

AN AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION:

A CASE STUDY OF A GROUP OF CHRISTIANS  
POPULARLY KNOWN AMONG THE AGIKUYU AS  
THE AHONOKI (SAVED ONES), AND AN  
EVALUATION OF THEIR UNDERSTANDING  
OF SALVATION, VIS-A-VIS A NEW  
TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

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## ABSTRACT

The religious situation in Kenya is characterized by a noticeable proliferation and diversity. This is mainly because freedom of worship is constitutionally protected, and thus, most world religions are represented.

It is Christianity, however, which dominates the religious scene in Kenya. Christianity itself, however, is not a monolithic phenomenon, but is characterized by division and denominationalism. This has been explained as a legacy from the missionaries who introduced Christianity along denominational lines such that it has retained a fragmented appearance. This explanation, however, fails to account for the Churches which exist independently of the traditional denominations. These independent Churches are about 6,000 in Africa, and the numbers are increasing.

The question pertaining to the causes of this tendency to schism has been asked. The reasons given are mainly non-theological, and it is argued that independency is a result of the Africans' reaction against the cultural-political imperialism implicit in the imposition of Christianity upon them.

It has also been pointed out that schism could also result from religious motives, particularly disagreement on theological issues. Students of the phenomenon of independency however, have tended to concentrate on the non-theological causes, at the expense of the theological ones which may be equally important.

In this study, we take an independent group, popularly known, among the Agikuyu as Ahonoki (saved ones), and we explore, to what extent theological factors were behind their separation from the established Church.

It is evident from our case study that, though sociological factors were not absent in the formation of this group, the theological factors were the dominant ones. In particular, the Ahonoki feel that they differ from other Christians in their understanding of the issue of salvation, an issue that is central to Christianity as a whole. Their very name Ahonoki, which they have earned due to their explicit claim of being saved implies their preoccupation with salvation.

Their exclusive claim of being saved, has also earned the Ahonoki some perjorative attitudes from non-members, who, on this account consider them as Pharisaical. They, on their side, are suspicious of the non-Ahonoki whom they regard as nominal Christians.

In this context, we may ask what is the cause of this variant interpretation of the cardinal theological issue of salvation. Could this variant interpretation be a result of a piece-meal-interpretation or a mis-interpretation of the scriptures which is the common basis for Christian doctrine.

In short, <sup>h.s</sup>thesis attempts to answer two questions.

(1) To what extent is disagreement on

theological issues a causative factor in division within Christianity?

- (2) To what extent is disagreement on theological issues due to a piece-meal approach to the scriptures?

When we analyse the causes which led the Ahonoki to secede from the established Church, we conclude that they seceded mainly because of disagreement on certain theological issues, particularly that of salvation. Secondly, there is evidence that these theological differences are mainly due to a failure to view the scriptures as a whole.

The thesis therefore, in conclusion, points out the need for a comprehensive view of the scriptures, if discrepancy of opinion on theological issues, which may lead to schism, is to be minimized. Our recommendation then, is that, viewing the scriptures more wholistically, may take us a long way on the path of unity and tolerance, rather than division and exclusiveness which have riddled Christianity since its introduction to this country.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The initial observation which led to this study is one that has been made by several observers of the religious situation, not only in Kenya, but also in Africa as a whole. This is the observation that Christianity is characterized by diversity, division and denominationalism. Commenting on the religious situation in Kenya for instance, Professor John Mbiti has pointed out that Christianity in Kenya has developed along denominational lines and that the splitting into smaller and smaller groups has continued. He continues to lament that this denominational proliferation borders on "national disunity" and is in fact "sinful".<sup>1</sup>

The same author has also observed that one of the tantalizing questions, with regard to this diversity, is as to what are the causes of the rapid proliferation both in numerical affiliation and the formation of a vast number of small Church groups.<sup>2</sup> The question regarding the causes of diversity of Christian expression in the African context is one to which several scholars have addressed themselves. One answer or explanation which may be given is that Christianity was brought to Africa along denominational lines and it was therefore inevitable that it would be diverse and fragmented. This explanation has, however, apparently failed to account for the fact that Christianity in Africa is not only expressed along the line of the traditional denominations. There has developed a version of Christianity, which broke from the Roman Catholic and the Protestant versions, and which itself continues to split. The causes of independency have been in this context, perplexing to scholars of religion.



It is to this question of causes of independency that David Barrett addressed himself in his book Schism and renewal in Africa.<sup>3</sup> In it, he attempts to assess the phenomenon of independency in Africa. In his search for causative factors, he comes up with two categories of factors that have led and may lead to schism and independency. On the one hand, he points out that schism may be explained in terms of socio-political factors which are in themselves non-religious. On the other hand, schism can be caused by religious and theological factors.<sup>4</sup>

On the whole, scholars of the phenomenon of independency have given it a social-psychological explanation, often seeing the movement as one of protest against British and other imperialism. This is the approach taken by such authors as Bengt Sundkler, who sees the movement of independency in South Africa as the "logical reply to the white policy of segregation and separation."<sup>5</sup> F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot portray independency in the Kenyan situation as a movement in search of a place to feel socially and psychologically at home.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Welbourn, for instance, observes that:

the most fundamental impression made by living for ten days with the African Israeli Church one of the independent churches is that it is a family united by a common experience, rather than, as so frequently in the older churches, a collection of individuals having little relationship except in their weekly meeting in the same building.<sup>7</sup>

He concludes that African Israel Church is "a new way of religious life, attempting to reorder round Christ the essential features of tribal life which are so often destroyed by the impact of the west".<sup>8</sup> This is the same conclusion that Erasto Muga comes to in his book African response to Western Christian religion, which is basically, as he points out, a sociological analysis of African separatist religious movements in East

Africa. He observes to the effect that:

It could be inferred that if western Christian missionaries accepted African culture as it was, provided some aspects of it were not condemned by the Christian Bible, it was doubtful if African Independent Church and political movements would have been established because the reasons for establishing them would have been lacking.<sup>9</sup>

This sociological element in the formation of independent Church movements is clearly evident in our current study of the Ahonoki as an independent Church.<sup>10</sup> As Barrett points out, however, schism is not only caused by non-religious factors, because religious and theological factors have also led to the formation of new churches.<sup>11</sup> In fact, as he observes, there is a school of thought which, though consisting of a minority seeks for the religious factor as the fundamental cause of independency. This school of thought sees the movement as basically a drive towards the attainment of a more satisfying religion. Independency is therefore seen as a "primarily spiritual and religious movement striving for cultural integrity and spiritual autonomy."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Barrett notes that independency may also be caused by theological factors, and comments that "in some small number of studies, independency is seen as having its roots in being a legitimate reaction to a distorted missionary Christianity".<sup>13</sup>

It is primarily along the lines of religious-theological factors that we seek, in this study, to discuss the formation of the Ahonoki group as an independent church. This is because, as it seems, there have not been many studies concerning the theological-religious factors that may lead to independency and division. Secondly, as it will be apparent in the course of this study, the Ahonoki explain their separation from the Anglican Church mainly on theological grounds. They argue that they separated from the church because they did not agree with the

missionary presentation of such issues as water-baptism, spirit baptism, and, particularly, the issue of salvation. It can be inferred, therefore, that their secession was a reaction against what, to them was apparently, a distortion of the gospel message by the missionaries. They too seem to have sought for a place to feel, not only socially but also theologically, at home.

The idea that theological issues, particularly the issue of salvation, is what has apparently led this group to secede from the established church leads us to our second point of observation. This is the observation that it is precisely the issue of what salvation means that can be cited as a major cause of denominationalism even within the framework of the established church. Although Christians on the whole agree that Christianity is the means to salvation, they do not seem to agree as to what precisely constitutes or leads to salvation in the context of Christianity. Discrepancy of opinion as to what leads to salvation is cited as one of the causes that led to Protestantism in the European history of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> This discrepancy of opinion on the cardinal issue of salvation can also be cited as one of the main causes of separation within African Christianity itself.

It is bearing these two observations in mind, namely, the fact that diversity can be caused by disagreement on theological issues, and that the issue of salvation is a major point where disagreement occurs that we proceed to do a case study of the Ahoncki (saved ones). This is because as we have already pointed out above, the group separated from the Anglican Church mainly on theological grounds. Secondly, we note that the major theological issue that led to their separation is the issue of salvation as is apparent in this study. As a group, the Ahoncki have

also been very pre-occupied with the idea of salvation as their very name implies. To them, salvation is primarily a matter of acknowledging Jesus as one's personal saviour, and for this reason, they have earned themselves the title Ahonoki (saved ones). Their public testimony to having been saved has led them to be regarded as religious fanatics or even contemporary Pharisees. They, on the other hand, have tended to be suspicious of other Christians, who are apparently nominal. At this point, a question that comes to one's mind is to what is the cause of this variant interpretation of salvation which has been evident all through church history.

Considering that the scriptures are the common basis for all Christian belief and doctrine, we proceed on the hypothesis that a probable cause of this variant interpretation of the idea of salvation is a misinterpretation or a "piece-meal" interpretation of the scriptures.

Against this background, and taking the Ahonoki as our case study, we proceed to examine the causes that led to this group's secession from the Anglican Church. This involves us in a brief historical sketch of the formation of this group as well as a brief sketch of its organizational structure. Secondly, in our study, we intend to analyse the concept of salvation held by this group since their idea of salvation is what distinguishes them from other Christians. Thirdly, bearing in mind the question raised above as to whether the differential opinion on the issue of salvation is caused by misinterpretation or a piece-meal interpretation of the scriptures, it is our fourth objective to study the concept as presented in the scriptures. This is with the view of comparing the scriptural notion of salvation with the Ahonoki's

understanding of it.

Finally, the study attempts to present a comprehensive view of salvation based on what is, hopefully, a more comprehensive view of the scripture. Thus, we conclude by presenting a point of view of looking at salvation, based upon what emerges from the scriptures as the "common denominator" in the concept of salvation. This view of salvation may help in avoiding discrepancies in opinion which have in many instances led to division within Christianity.

### The content and theoretical framework

Bearing the objectives and intentions of this study in mind, we note that this study falls into three sections. In the first section, comprising chapters two and three, we deal with the background preliminary to our study. In chapter two, we deal with the etymological and linguistic background to our major term of reference, salvation, both in the Bible and as it is translated into Kikuyu, the language spoken by the Ahonoki. In the third chapter, we trace the historical background of the Ahonoki, in order to establish the causes which led to the emergence of the group. It is in this chapter, too, that we attempt to define the group by trying to determine what characteristics give it its distinctiveness. In this chapter we come to the conclusion that the group's major distinctive mark is its members' claim of being saved.

The second section, comprising chapters four to six, deals with the analysis of the concept of salvation. In chapter four, we analyse the conception of salvation that the Ahonoki have. Chapter five is an analysis of the concept of salvation as is presented in the scriptures,

particularly in the New Testament. This exclusive treatment of the topic, as presented mainly the New Testament, is justified on the grounds that the Ahonoki base their beliefs primarily on the teachings of the New Testament. As is apparent in the course of this study, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are at the centre of the Ahonoki's understanding of salvation.

The analysis of the concept of salvation in the New Testament reveals that salvation can be viewed from various perspectives. When, in chapter six, we compare this with the Ahonoki's notion, we observe that, though, on the whole, their notion reflects that of the New Testament, nevertheless, there emerges a few discrepancies and gaps in their understanding. These have apparently resulted from a failure to view the scriptures comprehensively, a fact that has led to the overemphasis of one or other aspect of salvation. This overemphasis has led not only to the secession of this group from the mainstream church, but has also led to splitting within the Ahonoki movement itself.

It is apparent, therefore, that there is a need to view the scriptures more wholistically if a more comprehensive view of salvation is to be achieved. In our final section, comprising chapter seven, we, therefore, propose a perspective of viewing salvation as presented in the scriptures, which is our hope that it will lead to a more complete concept of salvation.

### Methodology

The Ahonoki movement, which is the subject of this study, is closely associated with the East African revival, a movement which swept the whole of East Africa about fifty years ago. Owing to their

noticeable concern with the idea of salvation, Christians who are revivalists are often given such descriptive names as Balokole (Luganda for "saved ones"); In Nyansa Province, the revivalists were referred to as Joreno, because they preached salvation through the blood of Christ. Among the Agikuyu in Central Province, these revivalists are often referred to as the Ahonoki (saved ones).

At first, the revival movement was within the Church. Owing to lack of consensus on some theological issues, however, some of the Ahonoki were forced to separate from the Anglican Church and form Independent Churches. We can, therefore, distinguish between the 'orthodox' Ahonoki, those who remained within the Church, and those who left the church to form their own independent Churches. In Nyansa Province, for example, 'Ahonoki' who seceded from the Anglican Church formed the Church of Christ in Africa. In Central Province too, some of the Ahonoki left the Anglican Church to form an independent movement. Members of this movement are to be found within Kiambu and Muranga districts of Central Province. It is these members, in Central Province, who are the subject of this study.

Apparently, this group is little known outside its own membership. This is mainly because they have deliberately tended to be secluded. They are non-committal, preferring not to give themselves a label or even to be registered with the government.<sup>15</sup> This reservedness of the group leads to certain problems to an enquirer who may wish to reconstruct its history and theology. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for an enquirer to be specific, particularly where numbers and other statistics are concerned.

In spite of this shortcoming, the conclusions reached about the

Ahonoki in this study are based on the observation of these people among whom the author has lived. During the period of fieldwork, which was preliminary to this study, the author was able to participate in worship services held weekly by these people. The research was limited to Kiambu District and particularly Kiambaa Division. The choice of Kiambu as the area of fieldwork was favoured because of its accessibility in view of the limited time available for the fieldwork. However, since members in Kiambu communicate with members from other districts, particularly Muranga, Nairobi and parts of Embu, it was felt that if we could assess the views of the members in Kiambu, they would be close to those held by members elsewhere.

In Kiambaa, we were able to identify three groups of the Ahonoki, who differed only in points of detail. One of the groups under the leadership of Francis Mungai,<sup>16</sup> does not allow its members to attend hospitals when sick.<sup>17</sup> A second group, under the leadership of Benjamin Mungai, allows its members to choose whether or not to go to hospital. Its members seemed to be more open to discussion than members of the other groups. A third group, under the leadership of Obadiah Nding'u, is apparently composed of the 'younger' members. On the whole, this group manifested the reservedness typical of the Ahonoki. We were not able to attend any of this group's worship services for we were told that they would not feel free if we participated. This view was explained to us by their leader who, himself was very helpful and open to discussion.

In our attempt to assess the conception of salvation held by these people, we participated in their worship services which are held



every week. We managed to attend five of the weekly services. Three of these were with Benjamin's group, while the other two were with Francis' group. It is in these meetings that we were able to observe the faith of the people in action. It is here that members made verbal expression of what they believed in and we could therefore come to some conclusions concerning the views of the Ahonoki in general.<sup>18</sup> The only problem here is that we could not take notes during the services because this would have embarrassed some of the sensitive members who might have felt that it was not in order for us to do so. Consequently, we made our notes later from memory.

Another method used for data collection was oral interviews. Unfortunately, here again, we came up against the major obstacle of reservedness. The author remembers being introduced to a member who, to all intents and purposes, looked like a promising informant. This informant, however, on the appointed day of the interview, claimed that after having prayed and thought about the issue, he had come to the conclusion that, so long as we were going to discuss the issue of his faith for academic purposes, he personally did not feel free to participate. He indicated, however, that after finishing what we were proposing to write we should come back so that we could discuss what his faith means to him and so that he could show us how we, too, could be saved. His silence was justified and it was an eloquent indication of the fact that, to him, salvation is a personal issue to be discussed only in the context of faith. This is the attitude which, as we have noted above, was displayed by Ndungu's group.

Fortunately, some members were, on the other hand, quite free to discuss their faith. The leaders were particularly helpful and in them the lay members felt that they were well represented and would often

refer us to the elders on some points, particularly regarding the history of the group. At first, we attempted to assess the views of the members by talking to them as a group after the services. This did not prove to be very helpful because, generally, the talking would be left to a few of the less reserved. It is these who were willing to discuss at length concerning their faith that we relied on. In total, we were able to interview twelve members, including the leaders of the three groups. These interviews were recorded on tape. Again we were able to interview only members from Benjamin's and Francis' groups. Five of the interviewees were from Francis' group while six were from Benjamin's group. We can therefore say that conclusions about the Ahonoki have been based both on participant observation and oral interviews.

There has also been an attempt to review the literature pertaining to the theology of salvation as presented in the Bible, as well as that pertaining to the Ahonoki movement. The latter is mainly about the East African revival movement, a phenomenon that has been very influential in the history of East African Christianity. This is the movement that led to the emergence of the Ahonoki who are the subject in this study. In spite of the significance of the East African revival, and its history, the literature describing it surprisingly small.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in order to supplement the oral sources on the history of the Ahonoki movement, we reviewed the material to be found in a few books and biographies. Some of the works we read were Roots of freedom, an autobiography of Bildad Kaggia and the African Pastor by E. N. Wanyoike. The latter book enlightened us to a certain extent on the origins of the revival and its spread in East Africa. It also tells us of how revival was received in Kenya by African Christians, particularly in Kiambu district. Wanyoike points out

that, initially, revival was received with mixed feelings by the clergy in the Anglican Church.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand it was regarded as a subversive and divisive factor in the church and was consequently rejected. On the other hand, some of the leaders, like the late Bishop Obadiah Kariuki, accepted the revival and furthered its interest within the Church.

Kaggia's autobiography, Roots of freedom brings us closer to the Abonoki in question. This is because Kaggia is cited as the founder member of this movement particularly in his home district, Murang'a. In addition to giving us some historical background to the revival movement as such, the book also enlightens us on the causative factors which led to the formation of Dini ya Kaggia which we call the Abonoki movement in this study. The book also sheds some light on the characteristics of the Abonoki who were his contemporaries. This helps us to understand the Abonoki's defining features today.

A third book is Encounter with the revivalists, by John Ndeti Somba. Here we find a compilation of 'testimonies' by several Abonoki from within the Church. Going through these testimonies gave us a general picture of the Abonoki's conception of salvation and revival. The booklet also contains a collection of criticisms directed at the revivalists by non-revivalists. One gets here the impression that the Abonoki have earned themselves some negative attitudes from non-members who may consider them as 'hypocrites' and divisive.<sup>21</sup>

A fourth work we read is that of Erasto Muga, African response to western Christian religion. This is a more academic work which attempts a sociological analysis of African separatist religious and political movements. The book discusses several independent churches and the causes for their separation. It portrays independency as a reaction by Africans

against some aspects of Christianity as introduced by European missionaries in East Africa. One particular Church, here linked with the East African revival is the Church of Christ in Africa. We can then conclude that revival itself was a reaction to the anglicized or europeanized version of Christianity.

This is the conclusion reached by F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot in their co-authored book, A place to feel at home. The Church of Christ in Africa is here again connected with the revival which is given as background of its secession. A similar conclusion is reached by W. B. Anderson in The Church in East Africa 1840-1974. He comes up with the idea that revivalism is a significant modification of "Kusoma Christianity", the version brought by Europeans which tended to be too intellectual.<sup>22</sup> It appears that all these writers are of the opinion that schism, revival, and independency are a reaction to the version of Christianity brought by European missionaries.

This is the suggestion also made by D. B. Barrett, in his Schism and renewal in Africa. The book is an analysis of six thousand independent church movements. It gives an excellent general over-view of the phenomenon of independency and revival. The book is particularly helpful where it analyzes the causative factors of schism and independency.

A short description of the revival fellowship is given in Kenya churches handbook, edited by D. B. Barrett. The article by George K. Manbo<sup>23</sup> gives us some historical background to the revival in its early stages and also describes it today. It also touches briefly on the theology of the fellowship.

It appears, however, that none of this literature focuses on the phenomenon of revival directly. The movement is often discussed only incidentally. There seems to be room for further description and discus-

ssion concerning the revival movement itself. We need to know more about its history, dynamics and theology. There is room, therefore, for a fuller discussion of revival itself as it is expressed both within and without the Church. In the current study, due to time limitation, we confine ourselves to a group of Christians that emerged as a result of the revival. We trace its history and discuss its central theological theme of salvation. It is our hope that this study will make some contribution however humble, to a wider discussion of the dynamics and theology of revival.

<sup>1</sup> P. G. Williams and E. A. Oso, *A History of the Church in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 120-121.

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

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Hoag, *African Responses to Western Christian Religion* (Baltimore: East African Literature Series, 1978), p. XIII.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 3 of this study regarding Egbe's teaching and the birth of a new church; the objectives he postulated for the formation of the new church reflect that the issues were both sociological and theological.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett, *Religion and Revival in Africa*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance the discussion of the emergence of Pentecostalism in Nigerian Church History in Elaine Scott, *The Religious Experience of Nigeria* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981) pp. 223-224.

<sup>10</sup> Causes for this 'aloofness' are explained in Chapter 3 of this study where we discuss the history of the Synod.

<sup>11</sup> Leaders from the various areas and districts held joint prayer meetings particularly during the big Christian Events like Easter and Christmas. The leaders from the various districts meet more often.

<sup>12</sup> See the list of oral interviews at the end of the study.

<sup>13</sup> A description of a typical prayer meeting is to be found in

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Mbiti, "Diversity, division, and denominationalism;" in David B. Barrett, ed., Kenya churches handbook: the development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973. (Kisumu: Evangel publishing house, 1975), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> David B. Barrett, Schism and renewal in Africa: an analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Bengt Sundkler, Bantu prophets in South Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 295.

<sup>6</sup> F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, A place to feel at home (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 132-145.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Erasto Muga, African response to western Christian religion (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), p. 212.

<sup>10</sup> See chapter 3 of this study regarding Kagga's teaching and the birth of a new church: the objectives he postulates for the formation of the new church reflect that the causes were both sociological and theological.

<sup>11</sup> Barrett, Schism and renewal in Africa p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance the discussion of the emergence of Protestantism in European Church History in Ninian Smart, The Religious experience of mankind (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1969) pp. 569-581.

<sup>15</sup> Causes for this 'aloofness' are explained in Chapter 3 of this study where we discuss the history of the Ahonoki.

<sup>16</sup> Members from the various areas and districts hold joint-prayer meetings particularly during the big Christian feasts like Easter and Christmas. The leaders from the various districts meet more often.

<sup>17</sup> See the list of oral interviewees at the end of the study.

<sup>18</sup> A description of a typical prayer meeting is to be found in

Chapter 3 of this study concerning the historical background of the Ahonoki. In the meetings, there is time set apart for the members to give personal testimonies and to share their experience with other members. From these verbal expressions of the members' faith, we were able to reach certain conclusions about what the Ahonoki believe in and how they view salvation.

<sup>19</sup>Barrett, Kenya churches handbook p. 117.

<sup>20</sup>See E. N. Wanyoike, An African pastor (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974), Chapter 6.

<sup>21</sup>John Ndeti Somba, Encounter with the revivalists, (Kijabe: Kesho publications, n.d.), pp. 15-22.

<sup>22</sup>W. B. Anderson, The Church in East Africa, 1840-1974 (Dodoma: Central Tanganyika press, 1977), p. 127.

<sup>23</sup>Barrett, Kenya churches handbook p. 166.

## CHAPTER II

### SALVATION: A LINGUISTIC AND ETMOLOGICAL

#### BACKGROUND

#### The language of salvation in the Bible

Some religious scholars are of the opinion that, basically, all religion is preoccupied with the human condition. It is an attempt by man to assess and deal with the problems, and mysteries that assail the human being. Religion is, in this sense, an anthropocentric concern. Man has assessed the human condition and is convinced that it is not what it ought to be; something is wrong or has gone wrong. Consequently, he has speculated on whether there can be ways out of this human predicament. Salvation, therefore, becomes a central issue in man's religious endeavour. The Hindus, for instance, think that the miserable human condition is a result of a mistake on man's side. Man is seen as having made an error of identity on his side. He had assumed that he is an individual being or soul outside the world soul (Brahman). He immediately began the vicious circle of birth and rebirth (samsara) into miserable lives here on earth. For the Hindu, the rectification of this predicament (moksha) or salvation) can only be attained when man reorients himself and rediscovers his oneness with the universal world soul, Brahman. Salvation becomes a matter of realization by the individual soul (Atman) that he is essentially the same with Brahman, and not an individual, as he is illusioned to believe.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of salvation is of central significance in biblical religion as well. E. M. B. Green, in his book, The meaning of salvation,



points out that the faith of the Israelites can be summed up in one credal statement: "Yahweh saves."<sup>3</sup> Salvation is indeed not only a central theme in the Old Testament but is also the core of the New Testament message. It is taught throughout the New Testament that Jesus saves men. This is both the message and the experienced fact to which the apostles attested in their proclamation.

It is the aim of this study to explore the Christian conception of salvation, especially as it is understood by a group of Christians who claim to have experienced this salvation in a special way, to the extent that they have earned themselves the title Ahonoki (saved ones). This claim, to be saved, has at times earned these Christians some unpleasant attitudes from their fellow Christians who may think of them as fanatics, or even contemporary Pharisees. They, on the other hand, have tended to look down on the others as, apparently, nominal Christians, and have accused them of being shallow in their faith. In fact, they have tended to equate Christianity with being saved. It is not rare to hear someone say in the same breath, "I am a Christian, I am saved". The question arises, therefore, as to the origin of this variant interpretation of what salvation means. Could it be a result of misinterpreting or a piece-meal interpretation of the scriptures?

Put in other words, to what extent is the Christian who claims to be saved reflecting the biblical tradition of what salvation is all about? To be able to arrive at a possible solution to this question, it is necessary to have a closer look at the terminology involved in the expression of the concept of salvation. This will call for examining what the terms mean in the biblical cultural context as well as what they might mean when translated into Greek, and finally, in Kikuyu.

This is in order to determine what they mean in their original context, and how well the recipient languages, namely, Greek and Kikuyu, have translated the nuances and the connotations of the words.

This is bearing in mind the fact that words and their meanings are, to a great extent, determined by the culture in which they are used, such that, a word may denote one thing in one culture and connote something entirely different in another cultural context. To take a biblical example, the term "flesh", when used in the Bible, may appear at first sight to refer to meat and muscles, (as opposed to bones, for example). The term flesh, however, is used in the Bible mainly to refer to the body as a whole. When Jesus, for instance, sympathizes with the disciples claiming that "the flesh is weak" (Mk. 14:38), he is using the term "flesh" in this wider sense. A translator of such a phrase into his language may have to abandon the term "flesh" altogether in his translation if the term does not bear the same connotation, and look for a word which will convey the meaning more accurately.

That words and their meanings are greatly influenced by the cultural context in which they are used is well illustrated by the case of Alice in wonderland. Having crossed the frontiers into a different cultural context, she is continually confused when she used words from her own culture and is completely misunderstood. Consider her conversation with the Hatter on the topic of time:

Alice sighed wearily, "I think I can do something better with time than wasting it, asking riddles without answers."

"If you knew time as well as I do, you would not talk about wasting it; its him." "I don't know what you mean," said Alice.

"Of course not", said the Hatter, "I dare say you never even spoke to Time."

"Perhaps not," Alice said cautiously, "but I know I have to beat time when I learn music." "That accounts for it, he won't stand beating."<sup>4</sup>

It is apparent from this passage that a word may be the same and yet mean something very different to different people depending on the cultural context in which the word is used. Alice and the Hatter could be using the same word, time, but they mean entirely different things.

It is bearing this limitation of language in mind that we proceed to explore the linguistic background to the term salvation and related metaphors, especially in their biblical context to try and determine their contextual overtones, with the aim of seeing how well their meaning is translated in the Kikuyu context.

As already stated, biblical religion conveys the message that Yahweh saves. The saving work of God has been described in a series of images and metaphors, the most common of which are redemption, justification, atonement, including the idea of salvation itself. If we are to understand the idea which these images seek to convey, it becomes necessary to examine the meanings of these terms in the context of biblical culture to see their relationship to the concept they are trying to express.

The word "salvation" in the New Testament is used to translate a number of Old Testament terms, notably yasha, yeshua, and yesha. The word yasha, and its cognates, has the basic meaning of "bringing to a spacious environment where one is at one's ease, free to develop without hindrance."<sup>5</sup> The term therefore comes to mean deliverance from oppressive situations or environments. In the process of salvation, there is always a third party, the deliverer, who comes to intervene for the oppressed. The latter is deemed helpless in the face of the oppressor. In this use of the term yasha, and related words, it is apparent that, salvation as deliverance is a matter of personal relations:

Deliverance, help and salvation come in favour of persons in situations which are often brought about by the hostile intent of other persons. Deliverance is often through the interventions of persons and only rarely through technical means.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note also that the term salvation, as used in the Old Testament, has a positive element as well, that of liberation. The sense of 'roominess' implied in the use of the term yasha implies that deliverance is also a freeing process, especially when the term is contrasted with the term tsarar, being hemmed in,<sup>7</sup> meaning, not free. The term, therefore, means "rescuing from danger or trouble," and also refers to the more positive notion of liberation - and freedom.

The Old Testament points out the fact that Yahweh alone is the author of all deliverance. Even when he sends intermediaries to save on his behalf, Hebrews generally acknowledged that, ultimately, it was Yahweh who saved. This fact is noted, for example, by Hosea who reminds Israel that outside Yahweh there is no salvation: "O Israel, if I destroy you, who can save you. Where is your king? Why don't you call him for help?" (Hos. 13:10f).

The paradigm of of this God's saving activity is the Exodus event where Israelites were delivered by divine intervention from the oppressive yoke of Egypt (Ex. 14:30, Dt. 26:5-9). This historical deliverance is a work attributed entirely to God. The saving activity of God, however, did not end with the Exodus event, but was constantly manifested in the day to day deliverances which his people experienced in concrete, historical and existential situations. <sup>For the</sup> Hebrews, salvation was mainly seen as a this worldly experience, because God is portrayed as performing his saving acts within history.

In this context, victory in war is viewed by Hebrews as a mani-

festation of the work of God. When David demolishes the neighbouring tribes, the victory is not viewed as emanating from his efforts; It is the Lord who "gave David victory wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:14).

In fact, the salvation achieved by Yahweh is often pictorially described as victory over the primeval dragon of chaos (Ps. 65:5-9). It is through victory that God makes known his salvation. The association of salvation and victory is also evident in the fact that the same term yasha can be used to designate either victory or salvation. There is always a note of victory in all the references to salvation.

Salvation is also seen in terms of vindication. In secular usage, salvation may be seen as an intervention on behalf of the weaker party, especially in legal disputes. In this sense, salvation is seen against the background of judgement. Not only does God rescue the oppressed, he also vindicates their cause by judging in their favour and against the oppressor. His saving activity is seen as a vindication for his people. Here we see the correlation between God's being righteous and being a saviour.<sup>9</sup>

God's salvific work is also seen in terms of his assuring the general wellbeing of his people. Deliverance means peace, from physical as well as spiritual foes that assail man. When the psalmist prays for salvation, he prays to be preserved from death, from the pangs of Sheol, tears, and stumbling (Ps. 116).

In short it can be said that in the Old Testament, salvation is mainly a historical experience whose content is seen in terms of victory, vindication and deliverance from all oppressive situations which hinder the general well-being of the people. This salvation is seen, however, solely as a work of God to the extent that it is difficult to talk of salvation in entirely secular terms. This is because, even when the people

experience salvation through human agencies, these are seen as intermediaries, or vehicles that convey Yahweh's salvation. He is therefore seen as the ultimate source of salvation, big or small.

### The term "salvation" in Greek and Kikuyu

In the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, the different Hebrew words for "to save" are rendered as sozein, while the noun salvation is rendered soteria. The noun, saviour, is rendered soter. In secular usage, the noun soteria and related terms basically means "an acutely dynamic act, in which gods or men snatch others from serious peril."<sup>10</sup> The term may also be used to refer to deliverance from judicial condemnation. The verb sozein is also used to refer to the healing of disease.

The use of the verb sozein and the term yesha differ in so far as the former does not imply that the saviour need be stronger than the one being saved, unlike in the Hebrew usage of the term yasha where one can only be saved by a powerful agent. The Greek usage can conceive of a person saving himself. Neither is the element of danger necessary in the use of the term sozein. This is because, although generally the term can be used to imply rescue rather than deliverance, it can also be used to imply keeping alive, safe, healthy or the maintainance of the well-being of the object both physical and spiritual.

In their religious usage, the terms sozein and soteria are similar to the terms used in the Hebrew Old Testament. Salvation from all perils of life is expected from the gods. Unlike in the Hebrew thought, where only God is regarded as saviour, in the Greek thought, the gods are not the only source of salvation and even rulers can play the role of saviour (soter).

In the Greek New Testament, we find that the term sozein occurs frequently. It is used in the purely secular sense of rescuing from physical danger as in the incident of the stilling of the storm (Lk. 8:24). The term is also frequently used to refer to physical healing and is often used in descriptions of the healing episodes like the curing of the Samaritan leper (Lk. 17:19), the man with a withered hand (Mk. 3:4), and the blind Bartimeus (Mk. 10:52). In these stories, the use of the verb sozein emphasizes the fact that when Jesus heals, he heals the person as a whole rather than just a particular part of the body. The cure is often followed by the characteristic statement, "Your faith has saved you". This implies that Jesus' saving-healing activity affects the whole person and changes him for the better. In this connection, it is of interest to note, for example, that in Luke, the statement, "Your faith has saved you", is used with reference to a repentant sinner (Lk. 7:40). In general then, we can say that the Gospel usage of sozein and its cognates, is similar to the Old Testament usage of the terminology of salvation, especially in their emphasis on the historical, this worldly reality of salvation, which can be seen through healing, forgiveness and exorcisms, among others. A point of significance to note here, however, is that in the New Testament, salvation is envisaged as coming or being accomplished through the person, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Most of the references are to Jesus as saviour and only a few texts refer to God as saviour. This is a significant development from the Hebrew conception where Yahweh is portrayed as the sole source of salvation.

Another point of importance to note is that, in the New Testament, it is Paul who gives a particularly spiritual sense to the usage of the term salvation. He seems to delimit the use of the terms sozein

and soteria entirely to the relationship between God and man. For him, salvation consists not so much of deliverance from physical problems as from the slavery of sin, and the wrath of God.

In Kikuyu, the terms sozein and soteria, 'to save' and 'salvation', respectively, have been rendered as kuhonokia and uhonokio. The noun soter is rendered muhonokia. In ordinary day to day usage, the passive verb kuhonoka has the implication of having escaped from acute physical injury and, in this sense, is a good translation of the term esother as used in secular Greek. For example, if somebody is almost knocked down by a car, people exclaim, "Ahonoka ciarera", meaning, "He had a narrow escape". It is noteworthy that in this context, there need not be a third party to help the subject escape. In other words, as opposed to the Old Testament usage of the term yasha, the use of kuhonoka does not necessitate a saviour.

There are, however, cases where a third party may come to the rescue of one in peril, and here, the active verb kuhonokia is used. If, for example, one is being beaten up by thugs and the police come to his rescue, it will be said of him; "Arahonokirio ni borithi", that is to say, "He was saved by the police". We note here that although by saving the person, the police is in effect his saviour, nevertheless, he will not refer to the police with the title saviour. As Professor Mbiti points out:

Such a person acted that way i.e. rescuing somebody in danger because of the particular moment of emergency. Once the act is over, he does not continue in the capacity of 'saving'. Therefore he cannot earn the title of saviour (muhonokia). There are no traditional saviours or redeemers.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, it is rare for the term muhonokia to be used in ordinary day to day usage. There are no people to whom one can appeal for sal-



vation, and the active verb kuhonokia (to save) is used as occasion may arise. In other words, it is never used outside concrete incidents of escape or rescue.

One could also point out that the term kuhonokia is narrow. Whereas it carries over the Greek meaning of the term sozein, "to come to the rescue of", it misses the positive dimension of the Hebrew term yasha and its implication of freedom and liberation. The term kuhonokia carries no such implication.

Another point of significance to note is that, in the New Testament, especially in the healing stories, the verb sozein is not translated with the verb kuhonokia as one would expect, but rather, it is translated with a different verb, kuhonia. This verb is normally used to refer to the act of bringing one back to health after one has been sick. The disease need not be a very serious one for the term kuhonia or kuhona to be used. Hence, the term is slightly different from the term kuhonokia, which always implies an element of danger.

When one compares the use of the term salvation in Hebrew, Greek and Kikuyu, there are a few points of significance that emerge. In the first place, in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, salvation is almost exclusively the function of God. In Kikuyu, however, the term for salvation and the verb to save need not be used in relation to God at all. In the Old Testament, it is difficult to detect any secular usage of the term salvation. It is therefore noteworthy that the term kuhonoka has come to acquire specifically religious overtones, especially owing to Christian influence. The term has come to have almost theological or religious connotations such that when one often hears "Ng'amia niarahonokire", that "so and so got saved", the immedi-

ate reaction is one of awe. One does not ask from what was so and so saved, for the immediate picture one gets is that of a special group of Christians who are extra religious and pious. It appears then that there has been a significant development of what the Kikuyu understand by the term kuhonoka.

Not only has the meaning of the term kuhonoka expanded, but it also seems that the Kikuyus' conception of salvation has developed. This is because the idea of salvation which is not absent from African religious thought, is, however, understood as a this - worldly experience. It is mainly to do with immediate physical dangers. Salvation, as Mbiti points out, is not "just an abstraction, it is concrete, told in terms of both what has happened and is likely to be encountered by people as they go through daily experience."<sup>12</sup> There are hardly any expectations of an eschatological heaven. Neither is there any apparent relationship between salvation and sin. It is, therefore, once more noteworthy that salvation has come to be seen in terms of conversion from sin. Today, a 'saved' person will explain that he is saved from sin and therefore he knows where he is going to - heaven. These two elements, the association of salvation with sin, and a hope of going to heaven are entirely new dimensions to the Kikuyus' understanding of salvation which seem to have been added by Christian evangelization.

#### Salvation as redemption

In the Bible, the salvific work of God for man has been expressed through a number of images, notably, redemption, justification and atonement. These are images by which the biblical authors have endeavoured to illuminate the idea of salvation. It is also necessary, therefore,

to examine the meaning of these images to see what they contribute to the biblical understanding of salvation, and to what extent their metaphorical meaning can be translated into Kikuyu.

The most frequently used metaphor in relation to salvation is that of redemption. Basically, this is a legal term which provides the biblical writers with an image that helps them express God's saving activity towards men. As a metaphor, redemption essentially means the act of buying back, by the payment of a price or an equivalent substitute, something or someone who has been subject to alienation.<sup>13</sup>

In the English Bible, the term redemption is used to render three Hebrew words, padha, gaal, and kopher. The fundamental idea in all these words is that of buying back or ransoming. The term padha is mainly used when the object of redemption is a person or other living things. In secular usage, it denoted the buying with an equivalent the release of something or someone from bondage. For example, if a Hebrew bondswoman, who has become the master's concubine, ceases to please him, he must not sell her but allow her to be redeemed.<sup>14</sup> There is also a legal obligation to Hebrews to set apart their first-born for Yahweh unless they are ransomed.<sup>15</sup> The term padha is apparently a more general and objective term for redemption and it implies nothing concerning the one performing the act, or his obligation to do so.

Where the word gaal is used, however, it is closely related to family solidarity. It denotes primarily the action of the next of kin to recover the property of a kinsman, or to purchase his freedom if he has fallen into slavery. This use of the term redemption is, for instance, found in the book of Leviticus:

If your brother becomes poor, and sells part of his property, then his next of kin shall come and redeem what his brother has sold (Lev. 25:25).

This law seems to be the one in operation in the case of Jeremiah and his kinsman Hanamel. The latter comes to Jeremiah with the request, "Buy my field which is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours" (Jer. 32:8). Jeremiah is legally obliged to redeem this land precisely because of his relationship to his cousin.

The metaphor of redemption which comes to mean the act of delivering a person or thing from bondage of one sort or another, becomes also an appropriate image to express God's saving activity towards man, an image which, set against the background of Hebrew law has a vividness difficult to comprehend by someone with a different cultural background.

This metaphor is frequently applied when Hebrews refer to God as their Go'el, (Redeemer). It is used to describe Yahweh's deliverance of his people from Egypt (Ex. 6:6). The image is also a favourite one with Deutero-Isaiah when he describes God's deliverance of his people from the Babylonian captivity.<sup>16</sup> The term ga'al (redemption) is in these contexts preferred to padha because of its personal connotations. It points to the fact that God, being the Israelites' greatest kinsman by virtue of his covenant with them, is obliged to redeem them when they become alienated in slavery or captivity and, by natural extension, when they fall into sin or trouble of any kind.

The metaphor of redemption is used to emphasize two factors in God's salvific work. First, it lays emphasis on the fact that salvation flows from divine initiative, for redemption is an objective action, done on behalf of man. Secondly, the metaphor emphasizes the

element of costliness in the process of saving. Salvation is not a trifling matter that God accomplishes by the waving of the hand. It involves effort in terms of divine might and love.

A similar metaphor underlies the New Testament usage of the term lutron and its cognates. The word lutron and the verb lutro translates the Hebrew term kopher. In English, it is translated as ransom, denoting primarily the price paid for the emancipation of a slave. In Greek, the term agorazein is a more general term referring to the buying in a market. This word is used in a few cases to supplement the use of the term lutron.

Here again we note that the metaphor is used to emphasize the costliness of salvation. St. Paul, for instance, continually exhorts Christians not to fall back into the slavery of sin, death, and the law from which they have been emancipated or bought back.<sup>17</sup> The noun lutron itself is used by Jesus with reference to himself. He claims that "the son of man came to give himself as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45).

Apparently, he interpreted his life and death in terms of their effecting a redemption for the lost. The New Testament, therefore is in continuity with the Old Testament in its emphasis on the costliness of salvation. This time however, the costliness of salvation is seen in terms of the 'cross' or the death of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ is seen as effecting a redemption in so far as it frees people from the bondage of sin and the barriers affecting man's relationship with God. The metaphor of redemption, in this context, should be recognized as such and not be interpreted in the substitutionary terms which it suggests. Taken in its figurative sense, the metaphor of redemption does its duty of emphasizing the objective aspect of salvation and the costliness

of the whole process. In short, the ransom-redemption metaphor points out the fact that God does something objectively to save man from his predicament and that this act is not trivial but "springs from costly grace".<sup>18</sup>

In Kikuyu, the noun redemption is translated as ukuuri. This abstract noun is rarely used. The commoner term is mukuuri (redeemer). This term has come to be almost exclusively used with reference to Jesus. As far as one can gather, the linguistic denotation of the verb gukuura is to pull out. For instance, gukuura igego is to pull out a tooth; gukuura miti is to pull up trees. It is difficult to make a clear connection between this secular use of the term and its theological use. Nevertheless, the noun "redeemer" is frequently used. This is a significant fact in view of the fact that the legal code, not to mention the slave economy presupposed by the use of the metaphor of redemption, are virtually unknown in the Kikuyu context. One can, however, concede that the idea of redemption implied by the use of the term go'el may be exemplified in a relatively new phenomenon in the Kikuyu context. This is the phenomenon of court cases, whereby a relative is obliged to pay the fine on behalf of his kinsman if the latter has become convicted. The law that leads one to act on behalf of a fellow kinsman is enshrined in the kinship system that embraces not only immediate relatives but also members of a whole clan. This family solidarity is similar to the one in Hebrew culture, which leads to the law obliging members of a family to act on each others behalf as 'redeemer'. In this context, the meaning of the metaphor would not be entirely lost, although some of its vividness would be lost.

## Salvation as justification

Another metaphor used to elucidate the concept of salvation, particularly in the New Testament is that of justification. In the Pauline writings, this term is almost used as a synonym for salvation, especially when salvation is viewed as a past event.<sup>19</sup> What did the biblical writers wish to express by talking of salvation in terms of justification?

The background for the Pauline, and indeed, the New Testament usage of the term justification is the Old Testament. The terminology of justification is used against the Old Testament usage of the word sedek with its cognates. Basically, this word translates as righteousness. It is of significance to note here that in Hebrew thought, righteousness is not merely synonymous with being "morally right" as is commonly understood. Righteousness in Hebrew thought is primarily a matter of conformity to the standards of a given situation or relationship.<sup>20</sup> In this context, a righteous man is the one who conforms to the standard set for him in his social context. He is the one who is in the right whether legally (Ex. 23:7, Deut. 25:1) or in any other context (I Sam. 25:11). To be righteous then is to be blameless, innocent from guilt in any context, whether legal, moral, or religious.

In the context of the divine-human relationship, a righteous man is conceived as the one who is blameless in God's sight. This is the person who has met the standard set for him by God. In effect, this came to mean conformity to the law as God's standard for man. Righteousness is also expected from God in his capacity as judge and law-giver. One of the functions of a righteous judge was to implement justice. This would involve vindicating the innocent and condemning the guilt (Ex. 23:7,

IK. 8:32).

Against this background, justification as a divine act is often understood forensically. As a judge, God is expected to justify the innocent and condemn the guilty. It is mostly in this juridical sense that Paul uses the term justification. We observe that he uses as a synonym for "to justify" (dikaio), "to reckon as righteous," or "not to reckon sin" (Rom. 4:2). We can concede therefore that the fundamental meaning of the verb "to justify" (dikaio) and the noun justification (dikaiosis or dikaion), as used by Paul, is to "recognize as right," or "to declare not guilty". The terms tell us little of the actual righteousness of the person so treated or declared righteous. In so far as the person may not actually be righteous, the term justification implies acquittal and forgiveness. This is the usage in which the New Testament abounds.<sup>21</sup> "To justify" therefore is not synonymous with "to sanctify". It does not mean, "to make someone ethically better".

This however is the meaning we get when the verb to justify is translated into Kikuyu. Apparently, there is no synonym for this term in Kikuyu.<sup>22</sup> For this reason, the legal idea of acquittal may be difficult to express. The verb "to justify" has been translated in the Kikuyu Bible with a phrase "gutua athingu". Compare the Kikuyu translation of Romans 5:1 "Ni undu ucio, kuona ati ni tutuitwo athingu ni undu wa gwitikia-ri... (Therefore, since we have been justified by faith...)"'. The phrase "gutua athingu" is not an adequate translation of the term "to justify", because, as it stands, it implies being made pure or holy. If the phrase were to be re-translated back into English, it would end up as "to sanctify" rather than "to justify". Apparently, the translators have failed to convey the idea of acquittal and forgiveness as implied



by the court metaphor of justification.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the term justification and its implication of forgiveness however, it presents the possibility of setting broken relationships right. This leads us to another dimension of salvation expressed in another metaphor, that of reconciliation or atonement.

### Salvation as atonement

Throughout the Bible, especially where salvation is seen as deliverance from sin, salvation is expressed in terms of atonement. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word kapper, and its derivatives is used to signify the act of 'atonement' itself, as well as the resultant reconciliation. Etymologically, the term kapper means to cover or to obliterate. In the biblical context then, the term is used to indicate the act of covering or removing sin and its effects. Often, the ritual act of atonement is associated with the shedding of a victim's blood, and thus shades into the idea of sacrifice.

In the New Testament, although the term 'atonement' itself is rare, the idea is present. It is completely centred around the person and death of Jesus Christ. The New Testament portrays the idea that the death of Jesus has an atoning effect. It is the basis of man's reconciliation with God, from whom he has been estranged by sin. This fact is attested to, for example, in Paul's letter to the Romans:

If when we were yet enemies because of our sins, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:10).

The main Greek terminology for rendering the Hebrew word kapper is the verb katallazo and the noun katallage, which are translated in English as "to reconcile" and "reconciliation," respectively. The use of

the term presupposes alienation and estrangement between man and God. On man's side, this estrangement is the direct result of his rebellion which can only provoke divine wrath from a God who is moral and just and, therefore, cannot be indifferent to sin. This estrangement, as the New Testament points out, is bridged by the cross. The metaphor of atonement therefore indicates a restoration of personal relationship between God and man. We note in passing here that reconciliation, like redemption, springs from divine initiative. It is God, we are told, who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). As such, reconciliation is an objective reality. Man is, however, called upon to respond to this reconciling initiative of God, evident in the death of his Son on the cross. It is in this context that Paul exhorts his Corinthian audience to be penitent and be reconciled to God in return (2 Cor. 5:20).

In the Kikuyu context, the term 'to reconcile' is translated as kuiguithania, a term which presupposes the estrangement of two parties. Kuiguithania implies a reunion of these two parties. A similar word used, particularly in the Old Testament, to refer to the ritual act of atonement is the verb kuhorohia (noun, horohio). This term implies reconciliation where an external means may be used to remove the cause of estrangement or the obstacle to reconciliation. This usually means the ceremonial killing of a goat in sacrifice. For example, in the Kikuyu culture, if a member of an age-group misbehaves by committing "fornication", his agemates do not accept him back until he ceremonially offers a goat and, in so doing, he is reconciled to them.<sup>24</sup> The term kuhorohia was also used for the ritual atoning of God when it was thought that he was angry or annoyed. For instance, in a case where a

person may be struck by lightning, it was assumed that he had angered God in some way. In such a case:

A sheep was slaughtered in the place where the lightning came to earth. With its stomach contents, the man struck by the lightning was washed for purification. The living and the dead will together try to propitiate kuhorohia the god, who in his wrath has struck down one of their members. The sacrifice has to soothe him so that no more of his anger will come upon the family group.<sup>25</sup>

This term kuhorohia, therefore, best translates the ritual acts of atonement, especially in the Old Testament. This Old Testament notion of salvation is one that finds adequate expression in Kikuyu terms. When the metaphor is used to include the God-man relationship, it would be well understood by the Kikuyus. Care should be taken, however, not to imply with the metaphor that atonement is a process by means of which God is placated or bribed to ignore sin. This nuance is strong, particularly in the term kuhorohia which implies that one party is angry with the other. If we are to do justice to the Christian conception of God, who is basically portrayed as loving, we should take care not to imply that we are trying to appease him. The biblical message is that it is in fact God who initiates the reconciliation process. He is ready to forgive the sinner and does not have to wait for a sacrifice to affect his attitude towards sin.

In conclusion, therefore, it is important to point out that as is apparent from the foregoing analysis, the term salvation is not a word that can be translated by the use of a single synonym.<sup>26</sup> It carries various connotations and can be viewed from various angles. Whereas basically it means deliverance or liberation, it can also have other meanings which other metaphors seek to elucidate. When salvation is viewed as liberation from bondage or slavery, it is expressed in terms

of redemption, where it is essentially seen as vindication and forgiveness, the legal metaphor of justification is used. When salvation seems to imply a reunion between God and man, the metaphor of atonement is used.

All these metaphors seek to clarify the concept of salvation, and therefore we can say that salvation is all these, redemption, justification and reconciliation. It is not any of these in isolation but involves them all. We have also seen how some of the metaphors do not seem to carry the right nuances into Kikuyu. There seems to be room therefore, for a more dynamic translation where words close in meaning to the biblical ones should be sought. Otherwise, like Alice in Wonderland, we will find the metaphors confusing rather than clarifying the idea of salvation which they are supposed to elucidate. We may find ourselves using the same words but understanding very different things.

It is bearing in mind this linguistic and etymological background to the term 'salvation' that we proceed to examine the Ahonoki's conception of salvation. As Christianized Kikuyus, their conception is based upon the translated biblical concept. How well, does their conception correspond to the biblical idea of salvation? Meanwhile, however, we first try to define who the Ahonoki are by tracing their history and examining their characteristic features in chapter three, before we analyse their conception of salvation in chapter four.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Bowker, Problems of suffering in religions of the world (London, Cambridge University Press, 1973). In this book, the author portrays religion as an attempt by man to deal with the problems that besiege him. He also shows how most religions speculate on the means of salvation by which man can escape from his predicament.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 196 f.

<sup>3</sup>E. M. B. Green, The meaning of salvation (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>J. F. Wallwork, Language and linguistics (London, 1972), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Green, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological dictionary of the New Testament (Vol. 7). p. 973. S. V. Salvation.

<sup>7</sup>Green, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>See below, salvation as justification.

<sup>9</sup>See Psalms 76:9, 54:1, 72:1.

<sup>10</sup>Kittel, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>John Mbiti, "The African experience of salvation" in Living faith and ultimate goals, ed. by S. J. Samartha (Geneva, 1974), p. 113.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Wheeler Robinson, Redemption and justification (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1960), p. 219.

<sup>14</sup>See Exodus 21:8.

<sup>15</sup>Exodus 13:13.

<sup>16</sup>See Isaiah 41:14, 43:1, 44:6, 49:7.

<sup>17</sup>See Romans 5:8 f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1.

<sup>18</sup>Green, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>19</sup>Romans 1:16; 5:8; 10:10.

<sup>20</sup>In this connection, it is not surprising to note that in the Old Testament, the term sedek (righteousness) is applied to things such as weights (Dt. 25:15, Lev. 19:36, Job. 31:6) and sacrifices (Dt. 33:19; Ps. 4:6; 5:2). In these contexts, a 'righteous weight' is the one which is what it is supposed to be, while a righteous sacrifice is the one

## CHAPTER III

which conforms to cultic standards. Mostly however, righteousness in the Old Testament is measured by the standards of the law. Hence, the term comes to mean conduct that conforms to the law. In this context, righteousness is often opposed to sinfulness and wickedness.

<sup>21</sup>See Romans 8:33; 3:2, 5:1; Galatians 3:6, 5:2.

In all these contexts, it is apparent that by justification or the verb to justify, Paul is talking about a divine act, in which, God as a judge passes a favourable verdict of acquittal and forgiveness upon men. This time, he accounts men as righteous not on the grounds of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. (Gal. 3:11). The emphasis in all these contexts is on justification as a process of acquittal and forgiveness of sinful men.

<sup>22</sup>This is probably because of the fact that courts as we know them today were absent in the Kikuyu traditional culture.

<sup>23</sup>In this connection, one can suggest the following terms as translations for the term justification.

(a) Kuherwo or gukirirwo - to be forgiven

(b) Kurekererio - to be set free.

These two terms suggest the idea of acquittal and forgiveness implicit in the term justification, more than the phrase "gutua athingu" which means "to make pure or holy".

<sup>24</sup>See Jomo Kenyatta, Facing mount Kenya (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 7th edition, 1978), pp. 159-100.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>26</sup>For a graphic summary of the terminology of salvation discussed in this chapter, see appendix I.

## CHAPTER III

### THE AHONOKI MOVEMENT: ITS HISTORY AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

#### The Church in East Africa before the Revival

The term Ahonoki (saved ones) is closely associated with a significant phenomenon that has greatly influenced Christianity on the African scene. The phenomenon is often referred to as the East African Revival which, like a flood, swept the whole of East Africa about fifty years ago. This phenomenon has also been referred to as Ruandaism because it started in Ruanda, a country that today borders Uganda to the west. It is the purpose of this chapter to sketch briefly the history of the movement and its connection with the Ahonoki movement today. In order to understand the revival movement, however, it is necessary to go a few steps backwards in time and have a look at Christianity on the East Africa scene before the revival, so that we can see what in fact precipitated it.

Christianity came to Africa long before it went to Europe. Some African countries like Egypt and Ethiopia can be cited as examples of early Christianity in Africa. Christianity did, however, penetrate the rest of Africa, South of the Sahara, only with the coming of the European era of exploration and colonization, particularly during the nineteenth century. It has also been said that the greatest agent in this process was the missionary explorer

and settler.<sup>1</sup>

The penetration of the whites into Africa was geared towards two goals. The primary concern of the Europeans was to expand their territory by bringing as many peoples as possible under their imperial wings. Secondly, the colonialists, particularly the missionaries, also came with the aim of civilizing Africa.

In the case of Kenya, although the people at the coast had encountered Christianity from Portuguese explorers as early as 1498, it was only with the dawn of the era of missions, from 1844, that Christianity began to penetrate the Kenyan interior. The first missionaries inland were Dr. Ludwig Krapf and John Rebmann. These were Lutheran missionaries working under the sponsorship of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.). Initially, Krapf had attempted to work as a missionary in Abyssinia among the Gallas. This earlier effort had failed and he therefore sought and obtained permission from the C.M.S. to try and approach this people from the Southern base of Mombasa. Later, John Rebmann joined him and together they established the first missionary station at Rabai in the hinterland of Mombasa.<sup>2</sup>

It is David Livingstone, however, who gave the impetus to the missionary invasion in East Africa. Livingstone had been working as a missionary explorer in Central Africa. In his journeys of exploration, he had encountered what he considered the chief obstacle



to Africa's civilization, namely, the evil of slave trade. He felt that this, together with poverty and ignorance, was a great hindrance to civilization. He consequently pioneered a programme by which he felt that civilization could be brought to Africa. This Livingstonian programme is what has come to be referred to as the three Cs, namely, Commerce, Colonization and Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In 1857, he sent an appeal for missionary settlers from home.<sup>4</sup>

After this period, particularly also due to the Berlin Conference which demarcated Africa to various colonial powers in 1844, various agents were sent out to Africa.<sup>5</sup> These included the alien government, the settler and the missionary. They all came with the aim, not only of furthering the imperial interests of their respective countries, but also, particularly with the missionary settler, to win Africa for Christ. As one writer has pointed out, missionaries of all nationalities were eager

to make native peoples German, British, Italian, Belgian as the case may be, and the expansionists of all countries let no opportunity slip to employ missionaries dead or alive to advance the kingdom, not only of God but of nationalism and economic power overseas. The C.M.S. supplied money to the British East African Company to help it remain in Uganda.<sup>6</sup>

The spread of Christianity continued as an influx of missionaries set in during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In East Africa, Christianity was initially spread by Protestant denominations, particularly the Anglicans and the German Lutherans. By 1877, Christianity

had also reached Uganda. Catholic Christians came into Uganda from the west in 1879. The relationship between Catholics and Protestants was characterized by a distinctive rivalry if not antagonism, a relationship that was apparently uncompromising.

This rivalry was also perpetuated to a lesser degree among Protestant groups themselves, for several Protestant groups were represented. These included the Church of Scotland Mission (C.S.M.), which reached Kijabe in 1901, and the United Methodist Mission (U.M.M.) which reached Meru from the Coast in the same year. The Christianity that was brought to sub-Saharan Africa was therefore a very fragmented Christianity. The result was that it had a divisive influence on the African society. African adherents of one denomination were led to mistrust and be alienated from their fellow Africans who were followers of another denomination. The Catholic-Protestant rivalry was particularly emphasized. As one early Protestant (Anglican) convert remembers:

We were told that our fellow Catholics were bad. Europeans brought a distorted Christianity to us. Instead of preaching Christ and Him only, they taught us Romanism, Anglicanism, Lutheranism. This division was indeed confusing to us.<sup>7</sup>

Another feature that was characteristic of Christianity in East Africa during this era of missions was its inclination towards being too intellectual. This was mainly due to the methods used to Christianize Africans.

Missionaries used several methods to win converts. These included medical care and straight evangelism. By far, however, the most significant method used to christianize Africa was through education. Mission stations often included a school in which converts were taught to read and write. In fact, Christians of this early period have often been referred to as Athomi (Readers), and scholars have gone as far as labelling this type of Christianity "Kusoma Christianity".<sup>8</sup> This reflects the fact that, in the minds of Africans at this early period, Christianity was equated with education and therefore was not well related to one's personal commitment.

The process of proselytizing was itself very intellectual. Candidates attended catechism classes, after which they were orally examined. They were baptized only if they passed their catechism examination. On the whole, therefore, baptism depended on the ability of the candidates to memorize facts. Those who were baptized were then taught to read and write so that they could read the Bible.

Furthermore, Christianity apparently tended to be nominal. This is due to the fact that there was apparently too much emphasis on names. Some Africans joined missions in order that they could acquire a new western name at baptism. The name was meant to indicate the fact that one was no longer a mshenzi<sup>9</sup> (savage), but a civilized person. The nominal tendency of Christianity during this

period is lamented by one informant:

I was attending classes at Thogoto Scottish Mission. I did not believe many of the things we were taught but I wanted a new name. So, I made the effort to learn and pass the catechism. I passed it and was then baptized - Francis<sup>10</sup>

Another early Anglican follower recalls:

It looks as if missionaries were more interested in numbers and names. The more followers they got, the happier they felt. The competition they had among themselves for converts made Christianity look like a mere biashara, a trade.<sup>11</sup>

This nominal Christianity which appeared to have more to do with names and the intellect rather than personal commitment led to a certain coldness in the Church. As a result of wrong approaches and distorted priorities, the African convert was more European than Christian. The majority lacked any real commitment to Christianity and its values for it was Christian only by name.<sup>12</sup> On the side of Christian missionaries, they also were too busy emphasizing their denominational differences to be able to present convincingly the central Christian message of love. They themselves apparently failed to display this love in their failure to understand Africans as their equals. As David Barrett, in trying to explain the causes of schism in Africa, notes:

The root cause, common to the entire movement of independency may therefore be seen in this failure in sensitivity, the failure at one small point of the version of Christianity brought in by the missions to demonstrate the

fulness of the Biblical concept of love as sensitive understanding towards others as equals, together with the perception from vernacular scriptures of the catastrophic nature of this failure and of the urgent need to remedy it if Christianity was to survive on the African soil... This failure /howbeit unconscious/ took numerous forms, including colour prejudice and denominational rigidity, was widely perceived, /by the Africans/ and in time because the major issue.<sup>13</sup>

The Christianity thus presented to the Africans was so clothed in western cultural garb that it could hardly be recognized as Christianity. The result was that there was a marked dryness and lethargy in the church at this time. The church seemed asleep for lack of zeal. There was an apparent need for awakening, a need for revival.

The Ruanda roots: revival germinates

The coldness and lethargy within the East African Church at this time could be acutely felt in the C.M.S. mission in the Ruanda kingdom to the west of what is now Uganda. At Gahini, one of the mission hospitals, things were not going very well. The zeal with which African converts had initially accepted Christianity was beginning to decline. Even missionaries there seemed to have lost their original fire. One writer, commenting on the state of affairs of the mission at this time, laments that "though the mission had started well and had a large following, the spirit of the African 'converts' was low."<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 1920s, the situation began to change for the worse everywhere. Commenting on this

change, another writer observes:

For the moment, the rising tide of success in Kigezi showed signs of superficiality. One after another, evangelists and leading Christians fell into sin. The bondage of drink, the corruption of sexual vice and the deep strong roots of witchcraft and the allurements of the world began to take their toll.<sup>15</sup>

In Ruanda, like in many areas of East Africa where Christianity had penetrated, the stage was set for revival.

The reawakening at Gahini started at around 1927.

On 26th December 1927, a third doctor, Joe Church, arrived at Gahini hospital to join the two doctors who were previously supervising the hospital. These were Dr. Leonard Sharp and Dr. Algernon Stanley Smith. Dr. Church brought with him the vivid experience of the Keswick Convention which he had attended in England in 1921, and which formed a significant background to the spiritual experience which he was to transmit to the residents of Gahini. His life was characterized by a depth of spirituality, prayerfulness and love.

One particular offender at Gahini hospital was an assistant, Yosheya Kinuka. Seeking to help him lift himself up, Dr. Church sent him to another African Christian, Simon Nsibambi at Mengo. Dr. Church and the latter had been to a retreat together.<sup>16</sup> They had emerged transformed and spiritually strengthened. After a stay with Nsibambi, Kinuka was led to realize that the root cause of all his problems was 'sin'. He was convinced of his sins which he openly confessed and became a witness to the forgiving

power of Jesus.

This nucleus of transformed men became the "mustard seed" from which would develop the fiery revival which swept the whole of East Africa in the decade that followed. At Gahini itself, the people were challenged by the changed lives of these men, and they too became involved.

Hidden sins were confessed openly and costly restitution was made. Then a burning zeal for others began to appear, so they went among their fellow Christians, testifying to what God had done in their lives and challenging others to repent their sins in order to be transformed too.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the seed of revival was sown in the far off mission hospital at Gahini. The fire caught and began to spread very rapidly. In 1933, a group of Ugandans attended the Ruanda-Keswick Convention in Kabale, where a definite change in the spiritual atmosphere was felt. Formerly quarrelling church leaders, missionaries and their African converts explicitly forgave each other. More and more people experienced the revival mood and got 'saved' as they committed their lives to Christ.

The fire continued to spread as teams of revivalists began preaching around the villages and shared their new experience with others.<sup>18</sup> The revivalists were very full of zeal. They emphasized the fact that the lethargy and lack of commitment and purpose in the church hitherto, was due to unrepented sins in the hearts

medicine.<sup>20</sup>

The restlessness also expressed itself in the formation of nationalistic churches which arose out of the political, educational and cultural turmoil of the 1920s. It is apparent that Africans by this time were beginning to question what Christianity meant to them. In 1928 for example, the Agikuyu Karing'a (Orthodox or true Agikuyu) movement was formed. Their major concern was whether it was necessary for an African to reject his culture in order to become a Christian. The major point of controversy was the question of female circumcision.<sup>21</sup> Missionaries felt that this was a brutal and abhorrent custom while the Africans felt it was an important custom that marked a girl's initiation into womanhood. They therefore did not feel the necessity to reject part of their culture in order to become Christians. As a result of this controversy whether one had of necessity to reject ones way of life in order to become an authentic Christian, there were formed independent schools and an Independent Kikuyu Church in which the participants could be loyal to their culture and still practise Christianity.

It is apparent therefore that by the end of the 1920s,, the Church in Kenya was also in need of reawakening. When the Ruanda revivalists visited Kenya in 1937 and the following years, they found the stage already set for revival. They had already taken revival to many areas of Uganda. In Kisumu, in Nyanza Province, those who



accepted the message of salvation through the blood of Christ were called Joremo (the people of the blood), because they believed that their sins had been washed by the blood of Jesus.

The Ruanda revivalists also brought revival in many areas in Kikuyuland in Central Province. They organized big conventions in places like Kahuhia, Kabete, Kikuyu and as far as Mombasa. Their message was centred around the assertion that 'sin' was the root cause of trouble. In order for it to be eradicated, one had to confess openly so that he could be cleansed by the blood of Jesus and become saved.

The message of the Ruanda preachers is well summed up in the revival hymn entitled Tukutendereza. This is a Kiganda word which means "we praise". The hymn was used by the revivalists to greet each other and identify each other as the "saved ones". The whole revival movement or experience came to be seen as kuhonoka (to be saved). The song is indeed a good summary of the faith, as believed by the revivalists. Its English translation from Luganda is as follows:

#### Chorus

Glory, glory, Jesus saves me!  
Blessed be his Holy name,  
For the Cleansing Blood has  
reached me,  
Halleluyah to the Lamb.

- 1 Long my yearning heart was striving  
to obtain this perfect rest  
But when I gave up trying,  
Simply trusting I was blest.

2 I am trusting every moment  
 In the precious blood applied  
 Calmly resting on the fountain  
 dwelling at my saviour's side.

3 Consecrated to thy service  
 I would live and die for Thee  
 gladly tell the wondrous story  
 of salvation full and free.<sup>22</sup>

This song summarizes the revivalists' message of salvation from sin, through the sacrificial blood of the lamb Jesus, that cleanses the faithful from their sins.

In their preaching, the revivalists from Ruanda put a great emphasis on sin and all its various manifestations. Anger, hatred, avarice, greed and adultery were all exposed and castigated. The result was, as some who experienced revival at this early stage recall, that people who accepted the Ruanda message spent a lot of time confessing sins and in great detail. Each sin was mentioned by name and confessed. "We used to confess sins that we had committed as children," one of the informants remembers.<sup>23</sup>

The confession of sins was often combined with restitution. People would confess theft and then return the goods stolen. If the goods could not be returned, they were thrown away. If one had quarreled with anybody, it was felt necessary for one to go and confess to the particular person offended before one could be accepted as a 'brother' by the revivalists. As a result of this emphasis on confession, those among the Kikuyus who accepted the revival were nicknamed Kiumburo (Confessors).

Generally, however, they were called Ahonoki (the saved ones), because they saw their revival experience in terms of their being saved by the blood of Jesus.

As the Ruanda preachers continued spreading their message, some church leaders, mainly Africans accepted it and got saved. They took the message to their respective churches and spread the revival there. Some such leaders were the late Anglican Bishop Obadiah Kariuki, by then, an African pastor, and Canon Elijah Gacanjah of the C.M.S.<sup>24</sup>

However, revival was not unanimously accepted. In some cases, it was regarded as a disruptive element in the Church. Its members came to be well known for their zeal and fervour and, particularly, for their refusal to acknowledge the established Church as the only vehicle through which one could be saved. They often appeared to be too zealous and were at times regarded as crazy mystics as they went around denouncing sinners from treetops, house-tops and market-places. In Kiambu, due to their zeal, they earned themselves certain nicknames. At times, they were called Aroti (dreamers). Other times, Githamo kia miti Iguru (the religion of treetops),

A telling and descriptive nickname for the group was Kienjero (those who dig deep). They were referred to as Kienjero because they were greatly concerned with knowing the scriptures at depth. The revivalists from

Ruanda had surprised African Christians by declaring to them that salvation was theirs in spite of the Church. They claimed to be saved by Jesus, independent of the Church hierarchy. This was a message that was entirely new. The Ruanda preachers had said that it was all in the scriptures. Could the scriptures tell them more? Did it have more messages which the missionary preacher could have overlooked?

It will be recalled that by then, the Bible translations into various vernaculars had been accomplished. By 1914, for example, the Bible in Kiswahili had been completed. By 1926, the Kikuyu and Luo New Testaments had been completed. Since the scriptures were now available, it was, therefore, felt that there was no need to wait until Sunday for the ordained priest or a pastor to read and interpret the scriptures for the laity. A concern for what exactly the scriptures say began to develop.

We began looking deep in the scriptures. We would spend days and nights in the bush, reading and meditating on the scriptures to see what they contained that we had not heard before.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of this tendency on the part of some converts, to seclude themselves and act independently of the established church, there was discontent within the church. Revival began to be regarded as a subversive element. One of our informants explained the situation rather concisely. To him, it was the problem of a pupil turning into a teacher:

Supposing, after you have finished talking with us you went back to the teacher who sent you to us and reported things that you have found out that he has never heard before, thus proving to know more than him. Inevitably, being human, he would not like you very much thereafter.<sup>26</sup>

This is what seems to have happened in the Church at this time. The laity, who were used to being preached at on Sundays, usually with messages that had little to do with their daily lives, were now standing up and claiming that they were washed clean of their sins by the blood of Jesus, completely side-stepping the church leaders, bishops and priests. More serious, they were directly challenging these 'pillars' of the Church to confess their sins and become saved, in order to participate in fellowship with other brethren who were now all equal before the Lord.

Although, generally, the Ruanda revival was tolerated in the Anglican Church, some leaders of which were converted, certain churches, particularly the A.I.M., were hard on the revival and refused to accept it. As one author reports:

Some of the members of the A.I.M. when they accepted the Revival were regarded as disobedient to the church and were disciplined by the church by being asked to confess that they had accepted the bad religion of Ruanda.<sup>27</sup>

Due to this discomfiture within the church, during the early days of revival in Kenya (1936f), some of the revivalists were forced to secede from the church. In

but in the knowledge of the scriptures, which were places where the revival was accepted by the leaders, however, the majority of the revivalists remained within the church. Today, they form what, for want of better terminology, we would call "Orthodox revivalists or Ahonoki". These are still active within the church and still attempt to keep the fire of revival burning there.

Our immediate concern however is with the development of the group that was forced to secede from the church. This group did not keep quiet after being forced to secede. Their fervour did not diminish. On the contrary, they continued to preach in market-places, on tree-tops and on house-tops. Megaphones in hand, they would demand their listeners to repent and be saved.

This behaviour of the secessionist group was so unorthodox that they even became targets of government vigilance.<sup>28</sup> They had become a disquieting group which even refused to acquiesce with the established order, government or church. By this time this group had some autonomy. They were now no longer in the established church, having been explicitly excommunicated in the mid-forties. Though they lacked organization, there could be seen, at least in embryo, the possibility of a new church. It was a case of renewal, definitely shifting towards schism.

#### The birth of a new Church and Kaggia's influence

As observed in the above sub-section, the revivalists were noted for their deep interest in the scriptures. They decided that salvation lay not in the church and its clergy.

but in the knowledge of the scriptures, which were taken as the literal word of God. They now felt that salvation could only be attained by close adherence to the scripture's teachings.

Having been bid farewell from the Anglican Church, the group began preaching in market-places and organizing big conventions in the tradition of Ruanda revivalism. Meetings of this nature would be held in the homes of the people who emerged spontaneously as leaders. In Kiambu, such meetings were held in the home of one early revivalist, Francis Mungai who is a leader in the group to this day.

Due to their digging deep into the scriptures, they gradually began to deviate from the norm of orthodox revivalism as taught by the Ruanda preachers. In the first place, after reading the scriptures, they felt that the Ruanda preachers had over-emphasized the need for public confession, especially as this had to be done almost everyday. The question arose as to what was the value of this "washing of dirty linen in public".

Gradually, a feeling developed that public confession of one's dirty life prior to conversion was not necessary. It was felt that public confession was in effect a futile exercise because it did not actually prevent one from sinning again. At times, public confession was embarrassing. It also threatened to become a formalistic if not a ritualistic prerequisite for acceptance by the already saved. As has been pointed out:

In the early days of revival in Kenya, if a person felt convinced of his sins, he was expected by the revivalist brethren to narrate very carefully how he met Jesus, and the process by which his sins were cleansed. After frankly, and specifically in great detail, exposing his carefree past, the repentant sinner was supposed to recite a formula: 'When the Lord met me and showed me my sins, I cried to him and he heard me; then I followed him carrying my sins to the cross. There he pointed to the foot of the cross where I saw a fountain of blood. I went into the fountain and my sins were all dissolved. I washed in the blood and was cleansed.'<sup>29</sup>

If the audience felt that the reciter had failed to mention some sins, or had glossed over anything, they would reprimand the person and refuse to accept him as a brother.

It is to this embarrassment and apparent futility of confessing sins primarily to please others that the members of the secessionist group reacted:

We felt that there was no need to expose our sins in public. We would just go privately and lay our hearts bare to God, and quietly and with meekness ask for forgiveness, not only for our individual sins, but also for our sinfulness. We would wake up from there, accepting by faith that our sinfulness has been forgiven. We did not need to mention the individual sins. Our past was from there clean; no longer was there need to confess forgiven sins. However, one could give testimony to others of having been forgiven.<sup>30</sup>

The scriptural backing to this conviction was the Johanne passage where Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about the need for spiritual rebirth. His instruction to Nicodemus was, "You must be born again" (John 3:7) in order to be saved.



This verse was taken by members of this group to mean that after conversion, or acceptance by faith of the forgiveness from God, one must thereafter become a new creature. He is in effect freed from sin and past guilt and the need to confess all this. They felt that sin became alien to them after conversion and the majority are convinced that they cannot sin after the conversion experience.

The same passage that reports the discussion of spiritual rebirth by Jesus and Nicodemus continues to claim that one must be born again "of water and the Holy Spirit." This text revealed some further truth to the members of this group. It seemed to them that there was something missing from the rite of baptism as they had undergone in the church. According to this passage, Jesus likens baptism to the process of birth. Its translation into Kikuyu carries over this insinuation as it reads: "Mundu no muhaka aciarwo ringi ni mai."<sup>31</sup> Literally translated back into English, this passage would read, "One must be born again by water." The preposition ni in the Kikuyu makes the phrase sound like, one must be born again by water.

Carrying this analogy to its logical conclusion, it was apparent to this group that what they had undergone in the church was not true baptism. It will be recalled that the majority of these had come from the Anglican Church which practised baptism by pouring water

on the forehead of the candidate. The ex-Anglicans felt that, if the Nicodemus passage was anything to go by, one had to enter the 'womb' of water and re-emerge just like a baby emerges from the hiddenness of its mother's womb.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, they felt that they had to be re-baptized, this time by total immersion in water. Baptism by total immersion was further supported by the fact that it was similar to that of Jesus at the river Jordan. And, if indeed Christians claimed to be the disciples of Christ, they had to follow his footsteps in all respects. As one informant explained:

Jesus had the power to call John the Baptist to come and baptize him in the more comfortable atmosphere of Jerusalem, in the more dignified manner of a few drops of water on the head. But the scriptures say that he walked many miles to be baptized at the Jordan. We have only to walk a few miles to a river. Why then should we not follow his example if we claim to be his followers?<sup>33</sup>

This method of baptism was further favoured by the Pauline references to baptism as a symbol of the Christian's death to sin and rising to a genuine Christian life. It was only through total immersion in water that this symbol could convey the meaning intended. It seemed, therefore, that they were justified in being re-baptized in the apparently more biblical manner of immersion. For this reason, they are described to this day as Githomo kia mai maingi (The religion of a lot of water).

Going back to the Nicodemus passage, it continued to say that one must be born again of water and the Holy

Spirit. The idea of the Holy Spirit was to become a big bone of contention between the group and its mother church. To the group, this was a new discovery of something that was rarely mentioned in the church. When they also read the book of Acts, they felt that there was something lacking in the church at this time. The early records of Christianity were records of a faith characterized by dramatic experiences, miracles and bold witnessing, healings and prophecies. These dramatic experiences were the direct result of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the Christians. The church was apparently devoid of these manifestations of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus himself, who, talking to his disciples had said, "I will ask the father and he will give you another advocate who will be with you" (John 16:7).

True to his promise, he had poured the Holy Spirit upon his disciples on Pentecost day. This fact manifested itself through the vivid experiences of the Apostles who began speaking in tongues, witnessing boldly, and healing the sick. The group wondered whether the pentecostal experience was limited only to the early church, or whether it had any bearing to Christians of almost two thousand years later. They concluded that the promise, "I will send you the Holy Spirit," was also applicable to them. They therefore set about waiting for this pentecostal experience and its major manifestation of speaking in tongues. For this waiting they earned themselves a name

- Gieterero (Those who wait). They preferred the more positive description, Arata a Roho Mutheru (Friends of the Holy Spirit).

Meanwhile, at Murang'a, another of the Central Province districts, Bildad Kaggia, a man who had been travelling around the world as an army officer for the colonial government, had just come back after several years abroad. Before going there, Kaggia had encountered revivalists from Uganda during his school days.

A group of evangelists came to our school from Uganda. Their meetings first attracted me when I heard that the preachers spoke neither English, Swahili, nor Kikuyu. The preacher gave his speech in Luganda; it was translated into English and finally into Kikuyu. I found this most amusing. After attending a number of these meetings, I noticed that the Ugandans were not as submissive as we were to the authority of the church. They even criticized the Anglican Church.<sup>34</sup>

The impression that Kaggia got of the Ruanda revivalists during his school days was that these people were not subdued to the established church:

I became interested in the group and attended its meetings. I learned that being baptized or even confirmed by the bishop whom we used to fear was not enough. Even being a pastor or a bishop does not necessarily make one a Christian, they said. Hearing this made me want to share the freedom of the Ruanda group so that I could criticize the clergy and my teacher of religion. I joined the group.<sup>35</sup>

During his wide travels later, Kaggia had encountered the white man at his own home. His sojourn had taken him as far as Jerusalem, where he had toured the "Holy places"

of the Christian tradition. His encounter with the white man at his own home made him question the genuineness of the missionary Christians back in Kenya. His visit to the Holy Land confirmed his suspicions that the missionaries back in Africa were using Christianity as a means of exploiting the black man. After visiting the Holy Land, he noted how pilgrims were exploited by having to pay to see the Holy places. Muslims as well as the Christians were good at preaching the Bible stories to the pilgrims with apparently no other motive in mind but money. He wondered, therefore, whether the missionary Christians were not just like the Muslim Arabs, preaching something they did not believe in for the purposes of getting money. He was convinced then that Christianity was a tool being used by the missionaries to exploit Africans.

Later, Kaggia also visited Britain, the home of the then Kenya colonialists. There he came into close contact with members of a Christian group called the "Assemblies of God" of whom he has this to say:

They were different from all the Englishmen I had met before. I was used to bossy D.Cs and settlers at home. They were close to Africans, they were friendly and understanding.<sup>37</sup>

This group of Christians was considerably non-conformist. He observed that "They were not the hypocrites I used to see in clerical robes in Kenya. These people practised what they preached and loved the Africans like themselves

without discrimination."<sup>38</sup> He came to the conclusion that these people were close to his beliefs, and almost identical in their attitudes to the Ruanda group of preachers, with whom he had had contact when they had visited Kenya in the 1930s. The latter had in common with the Assemblies of God the fact that they constantly attacked conformity to the church as opposed to genuine christianity. This group in Britain was non-conformist; it ridiculed church formality and insisted that the clergy was not necessarily holy or godly. These years of interacting with the whiteman at his own home were formative for Kaggia's beliefs and ideology.

Kaggia came back to Kenya in 1945 full of ideals. His major task, he felt, was to liberate the Kenyan from the colonial yoke:

In my enthusiasm, I felt charged by God to liberate Kenya, just as Moses was commanded to liberate Israel from the Egyptian bondage.<sup>39</sup>

However, he also felt that political liberation was not enough. The basic slavery was that of the mind and the enslavers were the whitemen and their agents, the missionary and the settler, who, had taught the black man to believe that they were less of human beings than their white masters. He decided that the greatest bondage of the African was the Mzungu's (European's) religion. His first objective on coming back was that:

Africans must be liberated from foreign religious beliefs before they could accept

Kaggia was the injustices of the British administration and before they could think of removing these injustices.<sup>40</sup>

Kaggia came preaching that 'churchism' and all religion that over-emphasized the need for formality was but a hideout for hypocrisy and therefore worthy denouncing. He had the intention of fighting within the church but was forced to leave the church when he was counter-attacked. He left the church but decided to make market-places in places like Fort-Hall, Kiambu and Embu his church. One of our informants remembers this time:

In every market-place, Kaggia's followers would shout through megaphones: 'The church is bad, leave the church. Christianity is not in the buildings.'<sup>41</sup>

This preaching was so novel that some of the meetings ended up in chaos as preachers were stoned. However, those of the revivalists who had already been forced to secede from the church felt an affinity with Kaggia's message and began to follow his movement against the church. The schism was now complete for now the secessionist group had a dynamic leader who could voice aloud their sentiments against the established church:

The objective of myself and my followers was to destroy the hypocritical "synagogue-Christianity" of the established church. We compared the 'Mzungu Church' to the Pharisees of old, those who outwardly professed godliness but were ungodly inside. Like Jesus, I changed the emphasis from 'converting the heathen' to 'demolishing the citadel of ungodly formality and hypocrisy.'<sup>43</sup>

The message spread and was embraced by many Christians.

Kaggia was preaching a new way of life in which the African Christians could stand on their own feet, where they would not be discriminated against. He therefore organized his followers into a group of Christians which was presently referred to as Dini ya Kaggia (Kaggia's religion), although his intention had not been to give this group a name, thus merely creating another denomination. His main objectives were:

- (1) To create a purely African movement, divorced from European denomination and entirely independent of the European church's doctrine.
- (2) To establish a holy church freed from all European customs which had been preached to Africans concurrent with religious teachings.
- (3) To formulate an independent doctrine to suit African customs and traditions.
  - (a) All converts had to be baptized or rebaptized in their mother names, erasing all foreign names.
  - (b) Matrimonial ceremonies were to be conducted in a new, African way.<sup>43</sup>

Kaggia managed to organize his first baptismal ceremony in 1947. This was performed in Kiambu at Riara river. Some of our informants were his earliest followers who were baptized or rebaptized on this occasion. The baptism was by total immersion and those who were baptized were not given any foreign name at this ceremony. If one was Kamau, he remained Kamau without getting an additional



Peter or John to one's name. Unfortunately, those who had already been given foreign names in their previous baptism could not drop them easily and are still referred to by those names today. They are, however, still opposed to those names, preferring to be called by their African ones.

By this time therefore, it seems as if the birth of a new 'church' had been accomplished. This is in spite of the fact that it was apparently not their original intention to found a new denomination, as is evident in the group's reluctance to give themselves a name or a label. Kaggia had found a people ready to stand on their own feet, people who had already felt uncomfortable in the established church. His role was to consolidate these people into a more or less homogeneous group for which he supplied dynamic leadership. For some time, he continued in his attempt to "liberate" the Africans mind. Soon, however, he turned his efforts towards political liberation, and joined the then strong nationalist party, Kenya African Union, under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta.

Meanwhile, his group continued its religious activities based on what they had gained from the Ruanda revivalists, their findings from the scriptures, and what Kaggia had taught them about the need to be African as well as Christian.

The group emerged as one which enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy with some clear cut defining

features. For one, they are notable because of their anti-formalism and anti-authoritarianism. They have continued their rejection of church-hierarchy, registration of members and, as already noted, they are reluctant to give themselves a label. Secondly, they are deeply interested in the scriptures. Even today, they are convinced that the scriptures are the only bridge to genuine Christianity. This deep interest in the scriptures has earned them the name kienjero (those who dig deep). In so far as they regard the scriptures as the literal word of God, we can point out that they are fundamentalists in their approach to the scriptures. The phrase 'the Bible says' or the 'scriptures say' is the inevitable prefix to all the arguments that they might put forward.

Thirdly, their study of the scriptures has led them to a certain understanding of Biblical concepts. Notably, they emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit, and also the concept of Baptism as a symbol of repentance.<sup>44</sup> Above all, they are characterized by their emphasis on the doctrine of salvation, a fact that has earned them the summary title, Ahonoki, the saved one's. It is our purpose in the next chapter to analyse in greater detail what their understanding of this concept is.

Meanwhile, a brief discussion of the worship and organizational structure of the group.

A Church in spite of itself: the organizational structure and the ways of worship of the Ahonoki

As already noted, the Ahonoki are not registered with the government. This is mainly due to the fact, that they are typically anti-formalists and anti-establishment:

We do not have any formal register or a formal way of conducting our worship. We do not have a name, we are not a religion but simply followers of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

This is the type of answer that one invariably gets from the informants when enquiring about the name or the organizational structure of these people. They insist that neither a name, nor a formal licence from the government is necessary in order to worship. Consequently, there are no records of the numbers involved although members are to be found in areas like Embu, Murang'a and Ukambani.

As a result of the group's anti-formalism, we find that the group has no formal leaders. There are no ordained priests or bishops. It is argued that since God is "no respecter of persons", he can use any member of the group to serve or minister to the others. The members who minister to others do not need to be specially trained but they arise spontaneously.<sup>46</sup> For the purposes of communicating with others in other parts of the country, these spontaneous leaders are blessed and prayed for by the rest of the congregation. Their purpose is to help in co-ordination between the various groups of the same persuasion.

They organize intergroup conventions where all can join together for the purposes of fellowship particularly during the Christian feast days, like Easter and Christmas. In some circles, these leaders, who are usually the elders in the group, are referred to as "Ariu a Ithe witu a murigo (Our brethren who carry the burden). These, however, do not assume any rigid powers and when asked whether they are the leaders, they claim that the leader is the Holy Spirit, not themselves.

Similarly, there is no formal way of worship. There are no written prayer-books, for they claim that prayers should be spontaneous and according to one's needs. There is also an antipathy towards written prayers recited over and over again. The argument against this is that if one really believes that prayers are answered by God, one would not say the same prayer over and over again. This is normally the case in the established church where prayer is apparently too formal and ritualistic. One informant lamented this ritualistic approach to prayer:

After I had lapsed from practising Christianity for a time, I tried to rejoin the Anglican Church where I had left. I found them still reciting the old prayers from the Anglican prayerbooks. I was bewildered. I came to the conclusion that God must have deserted this church if he had so far not heard their prayers. I left the Anglicans for good and joined this group within which I have had very fruitful fellowship since.<sup>47</sup>

The meetings, which are held on Sundays are not held in any particular building. Apparently, in the

tradition of the Christians in the early church who used to meet in what has been referred to as "house churches", the meetings are held in the homes of members, but mainly in the homes of "leaders". The services, however, are not held in the same house all the time. They circulate from house to house, ridge to ridge and, occasionally, inter-district conventions are held.

Worship: A typical prayer meeting<sup>48</sup>

Although there is no written code as to how a meeting should be conducted, nevertheless, there does appear to be a general pattern which is followed in the meetings. The room in which the prayer meeting is held is the largest room in the house. In the centre, there is an unadorned table on which rest several Bibles and hymn books. The meeting starts with a suggestion for a song of praise from any of the members. The singing is accompanied by drumming, clapping of hands and joyful dancing around the room. Then the leader for the day may invite the people to a few minutes of individual prayer. The windows are then closed and they all kneel in their respective corners with their faces right on the ground. Everybody then prays aloud, individually and simultaneously with everybody else. Some pray and weep; others pray in tongues. Above the din that results, however, one can perceive some audible prayers. The individual prayers which are addressed to Jehovah and to Isa (Jesus) rotate around the theme of asking God to strengthen them in their faith and to correct

their weaknesses.

Occasionally, one member may raise his or her voice above others. When the others notice this, they gradually quieten down and allow the person to express his or herself for a few minutes. When all is quiet again, they rise up from their kneeling positions. The windows are reopened, after which there may be a request for a song or more from any of the members. This is followed by a time of sharing. If anybody has anything to say, whether asking for prayer or expressing one's experience of one's encounters with God, or exhorting and advising the others, this is the opportune time to do so. There is no time limit for this activity and one can talk for as long as one wishes.

After this, a few more songs may be sung and then the leader gives what may be described as a sermon. The 'preacher' usually takes a verse from the Bible, and elaborates on it, trying to apply it to real life situations, and interrelating it with other biblical situations.

After the sermon, there are a few more songs and then any messages and announcements for the week are made. The leader concludes the meeting with a long prayer for all, including the needs of the members (referred to as the children of God), for the sick in general and for the society around them. After the meeting, the members share a common meal and then return to their respective homes, often singing joyfully and drumming on the way.

The description of the prayer meeting once more reveals the anti-formalistic tendency of the Ahonoki. Just as there is a sort of general pattern of worship discernible, however, so also is there a loose organizational structure. Elders from various groups meet about once every fortnight to discuss matters of mutual interest. However, there is one apparent weakness in this organizational structure. The Ahonoki, as already noted above, have come to rely heavily on the scriptures as their source of authority. Now that there is no longer any acceptance of the clergy as the source of authority, it is what the Bible says that has become of central significance. This fact is commendable but it has a dark side to it.

The lack of specific guidance, other than that of the scriptures, has led to splitting and counter-splitting within the group. Just like certain passages in the scriptures originally led to the secession of this group from the main Anglican Church, so also have the same scriptures caused the splitting within the group itself. The Bible, however, is not a very homogeneous book. It does not always say the same thing and even may contain apparently contradictory statements. When, therefore, somebody takes a verse or several verses and makes them the decisive authority for his christian life, another one may decide to act according to the dictates of a different and probably contrary verse. The result

is a clash which most frequently leads to separation.

For instance, among the Ahonoki under study, there is a group which insists that a saved person should not go to hospital when sick, but should rely entirely on God to cure him. This belief is based on the text in Mark where Jesus commissions his disciples to go and preach the gospel to all the peoples. Mark reports that Jesus promised his disciples that:

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe, will be condemned. And these are the signs that will accompany those who believe. In my name, they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover (Mark 16:16).

To the members of the group led by Francis Mungai,<sup>49</sup> the above text is the ideal one for the normal Christian. They feel that all the signs of a believer as listed above should be closely adhered to. They, therefore, feel that the sick should be prayed for and never taken to hospital. Others however feel that going to hospital or using scientific aid does not impinge on one's Christianity. They therefore leave it optional whether or not one feels like going to hospital, although they do not actually rule out faith-healing.

It is this entire dependence upon the scriptures, and a tendency towards a personal interpretation of them that has led to the splitting of the group into various small groups. However, one common factor uniting these



small groups is their explicit belief that the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in their salvation. We are justified therefore in classifying them under the summary title, Ahonoki for they only differ in points of detail. In the next chapter, we examine in depth what exactly they mean by claiming to be saved.

<sup>3</sup>Waga, op.cit., p.28.

<sup>4</sup>Waga, op.cit., p.13.

<sup>5</sup>Waga, op.cit., p.28.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.21.

<sup>7</sup>Asagator Ihanya, personal interview, Kibaha, March, 1972.

<sup>8</sup>Anderson, op.cit., pp.111f. In these pages, Anderson describes the version of Christianity brought by the missionaries as too intellectual. Later, in the chapter entitled "The post missionary," he portrays revival as a reaction against the missionary version of Christianity pp.115-127.

<sup>9</sup>This term Mbaraka is a Swahili word denoting one who is barbaric or a savage. The term is still used today by some Christians to refer to non-Christians.

<sup>10</sup>Francis Mungai, personal interview, Kibaha, March, 1972.

<sup>11</sup>Asagator Ihanya, ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Waga, op.cit., p.23.

<sup>13</sup>David B. Barrett, Shisms and Revivals in Africa: an analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.248.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Erasto Muga, African response to western Christian religion (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), p.28.

<sup>2</sup>William B. Anderson, The Church in East Africa: 1840-1974 (Dodoma: Central Tanganyika Press, 1977), p.2. See also, Roland Oliver, The missionary factor in East Africa (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, new impression, 1966), p.4.

<sup>3</sup>Muga, op.cit., p.29.

<sup>4</sup>Oliver, op.cit., p.12.

<sup>5</sup>Muga, op.cit., p.30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.31.

<sup>7</sup>Sospeter Ikonya, personal interview, Kiambu, March, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>Anderson, op.cit., pp.111f. In these pages, Anderson describes the version of Christianity brought by the missionaries as too intellectual. Later, in the chapter entitled "The wet missionary," he portrays revival as a reaction against the missionary version of Christianity pp.118-127.

<sup>9</sup>This term Mshenzi is a Swahili word denoting one who is barbaric or a savage. The term is still used today by some Christians to refer to non-Christians.

<sup>10</sup>Francis Mungai, personal interview, Kiambu, March, 1979.

<sup>11</sup>Sospeter Ikonya, idem.

<sup>12</sup>Muga, op.cit., p.95.

<sup>13</sup>David B. Barrett, Schism and renewal in Africa: an analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.269.

<sup>14</sup>Turyahikayo-Rugyema, the impact of Christianity on the Bakiga of S.W. Uganda: The revival movement 1920-40, Occasional Research Papers Vol.31, 294, Edited by Tom Tuma, (Makerere, 1975), p.3.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.4.

<sup>16</sup>P.N. Kariuki, revival movement in Kiambu District of Kenya: 1936-74, Occasional Research Papers Vol.31, 295, Edited by Tom Tuma, (Makerere, 1975), p.5.

<sup>17</sup>E.N. Wanyoike, An African pastor (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), p.152.

<sup>18</sup>Although the teams of preachers that spread the revival from Ruanda were composed of black and white Christians, scholars have pointed out that on the whole, the revival was a dynamic attempt by Africans to give Christianity an African expression and that it had a definitely authentic African tone in it. See for instance, Wanyoike, op.cit., p.168.

<sup>19</sup>See footnote 8, on the meaning of "Kusoma Christianity."

<sup>20</sup>At the same time that revival was starting in the C.M.S. mission in Ruanda in 1927, a revival was also starting among the Pentecostal mission and the friends African mission in western Kenya. This revival was started by Otto Keller, and Arthur Chilson, and it emphasized confession of sins and being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is from these revivals that there developed the Roho or Spirit Churches found in western Kenya, mainly among the Luhya. Members of the 'Roho' Churches among the Agikuyu in Central Province are called Akurinu (the meaning of this term is uncertain) or Aroti (Dreamers). Some of the Roho Churches in Central Province are linked with those in Luhya country where the Roho (Spirit) movements started. See Anderson, op.cit., p.129 for a more detailed discussion of the movement.

<sup>21</sup>In the Karing'a Independent Church movement, we see an instance of independency caused by the African reaction to the imposition of European culture among them. To European missionaries, the practice of female circumcision among the Agikuyu was abhorrent. To Africans, however, it was an initiation rite that was very important. For a detailed discussion of the social significance of elitoridecto

among the Agikuyu, see Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya (Nairobi: Heinemann Education Books, 6th Edition, 1978), pp.130-154. See also, Wanyoike, op.cit., pp.64-108 for a discussion of the controversy between the Agikuyu and the missionaries over some Kikuyu customs.

<sup>22</sup>This English version of the Tukutendereza hymn is taken from Wanyoike, op.cit., pp.166-167.

<sup>23</sup>Benjamin Mungai, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.

<sup>24</sup>It is during this period that Bildad Kaggia, who was later to become a significant leader of the Ahonoki encountered the revivalists and accepted their message. See below, "The birth of a new Church and Kaggia's influence."

<sup>25</sup>Benjamin Mungai, idem.

<sup>26</sup>Sospeter Ikonya, Interviewed at Kiambu, March, 1979.

<sup>27</sup>Kariuki, op.cit., p.18.

<sup>28</sup>Wanyoike, op.cit., p.155.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.166.

<sup>30</sup>Benjamin Mungai, idem.

<sup>31</sup>Kikuyu Bible, John 3:5

<sup>32</sup>Margaret Wangui, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.

<sup>33</sup>Idem.

<sup>34</sup>Bildad Kaggia, Roots of freedom: 1921-1963: the autobiography of Bildad Kaggia. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), p.13.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.38.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>41</sup> Rachel Nyokabi, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.

<sup>42</sup> Kaggia, op.cit., p.70.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>44</sup> We discuss in more detail these concepts, particularly as they relate to the Ahonoki's understanding of salvation when we discuss this in chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Gathu, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Gitau, Interviewed at Nairobi, February, 1979.

<sup>47</sup> Rachel Nyokabi, idem.

<sup>48</sup> The material for this sub-section was acquired by the author's participation in the prayer services as described here.

<sup>49</sup> See the list of interviewees at the end of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AHONOKI'S CONCEPT OF SALVATION

#### The meaning of "I am saved"

From the description of the Ahonoki movement in the last chapter, it is evident that salvation is of very central significance to members of this group. We came to the conclusion that, it is in fact, this preoccupation with the idea of salvation that makes it possible for us to label this group Ahonoki or saved ones. They not only prescribe to the doctrine of salvation but they also make an explicit claim of being saved. The question arises as to what they exactly mean by making this claim. What does a person mean, for example, when he introduces himself and says "I am so and so and I am saved"? What mental picture is he trying to convey by making this claim.

In this connection, it is best to let one of the Ahonoki explain what they mean by saying "I am saved".

To be saved is first of all a self-knowledge that I am in the state of the first Adam; that is, a sinner, a fallen man. An admission that I am a sinner is followed by a realization that God has done something to help me out of this situation. He sent Jesus to die instead of me, so that I can get the gift of eternal life. Once I have realized this, the next step is to confess my sins and to repent them, asking God to forgive me by virtue of the blood of his Son Jesus. By faith, having repented, I wake up from before God, believing that God has forgiven me, that my past is washed clean. Later, a person forgiven in that manner is baptized with water as a sign of his repentance, and then he is baptized by the Holy Spirit.

From there one can boldly bear testimony to the fact of having been saved.<sup>1</sup>

From the above detailed, but summary, answer to the question, "What do you mean by claiming to be saved?", several points of significance are evident. According to the above answer, salvation is a process which starts with:

- (1) Conviction of 'sin' or of being a sinner.
- (2) Realization that God has done something concerning this sin.
- (3) Belief that God sent Jesus to die for this sin.
- (4) Confession and asking God for forgiveness.
- (5) Baptism by water as a sign of one's faith and repentance.
- (6) Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The above seems to be a summary description of what may be called conversion or which, for the purposes of this study, we will refer to as Initial Salvation. One may wonder whether this initial salvation is the totality of salvation and whether it justifies one with the claim of being saved. This we can only know if we examine the above summary further, to see whether for the Ahonoki, Salvation is only this initial conversion or there is something more to it.

From the above "formula" of conversion, we can discern some significant features of salvation worth discussing. First, it appears as if salvation is seen as a negative process in which the convert is rescued from something,

in this case, sin. The idea that sin is what one is saved from is central to the Ahonoki's view of salvation. Without exception, all the informants with whom the author talked were of the opinion that they are saved from sin. This was expressed in terms of being saved from the "stump of Adam" or "being uprooted from sin."<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, one's salvation from sin is also seen as salvation from death, the wages of sin, and also from the anger of God. As one informant explained, "A person who is not saved is under God's anger due to his sins."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, by being saved, that is, repenting, he escapes God's anger and consequent death. Another member explains that "a sinful soul will eventually die."<sup>4</sup> To those who are saved however, the alternative is eternal life, given to them by God. It is apparent that, for this group, salvation is basically a rescue from sin and its consequences, God's wrath and death. At this point, it may be worthwhile to examine what sin means as far as this group is concerned.

For the Ahonoki, sin is viewed as a wilful transgression of what is forbidden by God, like breaking one of the ten commandments. Sin is visualized in its minutest detail and every transgression of God's law is harshly condemned. In answer to the question "What is sin?", one is given a list of what is forbidden like adultery, licentiousness, drunkenness and jealousy. All these are pointed out as things that a Christian should not do. It



is pointed out, however, that one does not have to steal or commit adultery in order to be a sinner:

You can sin through sight, and even through thought. If you get angry or if you think badly of someone, you have sinned.<sup>5</sup>

To the Ahonoki, these sins, which the original revivalists thought were the cause of man's problems, are also seen as manifestations of a deeper disorder in the individual. The actual sins themselves show how disoriented the individual is. Consequently, instead of advocating confession of 'sins' in their sordid details, they emphasize the need for a moral transformation, explained in terms of 'being born again'. One is saved, therefore, not only from individual 'sins' but also from the basic problem of "sinfulness."<sup>6</sup>

As a result of this concept of sin, as a state, rather than just an act, one hears another bold claim from the Ahonoki that after one is saved one cannot sin any more. One member points out to the effect that

My sinfulness has been forgiven. I have been cleansed. I have been uprooted from the stump of Adam and I have been placed in that of the new Adam. As such, I cannot sin again.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that after being saved one cannot sin any more sounds rather strange to an outsider, especially when combined with the converse, which is that, anyone who has not experienced "initial salvation" is a sinner. The whole statement has a "holier than thou" attitude which has led these people to be criticized as "pharisaical".

Their stance on this issue, however, may become clearer when we discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

Suffice it to say here that "sinfulness" and its manifestation in acts of sin is rejected in totality. Even what some of the more lenient Christians may pass off as venial sins cannot be tolerated in this group. Losing one's temper, anger, and association with loose company are all fully castigated by the Ahonoki.

A third feature of the Ahonoki's concept of salvation is that salvation is essentially forgiveness. In salvation, one asks for and receives salvation from God. This forgiveness is seen to be somehow related to the death of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> In so far as salvation is seen in terms of forgiveness, it is in effect also a process of reconciliation and atonement. Thus, as we noted in chapter two, the metaphor of salvation as atonement finds adequate translation in Kikuyu concepts. This is because, the idea of atonement by the blood of a sacrificial victim is found in the traditional Kikuyu context.<sup>9</sup>

It is, however, also apparent that the process of getting back into the right relationship with God demands also that a person must have faith in the forgiving nature of God. When a person asks for forgiveness, he is in effect making an act of faith. It is in believing that he has been forgiven that he is enabled to turn a new page and start a new life, believing that his past is now clean: "I feel I have been forgiven, not

only my sins, but also my sinfulness. I am now a new creature."<sup>10</sup>

The process of conversion, however, from the point of view of the Ahonoki, does not end with the individual's faith and repentance and presumed forgiveness. The convert awaits God's confirmation that he has indeed been forgiven. This confirmation is in terms of baptism with the Holy Spirit, who, as the Ahonoki point out is their guarantee of salvation.<sup>11</sup> In the words of one informant, the Holy Spirit is like a stamp which one puts on a letter, by way of indicating that the letter is ready for delivery. The Holy Spirit is God's stamp or seal on those whom he has accepted.<sup>12</sup>

One may enquire why the Ahonoki are so pre-occupied with the need for "God's confirmation." This is due to the fact that this group also believes that God saves those whom he wills. In other words, they believe in the idea of election and 'calling'. According to the Ahonoki, God has chosen, since the day of creation, those who will be saved. It becomes imperative then that the Ahonoki seek to know whether they are indeed among the elect. They hold the opinion that one may show all the signs of having repented, and may even be accepted by members of a particular group, but this would be of no use if God has not accepted the person. It is with great fervour, therefore, that those who have experienced initial salvation seek a "sign from above", to be sure that they have indeed been forgiven. They therefore pray fervently for

the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, especially as manifested in speaking in tongues.

We have so far attempted an analysis of the process of conversion or "initial salvation". We may also enquire further as to how this 'initial salvation' affects the Muhonoki's life thereafter.

The effects of initial salvation: the Ahonoki's view-point

On a cursory glance at the foregoing summary statement, which is an attempt to define salvation, it appears as if salvation is a negative process of rescue from sin and its dangers, God's wrath and death. In all fairness, however, although the above is the emphasis of a saved person when he expresses his beliefs, nevertheless, when one examines their faith in action, one observes the fact that there is indeed, a positive content in their concept of salvation.

According to members of this group, one is saved into what can be described as a life of fellowship. One is saved to become a member of a community characterized by sharing, brotherly love and understanding. One is saved to become a member of the "homestead of God", the family of God, or the Body of Christ. In this community, each member's pain is corporately felt, and each member's joy is shared by all. Indeed, this is the ideal community such as described in the Apostolic writings of the New Testament. As such, it is a commendable ideal. The question, however, is as to how wide should be the borders within

which to practise this brotherly love. One cannot help noticing that for the Ahonoki, the boundaries are rather narrow, being confined to the circle of those who have had a similar experience. The result is that they appear to be rather exclusive. The point to note here, however, is that a person considers himself to be saved into a life of sharing with his brethren, a thing that also ensures his security.

The Ahonoki also see salvation in terms of victorious living. After the initial salvation, the convert is expected to conquer Satan, Kuhoota Cetani, with all his wiles. These are seen in terms of temptation to sin. Sickness or any other calamity that may befall a Christian is seen as Satan's attempt to make the Christian weak.

The Ahonoki are sure of this victory over Satan because of two reasons. One is that they feel the battle against Satan has already been fought and won by Jesus on the cross. Secondly, they have been given the Holy Spirit to help and guide them.<sup>13</sup> He is supposed to show the individual that such and such a thing is wrong or right and also enables him to do the right thing. It is due to these two reasons that the Ahonoki believe that they therefore cannot sin. It appears that the Holy Spirit not only guides the individual in choosing the right thing, but also, by making him do it, it looks as if, in effect, the Holy Spirit dictates the actions of the individual. This is a point of view that may be worthy of further discussion

from the point of view of the scriptures. One may ask to what extent the Christian then is responsible for his acts of commission or omission or whether he has merely to rely on the Holy Spirit to dictate his actions.

As a result of these two reasons, the Ahonoki are confident of their victory over sin. They assert that the Holy Spirit is God in them, and as the scriptures say,

No one born of God commits sin;  
God's nature abides in him and  
he cannot sin because he is born  
of God (I John 3:9)

The converse to this view of salvation as victory is that life here on earth is seen as a constant battle with evil. It is not infrequent to hear these people describe temptation in a very concrete manner: "I was visited by the devil [In sickness or calamity or temptation to do wrong], but God gave me victory." Thus, this life is seen as a battlefield in which Christians are faced by the enemy, Satan, who pesters them in all manners of temptations.

Salvation is also seen in terms of providence and protection. There is, among these people, a quiet confidence and assurance that a person who is saved can rely entirely on God to provide health, wealth, and protection even from physical dangers. One often hears in their meetings, members encouraging each other by narrating incidents of what God has done for them by way of providence and protection. One boy narrated how he was saved from

being arbitrarily arrested by the police. A woman told of how she walked at night across a dangerous ridge, with the confidence that "a Child of God cannot perish."<sup>14</sup>

This confidence, that salvation also means protection and providence, is also evident in that they are apparently joyful even in times of tribulation and pain. Some rely entirely on God to remove disease, attributed either to the devil trying to tempt the Christian, or to the result of hidden unrepented sin. It is amazing to see a very sick person suffer for weeks, while trusting that God will eventually cure him. Whether this is a sign of presumption, fatalism, or a very strong faith in God is difficult to gauge. It is in fact questionable as to what extent one can just sit passively and "wait upon God" to do everything. This, as already noted, is a point of controversy even among the Ahonoki themselves.<sup>15</sup> Some argue that God helps those who help themselves, and advocate that one should be active in seeking solutions to his problems, such as going to the hospital in times of sickness. Others rely entirely on prayer and thus appear presumptuous.

We may conclude, therefore, that initial salvation or conversion affects the life of the individual positively. In their conception of salvation, the Ahonoki believe that salvation means a more positive life of love, fellowship, victory and protection.

However, this is not all there is to salvation.

Apparently, to the Ahonoki, all this is preparatory for a better life in the future. They are convinced that victory in this life over sin and Satan will lead to a life that is much better when they die. What then is the nature of the Ahonoki's future expectation? What is their vision? It is to this expectation or the Ahonoki's future hope that we shall now turn to examine.

The future hope and the concept of the hereafter: The Ahonoki's perspective

As noted in the above section, the Ahonoki generally view life on this earth as a continuous battle against Satan. Few of the Ahonoki will claim that this life is an end in itself. On the contrary, they are all emphatic that this life is just transitory; they use expressions such as "this life is a journey"; "I am saved from the the world"; "I do not belong here." Their attitude towards this worldly life can be well described as a "this world is not my home" attitude. They therefore feel that one should not be unduly concerned with what is transitory but should seek things from above. These are described as Manaiguru or Maundu ma Kiroho, "things from above" or "Spiritual things". As one informant explained:

Even if I am cultivating in the field or when I go to the market to sell, I do not allow the process of selling to overwhelm me. I am careful not to concentrate too much on what is merely transitory, thus forgetting my spiritual life.<sup>16</sup>



The attitude which the Ahonoki have towards life on this life is also reflected in their attitude towards death. In general, it is very rare to find these people mourning their dead. Their funerals are, in fact, characterized by an almost incomprehensible joy. No one cries, and no prayers are said for the dead. Instead, there is joyful singing and dancing. It is as if they are convinced that death is the best thing for the person concerned. This attitude towards death not only reflects their attitude towards this life but also what they expect life after death to be like.

It is apparent that a Muhonoki expects something more pleasant in the hereafter than he goes through here on earth. Their concept of the after life is expressed in biblical imagery such as Kugaya Uthamaki wa Ngai, "Inheriting the Kingdom of God", kugaya muoyo wa tene na tene, "inheriting eternal life", guthii mucii wa matuini, "going to heaven" or "to the heavenly home". This is what a saved person expects or hopes for.

It is also evident that they believe that there are two residences (ciikaro) "up there". There is one for the wicked and one for the righteous. These are the residences into which, at the final judgement, God will place people according to their merits or demerits. The holy will be placed in heaven (matuini, Ikenero) where they will live with God ever-after. The sinners will be thrown into hell (Icuaini, mwakini, jehenamu).

The Ahonoki emphasize their conviction that, in the final judgement, God will reward the holy and punish the wicked; each according to his actions here on earth. He will not have mercy even if the sinners outnumber the righteous as some would like to hope. He will only reward those who have endured in their faith. In the words of one convert:

(2) In the end, God will separate his own from the wicked. Though many people may claim that God cannot possibly punish all the sinners who obviously outnumber the righteous, such people ought to be reminded of the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, Noah and the flood. In these cases, God did not hesitate to punish the wicked although they were the majority. Let them not think that hell may not be big enough to accommodate all the sinners. The fact is, no sin will enter heaven.<sup>17</sup>

#### Time and Salvation: the Ahonoki's view-point

When a Muhonoki speaks of salvation, he often narrates a past experience of how and when he got 'saved', often mentioning a specific date. He speaks with the confidence that salvation for him has already happened. One also will often hear the Ahonoki enquiring from non-members whether they are saved yet, and if not, why not. When they refer to salvation in this manner as something that happens on a specific time here and now, the non-members observe that this is not possible because one can only know whether or not he is saved after one dies.<sup>18</sup> This variant interpretation of when salvation happens

raises a question that is worth discussing from the point of view of the Ahonoki. What is the relationship between time and salvation?

A Muhonoki's answer to this question can be paraphrased as follows:

- (1) We were saved by the blood of Jesus (a past event).
- (2) We were saved when we repented (a past event).
- (3) We are saved when God helps us in our daily problems (a present experience).
- (4) We shall be saved finally in the future when we enter our heavenly home (a future hope).

As already stated in an earlier section, however, for the individual, salvation is a process which starts with the realization of one's sinfulness, and the repentance thereof. In fact, at one point, the Ahonoki seem to equate salvation with repentance: "kuhonoka ni kwirira mehia, gutuira mehia maku cira, kuga ndugacoka kwihia ringi." Literally translated, this means: "to be saved is to repent your sins to make a decision that you will never sin again."<sup>19</sup>

Defined as repentance, salvation, to the person, has a definite 'once-and-for-all-event' tone. As one informant explained. "Kuhonoka ni kwa ihinda rimwe tu, ndungihonoka umuthi, ruciu uhonokokwo. That is, "you cannot be saved today and tomorrow you become unsaved."<sup>20</sup>

For the Ahonoki therefore salvation as repentance, is a once and for all event. As such, they are able to say with confidence, "I was saved in such and such a year."

Secondly, when we continue with the Ahonoki's definition of salvation as repentance, it also follows that salvation begins right here on earth and is not something that happens after death. The Ahonoki's belief is that, "In heaven, there will not be time for repentance. That will be time for judgement and subsequent verdicts."<sup>21</sup>

Further still, it appears to be the logical conclusion to the above argument that if salvation is repentance, and repentance is a once and for all event, then sinning after conversion is impossible. This, as we have already pointed out, is what the Ahonoki believe. They claim that some scriptures back their assertion that "one born again" or anyone who has experienced initial salvation cannot sin. They cite the passages in the first letter of John to the effect that

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sin, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins. (I John 3:4)<sup>22</sup>

Using such quotations to back their claims, it is a unanimous assertion by members of the Ahonoki group that they do not sin once they experience initial salvation. They admit that sometimes they may be tempted to sin, indeed slide, but not fall. As one of them explained:

Sin in terms of adultery, theft, anger, insulting one another, is alien to me. In fact, you may talk to me in abusive terms, but I find that I have absolutely no words to answer you back, and thus appear like a fool.<sup>23</sup>

The idea that after initial salvation one does not sin is in keeping with what we discussed earlier, that they view salvation also in terms of victory over sin. This power to conquer sin is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who preserves the Christian in the right path. One informant attempted to explain this notion, that after being born again, one cannot sin, by giving an example of a father-son relationship:

If my son offends me, rather than treat him harshly, I will first try to correct him, exhorting and advising him, though at one point I may use punitive measures. However, if a stranger's child offends me, I will treat him harshly, may be send him to the police, or even have him convicted. In the case of the born-again people, they have entered a father-son relationship with God. Consequently, if they offend God, they are punished there and then to correct them and put them on the right path. For someone who is outside this relationship however, it is difficult for God to help him. He is a sinner who can only be the target of God's wrath and judgement.<sup>24</sup>

In this example, we perceive an interpretation of sin that is typical among the Ahonoki. It seems from the above quotation, that sin is not so much a question of what one does, but rather it is a question of relationships. (The children in the example may have committed the same

offence). Those who have made an explicit decision for God against sin, stand a better chance of benefitting from the ensuing father-son relationship. The benefits include sustenance and correction all geared towards the growth of the individual. Those, who through sin are still alienated from God cannot have the benefits of such a relationship.

The born "again" Christians have allowed God's power to work in their lives, to reign in their lives as father, such that, through his Holy Spirit, he can show them where they go wrong. Thus explains another informant:

A saved person cannot sin, because he or she is guided by the Holy Spirit. Before you can step into sin, you can already distinguish that the thing is sinful and thus you stand a better chance of avoiding it. This is due to what we call thamiri (conscience) which is very strong in a born again Christian.<sup>25</sup>

Theoretically therefore, it is possible to concede that a saved person cannot sin. Some of the members hasten to add however, that life is not as easy as all that. It is a constant battle, in which the Christian tries, aided by God, to consciously conquer his old nature and become more godly. As such, salvation is not a past event that happens once and for all, but is a process in which the Christian matures up as he constantly fights against all temptations and weaknesses, (gwicokera).

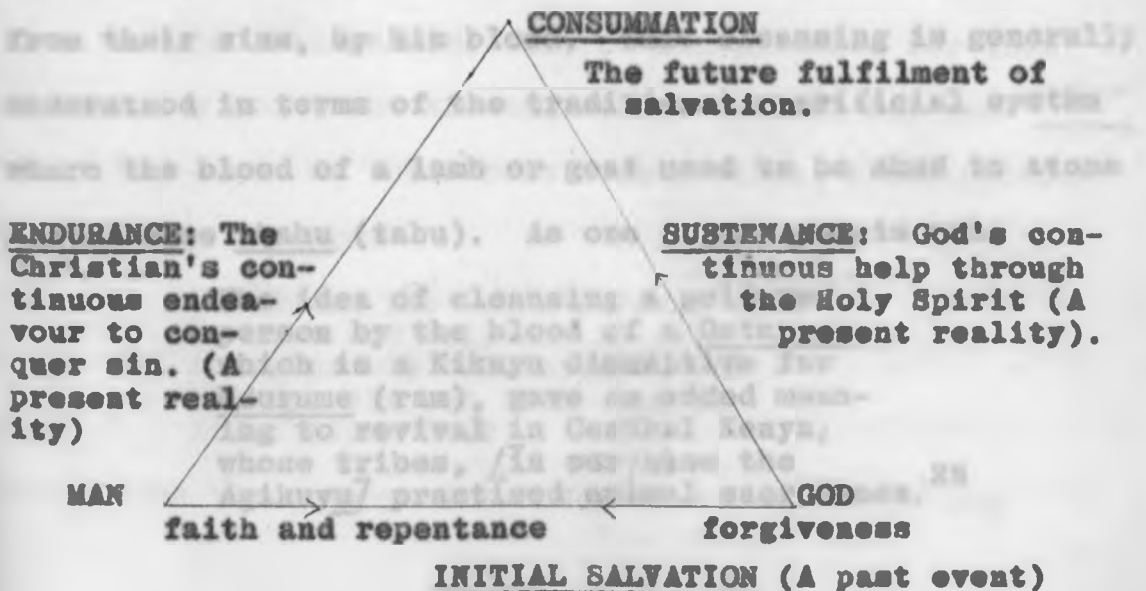
This process will only be completed in the future when the Christian's vision will be fulfilled:

My vision is to be victorious over all the earth-bound problems and temptations; to become more and more like Christ. My vision is yet to be fulfilled in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Another interviewee sees his expectations rather differently:

This life is a battlefield, where I have to constantly fight against temptation. My hope is that just as a soldier receives his awards after a victory in battle, so also will I receive my reward in heaven after this life.<sup>27</sup>

It is apparent, therefore, that although the overriding idea is that for the Ahonoki salvation is a past event of repentance on the sinner's side and of forgiveness from God's side, it is also a continuous process in which, aided by God's sustenance, a Christian endures to the end when his salvation will be consummated. So far, the relationship between time and salvation from the Ahonoki's point of view can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



Thus we can say that, for the Ahonoki, salvation is a process that has a past, a present, and a future. The apparent weakness with the Ahonoki however, is their over-emphasis on initial salvation as a past event. When they refer to salvation, it appears as if they are only referring to this once-and-for-all event, to the extent that they have earned themselves criticism on this account. Their case however may become clearer, when we enquire further what their views are, concerning the 'how' of salvation. How does salvation come about or how is the process of salvation implemented?

#### The dynamics of salvation

Asked the question, "how are you saved", a Muhonoki will usually answer without hesitation: "Jesus is my personal saviour." It is necessary, however, to enquire further how the Ahonoki conceive Jesus as effecting their salvation. The majority of the Ahonoki see the salvation brought by Jesus in terms of his having cleansed them from their sins, by his blood. This cleansing is generally understood in terms of the traditional sacrificial system where the blood of a lamb or goat used to be shed to atone and cleanse thahu (tabu). As one author points out:

The idea of cleansing a polluted person by the blood of a Gaturume, which is a Kikuyu diminutive for Ndurume (ram), gave an added meaning to revival in Central Kenya, whose tribes, [in our case the Agikuyu] practised animal sacrifices. 25



The majority of the Ahonoki see their sins as having been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, the greatest sacrifice. As one informant commented:

Though we used to slaughter goats in days gone by as sacrifices to cleanse us of any uncleanness (thahu, migiro),<sup>29</sup> these days there is no sacrifice other than the blood of Jesus. Faith in the blood of Jesus cleanses me of my sins. Not that I have to see the blood in order to believe, for it is written, blessed are those who believe without seeing.<sup>30</sup>

It is obvious, therefore, that though the blood of Christ saves a person, it only does so in so far as a person responds to it by faith.

A perplexing question, however, is that of the relationship between Jesus' death and God's forgiveness. Was the death of Jesus meant to appease an angry God just as in the traditional system, where sacrifices were used to appease an angry God? This is a question to which the Ahonoki gave no unanimous answer. Whereas some claim that Jesus died in their stead, that he was punished for them, the majority point out the solidarity between God the Father and Jesus in their role of salvation, often quoting the Johanine passage:

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who has faith in Him, may not die but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

At the same time, they also insist that, although they

are saved by God, through faith in the blood of his Son, a person is not recognized as a full Christian unless one is given the Holy Spirit. It becomes imperative to enquire how they perceive the role of the Holy Spirit in effecting salvation.

In chapter three, we noted that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one of the major points of difference between the Ahonoki and the Anglicans from whom they seceded.<sup>31</sup> The Ahonoki seem to have a strong affinity to the Pentecostals, preferring to call themselves the "Friends of the Holy Spirit." They therefore believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is a post-conversion experience characterized by the individual speaking in tongues. Whether experiencing the Holy Spirit is a second experience, and whether speaking in tongues should be the only manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the individual will be discussed later from the point of view of the scriptures.

Suffice it to say here that the Ahonoki are of the opinion that the Holy Spirit plays a central and significant role in effecting their salvation. For them, two words seem to summarize their idea of the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation, namely, assurance and guidance. As already noted, the majority of the Ahonoki insist that baptism in the Holy Spirit is a necessary follow up of initial salvation. This is explained as a sign that God

has accepted the repentant sinner. The Holy Spirit is therefore perceived as the guarantee that they have been and will be saved. As they point out:

We received the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit is the pledge that we shall enter upon our heritage when God has redeemed his own.<sup>32</sup>

In this context, the Holy Spirit is viewed as God's way of expressing that he has accepted a given person. Thus, those who receive the Holy Spirit, feel sure that God is on their side:

Once one gets the Holy Spirit one is in God and God is in him. One is therefore holy just as God is holy with whom he expects to live in his kingdom.<sup>33</sup>

The Holy Spirit also effects one's salvation by helping the believer in the daily battle against sin and temptation. The Holy Spirit is in effect, therefore, almost equated with the conscience (thamiri), because it is he who is supposed to guide the Christian from day to day, ensuring that he does not sin.

It is the Holy Spirit who helps the faithful not to sin. It is he who maintains me in the right path of faith, acting as my advisor, teacher and helper.<sup>34</sup>

Another informant points out that it is the Holy Spirit who reveals to one that such and such a thing is bad or sinful and should be avoided.<sup>35</sup> This makes it possible for the person to forbear from doing it.

In addition to assuring the believer of his salvation and also guiding him daily, the Holy Spirit is also portrayed as the source of spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing and preaching. These are referred to as motugi ma Roho Mutheru (The gifts of the Holy Spirit). He is also seen as the overall head and guide of the Church or house of God.

A final question relating to the concept of salvation remains to be answered. This is the one pertaining to who is to be saved or what is the scope of salvation. In this connection, we will examine the Muhonoki's answer to the question, "for whom is salvation?"

#### The scope of salvation from the Ahonoki's perspective

From the foregoing analysis of the Ahonoki concept of salvation, it becomes quite clear whom they expect to be saved. In summary, we can point out that salvation is for those who explicitly claim to believe in Jesus Christ. This view is supported by the Ahonoki by citing the Johanne passage which claims that God sent His only Son so that those who believe in Him will not be judged but will be saved. (John 3:16). The Ahonoki therefore assert that faith in Christ as Saviour is a necessary condition for salvation. One must publicly give testimony to the effect that Jesus is his personal saviour. Secondly, salvation is for those who, not only profess Jesus as their personal saviour, but also those who have the

Holy Spirit. It is the Ahonoki's belief that anyone without the Holy Spirit is not a Child of God.

Those who are saved are seen as God's elect. It is God who has predestined the ones to be saved. They therefore believe that those who accept Jesus as their personal saviour are chosen by God and confirmed as God's people by the Holy Spirit. Some even add that this choice was made by God right from the time of creation.<sup>36</sup>

Given the above arguments, inevitable questions that present themselves to an enquirer are: "What then is the fate of non-Christians or even 'non-saved' Christians, those who do not make a verbal claim to having been saved? Are they excluded from salvation?"

The Ahonoki's answer to these questions is rather ambivalent. At one point, it is a Muhonoki's strong conviction that, apart from Jesus Christ, and without the Holy Spirit, there is no salvation. In fact, several interviewees compared Jesus to a passport, without which a traveller cannot reach a given destination. They claimed that without Jesus, one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Salvation, then, is apparently only for those who possess the 'passport', Jesus, who is also seen as the only mediator between man and God:

Consider the situation whereby one wished to see the president. Without a mediator, someone who knows the president well, it would be difficult to see the president. By the same token, it is only those who have

Jesus as their mediator who will be able to see God.<sup>37</sup>

It is also argued by the Ahonoki that anyone who is outside Christ is so by choice, because the gospel has been spread to all corners of the earth. They therefore feel that non-Christians and even "non-saved" Christians have ignored the gospel. Some of the Ahonoki do not even see the need to preach any more, and the group as a whole is not as evangelical as it used to be in the early days of revival. They are now a closely knit group of those who have accepted Christ, and have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, however, there are a few who hesitate to condemn non-Christians outright. These claim that in the end, God will know what to do with those who will still have rejected Christ.

This question of who is to be saved is a significant one for the purposes of this study. It will be recalled that, basically, this is the question which led to the secession of the Ahonoki from the established church. Although the Ahonoki and the institutional church agree that it is necessary for one to be a Christian in order to be saved, they differ in their opinion of who a Christian is. On the whole, the established church accepts as a Christian one who is formally affiliated to the church, baptized and registered. The Ahonoki react to this and claim that such a Christianity is only nominal.

On their part, they hold the opinion that a Christian is one who makes a verbal claim to Jesus as his personal saviour, and who later receives the Holy Spirit. Only then can one claim to be a Christian and hence, saved. It becomes necessary, therefore, to attempt a definition of who a Christian is, from the point of view of the scriptures, in order to have a comprehensive answer to the question, "who is to be saved?"

The analysis of the Ahonoki's notion of the scope of salvation also raises some further subsidiary questions which may be worthy of discussion. The question of election and calling, for instance, leads an enquirer to ask whether the election of some, means that those who are not called are doomed. In this context, we will attempt to find out what is the meaning of being called, from the point of view of the scriptures. In the context of salvation, what does it mean to be called to be a Christian.<sup>?</sup> These are some of the questions which we shall attempt to answer as we discuss the biblical notion of salvation and its scope in later chapters. Meanwhile, a summary of the Ahonoki's notion of salvation is here called for.

#### A summary of the Ahonoki's concept of salvation

In the foregoing discussion in the whole of this chapter, it is apparent that for a Muhonoki, salvation is a process that starts here on earth, with the sinners repentance, and God's forgiveness of the sinner. As a

process, salvation is made possible by the death of Christ and is ensured by the Holy Spirit.

Salvation for the Ahonoki is essentially a process of moral transformation<sup>38</sup> because after experiencing salvation, an individual is said to be free from sin. The salvation of the individual manifests itself positively in victorious living and endurance in faith. This is in the context of fellowship with one's brethren, who are referred to as the family of God.

As a process however, salvation is as yet incomplete. It is a process in which the convert endures in faith, and which will be fulfilled in the future, when the Christian will enter the heavenly home, his victory over this world's problems having been won.

As such, salvation has a past, present, and future. However, it appears as though it is a Muhonoki's emphasis that salvation is a once-and-for-all event that happens at a particular time. This is especially so when the Muhonoki seems to equate salvation with the initial repentance and forgiveness.

There is also an apparent tendency to spiritualize the concept of salvation. On the whole, the Ahonoki seem to view salvation as an other-worldly fact, for which life on this earth is just a preliminary 'test' or, to use their terminology, a road or a battlefield.

Another point of significance is their emphasis that it is necessary for one to make a verbal claim to



Jesus as one's personal saviour. On the whole, we note that salvation is perceived at the personal level for they seem to conceive salvation entirely in personal terms. For them, it is the "I" who is saved, Jesus being one's "personal" saviour. One may therefore enquire whether salvation is only at this level of the individual in relation to his God, or whether it also has a social, or even a cosmic dimension.

In a final question, one can also ask what one is supposed to do with one's salvation. Once one is saved, does one sit back and claim "praise God, I am saved" and be satisfied with that, or what is a saved person's role in the whole process of salvation? These questions will hopefully become clearer when we examine the scriptural concept of salvation.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph Gitau, Interviewed at Nairobi, March, 1979.
- <sup>2</sup> Benjamin Mungai, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> Idem
- <sup>4</sup> Mwangi Mureithi, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Gathu, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.
- <sup>6</sup> It is not quite explicit, whether, by sinfulness, the Ahonoki refer to the individual's personal inclination to sin, or to the universal human condition of "sinfulness" often called "original sin".
- <sup>7</sup> Mwangi Muriithi, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.
- <sup>8</sup> See below, 'The dynamics of salvation'.
- <sup>9</sup> See chapter two, the section entitled, 'Salvation as atonement'.
- <sup>10</sup> Rachel Nyokabi, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.
- <sup>11</sup> See below, 'The dynamics of salvation'.
- <sup>12</sup> Joseph Gitau, Idem.
- <sup>13</sup> See below, 'The dynamics of salvation'.
- <sup>14</sup> Veronicah Wanjiru, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.
- <sup>15</sup> See chapter three, section entitled, "worship: a typical prayer-meeting".
- <sup>16</sup> Margaret Wangui, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Mungai, Idem.

<sup>18</sup> One of the informants, who happened to have been a Catholic initially, explained that he left this denomination because he felt that Catholics are wrong in assuming that salvation happens only after death.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Gathu, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

<sup>21</sup> Idem.

<sup>22</sup> See also, I John 3:9, 5:18, Romans 6:1f.

<sup>23</sup> Obadiah Ndung'u, Interviewed at Kiambu, February, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Gitau, Idem.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Wangui, Interviewed at Kiambaa, March, 1979.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Gitau, Idem.

<sup>27</sup> Sospeter Ikonya, Interviewed at Kiambu, March, 1979.

<sup>28</sup> E.N. Wanyoike, An African pastor, (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1974), p.167.

<sup>29</sup> The term thahu is in some churches, like the Catholic Church, used to translate the term sin. The term, however, is more accurately translated as something that makes one ritually unclean. The term migiuro is best translated as taboo.

<sup>30</sup> Sospeter Ikonya, Idem.

<sup>31</sup> See chapter three, The birth of a new church and Kaggia's influence.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Gitau, Idem, quoting Ephesians 1:13.

<sup>33</sup>Mwangi Mureithi, Idem.

<sup>34</sup>Margaret Wangui, Idem.

<sup>35</sup>Benjamin Mungai, Idem.

<sup>36</sup>This belief in election and predestination is part of the reason why the Abonoki feel a need for God's confirmation that they are indeed saved.

<sup>37</sup>Benjamin Mungai, Idem.

<sup>38</sup>The emphasis by underlining is mine.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NOTION OF SALVATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### The Old Testament background

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament continually emphasizes that God saves. In this chapter, we intend to glean an interpretation of salvation as presented in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Since time does not allow us to deal with each book of the New Testament to determine its notion of salvation, we shall, for convenience, first look at salvation from the point of view of the life, work and the teaching of Jesus. This is because Jesus is at the very centre of the New Testament theme of salvation. Secondly, we shall look at salvation in the thought of Paul, who has more to say about salvation than all the other New Testament writers put together, not only because he has more writings in the Canon, but also because salvation is at the core of his message.

This, in effect, means that we shall examine the concept of salvation, mainly as presented in the Gospels, which contain the story of the life, the work and the teaching of Jesus. We shall also, in particular, look at the Pauline writings, although reference will also be made to the rest of the New Testament writings when necessary.

When we look at the synoptic gospels, we note that, the notion of salvation is closely tied up with the idea

of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:17)<sup>2</sup>. The gospel of the Kingdom of God formed the core of the preaching of Jesus. As is recorded in Mark's gospel, "Jesus came preaching the gospel of God saying, 'the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand' (Mk. 1:14)." It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine the meaning of the notion of the Kingdom of God if we are to understand the notion of salvation as presented by Jesus. To do this, however, it is necessary to briefly examine the idea of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament as well as in the religious milieu within which Jesus preached, in order to see to what extent this was formative to Jesus' concept of salvation.

Looking at the Old Testament, we note that the phrase 'Kingdom of God' is not very common. The idea of God's kingship and sovereignty, however, is by no means absent. Old Testament writers in many instances refer to God as King, both of Israel and of the whole world.<sup>3</sup> This kingship of God was manifested in the history of Israel in the many instances of deliverance done for the Israelites. As King, God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, and also frequently ensured their victory in battle (Ex. 66:5-7, Deut. 20:4). The belief that Yahweh was sovereign over Israel, led to the expectation that, since Yahweh's sovereignty was not universally accepted, he would one day manifest his sovereignty to the

full by subjugating the whole world to his kingly reign. Therefore, in addition to references to the fact that God is already King, there are also frequent references to the effect that God will one day become King and manifest his rule absolutely.<sup>4</sup>

To the popular Israelite mind, the future coming of God, which means that God will manifest his sovereignty to the full, implies that Israel will have universal dominion over all the other nations. They expected that, through a divinely ordained monarch of the Davidic dynasty, God will finally manifest his lordship over all the other nations. The popular expectation of "the day of the Lord", therefore, was that, in the end, God will show his kingship over all the nations and subjugate them under the Israelites, to whom he was King in a special way by virtue of the covenant relationship.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to this nationalistic expectation that the day of the Lord will be a day of glory for the Israelites, the prophets pointed out that the day of the Lord will not merely bring blessing, but also judgement over Israel. This is because of the fact that they too had frequently forgotten that Yahweh was King over them. Thus, the day of the Lord would mean that God, as King, would judge, not only the other nations, but would also judge Israel herself. Amos, therefore, warned his contemporaries to the effect: "Fools, who long for the day of the Lord!

What will the day of the Lord mean to you? It will be darkness and not light" (Amos 5:18).<sup>6</sup> Israel herself, as God's particular subject, has fallen short of God's expectation of her in terms of justice and righteousness. The coming of God to manifest his absolute sovereignty would mean that she, too, would be adversely affected.

To the prophets, therefore, the coming of the Kingdom of God meant the purging of Israel and all nations of evil and all injustice. They therefore portrayed a God who was not merely concerned with Israel's national welfare, but also with justice and righteousness among the peoples of other nations (Amos 1-4). The prophetic message concerning the Kingdom of God then, was that, when God comes to consummate his rule on earth, he will not just bring blessing but will first of all mete out judgement.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the judgement, he will establish his reign which will be characterized by universal peace and harmony (Is. 2:4; 11:6-9; Mic. 4:3). It will be a reign when men will accept God's rule without question, because the covenant laws will be written in their hearts (Jer. 31:31f). The prophets, therefore, universalized the notion of the Kingdom of God, transcending national boundaries, and presented it in ethical terms. Although they pointed out that the coming days would be days of restoration for Israel,<sup>8</sup> it is in this context that they also emphasized that, it was not Israel as a nation that would enjoy the blessings of the ultimate Kingdom of God, but a purified



remnant.<sup>9</sup>

On the whole, the prophets saw the establishment of the Kingdom of God as a logical conclusion to their belief that God visits his people to bring salvation or judgement within history. Thus, they interpreted the immediate events in Israel in terms of the future coming of God as King. When other nations attacked Israel, the prophets saw this as God's way of punishing Israel for her sins. The historical event of the Babylonian captivity, which took place between 586 and 537 BC, for instance, was portrayed as a means of judgement over Israel (Jer. 25:1ff). Beyond this purging of Israel, the prophets held the view that Israel will emerge purified to enjoy the salvation inherent in the eschatological Kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup>

This ultimate Kingdom of God will be a consummation of the saving activities of God who comes to visit his people within history. For the prophets, therefore, the expected Kingdom of God will be the final event of redemption by a God who has saved and judged Israel and the nations both in the past and the present. This Kingdom of God was the very goal towards which history was moving. According to the prophets then, there is little distinction between historical manifestations of the kingship of God and the eschatological Kingdom which is also viewed as historical. The only difference is that the eschatological visitation will be final and will yield in nothing less than a new order of things (Is. 66:22).

Generally speaking, therefore, the prophetic expectation of the ultimate Kingdom of God, which will mean ultimate salvation, is historical, eschatological, universal and ethical. Its content is told in concrete terms. The setting of the ultimate Kingdom will be in a redeemed physical world (Is. 65:17). All men shall come to bow before God (Jer: 31:31). Both nature and man will enjoy this ultimate salvation in terms of material blessings, ideal social conditions, characterized by justice and righteousness which will be ensured by an ideal king chosen by God (Is. 32:15, Amos 9:13, Is. 42:1ff). In short, we can say that the prophets perceived the Kingdom of God as an era of ultimate salvation which will include material blessings in an ideal social context. For them, history, nature and mankind are the subjects of this final kingly reign of God and its inherent salvation.

Such then was the hope that the prophets held out for the people. Although they proclaimed God's judgement in history over Israel, due to her failures against the covenant expectations, they also held out the hope that Israel would repent and be converted in order to enjoy the Kingdom of God with its blessings. It seemed, from the prophetic message, that only repentance and moral transformation would make the coming of God's reign possible.

When the Jews, therefore, returned from the Babylonian captivity about 537 B.C, they renounced their

former idolatry and revived their devotion to the law unreservedly (Neh. 8:10). During the reign of the Maccabees,<sup>11</sup> many devout Jews suffered torture and martyrdom rather than give up their devotion to the law (II Mac. 5:7).

In spite of their faithfulness, however, the promised golden age of the kingdom did not come. Instead, they suffered further domination. The Persian rule, under Cyrus, which had made it possible for the Jews to return from Babylon was overthrown by Alexander of Macedon in 333 B.C. After Alexander's death in 323 B.C., the empire he had formed was divided among four of his generals. Palestine was annexed to Egypt by Ptolemy I in 320 B.C. For the next century the Jews were ruled by the Ptolemies who were, on the whole, mild rulers. These were years of comparative tranquility which was abruptly ended in 198 B.C., when Palestine was wrested from Egyptian control and was annexed to Syria under the Seleucid dynasty. The Seleucids attempted to hellenize the Jews. (That is make them adopt the Greek culture or hellenism). This is a situation that the Jews resisted. Things got worse during the reign of the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, from 175 B.C. He not only tried to hellenize the Jews, but he also desecrated Jerusalem and the temple. During his reign "the observance of the sabbath, the rite of circumcision, and the possession of a copy of the Jewish scriptures were made crimes punishable by death."<sup>12</sup>

This reign of terror by Antiochus Epiphanes gave rise to the Maccabean uprising. By guerrilla warfare, the Maccabees<sup>13</sup> gradually won for the Jews the freedom to worship and to follow the law. It was not until 142 B.C. that King Demetrius of Syria finally granted Palestine complete political freedom. This period of national independence lasted until 63 B.C., when Palestine again fell, this time under the Roman general Pompey.

Given this situation, where the Jews were continually under the yoke of one worldly power after another, it became necessary for them to reinterpret the notion of the promised Kingdom of God. This reinterpretation was provided in the apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period from the second century B.C., to the first century A.D.<sup>14</sup> The writers of apocalyptic literature attempted to solve the problem of the apparently undeserved pain and suffering of a righteous people. They developed a conception that history was totally immersed in evil, almost to an unredeemable point. They portrayed the world as being in the grips of Satan. However, they still held the hope that this Kingdom of Satan would one day be overthrown by God at the end of time, when God would usher in a new order of life. One of the most vivid pictures of this end time visitation of God is found in the extracanonical book attributed to One Enoch. In this book, the end is portrayed as being brought about by the glorious

coming of a heavenly son of man (I Enoch 47:7). In this new age, the righteous would live in peace, while the wicked would suffer judgement. It would be an age of retribution.

In the apocalyptic literature, we notice that there was a tendency to postpone to the expected future world whatever salvation that had apparently not been experienced in this world. They emphasized the hereafter, rather than the present situation. This eschatological expectation as a futuristic and Supra-historical hope was developed in post-exilic writings like Joel, Isaiah 24-27, and Zechariah 9-14. It reached its fullest development in the apocalypse of Daniel and the extra-canonical apocalypses like the apocalypse of Baruch, the Assumption of Moses, II Esdras and I Enoch. These were written between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D.

By this time, we can observe two trends of thought concerning the notion of the Kingdom of God. These are the prophetic and the apocalyptic conceptions of the Kingdom of God. Whereas, generally speaking, the idea of the Kingdom of God speaks of a hope for an eschatological salvation related to the perfect reign of God, nevertheless, there is a difference in emphasis between the prophetic and the apocalyptic conceptions. The prophets saw the Kingdom of God as a reign of salvation which would be brought by God within history. The apocalyptists, on the other hand, saw the Kingdom of God as otherworldly.

Convinced that history was under the sway of Satan, they looked forward to the future reign of God in the world to come. Their emphasis was on the hereafter and what happened after death. In short, we can say that, whereas prophets, on the whole, looked for salvation within history and in an earthly setting, apocalyptists looked for salvation beyond, and from history. They expected an otherworldly Kingdom of God which would replace the earthly Kingdom of Satan.

This kingly reign of God was expected to come, perhaps, by using the agency of men. In the prophetic notion, this agent was expected to be an ideal King like David, a Messiah anointed by God who would ensure the reign of God on earth. At another level, particularly in the apocalyptic literature, this emissary of God is seen as a pre-existent son of man who comes as God's personal representative.<sup>15</sup>

By the first century A.D., therefore, there was a general expectation for the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Jews expected a deliverer or a Messiah who would inaugurate the Kingdom of God, overthrow the Gentile oppressors and reinstate Israel. This was the popular and nationalistic hope. At the same time however, we can observe a gradual spiritualization of the idea of the Kingdom of God, as a time, not only for political liberation for the Jews, but also a time of retribution. The righteous, those who adhere to the law, will be saved, while

the wicked will be punished (I Enoch 1:1f). By this time then, it was every Jew's wish that the Kingdom of God would come, as is evident in the Jew's daily prayer that God

May establish his Kingdom in your  
life time and in your days and in  
the life time of all the house of  
Israel, even speedily at a near time. <sup>16</sup>

With this background, then, we turn to examine the development of the idea of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, and particularly Jesus' interpretation of the idea.

The development of the idea of the Kingdom of God in the Gospels: Jesus' conception of salvation

It is against this background of an expected kingly intervention of God that John the Baptist, who was forerunner of Jesus, came preaching the imminence of the Kingdom of God. In keeping with the climate of the hope of salvation in first century Judaism, John preached that the expected day of the Lord was near (Mt. 3:1). Like the prophets of old, he refuted the popular Jewish notion that the day of the Lord would only bring blessing to the Jews. He reemphasized that the day of the Lord would also be a time of judgement when God the Saviour and King, would not only gather the wheat, but also burn the chaff (Mt. 2:4).

For this reason, John saw the role of the coming Messiah as primarily a spiritual one. His role would be

to "take away the sins of the world" (Jh. 1:29). In this sense he differed from the popular expectation of the Messiah as a national liberator. In any case, he pointed out, just like the prophets of old did, that being an Israelite was no longer a guarantee of divine favour. He emphasized that the true Israelite was the one who was so at heart. He therefore admonished his contemporaries not to boast that they had Abraham as their father. God would not look at racial descendancy but rather, at a contrite heart, which was required for one to enjoy the blessings of the coming Kingdom of God. Thus, John emphasized the need for repentance and moral transformation.

The core of John the Baptist's preaching therefore, was "repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt. 3:2). Similarly, this was the message that Jesus, of whom John was the forerunner, preached (Mt. 5:17). He, too, preached that the expected Kingdom of God had dawned, and that it was not so much a matter of political, but spiritual restoration.

Like John, Jesus was aware that the Kingdom of God was an eschatological event in which God would intervene to issue salvation as well as judgement. His own understanding of the idea of the Kingdom, however, differed slightly from that of his contemporaries. On the one hand, he accepted the idea that the Kingdom of God would be established by an emissary of God, who would be his representative. In fact, he identified his role with that of the



coming one. He differed, however, in his interpretation of the role of the Messiah. When John the Baptist sent messages to him, asking him to clarify whether or not he was the one to come, he answered by quoting a messianic prophecy from Isaiah:

God will come to you and save you.  
Then the eyes of the blind shall  
be opened, the lame man leap like  
a hart (Is. 35:5-6).<sup>17</sup>

In another context, Jesus quoted another messianic prophecy in an effort to describe his own mission and role.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to pro-  
claim release to the prisoners, and  
recovery of sight to the blind, to  
let the broken victims go free, to  
proclaim the year of God's favour.  
(Is. 61:1)<sup>18</sup>

It is apparent that Jesus saw the fulfilment of these prophetic promises in his life (Lk. 4:20). However, it is significant to note that, in his quotation of Isaiah 61:1, he did not quote the whole passage but he broke off before the phrase; "and the day of the vengeance of the Lord."<sup>19</sup> This points to the fact that, although Jesus identified himself with the expected Messiah, he saw the role of the Messiah more as a saviour rather than a judge. As John the evangelist pointed out, the primary role of the Son of God was not to judge the world but that through him, the world might be saved (Jn. 3:17).

Another point to note here is that, the expected Kingdom of God was supposed to be a unique event that would

happen once in the future. For the prophets, it would be a final event in which God would sum up, once and for all, his saving activities. For the apocalyptists, it would be a time when God would do away with the Kingdom of Satan in one Cataclysmic drama. Jesus too accepted that the Kingdom of God was ultimately eschatological, but he saw this future event as having been broken in two. For him, the last days were being fulfilled in his life, mission and ministry (Lk. 11:20). Nevertheless, he still maintained that the consummation of the kingly reign of God still remained in the future. Thus he made reference to the Kingdom of God as a present reality in which man can enter.<sup>20</sup> He also referred to the Kingdom of God as an expected age to come.<sup>21</sup> For Jesus, then, though the Kingdom of God had already dawned upon the people, its consummation still lay in the future when the Son of Man would come in glory (Mk. 13:24).

In the meantime, Jesus assumed the role of the suffering servant of Yahweh (Mk. 10:45).<sup>22</sup> The task he undertook was that of seeking, serving and saving the lost (Lk. 19:10). He combined the notion of the suffering servant with that of the Son of Man, seen as God's representative in the establishment of the Kingdom (Mk. 7:14).<sup>23</sup> He claimed that the Son of Man must suffer, and that he would later be glorified (Mk. 9:31). Just as the concept of the Kingdom of God as a unique eschatological event had been split by the coming of Jesus, so

also was the role of the Coming One split in two by the coming of Jesus. The expected function of the Son of Man to save was already evident in Jesus' life, mission and work. However, the coming of the Son of Man in glory to consummate a work already started still belongs to the future. In a sense, the judgement which the Son of Man was expected to exercise belonged to this final coming (Mt. 24:37ff).

It appears therefore that, in the synoptics, the eschatological salvation promised by the prophets and the Kingdom of God promised by Jesus are equatable. The synoptics also equate the function of Jesus with that of the expected Son of Man. That the Kingdom of God is equated with salvation is clearly evident in one passage recorded in all the synoptics where salvation, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life are used interchangeably (Mk. 10:17, 21, 24, 26).<sup>24</sup>

In this context, we recall that the biblical notion of the Kingdom of God is not so much a geographical domain, but the kingly reign of God whose content is salvation. This kingly reign of God is, however, evident in the lives of those who accept it (Mk. 10:5). Jesus can, in this context, refer to the Kingdom of God as something to be received or entered into (Mt. 21:31) We can therefore conceive of a progressive unfolding of the Kingdom of God in the lives of people as more and more people abide by the kingly reign of God. This is evident in the parables

of the Kingdom where it is portrayed as something which can grow.<sup>25</sup>

The human condition necessary for the entrance into the realm of God's rule is men's response to its moral demands. This, in effect, came to mean the response men had to the person of Jesus. This is because, in the person and work of Jesus, we have on the one hand, the example of a man who is perfectly obedient to the will of God; and on the other hand, he is, in his works, the perfect representative of God as King. In other words, while, as a man, Jesus was the perfect example of how a person under God's rule should be, he was also representing God's power, and willingness to save, in his life and ministry. Therefore, being saved or entering the Kingdom of God had a lot to do with the person of Jesus. He constantly invited people to follow him, to enter into a relationship with him if one was to enter the realm of salvation, the Kingdom of God.

If Jesus thought that salvation was equatable with the Kingdom of God, and that entry into this Kingdom was related to commitment to him, we may enquire further how he set about presenting the Kingdom of God.

As we have already noted, he thought that the Kingdom of God had two phases: it was both a present reality and an eschatological one. Apparently, Jesus combined the two trends of the Jewish hope for salvation. Like the prophets, he held on to the notion of a God who is

involved in history; a God who is immanent, and intimately concerned with this world and the righting of its wrongs. He maintained, therefore, that God was not entirely absent in the affairs of this world. This was in contrast to the apocalyptists, who, as we have seen, tended to exclude God's intervention in the daily affairs of men, and expected the Kingdom as an entirely otherworldly event, to come at the end of history with its problem of evil. At the same time, however, Jesus accepted the apocalyptic expectation of a time when God would finally come to destroy evil in the world. In fact, in some references, Jesus portrayed the Kingdom of God as the final triumph of God over evil (Mt. 25:41) This is, on the whole, an eschatological hope, that ultimately the Kingdom of God is heavenly, and transcendental.

Nevertheless, Jesus maintained that in some concrete manner, this final eschatological salvation had indeed invaded history. / Salvation was not entirely an otherworldly affair but it also belonged to the present. Identifying his function with that of a God concerned with man in the historical context, he went around performing salvific works like his Father does (John 5:17). He healed the sick, liberated those under the bondage of Satan, and opened the eyes of the blind. As a present reality then, salvation was an advance of the blessings of the eschatological Kingdom of God. It was a gift of healing, liberation

and forgiveness.

On their side, men were required to receive this gift of salvation and enter the Kingdom by making their commitment to Jesus. Life under the kingly rule of God as a present reality is characterized here and now by the assurance of answered prayer, the confidence of forgiven sins and the assurance of God's providence and protection (Mt. 7:7, Mt. 6:12, 6:31). All this points to the wholeness of life enshrined in the Kingdom of God as a realm of blessing and salvation. By combining the prophetic notion of a God who saves in historical situations, and that of the apocalyptists who looked forward to a salvation beyond history, Jesus shifted the emphasis from the over-concern with a heavenly future Kingdom to the Kingdom of God as a present reality which ought to be received here and now in anticipation to the future consummation.

We note, therefore, that, as a present reality, salvation is to do with the whole of life. To Jesus, salvation was not just a spiritual experience but was for the whole man. In his works of salvation, he saved man not only from spiritual but also from physical problems. He posited salvation in terms of healing the sick and exorcising those who were oppressed by demons. In this connection, we recall that the verb, "to save", is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to curing of disease, blindness, leprosy and other ailments. Mark

and Matthew summarize the saving work of Jesus in the phrase, "As many as touched him, they were saved." (Mk. 6:56, Mt. 14:36). Jesus aimed his work of salvation at the whole man.<sup>26</sup> He was concerned with alleviating the needs of humanity; healing the sick, feeding the hungry. His concern for the whole man is summarized in the quotation from Isaiah which he saw as a summary of his mission (Is. 35:6). It is not surprising therefore that one of the moral demands that he made upon those who wish to enter the eschatological or the final Kingdom of God is the individual's cooperation in alleviating the needs of humanity. (Mt. 25:35f).

At the same time we note, however, that the healings done by Jesus were not merely materialistic works of charity. They were signs, as John the evangelist prefers to call them, or evidence of the power of God's kingly reign on earth. They were proofs that God's Kingdom was indeed upon the people. (Mt. 12:28).

As such, the miracles of Jesus point to spiritual realities. When he declared to a healed person that "your faith has saved you," he was not only referring to the physical cure, but to a deeper level of salvation. He was referring to the spiritual reality of the forgiveness of sins. For example, in the story of the paralytic, the declaration that the man's sins were forgiven was proved by Jesus' ability to make the palsied man rise up and walk (Mk. 2:6f). Jesus, therefore, was concerned with saving

the whole man both spiritually and physically, and bringing man in totality to a wholeness of life that is characteristic of the Kingdom of God.

It is also noteworthy that the healings were granted in response to one's faith. "Your faith has saved you" is a constant refrain by Jesus in the healing episodes.<sup>27</sup> This emphasizes a central theme in the New Testament conception of salvation; that salvation is through faith. The salvation that Jesus presented could only be received by faith alone and not by the 'works of the law' as the contemporaries of Jesus insisted.<sup>28</sup> According to Jesus, there is nothing meritorious about the gift of salvation.

At the same time, it is evident that salvation is made possible by Jesus. It is he who heals and forgives sins on behalf of God. It is apparent, therefore, that salvation is effected by a person's faith in the saving power of Jesus (John 12:47). We conclude, therefore, that salvation is achieved, on the one hand by the objective work on God's side, as represented by Jesus and, on the other hand, by the subjective response in faith on the side of man.<sup>29</sup> Salvation is by Jesus and through faith.

That salvation depends on a person's response to Jesus is well illustrated by the story of Zachaeus, who experienced salvation when he encountered Jesus. He repented his sins and resolved to lead a better life thereafter. Luke tells us that Jesus came to Zachaeus' house, and salvation came that day to his whole household (Lk. 19:1f).



This story reveals that salvation is intricately tied up with the person of Jesus; it calls for commitment, repentance and, a transformation of one's life for the better.

Jesus also emphasized that salvation is centred on the forgiveness of sins. He continually asserted that he came to seek and save sinners (Mk. 2:17). The whole of the New Testament expresses the idea that Jesus came to save men from sins, both by his life and death. He therefore geared his ministry mainly to the sinners and the lost.

These were in the majority, the common people. They were sinners, not only because of their moral degradation, as in the case of the prostitutes and the tax-collectors, but also because they could not attain righteousness as defined in latter Judaism. This was a righteousness based on a meticulous observation of the letter of the law. It often demanded the observation of ceremonial cleanliness and sacrifices, of which the masses were ignorant and could also not afford. Thus, at least in the eye of the Jews who could afford such meticulous observance, the commoners were unrighteous and therefore sinners.

It is to these poor masses and "sinners" who laboured under the yoke of the law that Jesus directed his appeal. He emphasized that entering the Kingdom of God was not synonymous with the observance of externals. Like the prophets

in the Old Testament, he reminded the people that what God required was mercy, not sacrifice; A humble contrite heart and not a boastful self-righteousness that was very characteristic of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Salvation and the forgiveness of sins was unmerited. What God required was only a repentant heart, a desire to be forgiven and be in a right relationship with him.

In this connection, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican is very illuminating. The story emphasizes that observance of regulations can never earn justification for one. The publican went home more 'justified' by God precisely because he recognized his need to be forgiven, and was, therefore, ready to receive the gift of salvation (Lk. 18:11).

In effect then, Jesus taught that salvation depends not on merit but on the initiative of a merciful and loving God. He presented a God who is not only concerned with a few "spiritual aristocracy" but a God, who is always ready to receive back the repentant sinner.

This positive attitude towards sinners was maintained by Jesus throughout his ministry. He mixed freely with the tax-collectors, the prostitutes and the poor. Claiming that the whole had no need for a physician, he dedicated his whole life to those who were sick (both physically and spiritually). In fact, he also saw his death in terms of forgiveness of sins claiming that his life would be given as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45, Mk. 14:20).

Jesus attitude was a perfect reflection of God's attitude towards sinners. He claimed that his work was representative of God's work. He healed, exorcised and forgave sins on behalf of God (John 5:16ff). That God has a positive attitude towards sinners was well illustrated by Jesus in the three parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son. (Lk. 15:1-32). The God that Jesus presents is not an angry, capricious God who is difficult to please, but a seeking God, an inviting God who looks forward to a sinner's repentance. God is a God who seeks until he finds a lost person. He is a God who is always ready to receive back the prodigal. In this connection, we conclude that salvation in terms of remission of sins and reconciliation rests on the initiative of a God who is willing to forgive. Although it is ultimately God who forgives and justifies the sinner, this attitude is well exemplified by Jesus in his life and ministry.

So far we can distinguish several features of the concept of salvation as taught and exemplified in the life of Jesus. To Jesus salvation is, in the first place, intricately bound up with the idea of the Kingdom of God. This, as we have pointed out already, is primarily an eschatological notion referring to the Jews' expectation of a time in which God would intervene in one final act of salvation for mankind.

Although Jesus thought of the Kingdom of God as an eschatological event, he also presented it as a present reality. He preached the fulfilment of the Jewish

expectation and presented the Kingdom of God as a fact to be experienced here and now. He presented, the present Kingdom in terms of objective works of salvation, namely, healings, exorcisms and forgiveness of sins. These were the blessings of the promised Kingdom of God, the sum total of which can be described in a word as "wholeness of life". In some texts, Jesus described entering the Kingdom of God as a transition from death to life, claiming that his role was to give life to men (Jn. 5:19, 24).

This gift of wholeness of life is given in response to faith and repentance on the side of man. It is a gift for the whole man, with little distinction between the spiritual and the physical salvation. It is for this reason that we find Jesus, both forgiving sins and also curing the sick, as a manifestation of the power and the blessings of the Kingdom of God. His work is not only to rescue man from physical problems but is also a positive process of reconciliation. The process, as we have seen, is initiated by God who seeks the sinner, and has little to do with merit, or man's self-righteousness. It demands, however, a moral transformation on the side of the individual.

We are also told that, experiencing salvation as a present reality is a foretaste of what will be consummated in the future. The work of Jesus is a fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of the Kingdom of God (Lk. 4:18-22), yet the final consummation of the work already started by Jesus remains a future eschatological event.

There are therefore frequent references to a future Kingdom of God which will bring an eschatological salvation. The eschatological salvation will mean deliverance from mortality (Jn. 6:40) and perfect fellowship with God. The final salvation will involve man in totality and not just his spirit (Lk. 20:35). Eschatological salvation will mean the consummation of the reconciliation process started by Jesus on earth. It will mean a restoration of fellowship between man and God, a fellowship that has been broken by sin. In this context, we are told that the pure in heart shall see God and enter into the joy of the Lord (Mt. 25:21). Several metaphors are used to describe this final fellowship or communion between man and God. The common one is that of the feast (Mk. 14:25), or a banquet (Lk. 14:16). These metaphors emphasize that in the end, there will be a restoration of communion between man and God, a fellowship that is anticipated and prefigured by Jesus' table fellowship with sinners (Lk. 15:2, Mt. 11:19).

However, the eschatological concept of salvation has a reverse side to it which describes the fate of those who will not be in a position to share in the blessings of the Kingdom in the Age to come. Jesus talks of the fate of those who will not have responded to the will of God in graphic terms of perishing and destruction (Mt. 7:13). Not to be saved is to lose one's life.<sup>30</sup> To lose one's life is to be destroyed because it is to lose oneself. This destruction is described in concrete terms like the

fire of Gehenna (Mt. 10:28, Mk. 9:42), eternal fire (Mt. 18:8, 25:41), and darkness (Mt. 8:12, 22:13). Since fire and darkness are not synonymous concepts, we can suggest that what Jesus is trying to describe is less the form of ultimate destruction, but more the seriousness of the negative possibilities for those who will in the end not be in a position to fellowship with God. The meaning of final punishment for the "unrighteous" in the end is best summed up as exclusion from the joys and blessings of being in the presence of God in the eschatological Kingdom. This is indicated in the words that God will finally tell the evil doers to depart from him (Mt. 7:23, Lk. 13:27). Exclusion from the presence of God, and the enjoyment of his blessings is the essence of hell.

The idea that salvation is both a present reality and a future phenomenon is not to be seen as though these two events are distinct and different entities. What God does now to save man is a foretaste of the life to come, while at the same time, what man does now will determine whether or not he will have a share in the eschatological Kingdom. Salvation as a present reality and as a future hope, is therefore portrayed in the gospels as constituting a continuum. The picture of salvation presented by

Jesus is well summarized by one author who points out that:

Salvation according to Jesus is concerned with the whole man. It is concerned with his past, present and future. It is the work of rescue, achieved by God, brought into history by Jesus. The conditions for its acceptance are repentance and faith. The very idea of merit is excluded by grace, but it demands a radical change of life in those who accept it. This salvation is no narrow national ideal, but is intended for all men (Jn. 3:17).<sup>31</sup>

### Salvation in the thought of Paul

#### (i) Salvation as a past event

The central theme of the entire apostolic writings of the New Testament is that of the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ. Wherever we turn in the New Testament, we are struck by the prevalent note of confidence of men, who seem to be possessing something so good, that they will not stop rejoicing and sharing it, even when they are imprisoned for it. This is particularly the case in the Acts of Apostles, where the disciples are so full of zeal, that, at one point, they are described as drunkards (Acts 2:13). The reason for this joy was given by Peter in the speech after the Pentecostal experience. Outlining the cause of their joy, Peter concluded that "all that you see and hear, flows from him" [Jesus]. He asked all Israel to "accept as certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord, and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). He concluded, therefore, that they were rejoicing in

Jesus because "there is no other name under heaven granted to men by which we may receive salvation (Acts 4:12).

This fact of the salvation achieved by Jesus, that the New Testament attests to is elaborated and exemplified by Paul, who, having dramatically experienced Jesus, was eager to share his experience, not only with the Jews of his home, but also with the Gentile world. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to examine what salvation meant to this great apostle of salvation.

On the outset, we can point out that, for Paul, salvation is primarily a process of deliverance from sin and its consequences. This deliverance was achieved by the life and death of Jesus. In particular, Paul stresses that man has been saved by the blood of Christ. As a process of deliverance, salvation covers a past, a present and a future. He, therefore, says: "We were saved" (Rom. 8:24); "we are being saved (I Cor. 15:2); and "we shall be saved" (Rom. 5:9). Salvation, then is the total work of God who has delivered, who does deliver, and who will yet deliver. (II Cor. 1:10). It would be convenient to follow this chronological distinction to try and get a comprehensive notion of salvation in the thought of Paul.

It will be pointed out here that, although Paul talks of salvation in the past tense (Rom. 8:24)<sup>32</sup> he is also aware that salvation in its fulness belongs to God's future. In fact, the majority of Paul's references to salvation speak of the future aspect of salvation. Paul,



like Jesus before him, however, realized that salvation was not entirely eschatological. The expected eschatological salvation was no longer entirely in the future but had already been brought into history by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This was a fact that the early Christians were happy about, confident that the prophesied day of the Lord had indeed come upon them.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Paul, at least in several passages already cited, talks of salvation as a past event. He talks of the believer as having been saved already. We may, therefore, enquire what Paul means by making the assertion that we have been saved.

As we have already noted, the fundamental idea in salvation is deliverance or rescue from danger or some form of evil.<sup>34</sup> In this context, we may consider from what, according to Paul, the Christian is saved. In a sentence, we can say that, salvation, for Paul, is basically a deliverance from sin and its consequences. It is nothing less than a deliverance from all the spiritual foes that assail man, and estrange him from God.

As we mention sin, it may be worthwhile to note in passing what Paul means by using the term sin. When referring to sin, Paul uses several words. First, he talks of sin as parabasis, a deliberate breaking of divine law (Rom. 2:23, 5:14). Secondly, he refers to sin as harmatia, a missing of the Mark or falling short of the standard set by God (Rom. 3:23). A third word is anomia

or lawlessness (Rom. 6:19). A fourth but very strong word for sin is asebeia or godlessness (Rom. 1:18). This godlessness is rooted in man's rebellious will against God.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in short, sin can be said to be a deliberate turning away from God. Sin, is therefore, an alienating factor, because it results in man's estrangement from God. It is in this sense that, according to Paul "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:24).

At another level, Paul speaks of sin as if it were an independent hostile power outside of man and alien to him (Rom. 7:8).<sup>36</sup> This fact, however, does not impinge upon man's freedom to sin or not to sin; neither does it absolve him of guilt. Nevertheless, Paul talks of man as a slave to the law of sin. In several texts, sin is portrayed as a slave owner and man as a slave. (Rom. 7:15)

The result of sin, therefore, is man's estrangement from God. On man's side, this alienation is caused by man's guilt, inherent in his rebellious attitude towards God. On God's side, this alienation is explained in terms of divine wrath.<sup>37</sup> Under the state of sin, men are not only estranged from God, and capable of experiencing divine wrath, but they are also dead. (Eph. 2:1, Col. 2:13) While the notion of death in Paul usually includes physical dying, it is obvious that in referring to death, Paul is also talking about the spiritual death that results from sin. To be saved from sin, therefore, is also to be saved from its consequences; alienation from God,

and death.

Bearing in mind then that sin is the basic problem from which man is saved, and that the term has several shades of meaning, Paul goes on to analyse how the rescue from sin has been accomplished. The past work of God in rescuing man is discussed by Paul by using several metaphors which cover the various shades of meaning in the term sin. He portrays salvation in terms of reconciliation and atonement, justification, redemption and liberation.

Paul goes ahead to pin-point how the Christian has been saved. He asserts that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has done all that is necessary for the salvation of man. God's work of salvation has been mediated by Jesus Christ; by his life and particularly by his death. It is in this context that Paul goes as far as calling Jesus our saviour. (Eph. 5:23, Acts 13:23) He has also attempted to explain how Christ's death has affected man's salvation.

At one level, he uses the legal metaphor of justification and claims that men have been "justified by his [Jesus] blood." (Rom. 5:9) This is a metaphor, which, as we have already noted<sup>38</sup> implies acquittal and forgiveness. Through the metaphor, Paul seems to be making the assertion that the death of Christ has made it possible for the sinners, as transgressors of God's law, to be forgiven and acquitted. His death is the ground for man's

justification.

In some texts, it appears as though Paul presents Christ's death as being substitutionary. Everything that the guilt of sin "legally" deserves from a just and moral God was fulfilled in the death of Christ <sup>39</sup> (Gal. 3:13). The metaphor, however, need not be taken as a mere legal transaction in which God makes people automatically better ethically, on the grounds of Jesus' death; nor that God accepted the death of an innocent Christ for guilty men. It should here be stressed that Paul continually emphasizes the solidarity between God and Christ in the very act of acquittal. (II Cor. 5:19) He also points out that this act of acquittal has to be appropriated by faith, and by man's response to God's love, which is evident in the death of Christ. In particular, it is significant to observe that in the many instances where Paul talks of justification by the blood or the death of Christ, he does this to contrast it with the notion of justification by merit. The overall emphasis when Paul discusses the notion of justification, is that, it is an action that springs from the initiative of a righteous and loving God on behalf of sinful men (Rom. 3:21). Justification is not merited, but depends entirely on God, who alone justifies. This fact excludes human pride (Rom. 3:27).

Another metaphor, through which Paul interprets salvation as a past work of rescue is that of redemption. He points out that, Jesus is man's redeemer, and that he

gave himself as a price for man's redemption. Christ's death is interpreted as apolutrosis or lutron (I Tim. 2:6, Titus 2:14, Rom. 3:24). The emphasis in all these references is that Jesus gave himself for man. This, as we have seen, is a metaphor carried over from the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> In Old Testament culture, it was the duty of a kinsman to act as a redeemer (goel) on behalf of his kinsman who may be in trouble. In the New Testament, the idea of redemption is also expressed by the term agorazo, to buy or purchase (I Cor. 6:19, 7:22). In these texts, the emphasis is that man has been bought or redeemed from the slavery of sin. We can conclude, therefore, that the metaphor of redemption emphasizes that Christ's death is firstly an objective act, done to accomplish man's salvation. Secondly, it points out that salvation includes liberation and emancipation. Thirdly, in so far as the metaphor includes a price, it also emphasizes the fact that salvation is a costly thing.

The emphasis in both the metaphor of justification and that of redemption is that in the death of Christ, God has done something objective and decisive to save man from sin and guilt, and to bring him back into a positive relationship with himself. Paul's classic statement of what God has done for man through Christ is in his second letter to the Corinthians. This is where he claims that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19) In another context, he points

out that when men were yet enemies of God due to their sins, "they were reconciled to God by the death of his son" (Rom. 5:10). This metaphor of reconciliation is used against the background of sin as an alienating factor. Man, conscious of his sin, had ran away from God's presence. He was spiritually too weak to turn back to God. He was burdened by guilt and the law did not help him but only underscored his powerlessness to withstand sin (Rom. 7:21). In this condition of alienation, man was even oblivious to the fact that God willed man to be reconciled to him.

It is in this context that Paul talks of Christ having reconciled men to God. The sinners' attitude was that of hostility to God. This hostility and rebellion could only elicit the wrath of a Holy God. The result was estrangement. This alienation, Paul says was removed on the cross. Once again we note that the initiative in the process of reconciliation is on God's side. It is God who was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

Salvation, as a past event then, is a work of God's grace to effect man's justification, redemption, liberation and reconciliation. However, as some theologians point out, if salvation is seen merely as an objective work of God's grace, it would remain an external transaction that is done outside the believer, and would have little impact upon his ethical and spiritual life. Whereas, therefore, we note that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God

has done all that is necessary for the salvation of mankind, it must also be pointed out that, there is a need for man to respond and make this gift of salvation his own. This response and appropriation is what Paul describes as saving faith. Faith, then is the attitude necessary that man may be saved. As Paul points out in one summary statement:

Both Jew and pagan are justified through the free gift of his grace by being redeemed in Christ Jesus, who was appointed by God to sacrifice his life to win reconciliation through faith (Rom. 3:24f)<sup>41</sup>

In this statement, we have a summary of Paul's view of salvation as a past event. It is a free and objective fact on God's side, which involves justification, reconciliation, and redemption through the self sacrifice of Jesus. It is also a subjective act on the side of man as he responds to God's free grace by faith.

Faith, however, need not be conceived as a 'giant' work which man has to accomplish in order to be saved. It is to be conceived as man's free response to God's free gift of salvation. It ought to go hand in hand with the objective salvific work of God.

Like Jesus then, Paul concludes that salvation is by God's grace through faith, and can never be merited. These are the two aspects of salvation at the personal level. The faith that receives God's gift of salvation does not issue in boasting and self-righteousness, for

boasting is the very anti-thesis of faith. Rather, faith issues in a trusting obedience to God's will and a selfless service to fellow-man. (Eph. 2:10)

The moment of faith is the moment one puts out his hand to receive God's gift of salvation. This is what we have described elsewhere as initial salvation<sup>42</sup> or what is commonly known as conversion. This is what must have happened to Paul on the way to Damascus. (Acts 9:20) One is saved then, by grace, through faith. The Holy Spirit comes into the life of the believer who is then baptized (Tim. 3:5). Faith, therefore is sealed by the outward sign of water and the inward sign of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:14). Both these signs of a believer need not be distinguished as consequent events. They are descriptive of a whole initiation process which marks the birth of the believer into a new way of life. Mention of a new way of life leads us to examine another aspect of salvation, namely, salvation as a present experience.

#### Salvation as a present experience

At this juncture, we note that although we can distinguish the moment of conversion as initial salvation, yet, according to the scriptures' teaching, salvation does not end with an initial experience. It has a content that speaks of more than a mere rescue from sin. We may enquire then what this positive effect of salvation is, according to Paul.

To answer this question, it is worthwhile to note



the distinction made by Paul between life before the conversion experience, and life after conversion. He makes the distinction between life in Adam and life in Christ. Man in Adam, or man outside Christ is characterized by sinfulness. In solidarity with Adam, who represents man's corruptibility, and through whom sin entered the world, mankind is in general, sinful. In solidarity with Christ, who represents perfect obedience to God's will, man can also become obedient to God's will.

Paul, therefore, classifies humanity into two categories; those in Adam and those in Christ.<sup>43</sup> Adam is taken by Paul to be representative of man's corruptibility. It is Adam who was the bringer of death (Rom. 5:12). Christ, on the other hand, is seen as the bringer of life. He is the embodiment of man's perfectibility.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, where Adam and Christ are again contrasted, Paul is distinguishing between natural and spiritual life. In effect, Paul is referring to two modes of life. Life in the state of Adam is characterized by sinfulness and rebelliousness (Rom. 5:12). To be in Adam then is to be in the realm of death. On the other hand, to be in Christ is to enter into a realm characterized by freedom from sin. It is the realm of life (Rom. 5:19). This is the realm which the believer opts for when he puts out his hand in faith, to receive initial salvation.

It may be worthwhile, therefore, to examine what it means for a believer to be in Christ. In the first place, to be in Christ means to have power to overcome sin. Union with Christ means that the believer dies to sin (Rom. 6:1). This death is symbolized by the believer being baptized in water (Rom. 6:1, 11, Eph. 2:5-6). On the positive side, this means freedom from sin and living a God oriented life.

This power to overcome sin is also explained in terms of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Rom. 8:9) given to the believer to make him more and more Christlike (Rom. 8:29). He is given to the believer to actualize within his life, the character of Jesus. Therefore, life in Christ is also called life in the Spirit.

Victory over sin is, therefore, a major characteristic of life in Christ. It is a mode of existence which is not subject to death, which is triumphant over sin and the powers of evil. The new order of existence is in fact described by Paul as "a new creation" (I Cor. 22).

The phrase that, one who is in Christ is a 'new creation', does not mean that one is automatically and passively carried into a state of perfection. Paul also makes reference to the need on the believer's side to co-operate in the process of becoming a Christian. The individual is, therefore, called upon to put on Christ, even though he is already in Christ. He is said to be

dead to sin yet he is continually exhorted to put to death the deeds of the body, that is, put off all sinfulness (Rom. 8:13). Thus the believer is asked to become, or to actualize in his life, what he is in principle. He is asked to re-enact daily the life and death of Christ as he consciously and constantly tries to conquer his sinful impulses. He becomes, albeit, gradually what he is already in Christ.

This is true even when reference is made to the believer's life as being in the Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit is given to help the individual overcome sin, yet the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit is not an all-possessing and, therefore, an irresistible one, but needs human response. The Christian is, therefore, exhorted to walk in the Spirit. This means that he lives each moment and makes each decision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is obviously not a once and for all event or incidence but something that is lifelong since, as it has been pointed out:

The life of man is a series of many decisions and situations where he must accept salvation afresh and decide for God's way of love, breaking with selfishness.<sup>44</sup>

At this juncture one may enquire what "walking in the Spirit" or "being in Christ" means exactly to the believer. In positive terms, as Paul points out, a believer's life in Christ must express itself in good works (Eph. 2:10). The Christian is to imitate Christ

in sacrificial service, not seeking his own advantage (I Cor. 10:33, Phil. 2:5). This means that a believer is expected to extend salvation to others. He is, therefore, instructed to proclaim the gospel of salvation to non-believers by preaching to them (Rom. 1:16).

Above all, the believer is called to express his salvation in terms of love. Paul concludes that love is the most essential element in the life of a Christian. It is the most important gift of the Spirit which believers must covet more than any other (I Cor. 13). Like Jesus, he concludes that love fulfils the demands of the law (Gal. 5:14) and, therefore, it ought to be the basis of all Christian conduct. Such a love expresses itself in good works and service to others.

Life in Christ also means that the Christian enjoys some personal benefits, particularly, in terms of protection and security. It is Paul's continuous assertion that solidarity with Christ spells salvation and security for the individual. On several occasions, when speaking of salvation, he stresses that it is in Christ.<sup>45</sup> Paul uses several metaphors to stress this organic union of believers in Christ. Christ is portrayed as the Body of which believers are members.<sup>46</sup> He is also the olive tree and believers are the branches (Rom. 11: 16-2). Believers are also the stones in the building of which Christ is the foundation stone (I Cor. 3:16-17, Eph. 2: 20-22).

Because believers are thus united with their Lord, they are assured security and protection. The believer is, therefore, confident that nothing can come between him and his Lord (Rom. 8:38). It is with confidence in God's protection that Paul himself endured all the hardships that he went through in his missionary career (II Cor. 1:9).<sup>47</sup> The Christian, therefore, is confident in divine protection until he will enter into the eschatological Kingdom.

We can describe the content of the believers life in Christ as that of a new creature who, not only enjoys the salvation and protection in the Lord, but who is also victorious over sin and extends his 'salvation' outward in love and service to others. Salvation, therefore, as a present experience, is a continuous personal endeavour to be under God's rule. This means that the believer ought not to be satisfied with a mere initial experience but should also be ready to actualize his salvation in his practical life. "Love your God and your neighbour" seems to be the ideal attitude for the believer in Christ. As the Christian experiences and expresses his salvation daily, as he puts on more and more of Christ, and walks in the Spirit, he becomes more and more a Christian, and more and more Christ-like. This Christlikeness is, as we shall see in the next section, the ultimate goal for each believer. Thus, becoming a Christian is a lifelong process.

It is in this context that Paul urges his audience to work out their salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12f). We proceed therefore to explore to what end and goal this working out of salvation is geared. Here we come to another aspect of the notion of salvation as a future hope.

### Salvation as a future hope

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As we have already seen, Paul talks of salvation a past event as well as a present experience. Nevertheless, he is at the same time emphatic that salvation in its fulness belongs to the future. He reminds the Christian that, although he is already saved, this is only in hope (Rom. 8:24). One would here enquire as to the nature and content of this hope for a future salvation.

Paul's emphasis on the idea that salvation is ultimately eschatological is an anti-thesis to one of the frequent 'heresies' in the history of Christianity. This is the assumption that salvation is achieved, once and for all by a single act, whether it is the act of predestination by God, or the saving death of Jesus, or a person's initial response to God. However, as we have emphasized throughout this study, salvation is a process which has a past, a present and a future aspect. This is because the believer who experiences salvation needs to grow more and more in godliness. God also, does not withdraw his salvation but he continually saves as he sustains and

maintains the Christian on the road of faith. Salvation, therefore, is not something that happens once and for all. Salvation, in its fulness, belongs to God's future and it is the goal for which Christian aims.

In Biblical terms, this final or consummated salvation is described as the Kingdom of God or of heaven. It is also described as eternal life. In Pauline thought, the content of this future salvation is seen in terms of sharing God's presence. "We believe, and therefore speak out for we know that he who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will with Jesus raise us too and bring us to his presence. (II Cor. 4:14)<sup>48</sup>

In this connection, it is significant to note that the future life is qualitatively defined as essentially a state of relationship with the Lord. The sharing of the presence of God means enjoying life in its fulness; The phrase, "eternal life", is often used to speak of the quality of life of this age to come.<sup>49</sup> According to Paul, this life will be nothing but a new creation, a new order of existence (II Cor. 5:17). It will be an age characterized by full harmony between creation and the creator, alienating and destructive elements having been swallowed up in God's victory (I Cor. 15:24). God's work of reconciliation, redemption and liberation will then be ultimately accomplished.

This life of final salvation is also spoken of in terms of communion and fellowship. In the age to come,

there will be perfect fellowship between the creator and the created. For this reason, we note that the eschatological salvation is presented by Paul, not merely as an individual experience, but in terms that connote corporateness. He uses metaphors that suggest this corporateness of future life. He refers to final salvation in terms such as the New Man (humanity), the Israel of God, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In many of his references to future salvation, the subject is always 'we'. For instance, it is 'we', with 'them' who will forever be with the Lord. (I Thess. 4:15)<sup>50</sup>

Another feature of this future salvation is that Christians will be qualitatively changed to the effect that they will share fully in the likeness of Christ (II Cor. 3:18). It is the Christian's hope, even while on earth, to imitate Christ and be more and more like him. Although the Christian is even now sharing in the likeness of Christ in so far as he allows Christ and his Spirit to guide him, the perfection of this still lies in the future. This is the destiny of man to which he was originally called, to be in the image and glory of God (I Cor. 11:7). Although now the Christian sees as in a mirror dimly, in the second coming of Christ, Christians will obtain the glory of Christ themselves (II Tim. 1:10), and will perfectly reflect the image of God as they will then be conformed "to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29) as God intended. This will in effect



mean moral perfection.

In addition to moral perfection, sharing the full image of Christ will also mean that the believers will also share immortality. The conviction that the believers will be raised from the dead was based on the faith in the resurrected Jesus (I Cor. 15:14). The Christian hope, then, according to Paul, is to share in the full image of Christ, both in character and in form. It will mean, both the end of the Christian's daily battle to put off sin, and also that he will put on immortality. (I Cor. 15:53),

All this, however, as Paul points out will be preceded by judgement. The purpose of Jesus' second coming will not only be to take the redeemed with him, but also to judge the living and the dead. (Rom. 14:10, 11:5-10). The day of judgement will test the individual's work as a Christian. (I Cor. 3:12-15)<sup>51</sup>

The question that may arise is as to whether there is a possibility of a believer ultimately losing his salvation. Several passages seem to point out the possibility of apostasy and consequent destruction on the side of the believers. Such a possibility is confirmed, for example, when Paul writes to the Galatian Christians warning them that he "who sows to his own flesh shall from his own flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:5). The strong warning of destruction upon those who lead the church astray is referring to Christian church leaders and indicates that the Christian is not

immune to God's final judgement. (I Cor. 3:17) Paul himself is very conscious of the need to endure in the race in order to get the crown of life. [The very image of a race signifies the possibility of becoming disqualified].

The idea of judgement also raises the question of the fate of those who will be found wanting. For these, Paul postulates the possibility of ultimate destruction, just as he postulates the hope for ultimate salvation for the believers. If ultimate salvation, which is based on man's conformity to God's will is seen in terms of life, the corollary for those who ultimately reject God can be seen in terms of death. Paul describes the final state of those who will not have obeyed the gospel by saying that they will suffer destruction and exclusion from the presence of God. (II Thes. 1:9)<sup>52</sup>

The fate of the rebellious, is thus exclusion from the presence of God and the subsequent loss of blessings of life that comes from the enjoyment of divine presence. This exclusion is tantamount to destruction, and is pictorially described as death, eternal fire, hell and gehenna. Paul describes nowhere the details of the doom awaiting the rebels at the end of time. Like Jesus before him, however, he emphasizes that such a doom is a real possibility.

This however is not to say that Paul sees judgement as an entirely futuristic phenomenon. The eschatological judgement has also reached back into the present. He

points out that the Christian who has accepted Christ has already been justified, that is, he has been judged favourably. Justification or acquittal is an eschatological fact which nevertheless has occurred in history. The believer has already had judgement in his favour on the grounds of the death of Christ (Rom. 3:21, 26). Because of the present justification, he shall be saved from wrath on the day of judgement (Rom. 5:9). Nevertheless, Paul still points out that the Christian is still regarded as fully answerable for the quality of his present life, the worth of which will be evaluated at the final judgement.

In short, we can say that the consummation or the goal of God's redemptive activity is the restoration of order to a universe that has been disturbed by sin and evil. This restoration will include not only the realm of human existence, although this seems to be the emphasis in the New Testament, but also that of nature and the spiritual world. It is God's eternal purpose that, finally, he will reconcile all things to himself through Christ. This restoration will include the very material world (Rom. 8:22). In the final consummation, the whole man, and the world of which he is a part, will be redeemed. It will, indeed, be a time for a new creation in which the whole man (body and spirit), with his entire personality, set in the context of fellow believers, will enjoy a life of love in its perfection. The over-riding

emphasis of the New Testament notion of final salvation is that God's intention and purpose is to save mankind and his world. Christians therefore maintain the hope that God will, in the end, be everything to everyone. (I Cor. 15:28). Although the possibility of final destruction is as we have seen, not excluded, yet the overall picture one gets from studying the New Testament notion of eschatological salvation is that it is more inclusive than exclusive.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The New Testament is, on the whole, the basis of the Ahonoki's beliefs concerning salvation, since Jesus and the Holy Spirit are at the centre of their salvation theory.

<sup>2</sup>Although several interpretations of the idea of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament have been given, it is generally agreed that in biblical thought, the phrase "Kingdom of God", refers to the kingly reign of God over the world, rather than to a specific geographical domain. See for instance Bruce Metzger, The New Testament: Its background, growth, and content (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p.148.

<sup>3</sup>See Exodus 15:18, Numbers 23:21, Deuteronomy 33:5, II Kings 19:15, Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>4</sup>See Isaiah 24:23, 33:22, Zephaniah 3:15, Zechariah 14:9.

<sup>5</sup>See Zechariah 14:12, II Samuel 23:5, Psalm 136.

<sup>6</sup>See also Amos 5:18, 6:3, 9:10.

<sup>7</sup>See Amos 5:18, Zephaniah 1:14, 18.

<sup>8</sup>See Micah 4:6, Jeremiah 30:8.

<sup>9</sup>See Ezekiel 36:27, Isaiah 7:3, Amos 3:12, Micah 5:7.

<sup>10</sup>See Jeremiah 30:1, 31:8, 33:1f, Isaiah 65:5.

<sup>11</sup>The name Maccabee was a nickname for Judas, the son of Mattathias, who was a leader of the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes between 165-161 B.C. This insurrection was sparked off by the religious persecution and imposition of Greek culture upon the Jews by Antiochus. The nickname Maccabee was extended to include his brothers who succeeded him in the leadership of the Jews. The period, in which the Maccabees reigned over the Jews is referred to as the reign of the Maccabees or the Hasmonian reign. This was the period between the Maccabean revolt and the fall of the Jews under Pompey in 63 B.C. For a detailed discussion of the Maccabean revolt see Metzger, op.cit., pp.20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Metzger, op.cit., p.20.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 11.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'intertestamental' period is used here to refer to the period between the closing of the Old Testament Canon, and the writing of the New Testament. This period roughly falls between the first century B.C., and the first century A.D. During this period, the Jews continued to produce some religious literature, which however, was never regarded by the Palestinian Jews as having the same religious authority as the Canonical Old Testament. The literature produced during this period is what is regarded as apocrypha. This literature, however, was widely read and therefore, had considerable influence on Jewish religious thought. In particular, a significant genre produced during this intertestamental period, was apocalyptic literature, which greatly moulded Jewish religious thought, particularly concerning the doctrine of the last things. See also below, footnote 15.

<sup>15</sup> This trend is to be found mainly in the literature of the intertestamental period, commonly called the apocrypha or deutero-canonical books. In these writings, and particularly in the apocalypses, the heavenly emissary of God, who would inaugurate God's Kingdom is referred to with several titles, notably, The Son of Man, The Righteous One, The Chosen One, and The Anointed One. See for instance I Enoch, 47:7, 56:3, 51:2, in R.H. Charles, Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus (London: S.C.M. Press, 1963), p.19.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Isaiah 29:18, Matthew 11:2. In this incident where Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:2, he significantly breaks off the quotation before reaching the phrase, "and the day of vengeance of the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Luke 4:18.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 17 above.

<sup>20</sup> See Matthew 11:11, Luke 10:16, Matthew 21:31, 23:13.

<sup>21</sup> See Mark 9:47, 10:23-25, 14:25, Matthew 8:11, Luke 13:28.

<sup>22</sup>See Isaiah 53.

<sup>23</sup>Cf Daniel 7:14, I Book of Enoch 1:1ff.

<sup>24</sup>In the incident of the rich young man, the term "salvation", and the phrases "the Kingdom of God" and "eternal life" are used interchangeably. In the Gospel of John, the idea of eternal life displaces that of the Kingdom of God to a large extent. The essential meaning is, however, the same.

<sup>25</sup>See the parable of the mustard seed, and that of leaven. Mark 4:33, Luke 13:20.

<sup>26</sup>In this connection, it is important to note that in Hebrew thought, man is never thought of as a dichotomy of body and soul, as in Greek thought. Neither is he thought of as a trichotomy of body, soul and spirit. The soul and body are viewed as inseparable parts of man. It is generally agreed that when the Bible speaks of man's body, soul and spirit, these are never viewed as separate entities but are three ways of viewing man as a whole. Man is therefore viewed as a totality. Consequently, salvation in the Bible is presented as being for the whole man, and not just for his soul or spirit or vice-versa. In this context, we also note that sin in the Bible is often portrayed as the cause of physical illness. Thus, in some instances, we note Jesus healing physical illness as a sign of inner healing or forgiveness of sin. Cf Mark 2:1f, the curing of the paralytic, and the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:14. The lepers were not only physically but also spiritually healed.

<sup>27</sup>See Mark 5:28, 9:23, Luke 8:50, Matthew 9:21.

<sup>28</sup>This is comparable to Paul's teaching that salvation is not by the works of the law, but by faith. See latter in this chapter, salvation in Pauline thought.

<sup>29</sup>We return to the idea of salvation as an objective as well as a subjective reality when we discuss Paul's idea of salvation.

<sup>30</sup>See also Mark 8:35, Matthew 10:39, 16:25, Luke 9:24.

<sup>31</sup>E.M.B Green, The Meaning of Salvation (London:

Hodder and Staughton, 1965), p.118.

<sup>32</sup>See also Ephesians 2:5, 8, II Timothy 1:9, Titus 2:11, 3:5.

<sup>33</sup>Peter's extensive quotation of the prophet Joel refers to this fact that Christians had realized that the last days had dawned upon them. See Acts 2:14f, Cf Hebrews 1:2, I John 2:18.

<sup>34</sup>See Chapter two, the etymological and linguistic background to salvation.

<sup>35</sup>See G.E. Ladd, A theology of the New Testament (London: Lutterworth Press, 1975), p. 405. In the chapter entitled "Man outside Christ", Ladd gives a comprehensive description of the terms for sin as used by Paul.

<sup>36</sup>See also Romans 7:11, 7:17.

<sup>37</sup>Divine wrath is not to be understood as a malicious passion of a God who is capricious and can change his moods when he is placated. It is best understood as the reaction of a moral and Holy God against sin, which is not a trivial thing, and to which he cannot be indifferent. For a comprehensive discussion of the notion of God's wrath, see D.E.H. Whiteley, The theology of St. Paul. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.61ff.

<sup>38</sup>See chapter two, "salvation as justification."

<sup>39</sup>This impression is particularly evident where he portrays Christ's death as a sacrificial one, with atoning value. Cf. Ephesians 4:2, Romans 8:3, I Cor. 5:7.

<sup>40</sup>This metaphor is carried over from the Old Testament. See chapter two, salvation as redemption.

<sup>41</sup>The emphasis by underlining is the author's.

<sup>42</sup>See chapter four, "The meaning of I am saved."

<sup>43</sup>The phrases "in Adam" and "in Christ" are best understood in the light of the biblical notion of the solidarity of man, and also, his corporate existence.



When, for instance, the Old Testament refers to Israel, it is talking about a person who is no mere individual, but who, in his life includes and represents others. It is this idea of corporate existence which finds expression in the Old Testament thought, where the individual's guilt is portrayed as the guilt of the nation. It is in this context, for instance, that the prophets castigated Israel or Judah for sinning. In the same manner, Adam and Christ are figures that are representative of humanity. Solidarity with Adam has resulted with sin entering the world; solidarity with Christ leads to a different destiny of life and salvation.

<sup>44</sup>J.P. Kealy, "I am saved" (Mimeographed article, Kenyatta University College, 1977), p.8.

<sup>45</sup>See II Timothy, 10:3, 1:9, Ephesians 1:4.

<sup>46</sup>See I Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:4, Ephesians 1:23, 4:4.

<sup>47</sup>II Thessalonians 3:2, II Timothy 3:10.

<sup>48</sup>See also I Thessalonians 4:16, 17, II Corinthians 5:18.

<sup>49</sup>This is comparable to John the Evangelist's idea of eternal life. John defines the idea of eternal life qualitatively as "knowing God" (John 17:3), a close, personal and intimate relationship with God. Although generally speaking, the Bible portrays eternal life as an eschatological gift of salvation (Cf Jeremiah 31:34, Hosea 6:2f), it is John's emphasis that eternal life or knowledge of God as an eschatological blessing, has already been brought to men by Jesus. This is what biblical scholars have termed "realized eschatology."

<sup>50</sup>Jesus also portrays final salvation in communal and corporate terms, particularly where he talks of the eschatological Kingdom as a heavenly banquet or a feast. See for instance, Matthew 8:11, 22:1-14, 25:1-12, Luke 14:16-24, 22:30.

<sup>51</sup>Compare with Matthew 25:31.

<sup>52</sup>Jesus also describes the fate of those who, in the end will not have complied with the will of God in

the condemnation to "depart from me." (Matthew 25:41).  
Their fate will be exclusion from God's presence.

## CHAPTER VI

### COMPARING THE AHONOKI'S NOTION OF SALVATION WITH THAT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### The essence of salvation

Having thus analysed the notion of salvation in the New Testament, we are now in a position to examine to what extent the Ahonoki's notion of salvation is in continuity with that of the New Testament. It is obvious that there are points of contact as well as points of difference, between the New Testament presentation of salvation and the Ahonoki's understanding of it.

To begin with, we note that, in the New Testament, salvation is presented as essentially a process of deliverance and rescue from evil, particularly sin. Therefore, it is presented as a process of redemption and reconciliation. Where salvation is viewed basically as deliverance or rescue, it is shown as primarily a rescue from sin. Sin is dangerous because it evokes the wrath of a Holy God who therefore cannot be indifferent to it. Sin also alienates man from God and, in fact, enslaves him. The work of salvation as presented in the New Testament then, consists of rescue, liberation and reconciliation. It is therefore centred on the forgiveness of sins.

When we compare this to the Ahonoki's view of salvation, we note that they reflect the New Testament

teaching that, basically, their salvation is from sin,<sup>1</sup> which, as many will underscore, is at the root of many of mankind's problems. We note here, however, an apparent weakness in the Ahonoki's conception of salvation as a rescue from sin in their assertion that, after experiencing conversion or initial salvation, one cannot sin any more. They emphasize that their salvation in terms of repentance and forgiveness is a once and for all event.<sup>2</sup> The picture that one gets from the Ahonoki's assertion is that, after conversion, it is impossible to sin.<sup>3</sup> On this account, the Ahonoki have earned criticism from non-members that they are "hypocritical and self-righteous." Since it is the Ahonoki's assertion that their beliefs are based on what the Bible says, it may be worthwhile to discuss this notion that they cannot sin, in view of the New Testament teaching.

Although it may be difficult for an observer to gauge whether, in actual fact, the Ahonoki live up to their assertion that they do not, actually sin after conversion, on the basis of some scriptural passages, it is possible to concede, at least theoretically, that a Christian cannot sin. This is apparent, for example, when we look at some passages in Paul, which talk of the Christian being dead to sin (Rom. 6:1), being set free from sin (Rom. 6:20) and not being in the flesh (Rom. 8:9, Gal. 5:24). In one particular passage in the first letter of John, this view, that one who is a child of God cannot

sin, is apparently stated.<sup>4</sup> These are some of the passages taken by the Ahonoki to back up their claim that they cannot sin. Taken in isolation, these passages seem to imply that, for a Christian, it is impossible to sin after conversion.

However, when we look at the overall picture presented in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline writings, we are nowhere left with the impression that it is impossible for a Christian to sin. In fact, where these passages are cited, they are always followed by an exhortation to the Christian not to sin. When Paul, for instance, makes the statement that the believer has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20), or that the Old man has been crucified with him (Gal. 5:24), he also points out the need for man to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13), or sinful deeds (Ephs 4:22). Where John makes the assertion that a Child of God does not sin, he does this against the background where he exhorts the believers not to sin, and if they do, to confess their sins (I Jn. 8:10, 2:1f).

The overall picture that one gets from an examination of the New Testament notion of salvation is, therefore, that to be saved from sin does not mean that it is impossible to sin any more. Whereas the Christian is definitely portrayed as being saved from sin, he is not carried passively into a state of sinlessness as the Ahonoki seem to imply.<sup>5</sup> There is nothing automatic about salvation.

It is the New Testament emphasis that, a person needs to grow as he consciously tries to conquer sin. As we have seen in the last chapter, the fact that one is in Christ, and not in Adam, carries with it the demand that one ought to act in a manner befitting his status of being in Christ. The New Testament, therefore, does not say that because one is in Christ it is impossible for one to sin; rather, it teaches that because one is in Christ, he therefore ought not to sin. The tension between being uprooted from sin, and the need to continually overcome sin is well maintained in the New Testament.

Thus the New Testament says in one breath that, in Christ, who is salvation (II Tim. 2:10), one becomes a new creature and, at the same time, Christians are exhorted to put on godliness, to put on Christ, to work out their salvation. This is a life-long process which, as we have seen, will only be perfected in the future eschatological salvation.

Another feature that we note is that salvation is essentially forgiveness and hence it is also a process of reconciliation. The Gospels present Jesus in the ministry of reconciliation. He came to seek and to save the lost. He continually mixed with sinners and is frequently reported to have imparted forgiveness to them. In his teaching, he emphasized that salvation is to do with the forgiveness of sins. In the stories of the

prodigal son, the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus presents a God who is interested in receiving back the estranged. In the rest of the New Testament too, we are shown how salvation is a process of reconciliation, a putting right of a broken relationship. To this end, God sent his only son in whom he was reconciling the world to himself <sup>6</sup> (II Cor. 5:18).

Here again, when we recall the Muhonoki's emphasis that being forgiven one's sins is basic to one's salvation, we note that he is in continuity with the New Testament teaching. To be saved is to be in a right relationship with God. It is to be justified and reconciled to God, having given up being rebellious.

\* The notion of salvation as liberation is also well brought out in the New Testament, particularly in the mission and work of Jesus. He sees that salvation essentially entails liberation and, in fact, interprets his mission not only in terms of rescuing and reconciling man, but also liberating him from all that enslaves him, physical as well as spiritual. The rest of the New Testament points out too that man, through salvation is emancipated from evil powers, particularly that of sin. This element of liberation in salvation is not well brought out in the notion of salvation held by the Ahonoki although the notion of rescue (kuhonokia) and reconciliation (kuhorohia) implicit in the notion of salvation in the Bible is well represented. But the equally important idea of freedom

and emancipation is almost totally absent in the Ahonoki's notion of salvation. This is probably due to the problem of translation as we noted in chapter two, where we discussed the terminology of salvation in the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

These three elements of freedom, reconciliation and deliverance constitute the essence of salvation as presented in the New Testament and, to a considerable extent, that of the Ahonoki. We next examine the effect of this process of salvation both from the point of view of the New Testament and from that of the Ahonoki.

#### The effects of salvation

As we have already noted, salvation is not a mere negative process of rescue, but in fact, affects men positively. This effect can be seen in the lives of those who have experienced salvation. As it has been pointed out, there is the necessity for a believer to appropriate the gift of salvation in his life and enjoy the fruits thereof.

These effects that the believer enjoys are protection and safety (Rom. 8:38), victorious living (Rom. 6:1f, II Cor. 2:14), and a life of love and fellowship (I Cor. 1:2, 12:27). It is the New Testament emphasis, as well as that of the Ahonoki, that, in Christ, a believer is safe. The Muhonoki may with Paul, express his confidence that neither height, nor depth, nor anything else can separate him from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:39).



This positive element in salvation is available for all those who are in Christ (II Tim. 2:10). In this respect, the Ahonoki are once more in continuity with the New Testament. They are confident of victorious living and safety not only because they are in Christ but because, being in Christ, means that they are members of a corporate existence characterized by brotherly fellowship and love.

The only problem that may be pointed out here is that, where brotherly love is concerned, the Ahonoki are considerably exclusive. Apparently, the boundaries within which this love is practised are rather narrow, leaving out those who have not had an experience similar to theirs. Love for them seems to be limited only to those who are "brothers in Christ." This has led to a certain amount of exclusivism within the Ahonoki group.<sup>8</sup> It is worthwhile to point out here also, that several scripture passages criticize this type of exclusivism. One classic statement in this connection is Jesus' answer to the question who is 'my neighbour?' In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29f), the neighbour is defined as "anyone in need". The injunction to "love your neighbour" or in our case, "love your brother", should not mean only those with whom one shares in fellowship meetings, or just the one who claims to be saved. "Love your neighbour" in the biblical context means that the believer has to extend his concern to all in need. Love of this nature

is more inclusive than exclusive. Thus, although the Ahonoki's view that to be saved means to enter into a fellowship of brethren is well supported by the scriptures, we also point out that in the light of the scriptures, a broader definition of the concept of 'brother' is necessary, just as it was necessary for Jesus to redefine the concept of neighbour to his contemporaries.<sup>9</sup>

#### Time and salvation

In the debates concerning the nature of salvation in the Bible and that held by the Ahonoki, one of the questions that is frequently raised up by non-members is that concerning the relationship between time and salvation. The Ahonoki's claim and emphasis is that they were saved on a particular day. The non-members argue that one cannot be saved here on earth because salvation happens only after death. This is a question that warrants discussion from the point of view of the scriptures.

It will be re-emphasized that it is the biblical assertion that salvation is ultimately eschatological. However, the New Testament has also emphasized that this eschatological event has broken into the present time and history. God is not just a spectator from afar awaiting some time in the future in order to save people.<sup>10</sup> The New Testament, in fact the Bible as a whole, presents a God who has intervened, and who does intervene to save man within the context of time and history. In the Old Testament, the story is told of how God liberated Israel

from the yoke of Egypt, and from captivity in Babylon. The prophets were always quick to point out that God was concerned with the day to day activities of his people. He was concerned, for instance, when the poor were exploited (Is. 1:17, Amos 2:6f). The New Testament tells the story of how, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has already intervened on behalf of man, to rescue, liberate, and reconcile him to himself. This, in effect, means that there is an element of "alreadiness" in the biblical notion of salvation. It is in this context that the Ahonoki keep narrating how God has intervened in their lives, to save them, just like the Israelites always looked back to the time when God first visited them in Egypt.

With the Ahonoki, the New Testament emphasis is that the expected eschatological deliverance has already been made available here and now in the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the life of Jesus, the groundwork, all that is necessary for the salvation of the world, has been done. This is what we have seen of salvation as a past event on the side of God, redeeming, reconciling and justifying man.

This past event, as we have seen, has to be appropriated by man, if at all it has to have any bearing upon his life. This is because, even if we affirm that Jesus died on behalf of man, one can still ask what the death of someone who lived two thousand years ago has to

do with one. The answer to this question, at the personal level, is that salvation is a result of the interaction between faith and grace. It is God's will to save mankind. On the other hand, however, God requires man's response to his gift of salvation. This response has been described as saving faith, repentance and a desire to be reconciled to God. This interaction of faith and grace yields in conversion. At the personal level, therefore, there is indeed a sense in which we can talk of salvation as a past event; this is the moment one responds in faith to the objective gift of God's saving grace.<sup>11</sup> And this is the justification of faith that Paul talks about and to which the Muhonoki bears testimony when he says that he was saved in a particular year or on a particular day. This is the salvation which each individual is called to affirm or claim personally, a salvation which has already been accomplished by Jesus Christ.

There is a tendency with the Ahonoki, however, to over-emphasize this 'already' factor in salvation, to the extent that it appears that, for them, salvation is 'equatable' to this initial experience and is, therefore, a once and for all event. In talking about salvation, a Muhonoki will always inevitably refer to the initial act of faith and repentance. In view of the New Testament teaching, however, one can point out that salvation is not merely past history but is a drama that has to be

re-enacted daily in the lives of the believers as they make a decision for God. Though the New Testament makes the assertion that man has been saved, this is done as a basis for hope that God will continue to save the believer to the very end. The Christian is also asked to continually work out his salvation. Salvation in the scriptures, then, is not so much a once-and-for-all event but a process with a past, present and future. It would therefore be necessary to avoid the isolation of any of the three elements and over-emphasizing it at the expense of the others, if a balanced view of salvation is to be had.

The tension of the Christian notion of salvation, therefore, is that between the "already" and the "not yet". The process of salvation has been decisively started but not yet realized in full. This consummation belongs to the future. Meanwhile, the Christian lives in what has been described as the "presence of the future."<sup>12</sup>

Bearing this analysis in mind, the question of time and salvation becomes more clearer. It becomes a matter of maintaining the balance between the past, the present and the future in the process of salvation.

It would be worthwhile here to compare, in passing, the notion of the future salvation held by the Ahonoki with that of the New Testament. As we noted in chapter four, the Ahonoki view ultimate salvation in terms of entering the Kingdom of God, going to heaven, inheriting

eternal life.<sup>13</sup> For many, this is seen as a 'reward' of a good life or to use their terminology, victorious living here on earth. Whereas we cannot rule out the fact that, at times, the New Testament seems to suggest that future salvation is a reward for a good life,<sup>14</sup> nevertheless, we can say with certainty that the New Testament negates a meritorious notion of salvation.<sup>15</sup> The idea of reward and punishment is not anywhere portrayed as a main motive for Christian living. The New Testament emphasizes that, the goal of Christian life is not so much the receiving of a reward but a perfection of what a Christian is, and has started to enjoy here and now. If we are not to fall back on a meritorious notion of salvation, which has been a problem throughout the ages, it becomes necessary to emphasize that future salvation is best viewed as a consummation or perfection of a process that has already been started in and for the believer. Furthermore, this perfection depends entirely on God's grace and has little to do with the individual's piety. The idea of salvation as a gift of grace, rather than a reward to be merited, is well illustrated in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16).<sup>16</sup>

In this context, we can hardly conclude that the Kingdom of God or heaven, which is a metaphor used to refer to future salvation, will be a reward bestowed upon the obedient. However religious or pious one may be, one cannot earn one's salvation. Ultimately, it remains God's

gift to those who rely entirely upon his grace. In this context, it may be better to view the future salvation or the Kingdom of God as a state of being characterized by love and fellowship, between God and his creation. This will be a perfect life, unmarred by evil, sin and death.

So far, we have looked at the notion of time and salvation, as well as the essence of salvation, both from the point of view of the New Testament, and from the point of view of the Ahonoki. Let us now look at how salvation is achieved, from both points of view.

#### Comparing the New Testament notion with the Ahonoki's notion of the dynamics of salvation

The question of how we are saved is one to which the New Testament writers have addressed themselves. In the first place, it is emphasized throughout the New Testament that God saves. It is God, for instance, who sent Jesus to save mankind. Ultimately, the work of saving belongs to God alone. However, we can still distinguish, in the New Testament, between the role of Jesus, the role of the Holy Spirit, and that of the individual, in effecting the salvation which is God's gift.

The New Testament emphasizes that God's gift of salvation is mediated through Jesus, whose very name means saviour (Lk. 1:26). Jesus himself sees his own role as that of a mediator of salvation in his life and ministry. His death and resurrection too, is seen,

particularly by Paul, as affecting man's salvation.<sup>17</sup>

Christ's death is at times seen in terms of sacrifice or in terms of a price paid to redeem mankind.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Ahonoki interpret the death of Jesus in terms of a sacrifice that cleansed them of their sins. This, as we have seen, is understood in the context of traditional sacrificial system where sin could be cleansed by the blood of a goat.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Muhonoki's emphasis is that he has been cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Without being too repetitious, however, we once again maintain that, the attitude of God and that of Jesus in the salvific work is identical. As we have pointed out elsewhere, seeing Christ's death as sacrificial ought not to lead us to infer that God had to see the death of Jesus before he could forgive or cleanse from sin. The solidarity between the Father and the Son is emphasized throughout the New Testament. Jesus himself was conscious of this solidarity between his work and that of God. As he says in the Gospel of John, "My Father works until now, and I work" (Jn. 5:8). Thus, salvation should not be seen as hinging entirely on the death of Christ. This should be seen as the climax of Jesus' life long saving career. In this connection, the death of Christ reflects, not so much the cruelty of a sacrifice-demanding God, but the love of a God, who in his mercy, is ready to offer his



Son on man's behalf.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, we are reminded of the need for human co-operation in the process of salvation. This co-operation is the initial response in faith to God's gift of salvation mediated by Jesus. It is man's total response and commitment to God that saves the individual (Lk. 14:26). It is this faith and commitment that, as the Ahonoki point out, is necessary for one's salvation, because man cannot be saved without his consent.

This saying "yes", in faith, is made possible, on the one hand, by God's saving grace, as evident in the objective work of Christ, and, on the other, by the indwelling Holy Spirit who arouses the response in the individual, enabling him to say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8: 15-16). The suggestion here is that whoever makes an act of faith and commitment to God is led to do so by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3).

The Holy Spirit not only evokes faith in the believer but also, as we have seen, helps in guiding the believer and sustaining him in the life of faith. However, it is nowhere suggested in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit dictates the actions of the individual such that he is incapable of going wrong. Even when one is confident that he has the Holy Spirit, one is still required to walk after the Spirit, making his own conscious decisions.<sup>20</sup>

In this context, one cannot help noticing that the Ahonoki's notion of the role of the Holy Spirit is not

quite in keeping with that of the New Testament. In the first place, they insist, and rightly so, that the Holy Spirit features prominently in the salvation of the individual. As we have seen, for the Ahonoki, baptism in the Holy Spirit is a necessary condition and a confirmation that one is truly saved. Conversely, they argue that anyone who has not received the Holy Spirit is not a full Christian even though he confesses Christ.

The Ahonoki's assertion that the Holy Spirit has a central role to play in the salvation of the individual is well supported by the scriptures. It is the New Testament assertion that the Holy Spirit is the mark of a Christian. Life in Christ is often equated with life in the Spirit. Paul asserts that it is even the Holy Spirit who enables a believer to confess Christ as Lord, and God as Father (I Cor. 12:3, Rom. 8:14). It goes without saying, then, that the Holy Spirit plays a very integral part in the process of salvation. The Ahonoki also agree with this.

The problem, however, is that they tend to distinguish conversion to Christianity from baptism in the Spirit, which they see as a post-conversion experience characterized by speaking in tongues. Consequently, they see 'Christians' as falling into two categories: Those who speak in tongues and, therefore, have the Holy Spirit, and those who do not. It appears that, as far as the Ahonoki are concerned, it is possible for one to be a

Christian for many years without ever having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and therefore, 'saved'.

From the point of view of the scriptures, it may be here pointed out that this distinction is not warranted, because, it is stated that to be a Christian means to have received life by the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is frequently pointed out that it is through the Holy Spirit that the believer is incorporated into the body of Christ. Thus, it can be pointed out that the life in the Spirit, or receiving the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra for Christians or a special gift bestowed on a particular category of believers. The gift of the Holy Spirit is part and parcel of one being a Christian and is true to all believers. As Paul points out in his letter to the Romans, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ (i.e. the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) does not belong to him (Rom. 8:9).

It appears, also, that though the Ahonoki agree with the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is the mark of a Christian, they differ in their interpretation of how the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is evident. The Ahonoki claim that, speaking in tongues is the main manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual. Consequently, anyone who has not yet spoken in tongues feels that he does not have the Holy Spirit, and is, therefore, not a full Christian.

However, when we look at the context in which Paul

discusses the relative value of the gifts of the Spirit, he seems to classify the gifts into two categories, the lower and the higher. He points out for example that all do not speak in tongues, or prophesy or perform miracles of healing (I Cor. 12:29). However, he emphasizes the need for all believers to aim at the higher gifts of the spirit, the highest of which is love (I Cor. 13:1f). In this context, we can conclusively say that the Holy Spirit is the mark of a Christian; that in fact, without the Holy Spirit, one cannot claim to be a Christian at all. Nevertheless, we can point out the sign of one who has the Holy Spirit is not so much speaking in tongues, or prophesying, but love. Love is the criterion by which one can judge whether one has the Holy Spirit and, therefore, whether one is an authentic Christian or not.

Another point of significance raised by the Ahonoki's notion of the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation is their assertion that the Holy Spirit ensures that they do not sin. They claim that once one has received the Holy Spirit after conversion, one cannot sin any more. They are convinced that the Holy Spirit is a 'seal' upon them, guaranteeing them their salvation. Consequently, they point out that Mundu wi na Roho wa Ngai ndehagia, meaning, that a person who has the Holy Spirit does not sin. The question that one would like to raise here is not whether the Ahonoki actually sin or not, but to what extent one can conceive the Holy Spirit as an irresistible power which

dictates the actions of the individual, as the Ahonoki apparently conceive him to do.

Here, we recall our earlier discussion on this issue, where we argued that it is suggested nowhere in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is a spontaneous, all-pervasive power which cannot be avoided. We noted that wherever mention is made of the believer being in the Spirit, it is followed by the exhortation to the believer to walk after the Spirit. The believer is therefore called to consciously respond to the guidance and promptings of the Holy Spirit. This response of man to God's grace, to the work of Jesus, and that of the Holy Spirit, issues not in self-satisfaction but in good works, or good fruits. In particular, the believer is expected to extend his salvation outwards in service to others.

The biblical assertion, therefore, is that salvation is achieved by God's grace, mediated by his son Jesus Christ and maintained through the work of the Holy Spirit indwelling in the individual. All this requires man's response by a faith that yields in co-operation with God in his salvific work. This co-operation is evident in a living faith that issues in love for God and for others.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, we can conclude that the dynamics of salvation consists in a balanced interplay of the various 'agencies' of the salvation which has its ultimate source in God's grace. In thinking about how man's salvation is achieved, therefore, one has to keep in view, the role of

God who is the ultimate source of salvation, the role of Christ the mediator of salvation and the role of the Holy Spirit in maintaining salvation. Equally important for a comprehensive view of the dynamics of salvation, we should also remember the role of the individual who has to appropriate the salvation which is God's gift, and who also has a duty in mediating salvation to others.

### The scope of salvation

A final question that remains to be answered concerns the relationship between the New Testament notion of the scope of salvation and that of the Ahonoki. The question of the scope of salvation raises several subsidiary questions: Is salvation only a matter between the individual and God or does it have a social dimension? Is it particular or universal? Is salvation only for the "saved" Christians or does it have any bearing to the rest of mankind.

To begin with, we note that the Muhonoki is primarily concerned with salvation at the personal level. For him, the personal experience is of paramount importance. That moment of decision, of turning to God in repentance and accepting Christ as personal saviour is a burning issue for many. They, therefore, view salvation at the personal level, as something that happens to people. In this respect, we note that the Ahonoki do not deviate far from the New Testament notion of salvation. For example, we

note that, in many cases, Jesus makes personal appeals to individuals to make a personal commitment and follow him (Mk. 10:17-24, Lk. 19:5). His salvific work is also often directed to particular individuals. At one place he forgives a sinner (Mk. 2:7), at another he cures a leper (Lk. 17:19), or raises a dead person. (Mk. 5:23).

However, the New Testament also emphasizes that salvation does not end at the personal level. It indicates that salvation is not a mere individual experience but it has a social dimension. People are saved at the personal level to become members of a corporate existence characterized by fellowship. Such a corporate existence is implied by Jesus when he refers to salvation in terms of a banquet or a wedding feast. In Pauline writings, the corporate life into which the believer enters is referred to in such metaphors as the Body of Christ, or the building of which Christ is the foundation. Thus those who have experienced salvation are referred to as the Body of Christ, of which the individuals are members (I Cor. 12:12).

The term 'brethren' is also used to designate this corporate aspect of salvation. However, as we have already pointed out, this term should not be interpreted in such a manner as to warrant exclusiveness. The fact that one is saved means that one has also accepted to mediate this salvation. The call to extend salvation to others is evident throughout the New Testament. It is

for instance, demanded of the believer to proclaim the gospel of salvation to others (Rom. 10:10). Furthermore, he is not only expected to proclaim the gospel but also live according to it. This means then that to be saved is to accept a task, of saving others not only by proclaiming the gospel, but also in service to others. In so doing, the believer is expected to go beyond narrow boundaries and to include the world as a whole. Salvation therefore has a definite social dimension.

We also note that, in the New Testament, salvation is not merely a social and personal affair, but there is a sense in which it is also cosmic. Ultimate salvation is equated to a totally new creation. The vision of John in the book of revelation is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. (Rev. 21:1f). This is the transformation that the whole creation awaits (Rom. 8:21). The promise of God is that he will make all things new (Rev. 21:5). Therefore, salvation is not only an individual's experience. Rather, as one author has pointed out:

We are saved together, not only with each other human beings, but also as created beings, sharing different levels in the being of all creatures in the cosmos, animate and inanimate.<sup>22</sup>

We need to see salvation in this wider context of its social and even cosmic levels, rather than merely the personal and individual level.



In relation to the Ahonoki's notion of salvation, one crucial question is whether salvation is particular or universal. Is it limited only to those who explicitly claims to be "saved", or does it have bearing to other Christians or even non-Christians?

When we look at the New Testament teaching concerning who is to be saved, we observe that it is the New Testament's explicit assertion that salvation is intended to be universal. St. Paul points out that "God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 1:2). It is for this reason that God sent his son that the world, through him, might be saved (John 3:16). Jesus himself commissioned his disciples to preach the good news of salvation to all nations (Mt. 28:17). It is apparent from these and related passages that salvation is universally available.

However, it is suggested nowhere in the New Testament that all will inevitably be saved. The need for men to accept the gift of salvation is emphasized throughout the New Testament. All men are invited to salvation. An invitation, however, is not coercive and it therefore carries with it the possibility of rejection. The point then is that, though God wills that all men be saved, he cannot save men, who are free beings and capable of choice, without their consent. This point is well illustrated by the story of the guests invited to the wedding banquet (Mt. 22:1f). There are those who may reject the light

and prefer darkness, to use Johanine terminology. These are judged already, and stand a chance of being finally destroyed by being removed from God's presence ultimately.

One thing is certain however. Both the Ahonoki and the New Testament point out the centrality of Christ in the process of salvation. As we noted in an earlier chapter; the Ahonoki equate Jesus with a 'passport' without which one cannot be saved. They, therefore, agree with the New Testament that Christ is the mediator of salvation. The whole of the New Testament itself is an affirmation of the gospel of the salvation which is in Jesus Christ. Whatever else the New Testament says, it explicitly suggests that to be in Christ or to be a Christian is to be on the way to salvation. Great emphasis is laid on the relationship between the person of Christ and salvation.

The difficulty, however, and the crucial question as far as the Ahonoki are concerned is how to be sure that one is an authentic Christian and, thus, firmly on the way to salvation. This is a question that bothers not only the Ahonoki but also members of other Christian groups. What makes a Christian authentic and, therefore, within the scope of salvation as taught in the Bible? It will be recalled that this is the question that originally disturbed the Ahonoki, when they were in the institutional church. They had felt that the church was shallow, nominal and inauthentic. In search for an authentic Christianity,

they broke away.

This is, in fact, a question that has caused many of the divisions within the Christian community. The question of what distinguishes a Christian has led to many schisms. Some insist that water-baptism is enough for one to be classified as a Christian. The Ahonoki insist that one also needs to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in order to be regarded as a genuine Christian. Others insist that it is only faith in Christ, as a personal saviour, that constitutes authentic Christianity.

In seeking to get an answer to this crucial question, all Christians have looked to the Bible for guidance. However, it appears that there has been a tendency to isolate one or other aspect of Christianity and make it the necessary condition for salvation. The situation is similar to that of proverbial six blind men, who went to 'see' an elephant. Each of them having felt a tail, a tusk or a leg, was confident that he had the right description of an elephant whereas, in fact, he had only a partial view. Christians too seem to have come up with only a partial picture of what Christianity is. In fact, not only does each church have a partial view of Christianity but also a partial picture of the salvation therein entailed.

This is apparently the case with the Ahonoki whom we are studying. From comparing their notion of salvation with that of the New Testament, it is apparent, that,

although the Ahonoki reflect the Biblical teaching on salvation, this is only to a certain extent. They too seem to have come up with only a partial view of Christianity and hence salvation. We summarize the points of difference and points of contact between the Ahonoki's notion and that of the New Testament in the next chapter.

The fact that it is possible to isolate one or other aspect and over-emphasizing it, such that one has only a partial conception of the salvation therein entailed makes it necessary to attempt a definition of what is essential for authentic Christianity. In the next and final chapter, we attempt to do this with the hope that it will lead us towards a more comprehensive conception of salvation.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter IV, The meaning of 'I am saved'.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>To a certain extent, this impression is apparently corrected by the Ahonoki's conception of sin as a negative relationship with God, and also their idea that this life is a continuous battle against sin. Even when we take this into consideration however, it still looks as if this battle is fought for them by the Holy Spirit. The overall impression that the Ahonoki give, therefore, is that for them, it is impossible to sin after conversion. (See Chapter IV on the Ahonoki's interpretation of the Holy Spirit in the sub-section, The dynamics of salvation).

<sup>4</sup>This verse is often quoted by the Ahonoki as a scriptural backing to their assertion that they cannot sin. In itself, this verse, as it is translated in English and in Kikuyu, seems to prove that a Christian cannot sin. However, commentators on this verse are of the opinion that in the Greek text, where the tense is in the present continuous, John is not speaking about individual acts of sinning. He does not mean that one who is a Child of God is confirmed in grace. What he is trying to say is that sin is entirely incompatible with a genuine Child of God. The meaning of this verse then, is that, a Child of God, or a Christian, ought not to sin, rather than he cannot sin.

<sup>5</sup>See footnote 3, above.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed discussion of this, see chapter five, salvation in "Pauline thought: salvation as a past event."

<sup>7</sup>This may be a result of difficulties in translation. See for instance, Chapter II, the Kikuyu translation of the term redemption.

<sup>8</sup>This criticism is applicable to almost any of the churches or denominations, because all have been guilty of this sort of exclusivism, a situation that the current ecumenical movement is trying to correct.

<sup>9</sup>In some cases, the idea of fellow converts being brothers in Christ has led to acute exclusivism that has at times even led to family tension. There are several

cases reported among the Ahonoki where a son or a daughter has been 'disowned' for deciding to marry a non-member. Such an act is regarded by the Ahonoki as an indication of apostasy and backsliding.

<sup>10</sup>This was basically the apocalyptic view.

<sup>11</sup>It is to this moment that the Ahonoki refer when they say that they were saved on such and such a day.

<sup>12</sup>G.E. Ladd, The presence of the future (London: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966). This is an attempt to expand how, and in what sense the eschatological Kingdom has become a present reality in the person and the mission of Jesus; and, we may also add, in the lives of the believers.

<sup>13</sup>Refer to Chapter IV, salvation as a future hope.

<sup>14</sup>See for instance, Matthew 5:12, 5:46, 6:4, 25:14, Mark 9:41. In these passages, salvation appears to be a reward for good works.

<sup>15</sup>Cf Paul's notion of justification by faith.

<sup>16</sup>We can point out here that salvation can never be merited, since man's very existence is a gift of God's grace. Even the faith with which he receives salvation is portrayed in the New Testament as a gift of God's grace. (John 6:44, Romans 8:14).

<sup>17</sup>See Chapter V, salvation as a past event.

<sup>18</sup>See Chapter II, salvation as atonement.

<sup>19</sup>G.E. Ladd, A theology of the New Testament (London, Lutterworth Press, 1975), p.424. Ladd here observes that "the first thing to be said about the death of Christ is that it is a supreme revelation of the love of God. While the New Testament as well as the Old has as its background to Christ's atoning work the wrath of God, this is in no way to be interpreted as turning God's wrath into love."

<sup>20</sup>See Chapter IV, salvation as a present experience.

<sup>21</sup>It is on this premises that James argues that

faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

<sup>22</sup>Rosemary Haughton, A Catholic understanding of salvation in Catholic Charismatic, Vol.3, 1978, p.4.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MORE COMPREHENSIVE NOTION OF SALVATION

#### Some conclusions about the Ahonoki's notion of salvation in the light of the scriptures

In the foregoing chapter, we compared the Ahonoki's notion of salvation with that of the New Testament. From this comparison, we saw that there are indeed points of contact and points of difference in the Ahonoki's notion of salvation vis-a-vis that of the New Testament. Here, we shall point out what are, in our view, the strengths and the weaknesses of the concept of salvation as held by the Ahonoki in the light of the scriptures.

To begin with, we point out that, on the whole, the Ahonoki's notion of salvation is well based on the scriptures. This is owing, as we have pointed out in chapter three, to the fact that one of the major characteristics of this group is their concern with what the scriptures say.<sup>1</sup> For them, the scriptures are the sole authority upon which they base their beliefs. Consequently, we find that all their arguments concerning their religious beliefs are preceded by the phrase, "the Bible says" or "the scriptures say". There is, in fact a tendency, in this group to take the Bible literally as the direct word of God. This fundamentalist approach to the scriptures was reflected by one informant who pointed out at the end



of an interview that "all that I have told you is true because it is what the scriptures say, and it is also written that if anybody adds or subtracts from what is written, he will be denied a share in eternal life."<sup>2</sup>

In view of this firm belief that the scriptures are the sole basis upon which to found one's beliefs, it is not surprising then, to find that the Ahonoki's notion of salvation closely corresponds with what the scriptures say.

The Ahonoki's understanding that salvation is primarily a personal affair is, as we have pointed out in the last chapter, a reflection of the New Testament teaching. It is also the Ahonoki's belief that salvation springs from the individual's heart; demanding a moral transformation and is, therefore, primarily a rescue from sin. This too, as we have seen, is a thesis that runs through the New Testament teaching on salvation.<sup>3</sup> It is a major point of comparison with the Ahonoki's concept of salvation.

A second point of contact between the Ahonoki's notion of salvation and that of the New Testament is their emphasis that salvation in the life of the individual starts here on earth. With the New Testament, the Ahonoki point out that salvation is not a purely otherworldly matter, but is something that happens to the individual here and now when he repents and commits his life in faith to God. This notion corresponds closely to the New Testament

teaching that salvation is both a present gift and a future hope.

A third strong point in the Ahonoki's notion of salvation is their concern with the fellowship of believers. As we have shown throughout this study, the Ahonoki, as a group, are characterized by a sense of community, in which sharing of joys and sorrows is common. Their idea that salvation leads to a life of love and fellowship among members of the Body of Christ is also a reflection of biblical teaching.

Regarding the notion of the dynamics of salvation, we observed that the Ahonoki have emphasized the central role of the Holy Spirit in the process of salvation. The centrality of the Holy Spirit is generally ignored in most churches. Yet, it is the New Testament affirmation as we have seen that in the dynamics of salvation, the Father, the Son, and not least the Holy Spirit have an equally important role to play. The Ahonoki's insistence that the Holy Spirit is essential to their salvation is a fourth strong point where they reflect the scriptural teaching.

We observed also that the Ahonoki on the whole, agree with the New Testament in their conception of how salvation affects them. With the New Testament, they portray the idea that for the believer, salvation means both victory and protection. It is not far fetched, therefore, to conclude that, on the whole, and to a considerable

extent, the Ahonoki's understanding of salvation is a reflection of the biblical concept.

However, as this study has also shown, the concept of salvation held by the Ahonoki has its pitfalls. There are times when their idea of certain aspects of salvation does not quite rhyme with what the scriptures teach. This is not due to neglecting the scriptures, because they are very active readers of the scriptures. It is rather due to a fundamentalist approach to the Bible. This has led to an attitude that even an isolated verse, taken from the scriptures and interpreted literally can be the basis of belief. In this connection, we recall, for instance, how the Ahonoki themselves split into two groups as a result of a variant interpretation of the text in Mark chapter sixteen.<sup>4</sup> This text is taken by one group to be the summary description of a genuine Christian. One verse in this text asserts that if the believers lay hands upon the sick, they will recover. On the basis of this verse, some members felt that there is no need for a sick Christian to go to hospital. Others felt that to go to hospital should be left optional. This shows that even within the group, the tendency to see the scriptures in bits has led to division within the group itself.

The Ahonoki's emphasis that a saved person cannot sin is another case where it is evident that they do not take the scriptures as a whole. Their belief that a saved person cannot sin is based upon certain passages which,

taken in isolation, would indicate that indeed, a saved person cannot sin. In the light of other texts, however, we have shown that these texts do not imply that a Christian cannot sin. Rather, the scriptures, taken as a whole claim that a Christian ought not to sin, precisely because he is a Christian.

At other times, there is a tendency among the Ahonoki to over-emphasize one or other aspect of salvation. We have seen how, for instance, their over-emphasis on salvation as a past event has led to their being misunderstood by non-members. There is an indication, therefore, that there is a need to view salvation more comprehensively. This can only be achieved when the scriptures are also viewed more wholistically.

Salvation as a process of love-exchange: a more comprehensive perspective

In view of our discussion in the last section, where we have pointed out the need for a more comprehensive view of the scriptures, and the salvation therein entailed, it is our proposition in this section that viewing salvation as a process of love-exchange gives us this comprehensive picture of salvation. Looking at the scriptures, this is a perspective, which, apparently, includes all the other perspectives. Whether we see salvation as a rescue from sin, a process of liberation or reconciliation, this is well covered by viewing salvation as a process of love-exchange. In this section, we attempt

to show how this is plausible.

When we look at the New Testament, we observe that the conception of salvation as love exchange has a solid foundation in the scriptures. For John the evangelist, salvation can well be summed up in one word, love. For him, to be saved is to enter into the realm of love which he also calls eternal life. In fact, the notion of love is at the centre of the message of salvation in the New Testament. This is true even when we talk of salvation as deliverance from sin, walking with the Spirit, entering the Kingdom of God, or being in Christ. All this can be subsumed under the conception of salvation as a process of love-exchange.

When we look at our analysis of salvation in the New Testament, we recall one of the central theses which runs throughout the scriptures. This is the statement that, ultimately, salvation springs from God; that the initiative in salvation is God's. This theme, that it is God who saves, is also clearly evident in the Old Testament. The initiative of God to save, is at times referred to as mercy, at other times as grace. At another level however, this grace and mercy is nothing less than an expression of divine love for man. John explicitly points out that God saves precisely because he loves, in that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ... that through him, the world might be saved (Jn. 3:16f). Paul too, in no uncertain terms, emphasizes that Christ's

death for sinners is a proof of God's love for mankind (Rom. 5:8). Salvation therefore can be seen as a gift of love from God to man.

This note of a God who is deeply concerned with humanity is evident not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament. Typical of the Old Testament statements about Yahweh is that he is a God who loves abundantly. The Israelites are frequently reminded that "Yahweh is a merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Ex. 34:6)<sup>5</sup> As a loving God, he enters into a covenant relationship with his people Israel. It is as a party in the covenant relationship that leads the people to refer to him as their Saviour, their Kinsman and Redeemer.

This love of God for Israel is recalled by the Israelites themselves when they portray their relationship with their God as a father-son relationship. The divine love for man is also profoundly presented by the figure of the suffering servant of Yahweh who delivers himself as a sacrifice of atonement for the faithless people (Is. 42:1-9, 50, 53). In the figure of the suffering servant, the dynamics of salvation, in terms of divine love for man, comes fully to the service.

In the New Testament, divine love for man is evident in that God not only enters a covenant relationship with man but also stoops low and becomes man (Jn. 1:1f). This divine love for man is as old as creation; it is the

initial outpouring of God's love and consists the very first salvific work. This theme of creation as salvation is particularly prominent in Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 51:9-11, 45:11-14). God's later acts of saving, for example, the Exodus event, or the saving of his people from the Babylonian captivity, are interchangeably portrayed as new acts of creation. This theme of salvation, as a fresh out-pouring of divine love, is also shown in the New Testament where the work of redemption achieved by Christ is portrayed as an act of re-creation in Christ (Gal. 6:15, II Cor. 5:17). Creation then can be seen as the initial act of God's love, his self-giving, which is continually renewed in consequent salvific work of God including the salvation achieved through Christ.

Of its nature, God's love is spontaneous and free and, as already stated, it manifests itself in that God saves. In the New Testament, Jesus presents this love of God in concrete works of saving. He presents a saving love that is available for adulterers, tax-collectors, thieves, the poor, the rich and the sick alike. God's love for men is therefore a saving love that is available for all men (I Tim. 3, 4:10), or even to the whole world (Jn. 3:10). In short, we can say that salvation springs from God. He is the initiator of process of love-exchange which we call salvation.

As we have also emphasized throughout this study, the love of God for man demands that man love him in

return. Man is called to make a conscious response to the love that God has for him. When the lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to be saved, he was reminded to love God with all his heart (Lk. 10:25). This demand to love regulates the entire relationship between man and God and indeed between man and man. It brings the old law both to its fulfillment and its goal.<sup>6</sup>

As in the Old Testament, the injunction to love one's God, with one's whole heart requires that a man make a decision to make God his "ultimate concern" to use Paul Tillich's terminology. Thus, the love for God manifests itself in a total surrender to God and an attempt to do the will of God unreservedly. This is an attitude of loving obedience which is also described in the New Testament as following Christ, carrying one's cross, seeking the Kingdom (Mk. 8:34f, 10:28). This surrender of the individual to God is a commitment of man with his whole personality, a commitment that may require one to leave father, mother and relatives (Mk. 10:29-30). Such a commitment implies love and would be a suitable alternative to what we have described elsewhere as saving faith.

Where God and man exchange love, salvation is the result. This is what Paul apparently means when he points out that we have been saved by grace (God's love for man), through faith (man's loving response to God) (Eph. 2:8).

It is important to re-emphasize here that this



response of man to God is itself a gift of God, since man's very existence is God's gift. In this context, we begin to have a clearer picture of the role of the Holy Spirit in this process of love exchange. As Paul points out, it is the Holy Spirit who makes man aware of God's love for him and enables him to turn to God in loving faith (I Cor. 12:3). Paul, therefore, is convinced that the very capacity to respond to God's grace is nothing of which man can boast, but is God's work in him through the Holy Spirit:

For all who are moved by the Spirit are sons of God. The Spirit you have received is not a Spirit of slavery leading back to a life of fear but a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry Abba, Father (Rom. 8:14).

This interplay of man's and God's love is what we have described at the personal level as "conversion" or "initial salvation". It is the entry at the individual level, into the realm of salvation, the realm of love exchange.

We have also pointed out that salvation is more than a mere initial experience, however dramatic. It does not end with the first giving and receiving of love. The initial experience is re-lived daily as the individual, helped by God, maintains himself in the sphere of love exchange. This state of a continuous loving relationship is called endurance when reference is to the believer, and providence, when the subject is God.

The love of man for God expresses itself in two

ways. First, it expresses itself in the cultic experience of worship and prayer. In the New Testament, graphic pictures of various Christian worshipping communities are drawn. To these Paul endeavours to write letters of instruction as to how they should conduct their liturgy and worship.

Secondly, as the New Testament is also quick to point out, the love of God is also expressed in doing the will of God. In the New Testament, the will of God is best summed up in the idea of loving one's fellowman, loving one's neighbour. In fact, the New Testament underscores the fact the love of neighbour is the test of true religiosity. The other side of the command to love God with one's whole heart is to love one's neighbour. According to the New Testament then, this is the way that we can know that one loves God.

This is evident even when we look at the New Testament writings in general. In the synoptics, Jesus points out that the candidates for the eschatological Kingdom are not necessarily those who worship most fervently (Mt. 7:21), but those who have let their love for God overflow into love for others (Mt. 25:31f). To love in this manner is to do God's will which, as John points out, is summed up in Jesus' command to love one another (Jn. 15:12). This is the new commandment that Jesus gives and which forms the core of John's gospel of salvation.

The command to love is not itself new. The Mosaic

law commands the Israelites to love their neighbour (Lev. 18). However, the scope of the command in the Old Testament is limited in context and applies unequivocally to members of the covenant community. For Jesus too, the entire content of the demands of the law is summed up in one: "Love your God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself." (Lk. 10:27). He however strikes a new note by redefining the notion of neighbour. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30ff), he points out two things. First, the neighbour is not necessarily the member of the covenant community, or even the one with whom one can share things. The neighbour is anybody who may be in need of loving help. Secondly, the neighbour, as defined by Jesus, includes one's enemies. This point is brought out by the fact that though Samaritans and Jews were hostile to one another, yet, in the parable, the Samaritan was neighbourly to the Jew whom he found in need of loving help. Jesus concludes the story by advising the lawyer to go and do likewise if he is to inherit eternal life. (Lk. 10:37)

This type of love has Jesus himself as its example. On the one hand, Jesus' love for man is the perfect reflection of divine love which is gracious and unconditional, a love that is aimed at the whole man, encompassing all his needs. On the other hand, Jesus is the perfect example of how man ought to be totally loving and obedient

to God's will. The meaning of this kind of love is that one ought to be prepared to give his very life for others (Jn. 15:13).

Such a love is not a mere emotional impulse but expresses itself in concrete actions. As James points out, faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:14ff). The implications of this are far reaching in the context in which the Christian is continually confronted with men in situations of need. It would not suffice, therefore, for the Christian to be satisfied with a mere personal salvation. As one author has pointed out, for the Christian, to accept salvation is not

to have oneself carried passively into a better world. It is to enter into a relationship of sacrificial sharing, the exchange of love to the uttermost, as we see it being poured out beyond all common sense in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>7</sup>

Man's love for man therefore is expected to be a reflection of Jesus' love, which in turn is a reflection of divine love. As such, man's love for man is expected to be self-giving not selfish; free and unconditional and not merited. It is also expected to express itself in active service of others, and particularly the needy, to encounter whom is to encounter God (Mt. 25:36f). In effect, then, the notion of an initial salvation as the occasion for the individual's conversion to God, is also at the same time a conversion to the neighbour.

The parable of the last judgement<sup>8</sup> also points out a third aspect of our notion of salvation as exchange of love. This is the fact which we have noted elsewhere<sup>9</sup> that, ultimately, love and communion is the goal of salvation. It is, in fact, the goal and the very meaning of human existence. The parable portrays the fact that, for those who have participated in this process of love exchange, particularly those whose love is expressed in concrete works of charity to fellow-man, their goal is not a reward as such, but a fulfilment of what they have been involved in already. They are invited to enter the Kingdom or eternal life which is qualitatively defined as a life of fellowship and perfect love. This goal of salvation, as a life of love, is hinted at in the synoptics, in the parables that speak of the Kingdom of God in terms of a messianic feast or a wedding banquet.<sup>10</sup>

In John, the goal of salvation is presented as eternal life, which he further defines as "knowing God" (Jn. 17:2). This is a phrase that speaks not so much of cognitive knowledge as of an intimate relationship and concern. In short, to know God is to love him. It is the New Testament assertion that the final goal of salvation is to know God perfectly. This ultimate knowledge of God will be a perfection of the father-son relationship that the believer enjoys even now.

The goal of salvation as the perfection of love and fellowship is also hinted at by Paul who points out

that of the three cardinal virtues of a Christian, faith, hope and love, love is the greatest. In the end, faith and hope will be unnecessary. Only love will remain (I Cor. 13:8f).

In summary, we can say that salvation can be viewed comprehensively as a process of love exchange. This is because, as we have seen, salvation ultimately springs from the divine love which God has for man. It calls for a response from man in love. This yields in a further outflow of love between man and man. The very goal of this interchange of love is its perfection. And, as one author has pointed out:

If we are to think morally of heaven, we should think of it as a land where love grows, where each citizen learns to glow more with an understanding love, not only for a common King, but also for his fellow citizens.<sup>11</sup>

The relevance of viewing salvation as a process of love exchange in the light of the New Testament and the Ahonoki's notion of salvation

In this final section, we consider to what extent, viewing salvation as a process of love exchange fits in with the New Testament perspective of salvation, and also, whether or not it helps us overcome the pitfalls which, as we have seen, may result from the over-emphasis of one or other aspect of salvation.

As we have already pointed out, viewing salvation as a process of love exchange covers well all the perspectives

from which salvation is viewed in the New Testament, and is, therefore, a more comprehensive approach. In particular, we can point out how the notion of salvation as deliverance from sin, which underlies both the New Testament and the Ahonoki's concept of salvation is included in the idea of salvation as love exchange.

When we look back at the discussion of the biblical concept of sin in an earlier chapter, we recall that sin was defined as rebelliousness and self-centredness; acting as though God was not there. This rejection of God is a failure in love. We have also shown how man's love for God ought to reflect itself in the love for fellow-men. A failure to love God will also reflect itself in a failure to love one's fellow-men. This failure in love may be cited, therefore, as what constitutes sin, which, in the Bible is portrayed as a matter of personal relationships.

Ultimately, therefore, sin is a failure in love, something that leads to alienation between man and man. To be saved then is to be delivered from sin in so far as it means a re-entry into a life of love exchange. It is, in the words of one author, "The restoration of man's intimate relationship with a loving Father, that peace and wholeness which comes about when God's will is being done."<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, also a process of reconciliation between God and man, man and fellow-man. This restoration of intimacy between man and God, and between man

and man, is referred to in the Bible, as we have seen, in metaphors that connote fellowship, such as, entering the Kingdom of God, sharing in a banquet, being in Christ. This is a more positive way of viewing salvation, and as St. John points out, entry into the realm of love-exchange is not a mere rescue from sin but a real transition from death to life (Jn. 5:24).

In addition to giving us a more comprehensive and positive notion of salvation, viewing salvation in terms of love-exchange also helps us to overcome some of the pitfalls such as we have detected in the Ahonoki's notion of salvation, and which spring from an over-emphasis of one or other aspect of salvation.

For one, viewing salvation in terms of love-exchange helps us avoid the pitfall of seeing salvation as a once-and-for-all event. This is because, the demand to love God and neighbour holds true every minute of one's life. As we have also pointed out, God on his side never withdraws his help from man but helps him throughout his life. Similarly, when we say that man's love for God is actualized in his love for fellow-man, it follows that this is not a once-and-for-all incident but a lifelong task, to fail in which is to sin.

Furthermore, it appears that in viewing salvation as love-exchange, we leave little room for a meritorious notion of salvation. This is because, if we accept God's love for man as spontaneous and free, and if man in his



works is trying to reflect this divine love, then, one's love for fellowman will also be free and unmerited, directed even to those who, in one's opinion, may not be worthy of it. In so doing, the Christian would be giving nothing more than he has already freely received from God. Against this background, final salvation ceases to be seen as primarily a reward for doing good, but, a fulfillment and perfection of a process started in this world's life.

In this context too, the question of who is to be saved also becomes less of a problem. When we assert that salvation springs from unmerited divine love, and that the very act of creation is the first salvific work, the initial outpouring of divine love, then we come to realize that God's love is by no means exclusive. The fact that one may have experienced it in a more explicit manner does not mean that others are excluded from it. We cease to see others as totally depraved, for, as we have pointed out, we are all saved together and are to a greater or lesser degree involved in the process of love exchange which we call salvation.

Against this background, we come to the conclusion as Augustine of Hippo did, that, if we insist that love is the authentic test of Christianity, and is central to salvation, then there is a possibility that "Many seem to be within who are really without, and many seem to be without who are really within."<sup>13</sup> In the final analysis, only "God knows his own" (II Tim. 2:19). This realization helps us to see all men as possible recipients of God's

love, no less than we. In so doing, we may possibly be able to overcome exclusiveness, denominational rigidity and intolerance which has been a characteristic of Christianity throughout its history.

To assert the fact that God's love is available for all however, does not diminish the value of being a Christian. This is because although all may be participants in the process of love exchange, some are called to be conscious participants in whom this love exchange is explicit and visible. In this context, it makes sense to be a Christian, not primarily for one's own comfort, but in order to be a witness to the universal love of God. In this context, the Christian's role may be visualized as that of mediating God's love to all men. We can conclude then, that the Christian is not called to a position of favour only, but to a task, an assignment, to be a vehicle of the love that is life, and indeed, the essence of salvation.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup>Sospeter Ikonya, Interviewed at Kiambu, March, 1979.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter V, Salvation in the New Testament.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter III, Section entitled "worship: a typical prayer meeting."

<sup>5</sup>See also Psalms 86:15, 103:8.

<sup>6</sup>See John 15:12, 13:34, Mark 12:30f.

<sup>7</sup>Rosemary Haughton, A Catholic Understanding of Salvation. Catholic Charismatic, Vol.3, (Aug. 1978), p.8.

<sup>8</sup>Matthew 25:31ff.

<sup>9</sup>See Chapter V, Salvation as a future hope.

<sup>10</sup>See Matthew 22:1ff, Luke 14:16ff, Cf Matthew 8:11.

<sup>11</sup>E.M.B. Green, The meaning of Salvation (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1965), p.184.

<sup>12</sup>John Kealy, "I am saved" (Mimeographed article, Kenyatta University College, 1977), p.6.

<sup>13</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, A theology of liberation (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973), p.193.

A SUMMARY OF THE ETYMOLOGICAL AND  
LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF SALVATION

HEBREW

Yasha and cognates:  
The basic meaning of the term yasha is "bringing into a spacious place." Thus, it seems to signify primarily the possession of freedom and well-being, which is gained when restrictive hindrances are removed. The term, therefore, has a connotation of

GREEK

Sozein and derivatives:  
This Greek term for "to save" basically means "to snatch or to rescue from serious peril." The term may also be used to mean the preservation of life. Hence, it may be used with reference to the healing of disease as is often the case in the Greek New Testament. In Greek thought, although salvation was expected

ENGLISH

To save: The term "to save" implies to rescue or keep away from danger. In its biblical usage, the term has come to refer to the process of freeing from sin and its consequences.

KIKUYU

Kuhonokia (Active verb), kuhonoka (Passive verb)  
The verb kuhonokia implies "to rescue" while the passive verb means "to escape from acute physical injury." Thus, these terms are closely similar to the secular usage of "sozein" in Greek. The passive verb does not necessitate a third party to effect the escape. Hence, the title Muhonokia (Saviour)

liberation from  
oppressive environ-  
ments, mostly by  
the agency of a  
powerful deliver.  
In the Old Testa-  
ment thought, sal-  
vation is conceived  
as a divine pre-  
rogative.

from the gods, salvation  
is not a divine prero-  
gative since even kings  
could be referred to as  
saviours. In the Greek  
New Testament, the role  
of saviour, which in the  
OT is Yahweh's prerogative  
is attributed to Jesus,  
who is portrayed as man-  
kind's saviour.

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Padah, gaal, kopher

The fundamental  
meaning in these  
terms is the pay-  
ment of a price  
for the release of  
a person or object,  
which is held in  
detention or sub-  
jected to slavery.

Lutron and cognates.

The use of this term in  
the LXX (Septuagint or  
Greek O.T.) and in the  
New Testament reflects  
the Hebrew usage of the  
terminology of redemption.  
In the New Testament, the  
death of Jesus is port-  
rayed as the ransom or

is rare. Uhonokio or salvation is basically a secular concept in traditional Kikuyu. However, among Christianized Kikuyus, the concept is thoroughly theological and is associated with God, sin, and going to heaven.

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Ransom, Redemption

The terms reflect the Hebrew and Greek notions of buying back by the payment of a price. In the English Bible, the term redemption is constantly used as a technical term

Gukuura (verb) ukuuri

(noun). These terms in Kikuyu translate the terminology of redemption. In common usage, they have the implication of "to pull out." There seems to be no obvious connection between

This process is often the function of a kinsman who acts as goel (redeemer), on behalf of his fellow kinsman. The terms are used metaphorically to refer to God's salvific work as an objective and costly one. The terms therefore carry the implication of emancipation and liberation.

price of man's redemption. Note however, that the emphasis of the ransom-redemption metaphor is on the costliness of salvation. This costliness is portrayed in the New Testament as Jesus' death on man's behalf. (Cf Mk. 10:45)

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Sedeqah and cognates      dikaios, (adjective)

for the salvation  
achieved by Jesus'  
death for man.

this secular mean-  
ing of the verb  
gukuura and its  
theological use  
which is very com-  
mon among Christian-  
ized Kikuyus. The  
term Mukuuri (Re-  
deemer) is always  
associated with Jesus.  
However, although  
the term redemption  
seems to have no  
adequate translation  
in Kikuyu, the idea  
behind the Hebrew  
usage of *gaal*, may  
be easily understood  
by Kikuyus because  
it has its roots in  
family solidarity.

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righteous, justi-

The term justification



There is no single Hebrew term to express the idea of justice. These concept is included in the concepts of judgement and righteousness (sedeqah). The fundamental meaning of the root sedeq is "what is correct or right according to a given standard." In the judicial context, the righteous person is the one who has been judged or declared to be on the right. One who is saddik, or righteous, then

dikaosune, (noun) dikaio (verb). Basically, these words are used in the O.T. sense of innocence or freedom from guilt. The active verb, dikaio, (to justify), means to declare innocent or not guilty. It therefore implies forgiveness and acquittal. This justification in the New Testament is achieved not on the grounds of the conformity to the law, but on the grounds of faith in the salvific value of the death of Jesus Christ.

fication. to justify. Righteousness in English seems to imply being morally right. It does not seem to carry over the Greek and Hebrew conception of righteousness as freedom from guilt, particularly in the judicial context. The verb to justify, in lay English seems to imply "to prove right" rather than to declare right." The NT usage however reflects the Greek and Hebrew use of the term to justify.

in the Kikuyu Bible is translated with a phrase "gutua athingu". This phrase has the implication of "to make pure or holy." The phrase does not carry the implication of acquittal and forgiveness as in the verb to justify in Greek and Hebrew. As translations for the verb to justify in the Kikuyu Bible, we suggest, two words, gukirirwo - to be forgiven, kurekererio - to be let free and to be acquitted.

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is the one who is declared innocent, and free from guilt. This declaration is often portrayed in the O.T., as the function of Yahweh who is seen as the righteous judge and law-giver. The righteous man in the O.T., is the one who is innocent in the light of God's law.

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Kapper and derivatives. Etymologically, this term means to cover, or to remove the obstacle to reconciliation. The term refers to the

Katallaso, katallage; (reconcile and reconciliation) respectively. In the New Testament the idea of a ritual act of atonement is suppressed. Atonement or reconciliation is portrayed

Atonement - recon-  
ciliation, reconcile.

The term atonement means the re-union of two previously estranged parties.

Hence, it means to reconcile or to make

The term atonement in the Kikuyu Bible is translated as kuhorohia while reconciliation is translated as kuiguithania. The latter is an adequate translation

ritual process of atonement as well as the resultant reconciliation. The ritual of atonement, in the O.T., often involved the sacrificial shedding of blood of a victim. In the religious context, the effect of atonement was to "cover" or to obliterate the effects of sin such that man could be reconciled to God.

in the New Testament as an act of divine love that affects a peaceful relationship between man and God. We are not left with the impression that God is the object of atonement. Rather, he is the initiator of the process in which man and the world is reconciled to himself through Christ. (Rom. 5:9, Aph. 2:13-10, II Cor. 5:18, 19)

"at one"

of the term atonement and reconciliation in English because it means bringing together previously estranged parties. The term kuhorohia however is used to translate the notion of the ritual of atonement, particularly in the O.T. The term implies that one party is angry with the other, and must therefore be appeased usually by the shedding of a victims blood, before reconciliation can be achieved. Kuhorohia



was a ritual which, in traditional Kikuyu often had God as its object. Care should be taken therefore when this term is used in the Christian context, not to imply that God must be appeased before man can be reconciled to Him. The N.T. emphasis is that it is God who initiates atonement and reconciliation.



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## ORAL SOURCES

### A LIST OF INTERVIEWEES AND SOME BIOGRAPHICAL REMARKS ABOUT THEM

#### 1. Gathu Richard and Wangui Margaret:

These are husband and wife, aged about 35 years. Richard was originally a Catholic. He felt dissatisfied with Catholicism on two accounts. First, Catholics apparently believe that salvation happens only after death such that one can repent on the last minute and get saved. Secondly, the idea of weekly confession of sins which may be repeated immediately did not appeal to him. In search for a more satisfying religion, he first joined the Pentecostals and later the Ahonoki who emphasize a once-for-all-repentance and that salvation begins here and now.

Margaret, his wife was originally a member of the P.C.E.A. Her conversion was a dramatic one, having received the Holy Spirit after attending a Pentecostal meeting. Both had intended to marry conventionally within the Church but after joining the Ahonoki, with their disregard for formalism they discarded the idea, though they had already paid for the ceremony.

#### 2. Gitau Joseph

Gitau is a secondary school science teacher aged about 32 years. He too was originally a Catholic. By 1955, he had learnt the basics of Christianity e.g. the ten commandments.

Later, he joined the P.C.E.A. where he learnt the Catechism and was later baptized. Here he first heard about salvation but it is not until he joined secondary school that he got "saved" or joined the Orthodox Ahonoki. In his study of the scriptures, he discovered some portions, concerning the Holy Spirit that were largely ignored by the group he was in. For this reason, he joined the Ahonoki, also called the friends of the Holy Spirit. Here he was baptized both with water, and the Holy Spirit. As a science teacher, Gitau was very open in our discussions, and we were able to discuss at depth some of the theological issues in which his group differs from other Christians.

### 3. Ikonya Sospeter

Sospeter, who is about 75 years old was originally a member of the Anglican Church. He was of the opinion that, missionaries had confused the gospel with the Church, making religion appear like a trade. When the Ruanda preachers appeared around 1936, with their emphasis on the need to confess one's sins and to get saved, he was one of their first converts. For this reason he was able to tell us much about revival in its early stages and also why the Ahonoki group broke away from the Anglican Church.

### 4. Mungai Francis and Wamboi Esther

This is a couple that has been Christians for many years. By the time of the Ruanda revival in the 1930s, Mungai was already a practising Christian, having qualified for baptism when he passed his catechism at Scottish Mission,

Thogoto. He was one of the earliest converts to Ruandaism, and as he described himself "we are the first-born of the revival." The early Revival conventions were held at his home; and he was the leader of the original group that broke away from the Anglican Church in Kiambu. He and his wife Esther were therefore very helpful in giving us information about the early days of revival and its development.

5. Mungai Benjamin and Mwangi Mureithi

These are leaders of a second group which broke off from Francis Mungai's group, on the issue of whether or not to go to hospital when sick. They too are some of the early converts to the revival movement. Having come from the Anglican Church, they were able to inform us about the early days of revival and the theological reasons why the present group deviated from the norms of original Ruandaism.

6. Ndung'u Ghadiah and Muthoni Ndung'u

This is another young couple among the Ahonoki. Ndung'u is a primary school teacher aged about 36 years. The couple belongs to a group led by Ndung'u, which consists mainly of the younger members. These were the two contacts we had with this group members of which did not feel free to be interviewed.

7. Nyokabi Rachel

Rachel, who is about forty-eight years old, is again one of the earliest converts to the revival. When the revival reached Kenya, she was a young girl; she was not sure what to

confess when the revivalists insisted that confession was necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, she joined the revivalists. Later, around 1946 she witnessed Bildad Kaggia's preaching around 1946, against all institutionalized religion. She knew Kaggia personally, and was therefore able to furnish us with information about Kaggia's teaching and his influence upon the Ahonoki. She herself used to be among the early converts sent out to preach the revival message to other places like Ukambani and Embu.

8. Wanjiru Veronicah

Wanjiru is a recent convert to the Ahonoki movement having joined it about six years ago. She was initially a member of the A.I.C. where she was baptized. She felt however that although she was baptized and regularly attended the Church, this did not help her not to sin, Thus she joined Benjamin's group which she feels gives her an opportunity for more meaningful and effective religious experience.