith. Such an implication is unacceptable to these Churches, which are also involved in missionary outreach and are expanding their membership beyond their parochial origins. The membership of some of these Churches in ecumenical organizations such as the national councils of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches is an indication

of their quest for fellowship with the wider community adhering to the Christian faith.¹¹

These Churches are varied in their causal factors, cultural and religious setting of the traditional African communities among which they originated, size, and the denominational background which forms the basis of their doctrinal and organizational frameworks. However, they all have some common aspects. For example, they were founded by Africans, primarily for African following, in response to needs which in the experience of the founder and his followers, were not met by Churches that had been established earlier in that particular area. It has been observed in chapters two and three that one causal factor, for example, was the reluctance or failure of the missionary societies to appreciate the African cultural and religious background in their evangelization and 'civilization' of African peoples.¹²

Some of these Churches have joined ecumenical organizations such as the national councils of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches. Examples of these are the African Brotherhood Church, the Africa Israel Church Ninneveh and the African Christian Church and Schools. A few of them, such as the Brotherhood Church, now have Bible schools in which they train

their lay and ordained leaders.¹³

The Churches are predominately rural, although some of them, such as the three mentioned above, have branches in urban centres such as Nairobi. The headquarters of most of these Churches are in rural areas. In 1968 there were more than six thousand of these Churches in the continent of Africa,¹⁴ and in 1972 there were more of them in Kenya than in all other East African countries. The number of these Churches was reported to be growing, and the number of adherents in some of them was increasing rapidly.¹⁵ Hence this is an important strand of Christianity both in East Africa and also in other parts of the Continent where they have been established.

Another strand of Christianity in East Africa is that which is a by-product of evangelical and pentecostal revivals in the western world. These Churches emphasise pentecostal experience, street and door-to-door evangelism, and many of them practise water baptism by total immersion. The Bible is literally interpreted, and Charisma and the power of the Holy Spirit are emphasized as the basis of leadership. They are more recent in East Africa than the Churches that grew directly through the agency of the missionary societies discussed in chapter one above. Although this strand draws a large following in urban centres, some churches such as the

Full Gospel Church, have members in rural areas. Other examples of such Churches are the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, and the Deliverance Church.¹⁶

4.3 CROSS-DENOMINATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION IN EAST AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

4.3.1 The East African Revival Movement

This movement began towards the end of the third, and gained momentum during the fourth, decades of the twentieth century. This section does not present an exhaustive history of the movement, but outlines it as one which has had a pervading impact across several denominations. Before considering its growth among East African Christians, it is worthwhile to examine its missionary background.

In Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the scientific achievements which had been realized, there was a decline in Christian piety, and an overconfidence in the success of science and technology. This situation alarmed some Christians, who longed and prayed for spiritual revival within the Church. Although the Anglican Church was the official religion of the nation, some Christians felt that nominal membership in the Church was

not enough. In their frustration they prayed for the Holy Spirit to revive piety among Christians, and to enhance this revival a three-day convention was held at Keswick in July 1875. The objective of this convention was to conduct 'union' meetings 'for the promotion of practical holiness'. From that year annual conventions have continued to be held with the same general aim, but varying themes. Similar annual conventions were started in many parts of the world, including East Africa.¹⁷

The main significance of this longing for revival in Britain for the beginning of the East African Revival movement, is that it influenced some of the missionaries who came to East Africa, so that in their contacts with East African converts they stressed the need for revival among East African Christians also. Among such missionaries were A.C. Stanley Smith, Leonard Sharp and Joe Church. Stanley Smith and Leonard Sharp, who qualified as doctors in 1914, felt challenged by the 'Great Commission' to go out of their country and evangelize the world. They went to Rwanda for three weeks in 1916 with the support of Bishop J.J. Willis, and on their return to Britain began to prepare themselves for long-term missionary work in East Africa. Failing to get financial support from the Church Missionary Society, a group of about thirty supporters was formed, called 'Friends

of Ruanda'. With the support of this group the two missionaries with their families came to Rwanda in November 1920. That support became strained by 1926, and in order to facilitate the continuation of their work a new missionary society was formed called the Ruanda General and Medical Mission. This new society was revivalist, and 'affirmed the authoritative and infallible Word of God, a conversion experience through faith in the atoning death of Christ on the Cross'. It called for a pentecostal experience in which the convert, infilled with the Holy Spirit, would be delivered from sin. Thus the two missionaries were facilitated to continue their evangelical and medical work, with the help of African evangelists and medical assistants. It was in this missionary background that the East African Revival Movement began.

The type of revival anticipated by these missionaries was experienced among African Christians in 1928. There was a famine in Rwanda resulting from the failure of rains for a long period. Two African Christians from Uganda went to the Gahini mission station to help the missionaries with the work of evangelization and famine relief. One was Blasio Kigozi, an ordained Anglican minister and the other, Yosiya Kinuka, was a trained hospital assistant. At the station there was a newly arrived missionary, Joe Church, who was also a doctor.¹⁸

During one of his trips to Kampala to organize famine relief, Joe Church met Simeoni Nsibambi, a brother of Blasio Kigozi. For two days Church and Nsibambi stayed together, devotionally reading the Bible, tracing through it the teaching on the Holy Spirit, and praying. In the power of the Holy Spirit they found victory, and experienced a deeper realization of the meaning of the Cross as the only means to individual salvation. For them, this realization was Pentecost, and they became changed individuals. Nsibambi began to testify about the power of Jesus Christ in transforming a person's life. Later on his brother, Blasio Kigozi, 'accepted Jesus Christ as his personal saviour'. This expression became characteristic of the testimonies of East African revivalists. Conversion was also accorded a special meaning, in the sense that becoming a member of a Church was considered by the revivalists to be inadequate. For a person to become fully converted to the Christian faith he had to 'accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour'. A mass revival was experienced in March 1928 at Rukinga and five years later, in December 1933, a Teachers' and Evangelists' conference was held at Gahini to discuss such themes as sin, repentance, faith, the new birth, the holiness of God, the Holy Spirit, sanctification, Christian work and prayer. The conference ended with the participants full of revivalist emotion.

The revival which had started with a few individuals, soon became a movement. From Gahini in Rwanda it spread to Protestant Churches in Uganda. In Tanzania it reached Katoke in 1935. when Joe Church visited there. Some of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church joined the movement. The revival reached Kenya in 1938. when teams of evangelists from Uganda visited Maseno and other parts of western Kenya. In central Kenya it made its first major impact in 1947. when a convention was held at Kahuhia. Three other conventions were held in this area, at Kigari, Embu, in 1948, at Kabete in 1949 and at Thogoto in 1950. The attendance at the end of the Thogoto convention was estimated to be twenty thousand, with participants coming from all over East Africa.¹⁹

The revival movement is a cross-denominational phenomenon which has followers in many denominations especially the Protestant ones. Revivalists stress personal experience of salvation, expressed in individual testimonies both in the fellowship groups and to anyone whom a revivalist meets for discussion. In prayer fellowships and conventions, revivalists from various parishes and denominations share their experiences of the Christian faith and confess their sins to one another. In the rural areas where inter-ethnic contacts are limited, such conventions provide an opportunity

for visiting revivalists to proclaim the teaching that Christianity transcends ethnic barriers. The emphasis of the movement on individual salvation has come as something new to the East African cultural and religious context where in traditional society there was more emphasis on communal belonging.

In the revival fellowship groups the revivalists call each other 'brothers and sisters in Christ', This applies to both the laity and the clergy who belong to the movement. Hence it provides the members with the opportunity to meet as Christians without over-emphasis on the official ranks of the hierarchies of the Churches.

The movement has normative standards of life to which every 'brother and sister' must adhere in order to be accepted by others. For example, drinking alcohol and smoking are forbidden. Dancing, both traditional and modern are also not allowed, being considered to be incompatible with Christian life. Polygamy is also not allowed, but unmarried Christians may join the movement provided that they undergo the conversion experience and adhere to the norms of the fellowship. Unmarried revivalists are not expected to marry outside the movement. Rather, a revivalist who wants to marry a person who is not 'converted' is expected to convince that person to join the

fellowship before the marriage is approved by fellow members of the fellowship. If this does not happen, the pressure of being ostracised from the fellowship may force the revivalist either to leave the movement and marry, or delay the marriage plans in order to remain within the fellowship.²⁰

The decision-making process in the movement is not bureaucratic or hierarchical. Though its membership is made up of both laity and clergy of all ranks, in fellowship meetings decisions are reached by consensus, after all members have had opportunity to declare their opinions, and prayers have been offered beseeching God to guide them to make the right decision.²¹

Prayer, confessions to one another, devotional Bible studies, singing and evangelism are some of the activities of a fellowship group. Fellowship meetings are held on Sundays after the main worship service, and also during week-days depending on the needs and convenience of the members.

4.3.2 Pentecostalism

The term 'Pentecostalism' is derived from Pentecost, a Jewish feast to which reference is made three times in the New Testament (Acts 2:1, Acts 20:16, 1 Cor. 16:8). The feast

was commemorated fifty days after the first day of Passover. It was sometimes called the 'feast of weeks', since it took place seven weeks after the beginning of Passover. Pentecost marked the end of the barley harvest, and was also called the 'feast of the first fruits', and the 'feast of harvest'. During the feast a devout Jew would express gratitude to Yahweh for the blessings of the grain harvest. It was an ancient feast in the Jewish tradition, having been observed in the Pentateuch period and onwards to the apostolic century. The feast, like the Passover, was another reminder of God's deliverance and sustenance of His people.²²

In Christianity, the feast of Pentecost acquired new significance when the disciples, gathered in one place in Jerusalem during the first Pentecost after the Crucifixion of Jesus, were visited by the Holy Spirit. Experiencing renewed inspiration, they began to proclaim the Gospel with new vigour. The experience was accompanied by speaking in tongues, and Peter defended that experience by declaring that the disciples were not drunk, but had received a fulfilment of what had been prophesied by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:1-36, Joel 2:28-32).

Belief in the Holy Spirit is included in the Apostles' Creed, and therefore all those denominations which uphold the trinitarian doctrine accept inspiration by the Holy

Spirit as the power of God working within the believers.

In the twentieth century Pentecostalism has become a movement affecting individual Christians in many denominations. It emphasises that a Christian must be 'born again' in the Holy Spirit, following the advice of Jesus Christ to Nicodemus (John 3:1-13). It has been pointed out in the preceding section of this chapter that in East Africa, in addition to the Churches which grew directly through the missionary movement of the nineteenth century and those started by African Christians in response to their perception of the missionary brand of Christianity, there are other denominations which have been established as by-products of Pentecostal and evangelical revivals in North America and Europe. These Churches get many of their adherents from older denominations by emphasising the need for a second conversion in which those baptised with water should be baptised with the Holy Spirit.²³

Unlike the Revival movement whose followers remain members of the denominations to which each revivalist belongs, the Pentecostal movement has led to the introduction of new denominations.^{23a} Thus adding to the denominational plurality

of East African Christianity. Pentecostalism is now a worldwide phenomenon, with small denominations in many countries.^{23b}

4.3.3 Charismatic Renewal

Closely related to Pentecostalism has been the Charismatic Renewal movement, which also has attracted interest among some Christians in many denominations. A conference on Charismatic renewal was held in Nairobi in 1976, and Christians from many Churches in Kenya attended it to participate in its sessions together with Christians from other parts of the world.

The Charismatic movement emphasises the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, following the teaching of Saint Paul that God has endowed all Christians each with spiritual gifts which must be put to use for the glory of God and for the furthering of evangelization (Rom. 12:3-3).^{23c}

Faith healing, for example, is a charismatic gift
granted to some Christians who lead prayer meetings for the
healing of the sick. The belief that God chooses individuals
and bestows charismatic gifts upon them for the furthering of
His work is not limited to pentecostalist denominations.
Leaders of some African Churches are believed by the adherents
of those Churches to have been chosen by God and guided by
the Holy Spirit to serve as leaders of those Churches. Faith
healing is practised in many such Churches and also in
pentecostalist denominations.

The Charismatic movement like the Revival, has
attracted some Christians in many denominations, but it has
also led to the formation of new Churches. It has a wider
interpretation than Pentecostalism, of the variety of ways in
which the Holy Spirit is working in the Church.²⁴

Evangelism

Since the time of pioneer missionaries, evangelization
has continued to be a major concern of the Churches in East
Africa. The urge to win more converts to the Christian faith
in response to the 'Great Commission', has been accompanied at

the same time by a desire to increase the membership of the denominations involved in the endeavour. One of the ways in which the success of evangelization by a denomination is assessed, is by counting the number of converts it has made in a particular area over a certain period of time. Therefore, although most Christians involved in evangelization would say that they are proclaiming the Gospel for their unconverted hearers to accept Christianity and for the Christian hearers to be strengthened in their faith, inherent in all evangelical proclamation is the desire and hope that those who choose to accept Christianity would follow the denominational persuasion of the evangelizer.

The Churches in East Africa have been growing in terms of the number of denominations established in the region, in the number of converts and congregations in each denomination, and also in the efforts to consolidate the identity of the Church. Hence the opening up of new denominational centres of evangelization in the rural areas where Christianity had not hitherto been introduced, for example among the Maasai and in northern Kenya. It is increasingly being appreciated that the 'Great Commission' is a challenge to the whole Church, and that therefore missionary responsibility is the responsibility of Christians both in East Africa and abroad.²⁵ For example, in two dioceses of the Church of the Province of

Kenya (Anglican) there are diocesan missionary associations whose objectives are the furthering of evangelization in areas to which Christianity has not yet reached.²⁶

4.4 INTER-DENOMINATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Although in the denominational plurality of East African Christianity each denomination is interested in the development of its own identity, the attitude of competition and antagonism which were a feature of the early missionary activity has increasingly passed away. Most Churches realize the need to work together in projects for development and social service, to reduce duplication of effort, and encourage mutual understanding between denominations.

Ecumenism has contributed greatly towards the encouragement of such mutual understanding, in the sense that since the International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 there have been many conferences and consultations in which Christians from various denominations got opportunity to share their views with others, especially in the context of the World Council of Churches. With the reduction of competitive and antagonistic attitudes some Churches have joined to form national councils of Churches, and through such councils projects are organized to meet identified needs of

society. One such council is the National Christian Council of Kenya, made up of about forty Churches. It conducts projects in aspects such as rural development, social work and community relations.²⁷ Although the Catholic Church in Kenya is not a member of this organization, there are aspects in which it co-operates with other Churches, such as some projects of rural development in northern Kenya, the construction of the Christian Student Leadership Centre in Nairobi, and in the development of Christian religious education syllabuses and materials for schools.

4.5 RURAL AND URBAN EXPRESSIONS

4.5.1 Rural Christian Life

In Chapter one it has been observed that the various missionary societies that introduced Christianity in East Africa, established their work mainly in rural areas, setting up mission stations which became centres for the transformation of rural African communities. They introduced such things as the new religion, a new concept of education in which literacy was an important aspect, new methods of agriculture, and modern medicine. Although many towns have grown in East Africa during the twentieth century, the majority of the region's population still live in rural areas. One other way of

considering the variety of expressions of Christianity in East Africa, apart from those discussed above, is to examine Christian life in rural areas on the one hand, and in urban centres on the other.

Chapters two and three have shown that although Christianity was introduced as a new religion and way of life, traditional African life has not completely disintegrated. Rather, African Christians selected some aspects of what they understood to be Christian teaching, and appropriated those aspects to suit their changing traditional life. This has meant, among other things, that the expression of Christianity in rural areas has a rural character, and a few points are outlined below to illustrate this.

The majority of East African peoples are living within the setting of their traditional ethnic communities. One of the factors facilitating this sense of belonging to the ethnic community, is the traditional language of the community. Christian worship in rural areas is conducted in the various traditional languages of East African peoples. This has been facilitated especially by the translation of the Bible and liturgical books into these languages. The availability of such translations has meant that although Christianity is a scriptural religion, learning about it has

been possible even among those whose literacy skills have not gone beyond reading and writing the mother tongue. For example, African Christians within the East African Revival movement discussed earlier in this chapter, express their faith in their traditional languages, to the extent that even the chorus Tukutendereza Yesu which is common and popular in the movement, is sung in the various African languages which are mother tongues of those revivalists.²⁸

Another point is that Christianity in rural areas is lived alongside traditional customs. As discussed in chapter two, for example, the Church and the traditional concept of the family are accepted as social realities within which African Christians live. Hence in practice, traditional marriage customs are not always overlooked in the Christian solemnization of matrimony.²⁹

Traditionally, religion was fully integrated into the rest of social life, so that there was no separation, as in the western world, between secular and religious dimensions. With the introduction of Christianity and the abandonment of some religious aspects of life as discussed in chapter three, Christianity has filled the resulting religious vacuum so that with regard to religion for African Christians, the Church has become 'a place to feel at home'.^{29a}

understanding of the Church as the community of faith in Jesus Christ answering and fully integrating the needs of the changing traditional community, that contributed greatly to the growth of African Churches (sometimes called 'Independent' Churches) indirectly from the missionary activities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when it appeared to some African Christians that missionaries' presentations of the Christian faith did not provide that possibility of integration. Such Churches are based mainly in rural areas, though they have adherents in urban centres.

Participation in projects of rural development is another significant aspect of rural Christianity.³⁰ In addition to their involvement in building permanent Church buildings in parish centres and villages, African Christians also contribute their labour and financial resources for the construction of new schools and the extension of old ones, especially at the primary level. In Kenya, for example, the sponsorship by respective Churches, of schools which used to be managed and controlled by missionary societies, has facilitated this participation. Following the Kenya Education Act (1968) the Churches and Christian organizations which formerly had been managing their schools, became the 'sponsors' of those schools. The new status enabled the former 'managers' to maintain, if they desired, a limited religious influence on

the schools of which they had become sponsors.. For example, with the headmaster's permission and in consultation with the school committee, the sponsor could use the school premises for devotional purposes when the school was not in session. The national Motto of 'Harambee' (Co-operation for self-help) has continued to motivate the Churches to build more classrooms in the schools which they sponsor, and to open new sponsored schools where necessary, with the direction of education authorities.

4.5.2 Christianity in Urban Centres

Urban centres are places to which people move from their homes in rural areas, mainly in search of employment, education and trade. The centres are foci of administration, commerce and industry. The people who go to such centres for a variety of purposes, are from the various ethnic backgrounds, hence the towns and cities are places of convergence.

Those who come to the urban centres may have become Christians before they left their rural homes, and they bring their faith with them. Many of the urban dwellers are in formal employment, such as clerical, industrial, teaching and administrative jobs. Owing to the mobile nature of urban society and the variety of backgrounds from which the

urban dwellers come, expression of the Christian faith in large urban centres such as Nairobi differs from Christian life in rural areas as discussed above. A few points are outlined below to illustrate this contrast.

Since the Christians converging in the urban centres come from many ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, a common language for Christian worship has to be sought in order to bring them together into a liturgical community. Each denomination provides worship facilities for its adherents. It is difficult to provide for the needs of all adherents in a single language, unless such a language is understood and spoken by all the members of a particular denomination. In Nairobi, for example, some Churches conduct two Sunday services, one in English and the other in Kiswahili. By conducting worship in these two languages, the Churches ensure that those who cannot participate in Christian worship in Kiswahili are given the opportunity to worship in English, and vice versa. The availability of the Bible and liturgical books in these languages helps to meet this need. When a Church experiences a felt need among its adherents for the provision of worship in a language other than English or Kiswahili, arrangements are made to make this provision.³¹ Such a problem does not arise in the rural areas, where the language of a particular ethnic community is generally the

language of worship in that area.

The sense of communal belonging is much less pronounced in urban centres than it is in the rural areas. Urban dwellers tend to maintain their ties with their relatives in their rural homes, so that living in towns is considered necessary mainly because it facilitates employment and the other purposes which attract people from the rural areas. Otherwise, 'home' is not considered to be in the towns, but in the rural areas where the rest of the extended family live. Therefore, the sense of communal belonging in urban Churches is not reinforced by traditional ethnic belonging, as it is in rural Churches. This has both positive and negative implications. Positively, the presence of the Church as a multi-ethnic community of faith in urban centres demonstrates that the Gospel transcends culture, although it is spread, received and expressed within particular cultural contexts. Negatively, it means that the individualistic tendencies of urban life do not foster as warm a communal relationship as in the rural Churches.

Furthermore, urban planning takes care of the development of towns, and therefore the Churches in urban centres are not as directly involved in development as they are in rural areas.³²

Before concluding this section, it should be noted that there are some points of contact between rural and urban Christians, for example in marriage ceremonies and funeral arrangements. Leaders living in urban centres meet with their counterparts in rural areas, in gatherings such as the provincial synods and episcopal conferences. Since many Christians living in towns consider their 'home' to be in the rural areas, they keep contacts with their parishes there, and contribute to the development projects of their respective areas. Therefore, although the nature of Christian living and worship in towns may be different from the expression of Christianity in rural areas, both forms of Christian life are in touch with each other, but respond to two different social settings.

CHAPTER FOUR

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- 2 R.P. Beaver, op.cit., p. 241: for example, Gambia, 85%, Senegal, 89%. This book gives a statistical table of estimated religious adherence in Africa, country by country, in mid-1972.
- 3 E. Muga, op.cit., p. 172. For some studies on Islam in Africa see ch. 1, reference note above. For comparative approximate statistics of religious adherence in Africa see R.P. Beaver, op.cit., p. 241.
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- 9 For a discussion of the meaning of 'Local Church' in the context of the Catholic Church, A. Hastings, op.cit., ch. 2.
10. For example, it is used by D.B. Barrett in Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of six thousand contemporary Religious Movements; H.W. Turner, History of an Independent Church, Vol. 1, Oxford, 1967, 'The Contribution of Studies on Religion in Africa to Western Religious Studies',

- 1 in E.W. Fashole'-Luke and Mark E. Glasswell, eds.,
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- 11 Interviews with Rt. Rev. L. Imathiu, 14th Nov. 1974
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- 12 J.S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion,
London, Heinemann, 1975, p. 184.
- 13 Interview with Rev. S. Mangaya of African Brotherhood
Church, 30th Aug. 1975.
- 14 Barrett, op.cit., 1968.
- 15 Kenya Churches Handbook, p. 229.
- 16 In the first example, the name of the denomination shows
its emphasis; in the second, the emphases on guidance
by the Holy Spirit, total immersion at baptism, charismatic
leadership are some of its features: interview with
Pastor J. Kayo, founder, 30th Aug. 1975. See also, F.B.
Welbourn, op.cit., p. 25, Langley and Kiggins, op.cit.,
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John Murray, in Kenya Churches Handbook, pp. 130-34, Also
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- 21 Mambo, op.cit., p. 113; Smoker, op.cit., pp. 96-108.
- 22 D. Freeman, 'The Feast of Pentecost', The New Bible Dictionary, London, 1962.
- 23 Langley and Kiggins, op.cit., p. 274, Welbourn, op.cit., p. 25.
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- 27 On the progress of the projects, see N.C.C.K. Annual Reports. Interview with B. Kiplangat, 14th June 1976.
- 28 G.K. Mambo, op.cit., p. 117, has noted that the chorus is sung in 30 African languages.
- 29 S.H. Ominde, Custom and Tradition in East Africa: The Luo Girl from Infancy to Marriage, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 5th printing, 1975, p. 49.
- 29a F.B. Welbourn and E.A. Ogot, A Place to Feel at Home, Oxford, 1966.
- 30 For a discussion of Church participation in Development; see for example, Peter Sartorius, Churches in Rural Development: Guidelines for Action, Geneva W.C.C. Publication, 1975, Church and Development, Report of AMECEA-MISEREOR Seminar,

1st to 14th Dec. 1970, Nairobi, 1971; Picking up the Pieces, a SODEFAX Report, Geneva, Ecumenical Centre, 1971; J. McLaughlin and J. Ward, 'Communications: Key to Development', in Kenya Churches Handbook, pp. 100-105.

- 31 For example, the Presbyterian Church conducts a Kikuyu worship service at the Martyrs Church, Eastlands (Bahati), Nairobi.
- 32 However, some Christians in residential areas of Nairobi are building by self help (Harambee), their churches and community centres - for example, St. Barnabas Church, Langata.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOME EMERGING THEMES IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL
REFLECTION

5.1 QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In his New Testament Survey, M. Tenney noted that Christian missionary process has three cyclic phases - inception, expansion and consolidation, or in J.V. Taylor's terminology, congruence, detachment and crisis. In the East African context these three phases of the process are going on at the same time. Thus there are areas in which Christianity is being introduced, others in which it has been introduced and is expanding and at the same time, reflection has begun among theologians, pastors, teachers and lay Church leaders, seeking to define the nature, role and direction of the Church in the context of contemporary challenges.¹

Theology
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The quest for an African articulation of Christian theology was one of the significant concerns of African Christian theologians during the seventh decade of the twentieth century.² For example, in 1963, Harry Sawyerr published an article reflecting on 'The basis of a (Christian) Theology for Africa'.

His emphasis was that an African Christian Theology should be part of the totality of Church tradition, but at the same time it should contribute fresh insights arising from African tradition and experience in response to the Gospel. He reiterated this concern in another article, originally prepared for a Lay Leadership conference in 1970, and published in 1971.³

E.B. Idowu published in 1965 a book entitled Towards an Indigenous Church,⁴ in which he urged African Churches, especially those that grew directly through the agency of foreign missionary societies, to strive towards giving such Churches an African character, in terms of having African personnel in positions of decision-making, and 'africanising' the liturgies, hymnody and administrative structures of the Churches. The basis of this urge was that in his view, such Churches had adopted, without alteration, many aspects of Church life from 'mother Churches' abroad, via the missionary agencies which had introduced Christianity into Africa. During the following year a conference of theologians and Church leaders was held at Ibadan to reflect upon the theme 'Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs'. The conference affirmed the centrality of Christ as the main concern of African Christian theological reflection, but the place of Biblical Revelation in this endeavour was not thoroughly explored.⁵ J.S. Mbiti, in his book African Religions and Philosophy, devoted a chapter to a consideration of the

development of Christianity in the midst of other religions with adherents in the continent of Africa, such as Islam and the Baha'i Faith.⁶ He observed that African peoples had made a wide variety of responses to Christianity, and that those who had accepted this religion had made their own adaptations to suit their respective needs in different contexts.⁷ In his later book, New Testament Eschatology in an African Background (1971) he considered the quest for an African (Christian) Theology which had been one subject for discussion throughout the seventh decade. He noted that though the phrase 'African Theology' was being used, it had not been defined to show what its contents and methods were. This would be a task for the future.⁸

During the first half of the eighth decade there were developments in the reflection about this quest. For example, in January 1972 a conference was held in Kampala to consider 'African Theology and Church Life'. Theologians and Church leaders from various parts of Africa participated in the discussions. In its editorial, a Christian periodical, The Christian Century, commenting on the proceedings of that conference, emphasised that unless form and content were put to the term 'African Theology', this quest as sounded by some theologians might remain only a slogan.⁹ Following up these discussions, the magazine Presence devoted one whole issue to a further consideration of the definition of this quest, in 1972.¹⁰ An East African Catholic theologian, Charles Nyamiti, also

published two papers considering this quest from an African Catholic perspective.¹¹ At the end of 1974, a consultation was held near Accra, in which theologians from various parts of Africa and black theologians from North America, met to discuss together the content and methodology of 'African and Black Theology'.¹² This was an explorative consultation, and the papers presented sought to highlight the differences and similarities of the contexts in which Black Theology in North America and African (Christian) Theology had arisen.

In all these developments cited above the quest for African (Christian) Theology was emphasised, but even at the Accra consultation it was not clear what form, content and methodology, this articulation would take. However, at least two points had become widely accepted; that there was a need for African Christians to articulate, in their own terms, their understanding of the Gospel in the context of Africa's cultural and religious backgrounds, and to reflect on the nature and role of the Christian Churches in the context of contemporary challenges in various parts of the continent. Hence, following from these developments, the question 'What is African Christian Theology?' can be defined simply as the theological reflection of African Christians with regard to their understanding of the Gospel, the nature and role of the Church, on the basis of their theological understanding, Christian experience, and their

African cultural and religious backgrounds.

Since such backgrounds and experiences are various, and since Christianity has come to Africa via many missionary agencies with varying emphases and approaches as observed in chapter one above, it follows that African Christian theological reflection is not a uniform or homogeneous undertaking. Furthermore, it is not a static event which will be completed some time in the future, but a continuing process in which Christian theologians in Africa will continue to explore, evaluate and reflect upon the meaning of Christianity for African peoples and for the world, from their African perspective. African Christian Theology, if it is to bear the adjective 'Christian', has to take serious consideration of the Gospel, and at the same time, the particularity of the response of African Churches in various parts of the continent, to that universal proclamation. Without acknowledging the universality of Christianity and the particularity of the various expressions of that religion, African Christian Theology may lack the catholicity which is essential to the Gospel. The two aspects are necessary, in order to clarify each other.

H.W. Turner, considering the theology of 'Independent Churches' and the quest for an African Christian Theology, has expressed the conviction that the limitations of a culture-bound, 'white', western theology - which have precipitated these

African developments - are not best corrected by the development of other culture-bound theologies, 'black, brown or yellow'.¹³ In expressing this conviction he was apprehensive of the distortions of Christianity which can arise when particularity of responses to the Gospel, is over-emphasised at the expense of the universal proclamation of Christianity. At the same time, however, the converse could also distort the Christian faith, if the universality of the Gospel is over-emphasised to the extent that the particular responses to it are not highlighted. Jesus Christ came and lived among a particular community, but He refused to be tied to its whims and frenzies. Hence African Christian Theology, while taking account of the traditions of the Church expressed in the western theological heritage, has at the same time to make a distinctive contribution to those traditions by commenting on the relevance of Christianity as a universal religion, to the particular challenges faced by African Churches in various parts and contexts in the continent.¹⁴ Christian theological reflection is always done in particular contexts, although the theologian may not state his presuppositions. It is a distortion of the notion of universality, to regard particularized, culture-bound theologies as normative for all Christians. This has been a prevalent mistake of the modern missionary enterprise.

Following this brief outline of the background in which African Christian theological reflection is continuing, the remaining sections of this chapter consider a few themes which have emerged, and are being developed, as the quest for an African Christian Theology continues to be discussed.¹⁵ The

examples cited in the foregoing outline are not exhaustive, neither are the concerns considered in the following sections.

5.2 STUDY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible has been translated, fully or partly, into nearly six hundred African languages, out of a total of about one thousand.¹⁶ In chapters one and two above, the importance of the Bible in the evangelization of Africa has been noted. The provision of the Christian Scriptures in languages which people can understand, is the main objective of Bible Societies in Africa, and all over the world. In African Christian homes the Bible is the most widely read book. However, considering that the rate of literacy in the continent is still very low - to the extent that only a small proportion of people can read and write their own mother tongues, and even fewer are literate in foreign languages such as English, French, Portuguese - the Bible may be considered as a 'closed book'.¹⁷

The work of translating the Bible into African languages has mainly been the responsibility of missionaries from abroad who had to learn these languages before engaging themselves in the endeavour. As the African Churches continue to grow, need is felt for African Christian scholars to participate in this work.¹⁸

The Bible is the most widely read book in African Christian homes. Provision of devotional booklets to aid and guide Christians in their devotional reading is another important aspect of this concern. The Scripture Union provides such booklets at subsidized costs, in English and other languages.

Since the study of the Bible is basic to Christian theological training, some African Christian scholars have emphasised the need for Biblical Studies to be taken more seriously than in the past. J.S. Mbiti, for example, has stressed that a study of Biblical Theology must be the basis of any Christian theological reflection. In the context of Africa, such reflection has to relate the Biblical message to the African cultural and religious understanding. Therefore, while acknowledging the rich heritage of Biblical scholarship that has accumulated since the early Church, it is necessary for African Christian scholars to make their contribution to this heritage. Mbiti has expressed the concern that it would be an impoverishment if Biblical Theology were to be assigned to the peripheries of African Christian theological reflection.¹⁹ K.A. Dickson has also been emphatic on the need for African Christian theological reflection to be grounded on a serious consideration of Biblical revelation.²⁰ Literature on Biblical Studies is accumulating, although this is a discipline

which does not have many African experts.²¹

5.3 PASTORAL CONCERN

5.3.1 Family Life

Counselling is one of the responsibilities which preoccupy the lives of Church pastors, apart from conducting worship, solemnizing marriage and officiating in the Church sacraments. A few aspects of this counselling concern are considered in this section, beginning with family life pastoral guidance.

Pastoral problems concerning the family have been given significant attention among Churches in Africa. Many seminars, consultations and conferences have been organized by single denominations and by inter-denominational bodies to consider the role of Christianity in family life, with a view to discussing ways of guiding African Christians in dealing with the challenges that arise in the family. The following are a few examples. In 1963 the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches sponsored a seminar in Zambia to consider the theme 'The Christian Home and Family Life'. The seminar discussed such topics as customary marriage, 'bride price', polygamy, family planning, the unmarried life, divorce, prostitution, the Christian home and family.²² Father Adrian

Hastings was in 1970 commissioned by the Anglican Archbishops of southern, central and eastern Africa to produce a report considering the pastoral issues which arise from African marriage customs. His report was published as a book entitled Christian Marriage in Africa.²³

The National Christian Council of Kenya runs a Family Life Education Programme, and the Catholic Church declared 1976 a Christian Family Year.²⁴ All these examples are indications of the seriousness with which Churches in East Africa, and in the whole continent, regard the challenges arising from family life.

5.3.2 Youth

Another aspect of this pastoral concern regards the problems of youth in the context of Christian living. Social change, modern education and urbanization have contributed greatly to the modification of traditional patterns of upbringing, to the extent that young people do not have as clear a direction and control from their parents and relatives as they had in traditional African life. They learn new ideas in school, are exposed to mass media, and spend a large portion of their time away from their parents, in school or college, in employment or in search of it. Faced with this

situation, Churches have responded by establishing departments of youth work, through which guidance to youth may be provided. Inter-denominational bodies also have responded to this challenge by having similar departments. For example, the National Christian Council of Kenya has a Youth and Social Work department, which organizes occasional seminars and courses to provide in-service training to Christian youth leaders, social workers and pastors.²⁵ The Church of the Province of Kenya (Anglican) has a youth organization to provide a forum in which the young people of that denomination can meet and express themselves as they grow in the Christian faith. The Catholic Church has a similar organization.²⁶

The All Africa Conference of Churches had a youth department for several years, and in 1971 it sponsored the All Africa youth and student conference in Ibadan.²⁷ The pastoral guidance for youth has been considered so important by Churches in Kenya, as to call for the establishment of a 'pastoral programme' for primary schools in Kenya. Pupils are expected to be given this guidance in addition to the learning provided in the Christian Religious Education syllabus which is scheduled in the main school time-table.²⁸ Moreover, the Family Life Education Programme of the National Christian Council of Kenya has prepared a draft syllabus for schools on 'Family Life and Sex Education' for pre-adolescents and adolescents. The introduction of this draft syllabus, states

that the programme was established in response to the concern which was expressed in the 1969 Annual General Meeting of the National Christian Council of Kenya, over 'the problem of school drop-outs due to pregnancies, teenage abortions and "child throwing"'. The programme was established with particular emphasis on young people.²⁹

5.3.3. Urban Challenges

The growth of urban centres has raised new challenges for the Churches in Africa. In chapter four it has been observed that the majority of adherents to the Christian faith live mainly in rural areas. The influx of population into towns in search of employment, education and trade, has led to the presence of many jobless and poorly housed people. The desertion of youth from their homes into towns has created, in Nairobi for example, the 'Parking Boys' problem. Various Churches and inter-denominational organizations have responded to this urban challenge by seeking ways to rehabilitate such youth.³⁰

In 1974 the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Association of Members of the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (Catholic), sponsored a one-year course in Nairobi to acquaint selected Church pastors from various countries, with African urban challenges, and learn some ways in which the

Church might respond to such challenges.³¹ The National Christian Council of Kenya has two departments which respond especially to urban challenges - the Church and Industry, and the Social Work projects. It also sponsors some small scale crafts industries to help in providing a basis for self-employment for some of the youth who come to Nairobi. Furthermore, various denominations run community centres in which to provide some devotional and social facilities for their urban-dwelling members.³²

The Christian film Between Two Worlds, produced in Kenya, depicts some of the challenges that a person from the rural areas faces when he encounters urban life, and the role that the Church may fill in helping those that face these challenges. The theme of that film is outlined below to illustrate some aspects of these urban challenges.³³ A young girl, innocent and obedient, is forced out of her rural home by her parents, to go to the city under the guardianship of a well-to-do man who promises the parents of the girl to give her a job. The parents are ignorant of urban life - they think of the city as an easy place where people go to be employed, and from which, people bring money and presents to their friends and relatives back home in the rural areas. The girl does not want to leave home where she has the security and care of her parents, and the company of her boy-friend

whom she hopes to marry when the two are older and employed. But she has to obey her parents, and the 'guardian' drags her to the city.

When she reaches there she is not only overwhelmed by urban life which she has never encountered before, she is also maltreated by the 'guardian' who turns her into a house maid. She is given no job though the man had promised to give it. After suffering great hardship for some time she runs away one night, and manages to go back to her parents. When she tries to describe her ordeals to them, they refuse to believe her, partly because of their ignorance of what can happen to a young, helpless person in the city, and partly because they rely more on the guardian to whom they entrusted their daughter.

The 'guardian' comes to her parents and accuses the girl of running away from his care, and the parents believe his version of the story. In her innocence and obedience she subordinates herself to the will of her parents and the lust of their pretentious friend, and she has to return to the city under his custody. Miserably she becomes pregnant, and/sent back home without a job, without any hope. /is

Meanwhile, her boyfriend, who had loved her since the

two were in school together, learns of the girl's disappearance to the city. Life becomes unbearable in his rural home, partly because he is unemployed, and partly because he misses his girl-friend who has been his companion. He decides to go to the city also, although he knows nothing about urban life, and has no friends or relatives whom he could approach for accommodation and guidance. His objectives in going to the city are looking for a job, searching for his bride-to-be, and running away from the loneliness he feels while at home. He wanders in the city for a long time, but finds none of the things for which he has been searching. In desperation he decides to take up a job as a dish-washer in a low-class restaurant. He works very hard, proves to be honest, and is promoted to the post of a cashier in the restaurant. He earns more money, and is not over-worked.

Urban life, and the temptation of squandering money, lure him to become a drunkard and a libertine. He faces the threat of demotion, and his initiatives at work begin to decline. Then he visits a Church community centre in the city, where he is touched by the joy expressed by Christian youth there, as they play and testify to the relevance of the Christian faith in their lives. He feels challenged to take the Christian faith more seriously, and makes a decision to change his life. He visits the pastor for guidance, and in their discussions he

feels relieved. He improves in his work again. Then he experiences a great crisis when he learns of the death of his father. Should he remain in the city and earn more money, or should he return to his rural home and take up his father's responsibilities, without money and without the companion he lost? The proprietor of the restaurant promises him more promotions and shares in the business if he will choose to remain in the city and help to make that business flourish.

In his renewed commitment to the Christian faith, he feels a greater sense of responsibility, and his memories of his rural background compel him to choose to go back home, hoping that his girl-friend will also have returned. On his return he learns what happened to her, and he finds her very miserable and desperate. She is a victim of circumstances which she could not control, but she cannot face her own self. The young man is at first unsure of what he should do. Though he pities the girl whom he had hoped to marry, should he accept her now in her condition? Can he forget all the experiences that she has gone through? It is a hard decision to make, and he takes a long time thinking and praying about it.

The film does not show what he eventually decides to do, but it gives hints that in spite of her condition, he is inclined to accept her as she is. Central to the theme of

the film is the question of the pastoral role of the Church in the context of such urban challenges.

5.4 CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN CULTURE

The matter of relationship between Christianity and African culture has been raised in chapter four above. This section outlines some of the ways in which this theme is being developed, in the context of the concern to encourage an African expression of Christianity. The urge to African Churches to reflect the African cultural heritage has been expressed by E.B. Idowu and others. Some of the aspects in which the Churches could do this are liturgy, music and art. With regard to liturgy, an experiment has been conducted and recorded, for example, to adapt the Catholic Mass into African traditional worship in Cameroun. In East Africa one of the supporters of such adaptation is Father Aylward Shorter, who has suggested that traditional African ways of praying could be utilized for the development of African Christian prayer.³⁴

Traditional African art could also be used in the expression of Christian ideas. For example, Professor A. Lugira, in a book entitled Ganda Art, has suggested that the traditional artistic genius of African peoples could, with Christian initiative, be adapted to reflect African impressions of Christianity.³⁵ In music, many Christian choirs in East Africa

are developing initiatives to compose Christian songs with a Christian message expressed in African tunes. This is for example one of the main concerns of the Kenya Christian Choirs Association, which has nearly one hundred choirs from various denominations.³⁶

It has been noted earlier, that African Christians, while accepting Christianity, according to their understanding of it, did not lose contact with their cultural heritage. However, as a result of missionary attitudes in which African culture was looked down upon as 'primitive' and 'heathen', there has been some reluctance to affirm and fully appreciate the African heritage. The urge to make a positive appraisal of African culture in the context of African Christianity, has been expressed in the context of such reluctance.

In East Africa, the urge to appreciate African culture has been affirmed to the extent that the teaching of the African heritage has been included in the revised syllabi for secondary and higher secondary schools. This affirmation is widely accepted among both Protestant and Catholic educators, as shown by the serious consideration of the African heritage in alternatives 223 and 224 of the Christian Religious Education syllabus in the East African Certificate of Education.

The 'Independent Churches' also take this concern seriously. For example, there is spontaneity and dynamic participation in worship, and the initiatives to adapt traditional religious life into Christian worship is common.³⁷

5.5 CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

The previous chapter has pointed out the multi-religious situation in Africa, and the widespread adherence to the African religious heritage, Christianity and Islam. The relationship between Christianity and African religious beliefs has been considered in chapter three. With regard to the relationship between Christianity and Islam not much has been written. However, the need for mutual understanding between the adherents of various religions is a basic necessity to facilitate co-operation in development activities. Religion could be a divisive factor in society, if the adherence to any particular religion became a barrier to social interaction. On the other hand, it could be a unifying factor, if mutual understanding was encouraged.

1962
1945-59
-7

One such effort to develop mutual understanding has been the publication of a book entitled Islam and Christianity, which answers some questions that hinder understanding between adherents within the two religions.³⁸ It is written from an

African context, noting the wide adherence to Islam especially in western Africa. In the foreword to the book, this concern is expressed as follows: 'Everyday Muslims and Christians meet, talk, do business together - but how often do they take a genuine interest in one another's religious convictions? Or if they do discuss religion, how easily it degenerates into an angry battle of words, full of misunderstanding and prejudice, bringing no advantage to either side. The Christian who sincerely desires to witness to Christ must be ready to open up a patient 'dialogue' in which he goes out to meet the Muslim and listens to him, trying to understand the faith, which is so precious to him...'.³⁹

J.S. Mbiti has also commented on the importance of this concern, noting that in Africa's search for new values it is necessary for the various religions to be considered in the context of the social change which Africa is undergoing.^{39a}

5.6 ECUMENISM

Another theme that is of concern in African Christian theological reflection, is the development of closer understanding between the various denominations of the Christian faith. Since the International Missionary Conference

at Edinburgh in 1910 discussions on this matter have been going on, and one of the significant outcomes of the discussions was the foundation of the World Council of Churches, as an organ to facilitate further efforts to encourage mutual understanding between Churches all over the world.⁴⁰ There are about two hundred and seventy five Churches which are members of the organization.

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches has also been improving, especially since the second Vatican Council. In Africa, the All Africa Conference of Churches, and the various national councils of Churches, help to further such mutual understanding, through the seminars, conferences and consultations organized with the mandate of the member Churches. Through the General Assembly and the Annual General Meeting, such councils provide opportunities for Christians of various denominations to meet and exchange views and experiences. For example, the fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Nairobi in November-December 1975, and the third assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches was held in Lusaka in May 1974.

Discussions on ecumenism have been going on at various levels. For example, between 1961 and 1967 there were discussions between Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans and Moravians, considering the possibilities of not

only inter-denominational co-operation, but eventual union.⁴¹ One of the outcomes of these discussions was the publication of a United Liturgy for East Africa. Thus one level of ecumenical discussion is structural union, another is liturgical agreement.⁴² Still another, which is more common, concerns inter-denominational co-operation, as discussed in chapter four above.

Apart from such discussions which go on between leaders, there is another dimension of ecumenism which affects ordinary Christians more profoundly. This concerns the encouragement of mutual understanding and co-operation at the local level, between African Christians of various denominations. Without necessarily referring to Church Union negotiations, African Christians co-operate in development activities such as the construction of public utilities like schools, dispensaries and roads. Although African Christians have become used to worshipping in and identifying themselves with particular denominations, the competitiveness and antagonism which was a feature of early missionary activity is diminishing. The possibility of a 'United Church' is far from being realized, but much more important is the need for Christians of a particular denomination to recognize as valid, the response to the Gospel, of Christians in other denominations. The universality of the Christian faith, which is taken for granted, does not negate

particular responses to the Gospel, but challenges Christians to recognize one another as 'brothers and sisters', as pointed out in chapter two above.

In the East African context, the spirit of ecumenism can be found in the development of Christian religious education. The production of school syllabi acceptable to most Churches, illustrates the affirmation of this concern. In theological education, the Association of Theological Institutions in East Africa, helps to develop such mutual understanding. The establishment of a United Theological College for Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and the Reformed Church of East Africa has been cited earlier to illustrate this same point.

One of the most glaring paradoxes of the Christian faith is its claim of universality, while there exist so many denominations each claiming to be faithfully following the Gospel. In witnessing to the world, ecumenism is a positive development towards the realization of the prayer of Jesus Christ, that all may be one.

5.7 THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

African Christians have begun to consider the nature and role of the Church of which they are members, in the context

of challenging situations in Africa. One of the issues that raised concern during the first half of the eighth decade (1970s) was the question as to how the Church in Africa, while remaining part of the universal Church, could acquire its own identity. Self-reliance was proposed as one of the means to reach that goal. For example, in the third assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches, self-reliance became one of the issues for discussion and debate. One concrete suggestion in this discussion, was that time had come for missionaries to withdraw to their countries of origin, so that African Churches could be left on their own to sort out their identity and learn to rely upon their own resources.

This proposal was popularly known as the 'moratorium,' indicating that the suggested withdrawal was to be a temporary experiment. The 'Moratorium' proposal was thought by some Christians to be difficult to implement, and undesirable partly because at the local levels of the Churches the issue was not clear, and partly because a theological explanation for the proposal was not readily discernible.⁴³ Without overlooking the 'Moratorium' proposal, however, it has been observed in the preceding chapters, that African Christians have all the time been taking initiatives in making Christianity a religion of their own, although some of them would not readily admit of having adapted their Christian faith

to their cultural and religious background. Therefore, the question of developing an African Church began to be solved when African Christians identified themselves as members of African Churches, rather than converts of particular missionary societies. The development of a distinctly African Church is a gradual process, which has already begun, and about which, African Christians at the local levels need to be educated to be conscious, so that they may more understandingly utilize some of their resources and genius to give their Christian faith a more distinct and observable African character, as for example in liturgy, music, art and architecture.

Another aspect of this concern, has been the consideration of the role of the Church in the various countries of Africa. For example, the question of the relationship between Church and State received some attention among some African Christian theologians, and an issue of the Africa Theological Journal published some articles on this theme.⁴⁴

'Black Theology' has been an issue of interest among African Christian theologians in southern Africa, in the context of the challenges the Church faces there. Thus African Christians have begun to address their reflections to the situations in which the Churches have to live and testify about the Christian faith

5.8 FROM MISSION TO CHURCH

All these themes in African Christian theological reflection. illustrate the fact that Christianity in East Africa has grown. from the scattered and remote mission stations of the nineteenth century. to a faith followed by many people in the region. The work of mission continues, in response to the 'Great Commission', and at the same time, African Christians and Churches in the third phase of the missionary process are consolidating their faith and experiencing a serious crisis as they seek to clarify what Christianity means to them in the context of contemporary Africa.

The contributions of African expressions of Christianity to the universal Christian Church are still being discerned,⁴⁵ and as the quest for an African Christian Theology continues to take more definite form and content, such contributions will become clearer.

CHAPTER FIVE

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CHAPTER SIX

MODERN AFRICAN CRITICISM OF CHRISTIANITY

6.1 EARLY AFRICAN RESISTANCE

The foregoing chapters should not leave the reader with the impression that the positive and unquestioning acceptance of the missionary brand of Christianity was the only African response to the modern missionary enterprise. Some African converts, while accepting the Christian faith, did not approve some aspects of the missionary presentation of this new religion, especially with regard to the African cultural and religious heritage which most early missionaries considered to be totally discontinuous and discordant with Christianity and western civilization. The African establishment of 'Independent' Churches separate from these Churches which the missionaries had patronized, was a direct African criticism of that prejudiced and unappreciative missionary attitude towards the African background. At the same time however, the 'Independent' Churches as far as they accepted the Christian faith, albeit with their own cultural expressions of it, were a 'positive' response to Christianity.

W.B. Anderson has observed that during the fourth

decade of the twentieth century the missionary enterprise 'faltered' under pressure of African resistance. He has enumerated four explanations for that 'faltering': political conflicts in which the missionary enterprise became involved; decline of dynamism in the missionary enterprise; breakdown of earlier missionary patterns and approaches; and the rise of 'Roho' Churches which called the missionary enterprise into question.¹

Looking at the first of these explanations, he has observed that there were political conflicts in three areas (Central Kenya, Kakamega and Ukambani), in which most missionaries and the Churches they patronized, showed themselves to be more in sympathy with the colonial powers than with the African resistance to it. In Central Kenya, this resistance was precipitated in the 'Circumcision Controversy' (as it was called), although the deeper issue was resistance against the alienation of land (called the White Highlands) for settlement by Europeans, and the herding of Africans into 'native reserves' as a source of cheap labour for the settlers' farms. Most missionaries enforced the view that circumcision was a 'pagan', 'barbaric', and 'unhygienic' practice which should be abandoned both within and out of the Church. For Africans, however, circumcision was not merely an operation on the flesh, but rather, it was a small important part of an

initiation and education programme which was vital to the development of identity both for the individual and the community as a whole. The missionary assail on the African cultural and religious heritage, was thus viewed by African resisters as an aspect of the total programme of the colonizing power to deprive African peoples of their identity. While the settlers alienated their land, the missionaries were busy alienating the African cultural and religious values.²

In Western Kenya, according to Anderson, the resistance was precipitated in the 'Kakamega Gold Rush'. There also, land was alienated, and Africans were forcibly herded from areas which the colonial administration and settlers considered profitable. The Friends Africa Mission, whose converts were affected, failed to side with the African resistance against the move, although some individual Europeans such as Macgregor Ross were in sympathy with the view that the colonial power should protect African rights. This failure, decisively reinforced the impression among Africans, that the missionary enterprise, though claiming to be in sympathy with African interests, was collaborating with colonialism for domination over and exploitation of African peoples.³

Turning to Ukambani, the issue that precipitated conflict was 'de-stocking', in which the colonial administration

forcibly confiscated a large number of cows, on the basis of the argument that the 'native reserves' were being destroyed by over-stocking. In effort to quell the African protest against this move, the colonial administration collaborated with missionaries, as evidenced by Rev. Rhoad's trip to Ukambani accompanying a colonial officer, to address the resisting Africans. This again became a reinforcement of the view held by many Africans, that 'there was no difference between a missionary priest and a European'.⁴

The other explanations expressed by Anderson follow from the one elaborated above. The practical impact of the missionary enterprise, was the introduction and establishment of a new way of life following western 'civilization'. The cultural transformation which the missionary societies effected (new houses, hospitals, clothing, soap, modern education and so on), was greatly facilitated by the donations from abroad which supported missionary work. The dynamism with which this transformation was carried out, declined in the fourth decade. Anderson has suggested that although this decline could be attributed partly to local crises such as those cited above, the economic depression which hit the world during that decade, also affected the missionary enterprise. 'This general economic stagnation cut into the desire to "improve"'. Furthermore, strict legalism crept into the

'missionary Churches' in reaction against the crises which had shocked the missionary enterprise. This decline generated further resistance. Having realized more clearly the weaknesses of the missionary enterprise, Africans wanted to run their own affairs for themselves, rather than being directed by missionary patrons whose sympathy with African interests was in doubt. They wanted to have not only their own Churches, but also their own schools.⁵

The older missionary pattern was breaking down in which each recognized missionary society monopolized influence over a given area, according to the policy of 'mission spheres of influence'. With the coming of new missionary societies (for example Salvation Army), denominational sectarianism especially among the Protestant missionaries, increased competitiveness in missionary work. This situation was further complicated by the growing number of 'Independent' Churches, with the result that Africans were increasingly realizing that the Christian faith was not as unquestionable as the earlier missionary teaching had been emphasizing within the monopolies of the spheres of influence. Missionaries could therefore no longer continue with their old assumptions regarding African initiative, since Africans had demonstrated that they were not as simple-minded as the popular nineteenth century western opinion had taken them to be. The slowness of

the missionary enterprise to realize this breakdown of the older missionary pattern and assumptions, contributed to further African criticism of the missionary presentation of Christianity, so that in the fifth decade, following the Second World War, there was accelerated resistance against colonialism and Christianity.⁶

Proceeding from this background, the following sections of this chapter continue to consider the modern African criticism of Christianity.

6.2 TWO LEVELS OF MODERN AFRICAN CRITICISM

Modern African criticism of Christianity is not an entirely new trend of African thought, but a continuation of one of the African responses to the modern missionary movement. Such criticism has continued to be articulated by modern African writers all over the continent, as can be discerned for example in the novels of Chinua Achebe (such as Things Fall Apart) and Mongo Beti (such as Poor Christ of Bomba) in west Africa;⁷ and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (such as The River Between) and the satires of Okot p'Bitek (such as Song of Lawino) in East Africa.⁸ However, whereas early resistance and criticism were furthered often by people with relatively low western education, modern criticism has been articulated by highly educated Africans.

Two levels of modern African criticism are observed in this section. The first may be described as cultural-historical, and is directly related to the historical background of the Christian missionary enterprise. It articulates the dissatisfaction and resistance which spontaneously erupted throughout the period of missionary activity, as shown, for example, in the instances cited in the preceding section. At this level of criticism, Christianity is portrayed as an aspect of western culture, which was used through the missionary enterprise to disrupt the cultural and religious heritage of African peoples, thereby facilitating the implementation of colonialism. The African resistance to colonialism aimed at rejecting all forms of domination which had been introduced and imposed upon African peoples. Since most missionaries presented Christianity as being part-and-parcel of western 'civilization', African resistance to colonialism could not isolate the western presentation of Christianity from western culture. African resisters recognized no distinction between missionaries and other Europeans, with regard to the missionary role of introducing the new religion and culture in Africa. After all, if they rejected the assertion of colonial powers to dominate African peoples politically, economically and culturally, why should they not also reject the religion which was presented as an integral part of the 'civilization' which was being imposed?

This level of criticism suggests that this African view of Christianity was valid, as long as Christianity was presented and recognized as the religion of the colonizers, and the missionary approaches of the nineteenth century missionary movement, as shown in chapter one above, gave Africans that impression. Prospective African converts were at the same time subjects of the colonial powers which protected the missionary societies. In the over-riding desire to propagate the 'western Christian civilization', which provided both the missionaries and colonial authorities with a common practical objective, African resistance movements recognized a weak point in the missionary enterprise, and resisted it together with the political and economic institutions which colonialism had established. Hence the African saying that 'there was no difference between a missionary priest and any other European', arose not merely from an African misunderstanding of Christianity, but more directly, from the missionary misrepresentation of Christianity as an inseparable part of western 'civilization' and from the missionary's taking sides with his "kith and kin" against the African especially in the struggle for liberation. If Christianity and western 'civilization' were identical, as most missionaries thought and presented it to be, then any African concerned about his liberation and identity had to reject both.

The second level of criticism may be described as intellectual-philosophical. It is concerned with the question: Is Christianity as a religion intellectually satisfying, and do its claims justify the missionary insistence that Africans should opt for this new faith at the expense of their religious heritage which has been meaningful to them for centuries? At this level, modern African criticism of Christianity is within the general criticism all over the western world, against the traditional formulations of the doctrines of the Church, which formed the basis of missionary teaching in Africa. The doctrine of God is one aspect of the Christian faith in which such questioning has been raised. For example, one journalistic study of the modern theological trends in the western world, made the following comment:

Despite the reassuring figures about Church attendance, the fact remains that Christianity today (1968) finds itself in a tumultous crisis. "Is God dead?" is no longer merely the taunting jest of skeptics for whom unbelief is the test of wisdom and for whom Nietzsche is the prophet who, by asserting that man had killed God, gave the right answer a century ago.⁹

This level of modern African criticism suggests that the answer is negative to both parts of the basic question which

is its main concern. The basic teachings of Christianity, as formulated in the Apostles' and the Nicene creeds for example, are viewed as a religious 'jargon' which is senseless to Africans, particularly because these teachings were formulated during the early Church under the influence of Greek philosophical ideas which are strange to African religious thought and belief. For instance, the Hebrew concept of monotheism, which was complicated by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, is viewed at this level of criticism as a new idea which has no relation with African concepts of deity.^{9a}

This criticism further suggests that in their eagerness to make Christianity acceptable to Africans, missionaries distorted African religious beliefs, by suggesting that some of the Christian doctrines, such as monotheism, were part of the African religious heritage. Criticism is extended to African Christian Theologians who, in reaction to the earlier prejudiced missionary attitudes, now tend to claim that African religious ideas and beliefs resemble those of the Christian faith.

The two levels of criticism elaborated above have a common stand in rejecting the nineteenth century view that Africans were 'pagan', 'heathen' and 'primitive'. These derogatory terms are meaningless in the modern African context,

and in the earlier missionary activity they served to inculcate in Africans, the sense of inferiority.

In the following three sections a more detailed study is made of these two levels of criticism, as articulated by two modern East African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Okot p'Bitek.¹⁰

6.3 CULTURAL-HISTORICAL CRITICISM

The novel The River Between portrays the conflict which developed between African converts to Christianity and African traditionalists, especially over the issue of cultural and religious alienation. The converts, following the teaching they had received from missionaries, preached that all African traditions and customs must be condemned and abandoned, and replaced with imitations of western culture and acceptance of colonial authority. The missionary attitude which looked down upon the African heritage as 'pagan', 'heathen' and 'primitive', was echoed by some African converts, such as Joshua in the novel. To Joshua, spiritual and heavenly salvation of the soul, and the imitation of the new culture, were the main objectives of Christian living. These objectives were considered unattainable unless the African convert was 'delivered' from the 'bondage' of his heritage.

The Bible was used to support this view. It was used for example by Joshua, who in the novel represented the typical attitude of the unquestioning African imitators of missionary teaching:

Joshua knew it was his duty as a Christian to obey the government, giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:19-26, Rom. 13:1-7). That was what he wanted every Christian to do. And was the white man not his brother? (Matt. 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35). Was the white man responsible for the ills of the land? No! It was the blindness of the people. People would not walk in the light. (John 3:19-21, 12:35-36; Acts 13:47, 26: 16-18; 1 Cor. 6:14; Ep. 5:8).¹¹

Joshua's was not the only interpretation given to the biblical theme of deliverance. To some Africans, this theme was directly related to the colonial domination to which they had been subjected. The accounts of the Exodus in the Old Testament gave such people the hope that God would deliver African peoples from the domination and humiliation which they were experiencing, as he had done through Moses. They therefore looked forward to a leader who would rise among them and like Moses, lead the colonized peoples from colonialism to independence,

restoring the eroded dignity and identity of the African community. Such a leader would need to be acquainted with western education and 'civilization', but committed to the liberation of his people. Schools, though established by missionary societies, would be useful in providing prospective African leaders with literacy, a tool which was indispensable in this project of deliverance. This was what one of the sages in the community envisaged.¹²

The theme of deliverance was also given another interpretation different from that of Joshua, though as personalized as Joshua's message of 'salvation'. For example Nyambura, one of the daughters of Joshua, interpreted this theme in terms of her love for the young, educated man who symbolized the hope of the community. At a personal level, he was her 'black Messiah', the one who would 'save' her from disintegration. This was the only interpretation which made sense to her. Without someone who really loved her she could not understand the love of Christ which Joshua her father was always talking about.¹³

Through the acquisition of literacy, Africans were able to read the Bible for themselves, and notice that other interpretations of Biblical passages were possible. On the basis of their own reading and interpretations, they questioned

the missionary presentation of the Bible. Furthermore, in their daily experience of the Christian life which missionary teaching had introduced, some Africans observed contradictions within the brand of Christianity which they were being urged to accept and adopt. A few such contradictions are outlined below.

One contradiction was related to the concept of 'Christian Maturity'. How could a person be considered mature in the Christian faith, if at the same time he was not recognized as mature in his community? Muthoni, another of Joshua's daughters, believed that although she had been brought up in a 'Christian family', she could not become a mature Christian unless she was initiated into adulthood according to the traditional custom of her people. The basis of her argument could be summed up as follows: The Virgin Mary was chosen by God to become the mother of Jesus Christ because she was a mature and 'morally upright' woman according to the traditional values and customs of the Hebrew culture to which she belonged. (Ex. 22:16-17, Lk. 1:26-38)(Matt. 1:1-25). Therefore, if Christianity expected of Africans to have a mature and morally upright life, then it must appreciate and accept the African traditions and customs which maintained this ideal within the African community. It was therefore contradictory for Christian missionary teaching to emphasize this value, and at the same time

object to the African rites of initiation.¹⁴ As far as Joshua was concerned, yielding to his African traditional customs was equivalent to returning to the 'bondage' from which Christianity had 'delivered' him.¹⁵ Yet he himself (like most of the first generation of African converts) had gone through these rites, and was a Christian. Why should his children be forbidden to share that heritage through which he had been initiated into adulthood prior to his conversion?

In this contradiction the novelist indicates that it was much to the discredit of missionary teaching, that the issue of African initiation was inflated into a controversy which precipitated an explosive cultural and political crisis. This issue was concentrated upon, as if it were the core of the Christian Gospel. It should be noted that when the question of relationship between Christianity and culture threatened to break up the early Church, the Council of Jerusalem declared it to be peripheral to a person's acceptance of the Gospel (Acts ch. 15), in the sense that a person could become a Christian irrespective of his cultural heritage. Paul elaborated this view in his epistle to the Romans (ch.2).

Another contradiction was related to the proclamation of Christianity as a faith which was based on love (Rom. 13:8-10).

The way Christianity was introduced to Africa, it became a divisive factor in the African communities - between neighbours, individuals, families and groups. For example, Joshua disowned his daughter simply because she could not agree with him over the issue of the relationship between Christianity and African culture. Furthermore, the African communities became divided each into two opposing groups, Christians on the one hand and non-Christians on the other. Thus in practice, Christianity contradicted the very message it was proclaiming in the Bible and in the sermons of missionaries and African converts. For this reason Nyambura, who did not want to disobey her Christian parents, felt compelled by the contradictions that she had observed, to abandon her father's brand of Christianity, which she felt to be unsatisfactory. She loved a young man, but simply because her father thought he was on the other side of two opposing groups (Christians and traditionalists), he would not allow her to marry, or even associate with him. Understood as Joshua practised it, either Christianity was not a religion of love, or there was a serious contradiction between the teaching of Christianity and the practice of it in Africa. Her dilemma was expressed as follows:-

Her duty to her parents stood between him and her.
A religion of love and forgiveness stood between them. No! it could never be a religion of love.
Never, never. The religion of love was in the heart.

The other was Joshua's own religion, which ran counter to her spirit of violated love. If the faith of Joshua and Livingstone (the Missionary) came to separate, why, it was not good. If it came to stand between a father and his daughter so that her death did not move him, then it was inhuman. She wanted the other. The other that held together, the other that united.¹⁶ (cf. Matt. 10:34-38).

The choice of Nyambura in this part of the novel is cited not to suggest that she was right in her decision, but rather, to indicate the frustrations which resulted among observers, when Christian teaching being commended to them was openly contradicted by practical living among the very people who were most keen in urging other people to become converted to the Christian faith.

A third contradiction was related to the presentation of Christianity as a religion proclaiming 'Salvation'. Whereas missionary teaching presented this doctrine in spiritual terms, for many Africans 'salvation' and 'deliverance' could not be considered meaningful and relevant unless these doctrines were interpreted in terms of the colonial situation under which African communities were living. For example, it did not make sense to suggest that African converts could be compensated in

heaven for their suffering on earth. To people whose world-view did not originally conceive of a three-decker universe, this interpretation sounded irrelevant to their practical needs, and seemed, for instance, to imply that missionary teaching expected Africans to remain colonial subjects for ever.¹⁷ Furthermore, this interpretation did not seem to many Africans to be consistent with the passage attributed to a sermon of Jesus and a prophecy of Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to
the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord
(Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2).

This passage was a message of hope on earth: How could the missionary presentation of Christianity be a message of deliverance, if it concentrated only on spiritual pietism and heavenly 'salvation' of the 'soul'? This was a contradiction which made some prospective African converts to Christianity doubtful of the positive practical value of the new religion as it was presented.¹⁸

Cultural-historical criticism of Christianity is portrayed also in the two satirical poems, Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol.¹⁹ Lawino represents the African resistance to cultural and religious alienation by western 'civilization' and Christianity. Ocol represents the opposite response, of indiscriminate adoption of western culture and Christianity following early missionary teaching, looking down upon and condemning the African heritage. To bring this criticism into sharp focus, Lawino is portrayed by the satirist as a confident woman who was Ocol's wife before he absorbed western culture, religion and education. She never went to a mission school and was illiterate, but Lawino is proud of her cultural and religious heritage. She makes no apologies for adhering to the traditions and customs of her people. She cannot dance western dances or sing western tunes, Lawino is not a Christian, and Christianity does not make sense to her. Because of this lack of orientation to western culture and Christianity, Ocol thinks that his wife is 'primitive', and he is ashamed to accept her as his wife. Like Joshua in The River Between and the Pastor in The Black Hermit,²⁰ Ocol is not appreciative of his cultural and religious background, and looks down upon his compatriots who have not lost their traditional cultural and religious identity.

The modern African cultural-historical criticism

of Christianity is summed up in the following words of Ngugi:

Kenya perhaps more than other parts of Africa has gone through certain difficult periods in her history, which have been a result of the contradiction inherent in colonialism and its religious ally, the Christian Church. I say contradiction because Christianity, whose basic doctrine was love and equality between man, was an integral part of that social force - colonialism - which in Kenya was built on the inequality and hatred between men and the consequent subjugation of the black race by the white race.²¹

The following section outlines some aspects of modern African criticism at the intellectual-philosophical level.

6.4 INTELLECTUAL-PHILOSOPHICAL CRITICISM

There are several points which modern African criticism of Christian teaching has considered confusing in the context of traditional African religious thought. (Refer to chapter three above for an elaboration of some of the Christian beliefs which were new to African religious thinking

and experience). In view of this level of criticism, one of the Christian concepts (God) is discussed below for illustration.

In an article entitled 'Is God Jok?', Okot p'Bitek discussed some explanations as to why early Christian missionaries identified the Christian concept of God with traditional African names and concepts of deity.²² One of the explanations, was that early missionary teaching, in its eagerness to introduce Christianity among African peoples, assumed that all human beings must have a concept of a 'supreme being' or 'high God' who was believed to be responsible for creation. This assumption was faulty, since there are religions in the world (such as Buddhism) in which the concept of God is not central. However, since the missionaries were convinced that the Christian concept of God was basic in Christian doctrine, they endeavoured to translate that concept into African languages. In doing this they did not take into serious consideration the fact that the use of an African language to communicate religious beliefs and ideas was limited to the cultural and religious experience of the people of that particular African community for whom that language was a medium of communication. (See ch. 2.2). Therefore, one early missionary approach of teaching Africans about the Christian doctrine of God, was to ask the question

'Who created you?' On the basis of the assumption indicated above, the missionaries thought that their leading question had a simple answer. However, among the Central Luo the question asked in this form did not make much sense, since traditionally, that African community did not explain the origin of the universe and of mankind in terms of 'Creation' out of nothing, as the book of Genesis did. The missionaries therefore had to modify the formulation of the question, in order to obtain a simple answer.

The modified form of the question was 'Who moulded you?', to which the answer was 'Rubanga.' This answer, according to p'Bitek, referred to one jok (spirit), among many others, which was believed to be responsible for causing deformity in the human body (hunchback). Rubanga was thus accepted by the enquiring missionaries, as the translation and equivalent of the Christian God. It is clear that the initial question was not understood by the African elders, owing to the difference in the underlying ontological assumptions of the missionaries and of the Central Luo. When that word was used as a translation of the Christian God, the whole of Christian doctrine became meaningless and absurd to the Central Luo (when it was applied for example, in the translation of chapter one of the fourth gospel in the New Testament). What was the connection between Rubanga and Jesus Christ?

Some other missionaries, realizing this difficulty of translating the Christian concept of God into the language of the Central Luo, considered this doctrine to be so new in the African religious context, that they wanted to introduce the Latin word Dio into African vocabulary - but this would not suffice in achieving the objective of establishing a conceptual starting point from African religious ideas to Christian doctrines. Others also tried to use Allah, but it was abandoned because it would be even more confusing to Africans, considering that Islamic and Christian doctrines are not identical, and both religions were new to that African community. Hence p'Bitek has remarked:

It is easy to imagine the dilemma of the missionaries trying to find suitable names for their God in the native (African) languages. Among the northern Nilotes the Catholic priests introduced the Italian word Dio, among the Alur the Swahili word Mungu was adopted. In Acoli the Catholic missionaries who in the southern Sudan had rejected Juok adopted Rubanga. The Protestants first used Allah, but soon dropped it, in preference to Rubanga, which never seems to have caught on, and Rubanga or Lubanga gained currency. Jok then was adopted as the name for the devil.

Somewhat, the Christian missionaries managed to convince themselves that the Central Luo really believed in a high god called Lubanga, who after creating the world withdrew from it, and though still supreme, takes no interest in his creations.²³

The missionary view that Africans conceived of a 'supreme' or 'high' god who was transcendent (who created the world and then retired from it), has been cited in chapter three above - 3.3. Transcendence was emphasized, so that the Christian doctrine of the immanence of God might be fitted into this missionary teaching. In Jesus Christ (in the Incarnation), the God who was presented as having retired from the world he had created, came back to it, to dwell with man and 'reconcile man to God'. This was the proclamation, the 'good news' which Christianity had brought. In his criticism, p^oBitek cited J.V. Taylor and Bishop J.K. Russell as modern missionaries who confirmed this missionary teaching. Summing up his point, he emphasized:

The idea of a high god among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries. The Central Luo did not believe in a high god who formed the universe out of nothing and then retired. They offered sacrifices at the chiefdom shrines and to their ancestors, and dealt with the hostile ghosts

accordingly. Rubanga or Lubanga was one of those (ghosts) that broke people's backs.²⁴

This criticism raises a basic question: Could there be any justification for introducing and encouraging the interaction of Christianity into the African cultural and religious heritage? Can (and should) Christian doctrines be introduced and accommodated within the conceptual background of traditional African thought, without being misunderstood or modified? Modern African criticism of Christianity poses a serious question on Christian doctrinal and missiological theology. To p'Bitek, the answer to both aspects of the question raised above, is strongly negative. At the doctrinal level, he has suggested that Christian missionary teaching did not succeed in eliminating African religious ideas, even among Christian converts. Instead, the African adoption of Christianity meant a modification of the basic Christian doctrine of God, resulting in the distortion of both the African religious beliefs and basic Christian doctrines, such as the doctrine of God:

The new God of Christianity was taken by many African peoples as just another deity, and added to the long list of the ones already believed in. So that many African Christians are also practitioners of their own (traditional) religions.²⁵

At the level of missiology, p'Bitek has questioned the justification of Christian missionary activity, because in the Church's missionary expansion at every period of its history (especially from the fifteenth century onwards), the 'great commission' as a scriptural basis for Christian mission, was always accompanied by cultural justifications, so that missionaries became not only evangelizers but also carriers of their culture which they considered superior to that of their prospective converts. Hence the missionary process involved the distortion of peoples' self-understanding and identity in order to justify the presupposed value of the new religion - Christianity.²⁶ Furthermore, the basic concepts of the new religion were likely to be misunderstood or modified by prospective converts, in order to fit into their cultural and conceptual terms of reference. Such a thing happened in Africa, as shown for example, in the missionary enquiry which led to the adoption of Rubanga (Lubanga) as the name of the Christian God among the Central Luo.

6.5 COHERENCE AND APPLICABILITY OF CHRISTIANITY

The two levels of modern African criticism of Christianity discussed above, may be considered as having arisen from two basic theological problems which confront Christianity

at every period and context of its development - the problem of coherence and the problem of applicability.²⁷ The intellectual-philosophical level of criticism has arisen from apparent lack of coherence in the Christian faith as it was presented in Africa, and the cultural-historical level of criticism has arisen from observed lack of consistency in the application of the basic Christian doctrines proclaimed by missionary teaching. This section elaborates these two theological problems as they relate to modern African criticism of Christianity, beginning with coherence. According to John M. Hull, the problem of coherence may be discerned as follows:

A problem of coherence arises when the clarity and the distinctness of a theological concept are in doubt. The concept of God might be such a case. Or the distinctions and relations between two similar concepts might be unclear, such as the relation between the human spirit and the divine spirit in prayer, or the distinction between procession and generation in the Trinity. In more severe cases, the coherence of the theological system as a whole might be under threat, either internally (the problem of evil and the goodness of God) or externally, as when two apparently rival theological universes converge (Christianity and Islam)(or Christianity and African religious beliefs).²⁸

Modern African criticism has shown that in the missionary presentation of Christianity there was internal incoherence in missionary teaching, and also, external conflict between that teaching and the traditional African cultural and religious life. Internal incoherence of Christianity in the African context could be illustrated, for example, by the lack of mutual doctrinal and practical understanding between the African convert Joshua and his two daughters in The River Between, as discussed earlier in this chapter (6.3). It could also be illustrated by the rise of African 'Independent' Churches, which accepted Jesus Christ and the Bible, but rejected the western cultural garb in which he was 'clothed', and the missionary interpretation of the Christian scriptures (the Bible) which seemed to be used in missionary teaching to justify western prejudice against the cultural and religious background of African peoples. In the western setting from which the modern missionary movement arose, internal incoherence of Christianity could be illustrated by the denominationalism which missionary activity exported to Africa, so that while missionaries taught that Christians should treat each other and all people as brothers and sisters, they at the same time engaged in denominational competition and rivalry, to the extent that each denomination claimed to be more faithful to the Christian 'Gospel' than all others, and wished to win more African converts than any other denomination in a particular missionary area. With criticism, some Africans noticed this internal incoherence,

and wondered if any of these numerous denominations represented the whole truth about Christianity.

External conflict could be illustrated, for example, in the rejection of Christianity by some Africans who considered the new religion to be part-and-parcel of western culture, which must be resisted in the general fight against colonialism. The external conflict between western Christian and African religious traditions has been portrayed, for example, in the conflict between Joshua's and Kabonyi's opposing groups in The River Between, and also between Lawino and Ocol in Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol. In the western setting it could be illustrated, for example, by the modern alternative movements such as humanism and secularism, which insist that the Christian Church in the western world has outlived its usefulness and relevance as a result of conservatism and its concentration more on the spiritual rather than on the material welfare of society. The Church, such movements suggest, should change its emphasis and re-organize itself to meet the practical needs of contemporary society, or otherwise be abandoned as an antiquated social institution, in favour of the newer movements which claim to be up to date with the practical needs of man in a technological, urbanized, western society.

The presence of this external conflict in the modern

African criticism of Christianity is observable, for example in Okot p^oBitek's criticism. In his discussion of the concept of God, for instance, he has made the following conclusive remark:

But will the African deities survive the revolutions in science and philosophy which have killed the Christian God? I doubt it. Christianity has declined because the Christian God used to fill gaps in science, or to deal with life at the point at which things got beyond human explanation or control. This has now been dismissed as intellectual laziness and superstition. The Christian God has become intellectually superfluous and, moreover, the metaphysical statements about him do not make sense to modern man.²⁹

The rise of secularism in the western world may be attributed largely to the disappointment among some thinkers, at the failure of Christianity to relate its metaphysical doctrines to practical living. For example, the Christian faith maintained that the God about whom the Bible talks, is the Creator and sustainer of the universe and moreover, he has positive moral attributes such as love and kindness. God's activity in the world could not be discerned with certainty,

and his positive moral attributes were not readily observable in the daily life of the Christian Church, which since Constantine, was greatly intolerant of those people who would not conform to its norms of faith and practice. John M. Hull has suggested a distinction between two areas of applicability:

Two areas of applicability may be distinguished. The first arises when theological concepts are applied within the Christian faith. There may be dissonance between the objects of credal confession and the popular objects of devotion, or the theological concepts may appear to be devoid of ethical significance, or they may be significantly different from the previous conceptualizations arrived at by the same community. If theology is to retain its role as the critical servant of the religious consciousness, it must strive to retain unity with what it purports to be articulating. The drive towards wholeness is a feature of mature religious consciousness, as well as a necessary feature of rationality. Ethical responsibility is another aspect of the religious consciousness, and a theological concept unable to relate itself to ethics would fail in its claim to be a valid theological articulation.

...In the second area of applicability..., theological concepts are applied beyond the community of faith... Religious faith seeks to comprehend and unite all experience, and the universal applicability of its critical conceptualised form (theology) is an aspect of this desire to unify. There may be aspects of human experience, whether within the community of faith or outside it, which resist this.³⁰

African Christian response to the first area of applicability is related to chapter five above. It is in the second area of applicability that modern African criticism of Christianity has been most clearly articulated. Early missionary presentation of Christianity is observed as having failed to apply in daily life, the Christian doctrines which it was proclaiming as 'good news' to African peoples. In practice, the missionary enterprise often contradicted the very doctrines it was spreading: For example, the Christian faith proclaimed unity in Jesus Christ, and yet, denominational divisions and rivalries were observable in missionary activity. Furthermore, the Christian faith came to separate 'believers' and 'non-believers', and by such separation in the African communities, Christianity became a factor contributing to the disintegration of traditional African religious coherence. Ngugi has expressed this criticism as follows:

The evidence that you were saved was not whether you were a believer and follower of Christ, and accepted all men as equal: the measure of your Christian love and charity was in preserving the outer signs and symbols of a European way of life; whether you dressed as Europeans did, whether you had acquired European manners, liked European hymns and tunes... Thus acceptance of the Christian Church meant the outright rejection of all the African customs. It meant rejection of those values and rituals that held us together: it meant adopting what in effect was a debased European middle-class mode of living and behaviour.³¹

It has been shown in chapters two and three above, that although missionary teaching expected African converts to detach themselves completely from their cultural and religious heritage, in practice this did not happen. Instead, most African converts outwardly adopted the new norms according to the demands of their missionaries and catechists, but at the same time, retained the basic values of their cultural and religious backgrounds. Some converts might openly condemn African values and customs in order to avoid excommunication from the missionary-led Church, but in practice they continued to live according to some of those customs.

At the same time, however, African converts experienced separation between themselves and those of their kith and kin who had not accepted the missionary brands of Christianity... between the 'readers' of 'dini' and the unconverted traditionalists. This relative separation reduced the African converts into a group which was neither fully-integrated in the traditional African community, nor fully accepted as mature according to western missionary expectations.

6.6 IMPACT OF AFRICAN CRITICISM ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY APPROACHES

Before concluding this chapter, it is worthwhile to add that many Christians from the western world who have worked as missionaries in Africa and Asia would acknowledge some aspects of modern African criticism of Christianity. Furthermore, from time to time since the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, evaluations have been made of missionary activity among Protestant Churches involved in mission. In the Catholic Church also documents have occasionally been written evaluating the achievements and failures of missionary activity. Without entering into detailed elaboration, this section cites a few examples to illustrate what has been said in this paragraph.

In his book For All the World: The Christian Mission

in the Modern Age, J.V. Taylor suggested: 'Our world is one in a way that has never been true before; and this should make it easier for us to recognize that the Mission in which we are involved is one and the same in all the continents. We may no longer imagine that it is something which goes out from the Christian West to the pagan "rest". The idea of a Christendom must finally be abandoned, and that also is a kind of death-of-self. We may no longer identify the Church with a particular section of the globe, geographically defined'.³²

The assumption prevalent during the modern missionary movement that western 'civilization' was 'Christian', was used to justify colonization, in the name of spreading this civilization. Consequently, African critics, taking off from that assumption, rejected Christianity as a tool which was used for the domination of African peoples by western powers. Taylor and others criticized this missionary assumption as one of the factors which brought Christianity under criticism in Africa. Taylor had worked as a missionary in East Africa, and was making this criticism from his experience of the practical consequences of early missionary activities and approaches. A similar criticism was made by Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin, who worked as a missionary in India for twenty-three years: 'During the long centuries of the "Constantinian era" of Church history, when Christians have normally had the authority of the state behind them, it has been regarded as abnormal that Christians should

suffer for their faith. Even when modern missions went out into the non-Christian cultures of Asia, Africa, America and the Pacific, they had behind them the power of the European nations, and they often expected to be protected by it. As a result of this long experience, many Christians seem to take it for granted that the "normal" state of affairs, which one ought to be able to expect, is that one can go anywhere and preach Christianity - or indeed any other religion - and be protected by the forces of law and order in doing so. This is a mirage for which neither scripture nor common sense provides any foundation. No human societies cohere except on the basis of some kind of common beliefs and customs. No society can permit these beliefs and practices to be threatened beyond a certain point without reacting in self-defence...³³

From the perspective of the Catholic Church, Adrian Hastings made an evaluation of Catholic missionary activity, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses, both the achievements and failures of the modern missionary movement within Roman Catholicism. This evaluation is most clearly expressed in his book, Church and Mission in Modern Africa.³⁴ Within the scope of this section it is not possible to make an exhaustive summary of his critique. However, it may be noted that he has raised some of the points made in that book, in other publications, for example, Christian Marriage in Africa (1973)³⁵ and Church and Ministry (1972).³⁶ The titles of these

two books are suggestive of some of the points at which missionary approaches and assumptions are observed to have failed. With regard to marriage, missionary teaching failed to appreciate African customs concerning this important rite of passage, with the serious consequence that marriage issues became one of the most burning pastoral challenges in Africa...especially in matters connected with the practice of polygamy and with the validity of African customary marriage. As regards Church and Ministry, he observed that the slowness of the modern missionary movement to establish a local ministry among the new African Christian communities, led to the existence of Churches which were dependent, materially and spiritually, on 'mother Churches' abroad.

Aylward Shorter, a Catholic missionary in East Africa, has made a similar response, as expressed in the following statement:

The Christianity which was brought to Africa in the nineteenth century was a Christianity retreating before the advance of science, a 'God-of-the-gaps' Christianity. It appeared superior to traditional religion because it was preached by white men, was expressed in a culture which was technically superior. In the way it was presented, however, it often

appeared less socially relevant than the religion it displaced.³⁷

These few citations have been selected from reflections and experiences of missionaries in the field during the seventh and eighth decades of the twentieth century. It is clear that some Christians in the western world, in retrospect, have been concerned to up-date the missionary assumptions and approaches which formed the basis of earlier missionary activity. The establishment of the World Council of Churches is one of the positive outcomes of the modern missionary movement, in the sense that missionary experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, showed that competing and antagonistic denominational missionary activity was a hindrance more than an aid to the implementation of the 'great commission'. The spirit of ecumenism among Churches in Africa has its background in that earlier realization. A further evaluation of missionary activity among Protestant denominations, led in 1961 to the full integration of the International Missionary Council into the World Council of Churches. The work of that International Missionary Council was to be carried out in all units of the World Council of Churches, especially the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. This integration was based on a rediscovery of the realization that Mission was an inseparable aspect of the Church and therefore, it was proper that the work of the International

Missionary Council, of co-ordinating missionary activity, should be incorporated into the main work of the World Council of Churches.³⁸

In the Catholic Church, the most remarkable conciliar evaluation of the modern missionary movement took place in the context of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). The deliberations of that council which lasted several years cannot be exhaustively summarized in this short section.³⁹ One of the significant concerns arising in that council, was aggiornamento (up-dating). On the basis of an evaluation of earlier missionary activity, this 'up-dating' was expressed for example in the decree on missionary activity, about which Adrian Hastings has commented:

In fact in the final text of the Vatican Council's decree on missionary activity, it is largely in terms of the service of a new local church that the specificity of missionary activity is delineated. As we have already seen, mission - the kerygma and diakonia of the community of Christians - can in no way be limited to that small minority of Christians who are members of missionary societies or who are working directly under Propaganda Fide or who leave their own local church or their own country to work elsewhere. Mission is the character of the whole

church...If the Catholic communion is a fellowship of local churches and the fulness of catholicity depends upon there being local churches which reflect and sharpen in Christ all the positive values and different cultures of the societies of the world, then obviously something is gravely missing within the Christian witness and the chorus of catholicity if in some parts of the world there are no local churches at all, if there are some peoples or some cultures among whom the gospel has never yet been preached.⁴⁰

It is remarkable that these major evaluations to which this section has referred, took place mostly after the second World War, and were accelerated especially in the sixth and seventh decades of the twentieth century. This was the period of accelerated struggles for Independence from colonialism in Africa and Asia. It was also the period when African criticism of Christianity was most sharply articulated, especially owing to the apparent slowness of the missionary-sponsored Churches, to grow out of the earlier assumptions and approaches which were being viewed as the religious foundations of colonialism. It can therefore be concluded that the internal evaluations of missionary activity which have been taking place during the twentieth century within both

Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, were motivated partly by the concern of Christians directly involved in missionary activity to be effective in their work, and partly by the criticism which missionaries, and the Churches they founded, were experiencing in their missionary endeavours. Hence the modern African criticism had the important impact of challenging Churches and missionary societies to review their assumptions, approaches and objectives if Christianity was to be a relevant religion among African peoples. Viewed from the perspective of this challenge, modern African criticism of Christianity has had a positive and constructive impact in Africa.

This can be attested, for example, in one citation of a constructive criticism and challenge by one modern East African writer, a citation which is fitting as a conclusion to this chapter:

If the Church in the past has been the greatest cause of the misshaping of African souls and cultural alienation, it must, today, work for cultural integration. It must go back to the roots of the broken African civilization: it must examine the traditional African forms of marriage, traditional African forms of sacrifice. Why were these things meaningful and wholesome to the traditional African community?... Can the core of Christian faith find anchor in some

of these symbols, or must it be for ever clothed in the joyless drab and dry European middle-class culture?...These are not idle questions: for the symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing the values held by a community.⁴¹

Christian missionary activity in East Africa is undergoing a crisis, in which the era of 'foreign missions' is coming to an end, and African Churches are taking up the responsibility of keeping Christianity alive and growing in Africa.⁴² In the process of this great transition, modern African criticism of Christianity has to be taken seriously, at both the cultural-historical and the intellectual-philosophical, and theological levels.

CHAPTER SIX

REFERENCE NOTES

- 1 W.B. Anderson, 'A History of the Church in Kenya from 1844 to Now', Makerere, Occasional Research Papers, Vol. 10, Feb. 1973, pp. 48-53. For an expanded consideration of this topic see his recent book, The Church in East Africa, Tabora, Central Tanganyika Press, 1977.
- 2 Anderson, 'A History of the Church in Kenya', pp. 48-49.
- 3 *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 50.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 51.
- 7 Both these books were published in London, Heinemann, African Writers Series.
- 8 James Ngugi (Ngugi wa Thiong'o), The River Between, London, Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 17, 1965; Okot p'Bitek, Song of Lawino (1966) and Song of Ocol (1967), both published in Nairobi, East African Publishing House.
- 9 J.D. Brown, ed., Can Christianity Survive?, New York, Time-Life Books, 1968, p. 11.
- 9a See for example, Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship. Nairobi. 1970. ch. 10.

10 The critique presented in this chapter is based on a study of the relevant books by these two East African writers, and on oral interviews with Mr. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (4th Oct. 1975) and Mr. Okot p'Bitek (3rd and 4th Feb. 1976). I am grateful to both of them for discussing their views with me, to sharpen my understanding of their books. Their publications are widely read, and some of them are prescribed texts for East African Examinations, such as E.A.C.E. and E.A.A.C.E.

11 The River Between, p. 36. The relevant Biblical references have been inserted, in this quotation.

12 ibid., pp. 44-45.

13 ibid., pp. 116-177, 154-5.

14 ibid., pp. 29-30, 50-51.

15 ibid., pp. 36-37, 67-68, 97-100.

16 ibid., pp. 154-5.

17 ibid., pp. 170-171.

18 ibid., p. 113.

19 For a critique of Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol, see G.A. Heron, 'Introduction' to the combined school edition of these Two Songs, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1972, pp. 6-35.

20 James Ngugi (Ngugi wa Thiong'o), The Black Hermit: A Play, London, Heinemann, 1968.

- 21 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homecoming, London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 31.
- 22 Okot p'Bitek, 'Is God Jok?', in Dini na Mila, Vol. III Nos. 2 & 3, Makerere, Dec. 1968, pp. 1-16. The points made in that article are articulated in more detail in African Religions in Western Scholarship (1970) and Religion of the Central Luo, (1971), both published in Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau.
- 23 Religion of the Central Luo, p. 49.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 50.
- 25 African Religions in Western Scholarship, p. 113.
- 26 *ibid.*, p. 104.
- 27 I am indebted to Dr. John M. Hull for these two terms, which he has elaborated in his article, 'What is Theology of Education?', in The Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. XXX No. 1, 1977, pp. 3-29.
- 28 J.M. Hull, *op.cit.*, p. 9.
- 29 African Religions in Western Scholarship, pp. 112. A. Shorter in African Culture and the Christian Church (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1973), pp. 80-81, has observed that in the way Christianity was presented in East Africa, it often appeared less socially relevant than the African religious heritage, and 'the result in some areas has been to encourage secularism'.

- 30 Hull, op.cit., p. 10.
- 31 Ngugi, Homecoming, pp. 31-32.
- 32 J.V. Taylor, For All The World, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1966, p. 55. For a more extensive evaluation by Taylor see The Growth of the Church in Buganda: An attempt at understanding, London, S.C.M. Press, 1958; The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion, London, S.C.M. Press, 1963.
- 33 Lesslie Newbigin, The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1963, p. 42. See also his Honest Religion for Secular Man, London, S.C.M. Press, 1966, esp. chs. 1 & 4.
- 34 A. Hastings, Church and Mission in Modern Africa, London, 1967.
- 35 Christian Marriage in Africa, London, S.P.C.K. 1973.
- 36 Church and Ministry, Kampala, Gaba Publications, 1972.
- 37 A. Shorter, African Culture and the Christian Church, London, 1973, p. 80. See also his The African Contribution to World Church and other Essays, Kampala, Gaba Publications, 1972. A wide collection of evaluations of Christian missionary activity covering the whole world was published in Geneva, History's Lessons for Tomorrow's Mission: Milestones in the History of Missionary Thinking, W.S.C.F., 1960.
- 38 Questions and Answers about the World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1973, pp. 7-9.

- 39 For a detailed commentary on the Second Vatican Council see Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., The Message and Meaning of the Ecumenical Council: The Documents of Vatican II, with Comments by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Authorities, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1966.
- 40 A. Hastings, Church and Ministry, pp. 22-23.
- 41 Ngugi, Homecoming, p. 35.
- 42 This was observed by Prof. J.S. Mbiti in The Crisis of Mission in Africa, Mukono, Uganda Church Press, 1971. This booklet was the published version of a lecture he presented to a conference called by the Church of Uganda (Anglican) in August, 1970, to consider the theme 'The Mission of the Church in the 1970s'.

CONCLUSION

The sixth chapter brings this study back to the point at which it started, and from which a conclusion can be drawn: The following paragraphs outline the main thesis emerging from and supported by the study.

Through the modern missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christianity was introduced and established in the interior of East Africa. During the time lag of almost two thousand years between the apostolic generation and the rise of the modern missionary movement, the missionary methods which were discernible in the New Testament were lost or ignored, with the result that the modern missionary enterprise became paternalistic and unappreciative of the African cultural and religious heritage of the peoples to whom Christianity was introduced. Deviating from the insights endorsed by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts ch. 15) which discouraged the demand that Gentiles should be proselytized into Judaism before they could be accepted as Christians, most early missionaries to East Africa expected African converts to abandon their cultural heritage and adopt the norms of belief, conduct and culture which the missionaries had introduced from their respective cultural backgrounds. As far as the African converts were concerned, this expectation was not

fully implemented. The converts memorized the new Christian doctrines and outwardly conducted themselves according to the new cultural norms which they copied from missionary teaching and practice. At the same time, however, they retained the basic aspects of their cultural and religious heritage, which remained the basis of their interpretations of the new religion. Some converts, if need arose, publicly condemned the traditional customs of their peoples to avoid excommunication from the missionary-led Churches, but in practice most African Christians maintained cultural and religious links with their traditional backgrounds.

The denominational and fragmentary character of the modern missionary movement led to the development of multi-stranded expressions of Christianity in East Africa. Many and various denominational strands of Christianity (having their backgrounds in the Reformation in Europe) were exported to East Africa and acquired converts among African peoples. That missionary-led denominational proliferation was later complicated by the rise of 'Independent' Churches, which were initially founded by Africans as a reaction against some aspects of missionary leadership and missionary presentations of Christianity. Further fragmentation followed among some of those Churches, as African Christians strove to search for a religious 'place to feel at home', their traditional cultural and religious coherence having been disrupted.

Modern African Christian theological reflection has been concerned with considering and articulating the relevance and role of Christianity, and of the Church, in the various social contexts of changing Africa, taking off from the achievements and failures of the modern missionary movement. The process of this internal evaluation within the Church in Africa is continuing, and it is clear that some Churches in Africa have grown to a stage in which an African Christian theology is beginning to take form as shown in chapter five, although the detailed articulation of this theological reflection is still an expectation of the future. African Christian theologians have still to face the challenge of showing how Christianity, as a universal religion, can be particularized in the African context, without compromising the universality of the Gospel and without disregarding or degrading the African cultural and religious heritage as the modern missionary movement did. At the same time, African Christian theological reflection has to wrestle with the challenge of showing how Christianity can fit meaningfully and relevantly in the changing national contexts of Africa. In this double-edged endeavour, such reflection within the Church has to take into serious consideration, the modern African criticism of Christianity, with which chapter six of this study has dealt.

Modern African criticism of Christianity is the continuation of another aspect of African response to Christianity - that aspect which viewed Christianity, as it was presented by the modern missionary enterprise, as a threat and undesirable interruption to the integrated traditional African communities. This criticism has had the positive impact of challenging the Church and its missionary activity, to review previous assumptions, approaches and objectives, in order for Christianity to be meaningful and relevant to the needs of the individual and of society in changing Africa.

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A COMMENT ON THE SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

It should be noted that not all the works cited in the reference notes within the text of this study, are included in this select bibliography. A comprehensive bibliography would be much longer than this list. The select bibliography lists those works which are concerned with various aspects related to the theme of this study. Some of the entries in this bibliography are not specifically cited in the reference notes at the end of chapters in the study. However, I have found

them useful in the process of research leading to this thesis.