

Noniya Luo Church: The dynamics of an African
Independent church among the Luo of Siaya District.

By

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A B S T R A C T

The history of the Christian Church in Africa is a vast field that at the moment a lot of work is being done on. The extent of the task grows with the increasing recognition accorded the widespread indigeneous churches now referred to as the African Independent Churches. The very multiplicity of these movements and the peculiar characteristics of many of them present a formidable problem to those who are concerned with or are interested in the study of Christian history in Africa.

In the last few decades there have been surveys of some areas or of groups of such churches as indicated in the literature review in the next chapter. These studies have not only provided valuable outlines of the history, the beliefs and the practices of the independent church movement but have also offered a certain amount of interpretation and evaluation. Perhaps, to make these general theories more convincing and refined there is still a great need for more case studies, especially of those movements that have arisen in areas where there are very many independent churches, as the latter may have their own contribution to make towards a general understanding of independency itself.

In this present work we seek to make such a contribution by concentrating on a historical description of one representative member of the prophetic type church known as Nomiya Luo Church in the Nyanza Province of Kenya. Nomiya Luo Church, is little known outside its own membership. Government Sources have only information of the official kind, on this Church. Neighbouring churches and their clergy are astonishingly ignorant, often misinformed and sometimes hostile to the church. Apart from mention in certain books and journals as the first breakaway church in Kenya, little is known about the origin, growth and significance of the church in Nyanza. This is one significant

factor that necessitates this study.

The purpose of this study is to make a survey of all the available information in both primary and secondary sources on the Nomiya Luo Church in an attempt to establish three facts. First, that this church has been existing since ¹⁹⁰⁷ 1912 and that the causes of its emergence are very complex. Secondly, that the beliefs and practices of the movement have had to undergo change in order for it to be able to exist until now. And finally, that in a way the church has contributed to the social development in the community.

The historical account is confined to an outline of the background of the movement, a narrative of the life and work of the founder, description of the church and the development of the church within a given period, 1907 - 1980. The material is restricted to the immediate story of the church, regarded primarily as a religious movement. As in all religious history other factors, Geographical, economic, social, and political have conditioned the religious development at many points, we have the occasion to refer to some of the more obvious of these in passing; to attempt their full scale study would deflect us from the primary purpose of this work and requires a competence appropriate to other disciplines.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AIM - African Inland Mission
- OCK - Christian Council of Kenya
- CECK - Christian Evangelists Council of Kenya
- OMS - Church Missionary Society
- CN - Central Nyanza
- DC - District Commissioner
- DEB - District Education Board
- KNA - Kenya National Archives
- LNC - Local Native Council
- MHF - Mill Hill Fathers
- NLC - Nomiya Luo Church
- NZA - Nyanza
- PC - Provincial Commissioner
- PCEA - Presbyterian Church of East Africa
- RC - Roman Catholic

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Problem statement and rationale

H.W. Turner, in a paper entitled, "A new field in the history of religions", boldly expresses the following views: "there would be little religious history if there had not been a succession of new developments, new features and new religious traditions that claim an origin in some new departure". The rise of Independent Churches in Africa present a range of phenomena sufficiently distinctive to be designated a new field of study in the history of religions.¹

The existence of this field is indicated in the literature of the last two or three decades, since Katesa Schlosser surveyed prophets and their movements in the whole continent of Africa.² Ten years later, Guariglia, extended the study to a world survey of what he called Prophet and Salvation seeking movements.³ Then came another world survey, Vitorio Lanternari's book on the religious movements seeking freedom and salvation among oppressed peoples.⁴ In the same period there has been mounting interest among scholars in different fields who have attempted

¹ H.W. Turner, "A new field in the history religions", Journal of Religion and Religions. Vol. 1, No. 1 1971, pp. 15 - 23.

² Ibid., (Katesa Schlosser, Propheten in Africa Limbach: Braunschweig, 1949).

³ Ibid., (Guariglia, Prophetismus, Und Heilserwartungsbewegungen also v'o' l Kerkund - liches Und religions geschichtliches problem (Vienna: Ferdinand Berger, 1959).

⁴ Lanternari, The religions of the oppressed: a study of modern Messianic movements (New York: Knopf, 1963 English Edition).

their own world classification and general theory.⁵ A new bibliography of modern religious movements in Africa now contain some two thousand items in this area.⁶

Due to the vastness of this area, appeal has been made, in recent years, by people in different fields, for more research into these groups of religious movements. Reverend George Parrinder complained that "one reads very little about these sects in Mission literature", adding, "they are a very potent factor in the religious situation" as they incorporate spiritual needs that "seem to be neglected by the orthodox churches."⁷ This state of affairs has somewhat improved and there are at present a vast accumulation of publications on African Independent Churches.

Professor Bolaji Olowu sees in the phenomenon of independent churches a sign of rebuke for the missionary started churches and gives the advice that "the right thing for the church to do is to make an objective study of the movements" in order to learn the secrets of the undoubted attractions and to be able to avoid the pitfalls usually faced by the church in the process of indigenization.⁸

⁵ M.W. Smith, Towards a classification of cult movements, Man Vol. 59, 1959 pp. 8 - 12.

⁶ R.C. Mitchell and H.W. Turner, A bibliography of modern African religious movements (Evanston: North Western University Press; compilers 1966), H.W. Turner, Bibliography of new religious movements 1968 revised 1971 and 1977).

⁷ G. Parrinder, African traditional religion (London: SPCK 1962), pp. 145 - 146.

⁸ B. Idowu, Towards an indigeneous church (London: OUP, 1965), p. 47.

F. B. Welbourn does not hesitate, however, to assert that a study of African independent churches is indispensable for an understanding of contemporary culture:

We cannot understand contemporary culture as a whole, unless we study its underworld of churches which under African leadership, have broken away from ... missionaries and will continue to break... even after they ... are ... led by Africans.⁹

In spite of the fact that several studies are already done on independent churches, the necessity for more studies has not subsided and so the study undertaken in this dissertation is indispensable.

This study on Nomiya Luo Church (NLC) was mainly instigated by the fact that although it is the first breakaway church in Kenya, very little is known about it. The NLC has been in existence for over sixty years and has experienced several splits so that there are several other groups which have retained the first word "Nomiya." The study was viewed as indispensable due to the fact that, if immediate study was not undertaken, the origin and development of the mainstream NLC would get obscured with all these splinter groups around. In this dissertation, therefore, an attempt is made to show that the NLC has been in existence since 1912. The explanations for its emergence are more complex than what is given in the literature and, with time, changes have occurred in various aspects of the movement.

Another significant factor was the area within which the NLC arose. The NLC rose among the Luo of Nyanza Province,

⁹ F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, A place to feel at home: a study of two independent churches in Western Kenya (London: OUP, 1966), p. 7.

an area noted for its high concentration of independent churches. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot express the need for more case studies of independent churches in this area when they write:

in particular, it is hoped that a thorough study of West Kenya may soon be possible. It offers a galaxy of both Missions and Independent Churches, which is not available in other parts of East Africa. Moreover the present moment provides an opportunity when colonialist roots of independency may be studied alongside the consequences of political independence.¹⁰

The NLC has over thirty thousand adherents in Nyanza Province, a number large enough to necessitate a study particularly on the attractions of the movement. In fact, there are several movements with far fewer members in Nyanza than the NLC itself, some of which have very few new ideas to offer since they are reproductions of other movements.

Another factor which instigated this study is connected with indigenization. Most missionary related churches have, at the moment, been attempting to indigenise, thus creating a kind of Christianity that is truly African. This attempt has changed the attitude of the missionary churches towards African Independent Churches. They are now viewed as truly indigeneous churches and the missionary churches have much to learn from them. With this in mind, it seemed that the NLC, being the first prototype attempt to create a genuinely indigeneous Christianity on Kenyan soil, had something to offer. It would, therefore, be interesting to look at what impact it had on an African society and whether it has anything to offer to other churches in their attempts at indigenization.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 7 - 8.

A study of the NLC is, therefore, an indispensable undertaking and will go far to challenge not only the foreignness of the mission started churches but will give a picture of an indigenized church. This study will also challenge the NLC to be a positive contributor to the rapidly changing society of Kenya if its contribution, particularly to the welfare of the society, has been negative.

In this study, the term NLC will refer to the church started by Yohana Owalo in 1912 after "God spoke to him on the 1st March, 1907 in Mombasa to go and teach the word of God."¹¹ There are a confusing variety of names that have been applied to this church, especially by people who are not its members. Some of the names are JokOwalo, JoNomiya and JoNyangi.¹² Before 1956, the official name of the Church was Nomiya Luo Mission (the Mission to the Luo that was given to me), but in 1956, when the Government demanded the re-registration of all independent churches, the name of the Church was officially changed to Nomiya Luo Church. This is the name that is used throughout the dissertation, except in quotations from other sources.

The NLC is presented as a movement that, in its origins and development, is, at the same time, the result of forces as well as the causes of new forces. The interplay of forces, resulting from the traditional, colonial and Missionary activities will raise the whole spectre of problems connected with culture changes. In other words, dynamics will not only characterize continuous movement, advance or expansion, but also continuous change or tending to produce change.

¹¹ Fundamental declaration, Laws and Regulations of the Nomiya Luo Church (The Revised Constitution of May, 1973), p. 1.

¹² JokOwalo - People of Owalo. JoNomiya - People of Nomiya Luo Church. JoNyangi - People who circumcise.

The NLC, in its origin and development, is African; it originates from the African Continent, hence the description, "An African independent church." It is described as "independent" in the sense that it was founded by a Luo Christian to be independent or free from missionary control. The word "church" is said by many to be basically Christian so that one cannot talk of Islam and talk of church concurrently. It is the contention in certain literature that the NLC beliefs and practices betray a lot of unchristian tendencies such that the use of the word "church" is unwarranted. Further attempts to verify this will be made in Chapter Five. Usually, when one is dealing with a church that is not one's own, biases are bound to occur. However, in view of the fact that the NLC depends, for its instruction, on the Holy Bible, which is the standard for any church, it is referred to here as "church." In any case, in the history of Christianity, the name, "church", has continued to be used even by those who were considered heretics.

2. Objectives

This dissertation, the result of many months field work, undertaken mainly in Siaya District of Nyanza Province of Kenya, seeks to do five things.

First, an attempt is made to give some insight into the causes of independent churches by looking at the background of causes of the NLC. To provide the necessary background, the colonial situation, the missionary setting, and the traditional setting of the NLC is considered in Chapter Two. Since in all religious history, other factors, such as geographical, economic, social and political have conditioned the religious development at many points. We refer to some of the more obvious in passing.

The experience and the personality of the founder are also taken into consideration in order to throw light on whether or not these contributed to the rise of the movement. Theological standpoints

usually lay at the background of every breakaway, therefore, these are also assessed to show if the movement arose as a result of theological differences.

Secondly, an attempt is made to sketch some of the major features within the Church that made it attractive to those who accepted it. By considering what needs the church seemed to satisfy and what values it incorporated from the traditional society, one hopes to get a few correctives in missionary methods. It would not be too much to expect that there may be discovered in this process some indications that point the way to a better understanding of the African mentality as an aid towards creating a truly African Christianity.

Thirdly, an attempt is made to reconstruct the history of the Church since 1912. In most literature, mention is made of the NLC as if it died after 1920. The stand here is that the Church has been in existence since 1912 and, inspite of problems it has experienced, there is no time between this period and 1980 when it was extinct.

Fourthly, an attempt is made to determine any changes that have taken place in the Church since 1912, particularly within some of its beliefs and practices. The groups that have split away from the NLC are also considered because, as already said, theological differences sometimes lay behind the splits. Usually, after a split or with time, a church is forced to reconstruct its various aspects, the aim here is to determine these changed aspects within the movement, and whether or not some of the changes have been acceptable.

Finally, an attempt is made to determine the contributions of the NLC to the Luo Community and to Christendom. The contribution to the Luo Community, and perhaps beyond, is looked at in terms of the Church's involvement in Education and other social welfare activities. Since it is a divided Christianity that offered and still offers its message of salvation to Africans, the same Christian

disunity has become a pattern according to which Africans have modelled their own versions of Christianity. An attempt is made here to look at the NLC's involvement in ecumenism. Lack of involvement with other groups has repercussions on the Christian nature and enrichment of any Christian movement. Usually, churches do not have good relations because of lack of knowledge of each other, this work is meant to provide data to the churches, particularly in their attempts to relate to the NLC in an attempt at ecumenism.

3. Statement of hypothesis

With the aim of achieving the objectives shown above, available information in both primary and secondary sources on the NLC were surveyed to establish or nullify the hypotheses set below. The first hypothesis is that the explanations for the emergence of this independent church are more complex than would be perceived. The second hypothesis is that when the NLC started, its teaching provided a progressive and coherent explanation of changes in Luo society brought about by Western colonialism and missions, however, in 1980 its teachings no longer provide a satisfactory explanation of current processes of cultural and spiritual change. The third hypothesis is that if a movement is to endure or exist, some reinterpretation of events and some reorganisation of its beliefs and practices must occur. The fourth and final hypothesis is that, if there must be a reinterpretation and reorganisation, then the NLC has undergone several changes especially in its beliefs and practices such that an analysis of one phase of its history would not necessarily hold for another phase.

4. Literature review

In recent years, there has been a growth of interest in the history of "enthusiasm", to use the term resurrected by R.A. Knox,¹³ amongst workers in various fields, some of whom are

¹³ R.A. Knox, Enthusiasm: a chapter in the history of religion with special reference to the XVII and XVIII centuries (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1950).

historians, anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists. These religious movements are global. Malenesia, Polynesia, Micronesia, Africa, North and South America, China, Burma, Indonesia, Siberia, all have had their share of such movements and the history of Europe provides numerous examples.

The phenomenon is not new and has always been there since the beginning of Christianity. Knox, in reviewing "enthusiasm" from the first century to the eighteenth century, says of schism:

the pattern is always repeating itself, not only in outline but in detail.... Almost always schism begets schism; ... it is a fugal melody that runs through the centuries.¹⁴

Since the phenomenon is not new, independency in Africa should not be regarded as an abnormality, almost a disease which needs some very special explanation, which might perhaps be diagnosed and cured.¹⁵

On the same phenomenon of independent religious movements E.S. Gaustand expresses a lament,

Western christendom is no stranger to schism. Popes and counterpopes spoke not a gospel of brotherhood and love but of factualism and strife.... He who does not have the church for his mother does not have God for his father, Cyprian had long ago written. But for many dissenters at the dawn of a New Age mother was a whore. Schism then became a duty not a sin but a duty.

14

Ibid., p. 8.

15

T.O. Ranger, The African churches in Tanzania paper No. 5 of the Historical Association of Tanzania (Nairobi: BAPH, 1968), p. 4.

In bewildering and terrifying cleavages came:
Lutherans, Zwinglians, calvinists, fanatic
prophets, tender evangelicals, strange mystics,
political opportunists, mediating scholars.
Would the splintering of the church never cease!¹⁶

R.L. Wishlade; speaking on the same phenomenon, says that one of the characteristics of the major world religions has been the process of sectarianism by which small new religious groups are formed by secession from existing groups, with the sects still considering themselves the followers of the founder. He further reckons that sectarianism has been the characteristic of the history of Christianity, with the result that there are in the world today several thousand religious groups paying allegiance to Christ.¹⁷

In Africa, according to David Barrett, in 1968 there were more than 6,000 of these churches. The churches had a total membership of approximately seven million to be found in more than two hundred and seventy five African ethnic groups.¹⁸ M.L. Daneel suggests that the whole movement of independent churches grows at a rate of approximately three to four thousand members per year.¹⁹ At this rate of development, the combined Protestant and Catholic memberships on the African soil will be surpassed in the future. G.C. Østhuizen says that these schisms are taking place on a scale

¹⁶ E.S. Gaustad, Dissent in American religion (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1973), p. 8.

¹⁷ R.L. Wishlade, Secretarianism in Southern Nyasaland (London: OUP, 1965), p. 1.

¹⁸ David Barrett, "Two hundred independent church movements in East Africa: a survey, analysis and prediction." Paper read at a social science conference at Makerere, Uganda, January, 1967.

¹⁹ M.L. Daneel, Zionism and faith healing in Rhodesia: aspects of African independent churches (Paris: Mouton, 1970), p.9.

unparalleled in the history of Christianity.²⁰

Kenya, like all other nations that experience independency, has had its share of independency. Barrett says that by 1966 there were one hundred and sixty African independent churches.²¹ By now the number has exceeded one hundred and sixty by far because by May, 1979 even the Government of Kenya refused to register any new breakaway churches.²²

The above mentioned rapid growth gave cause to intensive questioning, particularly by researchers, into the factors influencing the rise of these movements. Right through research workers have tried to trace the complexity of the causes of origin to the very basic aspects. Thus in the description of B. Sundkler and G. Blandier with regard to South African churches and messianism in Zaire, there is a sharp emphasis on the socio-political factors. The fundamental causes are sought in social disruption, for example, the apartheid policy, the occupation of tribal areas by Europeans and racial tensions.²³

²⁰ G.C. Oosthuizen, Post-christianity in Africa: a theological and anthropological study (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1968), p. 29.

²¹ David Barrett, Schism and renewal in Africa: an analysis of six thousand contemporary religious movements (Nairobi: OUP, 1968), p. 30.

²² Kenya Gazette, 17 May, 1979.

²³ Bengt Sundkler, Bantu prophets in South Africa (London: OUP, 1948 (New Ed. 1961) p. 1 - 38.

Blandier reminds us that independency in Zaire has its origin in the colonial situation in which the colonised is done an injustice by the coloniser.²⁴ Lucy Mair calls the movements, "a simple correlation between the appearance of cults and the absence of political representation."²⁵ Daneel sketches them, primarily, as political or African nationalism.²⁶

Contrary to Daneel's view, Ousthuizen warns that it is wrong to view independent churches as nationalistic enterprises with political aspirations. He sees culture conflict as the basis to the rise of independent churches.²⁷ This echoes Barrett's view when he claims that "the basic cause common to the entire movement of independency" is the "clash of three impinging cultures, the traditional, the colonial and the missionary."²⁸ He says that where the culture clash has been strong independency is strongest and where a group has been protected from the shock of culture clash independency is absent.

Katesa Schlosser maintains that the appearance of prophets

24 G. Blandier, Messianismes et Nationalismes en'Afrique hoire' in cashiers luternaux de sociologie XIV 1953, pp. 41 - 65.

25 Lucy Mair, Independent religious movements in three continents Comparative studies in society and History 1 (2) January 1959 pp. 113-136.

26 M.L. Daneel, Op. cit., p. 9.

27 G.C. Oothuizen, Op. cit., p. 30.

28 David Barrett, "Two hundred independent church movements in East Africa." See also, idem., Schism and Renewal in Africa for the list of causes of independency in Africa.

is due mainly to economic and political reasons and very seldom exclusively to religious reasons.²⁹ However, Adrian Hastings and J. B. Webster say that independency is all a revolt against imperialism whether the basic causes are religious, political or social.³⁰ Their view is almost similar with that of Vittorio Larternari who sees the main causality of independent churches as the quest of oppressed people for "freedom from subjection and servitude to foreign powers."³¹

From the above examples it is evident that different views are held by different people about the causes of independent churches. One should not, however, point at one single cause as the reason for the rise of any movement because no cause is satisfactory in itself. Take the case of politics as a cause. Whereas political elements cannot be ruled out, as always prominent in the rise of independent churches; a description of any movement might reveal it to be more than just merely political. An example can be given of the Chilembwe uprising of 1915. The uprising even tried to overthrow British power, but at least some of the ideological impetus came from the preaching of 'Watchtower' people or Jehova's Witnesses, that the gentile times would end in 1915.³² In this case, the political action

29 Katesa Schlosser, Propheten in Africa, p. 401.

30 Adrian Hastings, A history of African Christianity 1950 - 1975 (London: Cambridge University press, 1979), p. 66 and J.B. Webster, African churches among the Yoruba (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1964), p. 193.

31 Vittorio Larternari, The religions of the oppressed, p. 302.

32 G. Shapperson and T. Price, Independent African: John Chilembwe and the origins, setting and significance of Nyasaland native rising of 1915 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), p. 1 - 13.

was as a result of some religious belief, so to account for the cause of origin in politics alone would not be realistic.

Economic causality alone appears to dominate the views of many people. It is of course undeniable that economic factors loomed large in nearly all the movements. But it is equally indisputable that economic, like the political motives, were contained within a larger framework, that of religion. For example, Jomo Kenyatta links Mau Mau with economic factor, including greatly reduced rainfall in Kenya, but even he notes that the Kikuyu linked the misfortune with the religious beliefs.³³

Again acculturation has been viewed as a basis of the origin of these movements. In this view culture clash is held responsible. It is a necessary but not a sufficient cause because not all people in this situation react the same way. People have reacted differently each time by either geographical removal or isolation.

It would seem reasonably clear that no particularist explanation, whether political, economic, social or psychological can exhaustively or exclusively explain the origin of any religious movement. It can be conceded that, although, in certain movements other components appear to be prominent, all components are likely, in some degree to be implicated in any movement. They are over-determined by multiple part causes that operate effectively in the final analysis, only as a totality. This conclusion is fairly applicable to the NLC whose causes are complex.

When studying independent churches, one is dealing with a highly complex phenomenon which has received analysis from a variety of perspectives in contexts. At this juncture, a review of some literature on independency is necessary. This survey will, by no means, cover all the important works but will, at least, highlight the importance independency has gained in the past three decades.

A look at the world scene, where single works attempting an overall study and interpretation of similar phenomena in colonised societies, is appropriate. Already mentioned is the work of Vittorio Larternari which is a comparative study. In the book, he sees the causality of these movements as

the quest of oppressed peoples for freedom from subjection and servitude to foreign powers as well as from adversity and salvation from the possibility of having the traditional culture destroyed and having the native society wiped out as a historical entity.³⁴

He is saying that independent churches are anti-colonial.

A totally different and quite modest world survey comes from G. Oosterwal's work.³⁵ Here the subject is placed firmly with clear critical analyses of casual explanations, terminologies and typologies. Despite the use of the term messianic, this is a good introduction to the independent church movements, with a holistic

³⁴
p. 302. V. Larternari, The religions of the oppressed

³⁵
G. Oosterwal, Modern messianic movements as a theological and missionary challenge (Missionary studies 11) Indiana: Institute of Menonite studies, 1973).

approach to which theology provides the centre. H.W. Turner's article in the Encyclopaedia Britannica³⁶ has something common with Oosterwal's work and combines a theoretical analysis with a historical survey except that the African scene is necessarily limited.

Turning to the African scene itself, we find new developments in recent years. In Africa, independents were first the concern of missionaries and administrators, and it was Sundkler who published the first full and, probably, still the best account of them in his Bantu Prophets in South Africa.³⁷ Although he recognises the fact that there are diverse causes other than the ones he mentions he gives a simplistic understanding of the causes of the independent movements. He supplements this in his later book The Zulu Zion.³⁸ A serious point of criticism concerns his dual classification: the Ethiopian and Zionist churches. A church like Nomiya Luo Church would not properly fit into the classification since it has all the elements of both Ethiopianism and Zionism. Credit, however, goes to Sundkler for documenting the rise of these movements among the Zulu traditional society, religion and culture. With the appearance of his work, independency in Africa became established as a subject worthy of study. .

³⁶ H.W. Turner, Tribal religious movements, New,
Encyclopaedia Britannica (New 1974 edn.) pp. 697-705.

³⁷ B.G. Sundkler, Op. cit.

³⁸ B.G. Sundkler, Zulu Zion (London: OUP, 1976).

The immediate result was an increase in the number of new published studies. Between 1940 and 1959 over three hundred and forty had been written. There has also been an increase in the literature by all types of scholars since 1960, some of which are going to be mentioned. In 1968 David Barrett produced in a most encyclopaedic manner, a mass of comparative information on African independency. He has a lot of data and can speak authoritatively on at least five thousand of the movements among which the NLC is one.³⁹ His work is a considerable accomplishment and his title shows that he regards independency as one of the many different forms of African Christianity or religious initiative. Renewal and relevance are dealt with in the final chapter of this dissertation.

G.C. Oothuizen's book, written in the same year is primarily a theological assessment of independent churches. A realistic treatment of the lack of missionary empathy towards Africa is followed by a summary description of independent churches in Africa. This is followed by yet another attempt at classification and eight chapters of theological and ecclesiological analysis. His classification has a cultural bias and his theology relies too much on German concepts. Hence in spite of the light that his work throws on this study his theological analysis hardly applies to the NLC.⁴⁰

One significant development is the work done by Roman Catholic scholars. This is a field they once regarded as an undesirable protestant offshoot but which is now discovered to be more involved with catholicism than they had imagined, Father Peter J. Divern has produced a substantial doctoral study of

³⁹ David Barrett, Schism and renewal in Africa, pp. 8 - 16.

⁴⁰ G.C. Oothuizen, Post-christianity in Africa.

the largest breakaway movement from a catholic milieu; the Maria Legion in East Africa.⁴¹ Another work by a catholic which will be described later is that of Marie France Perrin Jassy.⁴²

In other parts of Africa there are books published by such authors as M.L. Daneel,⁴³ M.L. Martin⁴⁴ and T.O. Ranger.⁴⁵

In Kenya, these independent movements have been described, at least in the colonial period, from the view point of Westerners. Sex, superstition, magic, and witchcraft have been given a prominent place by journalists and novelists when they talk of independent churches. This picture was reinforced by the government and missions. Some writers of African origin have supported the colonial view, for example, B.A. Ogot considers one such movement as fanatical and non programmatic, a cult whose leaders preached complete rejection of everything European and a return to the African way of life.⁴⁶

41 P.J. Divern, the Maria Legio : the Dynamics of an African independent church among the Luo in East Africa (PhD Thesis Rome, 1970); A Protestant and A challenge, AFER Vol. IV. No. 2, 1968.

42 M.F. Perrin Jassy, Basic Community in the African Churches (New York: Orbis books, 1973, translation by J.M. Lyons).

43 M.L. Daneel, Old and new in Southern Shona independent churches Vol. 1 in Background and rise of major movements (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 557.

44 M.L. Martin, Kimbangu: An African prophet and his church translation by D.M. Moore) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

45 T.O. Ranger, The African Churches in Tanzania.

46 B.A. Ogot, British administration in Central Nyanza District 1900 - 1960, Journal of African history Vol. VI No. 2, 1963, pp. 249 - 73. He refers to the Cult of Mumbo.

J.M. Lonsdale supports this view.⁴⁷

There is a great deal of literature available at present on independent churches in Kenya. Apart from books written on specific independent churches, there are also pamphlets and journals. In almost every history book dealing with Kenya, especially during the colonial period, mention is made of one or other independent churches. It would not be possible to review all the literature here so only a few that directly concern us will be mentioned.

Audrey Wipper has dealt with the cult of Mumbo and Dini ya Msambwa in some detail.⁴⁸ Welbourn and Ogot have also given a detailed study of the origin, ministry, present structure and theology of the Church of Christ in Africa and the African Israel Nineveh.⁴⁹ B.A. Ogot's work on Alfayo Odongo Mango 1870-1934, presents a brief biography of Mango, founder of the Musanda Holy Ghost Church of East Africa, with a mention of the veneration accorded him by his contemporary followers.⁵⁰ F.B. Welbourn deals with the Kikuyu independent churches, the African Independent Pentecostal Church, the African Orthodox Church and the Female Circumcision controversy among the Kikuyu 1929 to 1932.⁵¹

⁴⁷ J.M. Lonsdale, A political history of Nyanza 1883-1945 (Trinity College, Cambridge 1964, Doctoral Thesis), p. 363.

⁴⁸ A. Wipper, The rural rebels: a study of two protest movements in Kenya (Nairobi: OUP, 1977).

⁴⁹ F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot, A place to feel at home.

⁵⁰ B.A. Ogot, 'Reverend Alfayo Odongo Mango 1870-1934,' in K. King and A. Salim (eds) Kenya historical biographies (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), pp. 90 - 111.

⁵¹ F.B. Welbourn, East African Rebels: a study of some independent churches (London: SCM, 1961).

G.C. Rosberg and J. Nottingham have attempted to see the roots of Mau Mau in the early protest movements even independency in Church and Schools.⁵² Bildad Kaggia, in Roots of Freedom, gives his relations with the Church Missionary Society and the start of the Dini ya Kaggia.⁵³

Erasto Muga, from a sociological point, asserts that independency is the unintended consequence of the missionary activities, the result of mistakes made in their attempts to convert Africans. Consequently, Africans resented certain aspects of christianity as introduced by the missionaries. He further views independency as the result of frustrations, which resulted from the introduction of social stratification with Europeans at the highest strata and the Africans at the lowest strata.⁵⁴ Certainly, this looks convincing, but one poses the same question posed by Welbourn that, given three men whose fundamental outlook is the same, what are the social and cultural pressures that would keep one in the Missionary church, lead another into independence and leave the third indifferent to both?⁵⁵ Muga gives no answers to the question.

Muga mentions the date of origin of the NLC as ⁵⁴⁰⁻²1940 which is very unlikely. Perhaps, he obtained his information from South Nyanza or North Mara in Tanzania where this movement reached much later. He calls the beliefs and practices syncretistic, having some Luo

⁵² C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Praeger, 1966).

⁵³ Bildad Kaggia, Roots of freedom (Nairobi: EAPH, 1972).

⁵⁴ Erasto Muga, African response to Western Christian religion (Nairobi: EALB, 1975), pp. 7 - 23.

⁵⁵ F.B. Welbourn, East African rebels, P. 13.

practices backed up with equivalent Old Testament practices.⁵⁶
 This view contradicts what the NLC constitution says that the word was given by God and is well written in the prayerbook and in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.⁵⁷ In the Fourth Chapter of the dissertation it is hoped that we shall arrive at the truth about this matter.

3/ Unlike E. Muga, Oginga Odinga states that the NLC started in 1907. For him, it is the missions that "stocked" up a revolt in the church that led to dramatic breakaways and foundation of Independent Churches which preached the gospel with strong political overtones. He says that the NLC was the first breakaway in Kenya, gives a brief biography of Yohana Owalo and indicates that political causes were basic to the rise of this movement. The rise and origin of the NLC will be examined in the Third Chapter of this dissertation.⁵⁸

B.A. Ogot in the last chapters of Zamani has devoted a small section to the rise and origin of the Nomiya Luo Church. He refers to Yohana Owalo as the first Christian rebel who was willing to accept the new Christian faith but on his own terms and without accepting the whiteman's ways or rule.⁵⁹ This is a good outline of the rise and

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p. 148.

⁵⁷ Revised Constitution 1973, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Oginga Odinga, Not yet Uhuru: An autobiography (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 6.

⁵⁹ B.A. Ogot, Zamani: A survey of East African History (Nairobi: EAPH/Longman, 1968/1973 new edn.), pp. 262 - 263.

development of the church during the life time of the founder. The information he gives will be examined in the Third and Fourth Chapters of this dissertation.

E. Wakin has also attempted to give a short description of the worship life of the NLC. He also reproduces the churches statement of belief.⁶⁰ His work points to the fact that the church is still alive and going strong and thus necessitating a much bigger work on the church.

In a chapter on Independent churches among the Luo, Michael Whisson gives a brief description of the origin of the NLC and the beliefs and practices of the church.⁶¹ This information is very useful except that it leaves more to be desired.

J.M. Lonsdale in his doctoral thesis has a whole chapter dealing with Independent churches of which the NLC is one. He gives a short description of the NLC in its early stages before the founder's death. Since he is dealing with the political history of Nyanza he looks at the movement's origins as basically political.⁶² The contention here is that the basic causes of this religious movement were not necessarily political. His work will be examined further in the Third Chapter.

The most detailed, available information on the NLC is found in the work of Marie-France Parrin Jassy. Her work is very

⁶⁰ E. Wakin, "A Unique sort of church," MaryKnoll Vol. 1.66 No. 1, January, 1972, pp. 38 - 40.

⁶¹ M. Whisson, Change and Challenge (Nairobi: C.C.K., 1964), pp. 154 - 158.

⁶² J.M. Lonsdale, A political history of Nyanza 1883 - 1945 pp. 363 - 376.

useful and shall be referred to time and again in this dissertation. One of the handicaps in her work is that her information was obtained from a branch of the NLC in Tanzania's North Mara district and this group no longer has any strong attachment with the mother church in Kenya. Secondly, she does not deal with the NLC alone but she only uses it as one of the examples to prove her thesis, "the basic community in the African churches."⁶³

A review of the literature on the NLC shows evidently that any written information on it is sketchy thus necessitating some exhaustive study.

5. METHODOLOGY

(a) Theory

Dealing theoretically with independency, the opinion here is taken from reading of various books, reports, and pamphlets which are compiled in the bibliography. The literature is referred to only when it seems necessary.

To understand the setting of the NLC and the conditions which gave rise to it, various kinds of data were used: anthropological and sociological studies were available on the life of the Luo among whom the movement arose. Early accounts of explorers, missionaries, administrators and settlers provided data on views of the colonial agents regarding their Missions and their relationship with Africans.

(b) Archives

Several months were spent in the Kenya National Archives looking through records. The information on the origins, development,

activities of the NLC and its relations with the colonial government, was obtained from the District and Provincial annual reports, Native affairs reports, intelligence reports and political record books.

For material on the early life of the founder, the microfilms on the church of Scotland, kept by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, were very useful. These were mainly correspondences between Alexander Morrison who was a judge in Kisumu and later Mombasa and Dr. Arthur Scott of the Scottish Mission in Kikuyu. There was also correspondence between Dr. Scott and J.J. Willis of Maseno on Yohana Owalo.

From the Roman Catholic Mission, Kibuye, information on the life of Owalo at Ojola was obtained in one of the record books.

At the headquarters of the church of the Province of Kenya, Maseno South, information was obtained from the baptismal record book, outlining the precise dates when Owalo moved from one Mission to the next.

Archival materials all have their defects. The information is highly dependent on the attitude of the writer; often the information is misreported. To make the information useful an attempt was made to interrelate all the information first to each other, then to the oral evidence.

(c) Reports

All voluntary associations in Kenya must register with the government and file a yearly report. The Registrar-General of Societies files provided information on the constitution, the membership figures since 1956 and finally the problems the church has experienced mainly since 1960.

From some leaders of the NLC certain correspondences, between 1949 and 1959 particularly on Education, was obtained. These will be included in the appendix.

(d) Participant Observation

Far more important for an understanding of any movement are the views of the adherents themselves. During field research information was gathered through participant observation. Fellowship meetings and ceremonies were attended. To observe the social world of the members the author engaged in conversation with them and stayed in their homes.

(e) Interviews

Due to certain problems which will be discussed later the questionnaire which had been designed for conducting the oral interviews, failed. The author was forced to resort mostly to non-directive methods. The ordinary members, particularly, enjoyed telling stories about the movement. They were allowed to talk on and were only interrupted with questions where it was necessary. The interviews were tape recorded and then written down later. The choice of interviewees was not random. Each interviewee was picked on because of one reason or the other (the names of some of the interviewees are listed in the appendix, and reasons why each was interviewed is given). Since the information on origin, development, and expansion of the movement was quite often distorted - an attempt was made to interview most of the adherents who had lived from the time of the start of the movement upto 1980. People who did not become members of the movement but lived in the area when the movement started were also interviewed.

Oral evidence, as a source, has been highly depended on. The main case against oral evidence is usually the fact that it is difficult to prove whether what one is told really took place. The second case is usually the amount of subjectivity with which the informant tells his story. In this work oral evidence was depended upon mainly due to the fact that there were no detailed written records, and even if the records were there the biases connected with them would not be ignored. Secondly, there are many people alive today whose lives have spanned the history of this movement. They associated very closely with the founder, and have participated in the

development of the movement since the founder's death.

Flexibility was stressed during interviews. People were either interviewed in their homes as individuals or a group of people were interviewed with any number contributing and listening. For instance, in Uyoma and Gem Ahono a number of days were spent discussing various aspects of the life of the church with groups of people. We also spent a number of evenings, holding discussions with some two adherents who were spending their annual leave in the vicinity of Oboch.

During discussion a listener might interrupt the interview because he did not agree with what was said or even introduced something new. The interviewees were allowed to speak freely, the length of the interview depended on their interest and what they knew. A characteristic of those interviewed, especially older ones, was not to give direct answers - they preferred telling long stories to illustrate a point.

People were questioned on particular topics until the information given was now repeated and when little or no new information was forth-coming the topic was pushed more to the background. Over two hundred people were interviewed and not all names are given in the appendix. However, the information obtained from all these people have influenced whatever conclusions have been reached about the NLC.

During the period of research all information obtained from any source was written down. Pertinent sections were copied from all the written records. Since the interviews were tape recorded they were also written down verbatim. When analysing the data all the items on a particular topic were made to show where opinions conflict and the view of the author.

This work is the result of information obtained from various sources. The conclusions reached here are due to the valuable

information obtained during research.

6. Research Problems Experienced

After the time of theoretical preparations, the author went out for the field research. The experience with the NLC adherents was doubtless the most interesting and exciting part of the research. Various homes and locations were visited in the whole of Nyanza Province. In spite of the friendly help and the generous hospitality that was received there were some obstacles and hindrances.

The first hindrances lay in the fact that the movement had some problems that were about to cause yet another split. There were threatening letters from the Registrar-General of Society. The NLC adherents suspected that the government had sent people to spy on them. The problem here was suspicion; they did not believe that the author was not a government agent. Some people either refused, totally, to give any information or made appointments which they did not fulfil.

The second problem was that it was impossible to make the members mere objects of interest, ignoring their questions, wishes and problems. Often one would go a long way to interview and ended up discussing family, school, and marriage problems. This, of course, meant that a lot of time was wasted. Moreover, the presence of a visitor was always an exceptional event; something special for which special preparations were made, thus making it very difficult to distinguish it from the normal and the regular.

The third problem was connected with the method of research. The initial arrangement was that questionnaires would be used throughout the research. Several questionnaires were posted to the adherents particularly the educated ones. Until now no questionnaire has been received back. Secondly, an oral interview using the questionnaire was tried, particularly, with the illiterate but by

the time thirty people were interviewed the information was found wanting. The same people were interviewed again without the questionnaire, with more satisfactory results. The situation of the people could also not allow for proper use of the questionnaire. The minute the questionnaire was produced the interviewees began to feel uncomfortable and the interview had to be stopped immediately. To some of the interviewees the questionnaire was time consuming and boring. Over one and a half months were spent using the questionnaire but without much headway.

Another serious problem was connected with the transportation facilities. Whereas certain areas are well provided with communication facilities, others are not. One is forced to walk long distances to reach certain places. In certain places there were good roads but the number of public vehicles were so limited that if one did not get a vehicle at a particular time of the day then the journey was cancelled. It was easy, for example, to travel to Gem and Ugenya and other parts of Alego but if one wanted to go to certain parts of Yimbo, Uyoma and Sakwa one had to be prepared to spend a night or two.

7. Division of the subject matter

It is proposed first to describe the various factors that created the situation from which the NLC arose. Against this background, the actual origin, history and nature of the movement itself can be easily understood and analysis be made possible.

The main body of the study will fall into four parts. In the Third Chapter the origin and rise of the NLC from 1900 to 1912 is discussed. Here an attempt is made to give a short history of the life of the founder and to analyse the factors that led to the rise of this movement. In Chapter Four an attempt is made to show the development (expansion) of the church from the time of its

emergence to 1980. Reasons for the advance and factors that could have made the movement attractive to those who welcomed it are also discussed.

In the Fifth Chapter an attempt is made to describe the NLC. Under this the doctrine and belief of the NLC, the organisation and practices are considered. Factors that seem to have undergone change are also determined.

In the final chapter an evaluation and appraisal of the movement is done. Its role in the society, the impact on the society, and its religious dynamism are examined. A final section is devoted to a critical review of the movement and the conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BACKGROUND OF THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH

1. The Luo background

(a) The area

The Nomiya Luo Church (hence the NLC) developed among an ethnic group of people of Nilotic origin, the Luo of Kenya. They are found in the area around Lake Victoria from close to the Uganda border to Northern parts of Tanzania. In Kenya they occupy the Nyanza Province which is contained within the boundaries of present day Siaya, Kisumu, Kisii and South Nyanza Districts.

Nyanza Province which lies at both sides of the equator has an area surface of 16683 square kilometres and a population density of over two hundred inhabitants per square kilometre. The Luo part of Nyanza consists of plateau or tableland rising from the relatively dry 1134 metres Lake level area to the more inland tracts where the elevation approaches 3,500 metres and rainfall is more abundant. There are a few hills and mountains of which some are the Volcanic Gwasi and the Homa Mountain.

Rivers, like the Nzoia, Yala, Nyando, Sondu, Kuja, Malawa and Sio gather their water in the highlands, empty into Lake Victoria and thus contribute to the flow of the River Nile.

Despite its equatorial position, the area, on account of its altitude, is not excessively hot. Two rainy seasons, main rains from March to May, and the lesser rains from October to December, with annual variations, provide the necessary moisture for agriculture.

The area of Luo occupation may be divided into several ecological areas. There is the densely populated, high rainfall areas which includes parts of Western Province, North Gem, North Seme and parts of Ugenya and Alego. Most of the lakeshore area and much of the hinterland for a distance of about twenty kilometres or more,

has a lower rainfall. Cotton is the main cash crop in these areas. South Nyanza has a lot more rain than Siaya and Kisumu Districts. The area has a higher agricultural potential.⁶⁴ More will be mentioned later under the ecological setting.

(b) Migration and Settlement

The Luo of Nyanza constitute the Southern most advance of Western Nilotes.⁶⁵ Their land of origin would be near the Nuer's in Sudan, around Wau at the junctions of the Rivers Meridi and Sue.⁶⁶ During the fifteenth century, probably threatened by absorption or extinction by their neighbours, the Luo chose to emigrate southward in search of new lands.⁶⁷ In general, the Luo, on the move, retained their original name when they had to combat another group in order to settle in a new territory. This is true of the Luo in Nyanza.

From the Sudan, the thrust southward continued through Uganda to Kenya. A close study of the Luo of Nyanza makes it possible to divide them into three big clusters.⁶⁸ The first group

⁶⁴ M. Whisson, Change and challenge, pp. 107 - 109, B.A. Ogot, Zamani, pp. 127 - 134.

⁶⁵ B.A. Ogot, A history of the Southern Luo, Vol. 1: Migration and Settlement 1500 - 1900 (Nairobi 1967), deals mainly with migration mainly of the Kenya Luo. Good summary of the Luo migration can be found in G.S. Were and D.A. Wilson, East Africa through a thousand years: AD. 1000 to the present day (Nairobi: Evans Brothers, 1968), pp. 64 - 65, 309 - 310 and B.A. Ogot, Zamani, pp. 142 - 157.

⁶⁶ W.R. Ochieng, An Outline history of Nyanza (Nairobi: EALB, 1974), p. 19.

⁶⁷ M.F. Perrin Jassy, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Op. Cit.*, pp. 21 - 22.

is that of Joka-Jok which claims to have come from Acholiland and reached Nyanza probably between A.D. 1490 and A.D. 1600.⁶⁹ They claim direct descent from Ramogi Ajwang'. From Acholiland, this group, led by Ramogi, halted in Samia at a place called Ligala where they sojourned for about three generations. According to traditions Ramogi begat many sons, including Odongo and Jok. One day Jok's great grandson went on a hunting expedition which took him at the foot hills of Got Ramogi. After surveying the area he went back to Ligala and told the story. The entire population moved from Ligala to Got Ramogi. After a while one splinter group led by Nyikal moved off to Sakwa. Other groups also moved to Alego. This group was led by Alego. However, later after a serious civil war the Joka-Chwanya group moved off to South Nyanza (present Karachuonyo). Many other groups moved to occupy Asembo, Gem, Ugenya and Sakwa.⁷⁰

The second major group was the Jok-Owiny which might have come from the Adhola group or has a history closely related to that of the Adhola. They reached Nyanza during the period between A.D. 1560 and A.D. 1625. This group is said to have been led by Owiny the Elder. From Northern Uganda they travelled along the Western flanks of Mount Elgon, passing through Mbale and Tororo, eventually settling for sometime in Budama. They settled in Busoga for about four generations before moving on to Nyanza; moving across Samia, where some of them remained, they finally settled in Alego. Included in this party were the predecessors of present day Kadimo, Kowil and Wanyenjira in Yimbo, Kogelo, Karuoth, Karapul, Kanyabol and Agoro in Alego, Kanyakvar in Kisumu and Kamot and Konya in Kano.⁷¹

The third major group was the Jok-Omolo which appears to have come from the Alur, arriving in Nyanza between A.D. 1540 and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 24 - 25.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 26.

A.D. 1600. From the North they arrived at Ibanda in the Bukoli County of Busoga. Having stayed at Ibanda for about two generations they moved and stayed for about two generations in Samia. From here they moved to Yimbo Kadimo where they lived for about four generations before migrating to West Alego. The Jok-Omolo migrants consisted primarily of Jo-Gem, Jo-Ugenya, and also of Joka-Gan - now found in South Nyanza, Joka-Det - now found in Gem of Siaya, Joka-Nyada and Joka-Ochia - now found in South Nyanza, together with Jo-Unami - now found in Samia. With more pressure exerted on them by other in-coming Luo sections, a number of Jok-Omolo moved to present day Gem of Siaya District, while others drifted southward to Uyoma. When the area grew crowded some sections crossed the lake and built new homes in South Nyanza.⁷²

Luo occupation of Nyanza was haphazard and spread over a long period of time. Indeed even during the colonial period, the Luo were still occupying parts of South Nyanza.

(c) Political Social and economic Organisation

When the first Europeans arrived in Nyanza in the 19th Century they were confronted by an organised Society which, although operating on small scale, presented a wide variety of social organisation and cultural development. While life in this society may have appeared to early Europeans to be simple and lacking in specialisation, it was life in a society involving the

instrumental imperatives of economic organisation, the normative system, the political constitution, the mechanisms and agencies of education and other derived requirements which affect primitive and developed countries alike.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., p. 27 - 28.

⁷³ B. Malinowski, The dynamics of culture change (1945), p. 46, as quoted in J. Anderson, The Struggle for the School (Nairobi: Longmans, 1970), p. 101.

The largest political unit to which a Luo person could belong was Oganda (sub-ethnic division). Each Oganda was a gathering of various clans. It was composed of a powerful clan to which others attached themselves for protection against neighbouring coalitions.⁷⁴ The Oganda was the largest unit within which all disputes were usually settled by mediation. Leadership within the Ogendini varied considerably. In some Ogendini there was a tradition of chiefdoms (Ruoth) which went back for ten or more generations, each chief being succeeded by his son or a close relation who was subsequently considered to be his son. The power of the chief depended on his own ability to settle disputes, and to lead or direct his people in war. He possessed considerable power as a magician and soothsayer. Such routinised chiefship appears to have emerged when one clan gained power over the rest.⁷⁵

In other Ogendini this was not present. The effective leaders of such Oganda were, the most successful warriors, and the most feared magician. Due to his success in settling disputes and predicting success in war he took on the role of chief (Ruoth) without establishing a dynasty.⁷⁶

Generally, each Oganda was headed by a chief (Ruoth) who was advised by a territorial council (buch piny) which

⁷⁴
p. 22. Oginga Odinga, p. 12 and M. Whisson, Change and Challenge

⁷⁵
M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, pp. 23 - 24.

⁷⁶
Ibid. Oganda - Singular, Ogendini - plural.

consisted of elders (jodong dhoot), the peace maker (ogaye) and the war leader (osumba mrwayi). In the Luo political arrangement two features were outstanding. First in each of the Ogendini, there was often a chiefly clan which provided the chiefs. The second and most important is that, rigid and perpetual overrule would not have been possible, since rulers were limited by the fact that the ruled had the alternative of migrating.⁷⁷

Although few of the Ogendini were exogamous most marriages were with Luo women from Ogendini other than ones own. This was found desirable for strategic reasons in that one was not allowed to fight relatives. Also a man who sought political power would first consolidate his position with the Oganda by marrying women from as many clans as he could afford.⁷⁸

Within the Oganda there were several localities. (Gweng' - singular and Gwenge plural) Gweng was usually made up of a core lineage of one of the clans in the Oganda, with additional members who might be matrilineal kin, friends and allies or refugees from another subtribe. The focus of unity for the group was the fact that it held a single piece of land. The leader was the senior man in the core lineage.⁷⁹

77 W.R. Ochieng, An outline history of Nyanza p. 49 and Oginga Odinga, p. 22.

78 M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, pp. 24 - 25.

79 W.R. Ochieng', An outline history of Nyanza, p. 12.

Within each Oganda there was usually one dominant lineage which was exogamous and a number of other clans or groups of clans with which it could intermarry. The main focus of unity in this case was the common ancestor and the opposition to other clan groups in the Oganda. Between the clan groups within a subtribe there was a mechanism for settling disputes either through the magician or the chief. When conflicts between them could not be resolved by an arbitrator there was always a possibility that the subtribe would divide. When war was ruled out by the British administration, and the Ogendini became administrative areas, there was some oppression by the stronger clan groups of the weaker.⁸⁰

The clans were the major sub-divisions of the core lineages of the Oganda or the locality. The clans maintained a strong sense of unity and often strict exogamy. The clans further divided into lineages based upon the ancestors who founded them. These divisions, within a clan, depended upon its size. A larger clan had several lineages. If a lineage was large enough, it had its own elders who settled disputes within it.⁸¹ There were rules that were set to guide the members of each clan. There was no theft or raiding or full sexual relationship between members of the same clan. Kinship terminology was used throughout the clan, and the senior men were expected to know the proper term of address to apply to all other members of the clan.⁸²

The clans further divided into lineages based upon ancestors who founded them. Shedding blood within the lineage was considered virtually dangerous. Full sexual relations between members of such lineages would be considered incest. The terms

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 29 - 30.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 28 - 29.

used to describe the lineages within the clan varied. The term Anyuola was used for lineages of a greater depth, with very close relationships as to be referred to as brother. Libamba was used to denote the lineage other than that of which the speaker was a member.⁸³

Within the Luo Society, the smallest unit in the clan within which individuals related closely was the household or the significant inter-familial relationships. First, there was relationship that existed within the homestead and immediate locality. Secondly there were those relationships which existed with those outside the locality, for example, the matrilineal kins. A third class of relationships at the level of the homestead, was that between the owners of the home and those with whom they had no kinship connection, but with whom they lived.⁸⁴

Within the society, there was a clear pattern of expected behaviour between people who stood in certain relationships to each other. These were dominated by such factors as generation and group affiliation and also by the sex of the persons concerned. New introductions during the colonial period affected these relationship patterns. Family relationship followed a strict pattern. For example, the father was the centre of authority, respect and fear - a status which also his brothers and even eldest son shared. In the safe routine of social life, the individual felt valued and understood. There was precedent for everything; rules and guidance for all situations. One's obligations to others were made very clear. An elaborate system of taboos ensured that the individual interacted well with the members of immediate family circle.⁸⁵ The result was an

⁸³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 29 - 30 and 34 - 43. In this book Whisson gives detailed explanation of the relationships. D. Barret, Schism and renewal, also gives some information on this.

orderly society and "no kind of prison system had ever been found necessary among the Luo."⁸⁶

Within the society, polygamy was an accepted institution and the levirate provided security for the widow. Marriage contracts were arranged by transfer of dowry, then the man took his rightful wife. Unlike their Luhya and Kisii neighbours the Luo did not practice circumcision. However, education was imparted gradually by older men and women, while practical skills were mastered by day to day participation and institution by the village's middle aged and junior members.⁸⁷ From the above description it is evident that the Luo people lived in a communal life. Cooperation and togetherness in action was their pride. What is given above was the general set up of socio-political organisation which prevailed among the Luo at the time of the arrival of Europeans.

Economically, the two principal sources of wealth were cattle and land. Cattle supplied the milk and blood which was needed for nourishment. Meat was eaten only occasionally. Cattle was much more than just a source of food. It was, at the same time, the principal means of exchange and form of capital. If one had many head of cattle he was considered a wealthy man. Cattle was also a means of procuring wives. The more wives a man had the more farms flourished, that is to say that, he had more people to work on his land.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ W.E. Owen, Some thoughts on native development in East Africa, Journal of the African Society, Vol. XX, No. CXX April, 1931) pp. 225 - 237.

⁸⁷ W.R. Ochieng', Op. cit., pp. 54 - 62. Luo rite of initiation which correspond with circumcision was the extraction of teeth.

⁸⁸ Parrin Jassy, Basic Community in the African Churches pp. 5 - 7.

The system of land ownership among the Luo was communal. A clan or a lineage claimed so much land and each member of the clan had the right to use it, or to cultivate any sphere of the land. But the concept began to diminish at the beginning of the nineteenth century when families began to specialize on specific plots within the clan areas.⁸⁹ These claims gradually became recognised, although, if the clan wanted to use the land for communal benefit, the trustee had no alternative but to look for fresh plots. Within the family, a man's plots were divided among his wives but at the death of the man the male children inherited land. When clan land got overcrowded then the landless moved to new areas in search of land.⁹⁰ This is one reason why at the arrival of the Europeans the Luo were still migrating, particularly, to South Nyanza.

(d) The Luo religious beliefs

One important factor among the Luo was religion. It was the armour of the social order, the instrument for controlling the natural phenomenon and the means of explaining the mysteries of life and death.⁹¹ In their religious pattern, six elements may be distinguished, although there is a good deal of overlapping. The first and most significant element is that of the Supreme Being called "Nyasaye". Whether the Luo had this notion, of a personalised God before their arrival in Nyanza, is uncertain. It is, however, certain that the concept of a creator spirit was in the Luo mind before the introduction of the Christian concept. Among the Luo the Supreme Being, Nyasaye, was viewed as all powerful. He manifested himself in all extraordinary things such as the sun, the moon,

⁸⁹ W.R. Ochieng', An outline history of Nyanza, pp. 50 - 51

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ M.F. Parrin Jassy, op. cit., p. 25.

the huge rocks, the great serpents, the elephants and the miracles of nature. He dispensed life, health and wealth to those who were obedient to custom and he favoured good undertakings. The Luo did not adore the sun but saw in it the supreme expression of the majesty and might of God. It was considered well for all people to be out of bed by dawn when prayers, mainly of a supplicatory nature, would be offered to the rising sun. An old man might say, "Rise well for me that I may be at peace." Prayer was given force by the suppliant spitting in the direction of the sun.⁹²

Perhaps the most important agency of the supernatural in daily life was that of ancestors. The ancestors played an active role in the society. They were invoked to keep evil forces away but also their anger was held accountable for the misfortune which struck the community. They retained human characteristics in the hereafter. The ancestor could occasionally manifest himself then sacrifices could be offered to him or his name given to the baby. Each group was distinguished from the others by its own ancestors and felt tied to the others through a common ancestor - Ramogi the ancestor of all.⁹³

The third element is that of the free spirits. While the existence of God only explained the order in the world it did not explain the contradictory phenomena, such as sickness, drought, famine and death, which troubled it. The free spirits which lived on rocks and rivers were made responsible for the phenomena. The spirits searched for men whom they tried to possess. Possession itself was not bad, but if left uncontrolled, was dangerous and violent.⁹⁴

⁹²² Ibid., p. 26; M. Whisson, op.cit. pp.4-5, David Barret Schism and renewal, pp. 40 - 45.

⁹³ Perrin Jassy, op.cit., pp.26; M. Whisson, op.cit., pp.6-8.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Perrin Jassy, p. 26; M. Whisson, pp. 9 - 12. The Luo believed that God was all powerful but they could not associate him with evil. However, when faced with evil they pleaded for God's help.

The fourth element is that of magic and witchcraft. Magic provided an explanation for evil and a means whereby it could be controlled. Magic helped to discover why evil happened and how it could be forestalled or overcome. One protected by magic was given extra self-confidence. The power of an evil magician (Janawi) was greatly feared; yet the diviner and the medicine man (Ajuoga) were respected in the society, though they could also be guilty of fraud.⁹⁵ Dangerous and asocial were those that were considered sorcerers and witches whose representative was mainly the woman - with - the evil - eye (jojuogi-jajuok).⁹⁶ The services of the diviner and medicine man were required in case of mental or physical disease. These diseases were caused by hostile persons or by spirits or by personal sins. They required the prognosis and help of an ajuoga (diviner and medicine man) or Jalang'o (a possessed person who cured possession by spirits) or the Jabilo (a person who combined the qualities of diviner, magician, doctor and prophet).⁹⁷

Another significant aspect of the supernatural is charisma. This was a spiritual power which marks a man off from his fellows. Apart from the priestly and ritual office of the lineage elders (Jodongo) in offering sacrifices to the ancestors, was the office of the charismatic, Jabilo (man of medicine) and Jahulo (the man who announces information). The charismatic person acquired his position by some unique experience as a result of fasting, vision and lonely

⁹⁵ For the part played by evil and good magicians in the Luo society, the first novel of Grace Ogot, The promised land (Nairobi E.A.P.H., 1966), offers an excellent though exaggerated picture.

⁹⁶ The woman with the evil eye inherits her power from her parents and has little choice about using it. When she looks at a child who is eating that child will suffer from stomachache (. Whisson, Change and challenge, p. 15).

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 16 and pp. 188 - 189.

retreat which set him apart from his fellow men. As a man with spiritual power, wisdom and individual charisma, received from God or Spirits, he was not only the chief adviser and priest to the leaders of each subtribe or clan but also the final arbiter in disputes.⁹⁸

Another significant element was that of mediators. Luo spiritual leaders were mediators but not a special class of priests. The idea of a permanent and special priesthood was unknown. The elders indeed offered sacrifices to the ancestors; the rainmaker interceded with God for rain on behalf of his people; yet, the elder was only an occasional priest for his own family not for everybody. Although official mediators were used to appease the spirits in public rituals or in private crisis that affected the life and the well-being of the clan and the family, everybody was free to "pray to Nyasaye and hope for his blessing."⁹⁹

Beliefs and practices relating to the supernatural world used to play a considerable role in the Luo society. They served to explain the mysteries that existed in the universe and laid down norms for the relations between a man and the world and between a man and his fellow men. Finally they held the society together.

2. Ecological Setting

The name "Nyanza" has, in the past, been applied, both in civil and ecclesiastical administration to various regions. The reason is that Nyanza simply means "Lake" and evidently it refers to Lake Victoria. Nationalist politicians, anxious to erase any traces of the colonial period, urged that the name of the Lake be changed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 18 - 20, 117, 141 and 142.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5, 4, 14 - 15.

¹⁰⁰ Oginga Odinga, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The main area of interest within the administrative province of Nyanza is Siaya District. The province is subdivided into four districts: Siaya, Kisumu, South Nyanza and Kisii districts. The first three districts form the homeland of the Luo of Kenya.

(a) General features

The Luo as we have seen, live in the Central and Southern parts of Nyanza Province. This area lies astride the equator and it is bounded on the West by Lake Victoria whose altitude is 1136 metres above sea level and which stretches about $\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ North to 3° South covering a distance of about 160 miles.

Siaya District is in the Central part of Nyanza, towards the North of Lake Victoria. The area rises from about 1,333 metres near the lake to approximately 2,000 metres at the foot of the Nandi escarpment. The area is drained by seven large rivers, Malawa, Sio, Nzoia, Yala, Nyando, Kuja, Sondu and their tributaries. Siaya district falls approximately between 1,333 metres and 2,000 metres above the lake.

Ecologically, the Luo areas of Siaya District can be divided into two zones, the high rainfall zones and the savanna zones. The former includes Buholo, South Ugenya, North Ugenya and Gem locations. This area has a more abundant and securer rainfall allowing a wide amount of double-cropping, producing coffee, bananas and a high yield of maize. The area is marked by a large population of about sixty people per square kilometre. East Ugenya, parts of Alego, Uyoma, Sakwa, Yimbo and Asembo fall under the latter rainfall zone and allows the production of one annual crop only. Because of its lower elevation (from lake level to about 1,260 metres) it is hotter, less healthy and less densely populated. The land is suitable for animal grazing. Cotton is the main cash crop and millet is the major subsistence crop. The fish from Lake Victoria form a welcome

addition to the diet and the economy.¹⁰¹

Economically, the Luo, whether on high or low rainfall areas, practice agriculture. They keep cattle, sheep and goats, but the practice is going low because of the land consolidation which has either left some people landless or with very little land. For a long time Nyanza's economy has been basically subsistence, however, at the moment there is a lot of stress on cash crops and many people are taking initiative to produce for commercial purposes.

(b) The administrative Districts

The three Luo Districts of Nyanza Province are Siaya, Kisumu and South Nyanza.

Siaya District forms the northern part and though densely populated in the north and the east, it has no towns of any significance. Its headquarters at Siaya have still to be completed. All the locations of this district are of importance in view of the theme of this dissertation.

Kisumu District falls at the centre of the province and extends east, as far as Koru where the plantations and white settlement farms were. Kisumu town is the District and Provincial headquarters and it is the third largest town in Kenya.

South Nyanza district is an area that is not so densely populated. It is on the southern part of the lake.

(c) Communication and its effect on the economy

At one time, Kisumu seemed likely to become a great centre for transport by boat, train, road and air. As the lake port, it

¹⁰¹ More details on the geographical environment of the Luo may be found in, M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, pp. 107-109 and B.A. Ogot, History of the Southern Luo, pp. 127-134.

can ship goods to all parts of Lake Victoria but even this was halted by the death of the East African Community. It was also the rail head for trade to Uganda after the "Uganda Railway" began in 1895 from Mombasa to reach Kisumu in 1901. In 1921, however, a branch was started which ten years later, reached Kampala and syphoned Uganda trade from Kisumu. The branch was, probably, established to shorten the distance between Uganda and Nakuru and Nairobi. "Kisumu was left high and dry on a branch line."¹⁰² Also the all weather macadam road from Kisumu to Mombasa has an offshoot which allows Uganda bound traffic to bypass Kisumu. Even Kisumu airport, "situated on the most direct route from London to the Cape"¹⁰³ has largely lost its importance except for internal traffic.

The above indicates the state of transport in the whole of Nyanza. Whereas certain areas are well served with communication facilities others are not. One has to walk long distances to reach certain places. In certain places there are good roads but the number of public vehicles are so limited that if one does not reach the bus stage in time then the journey is cancelled. The development of communication depends on production of the local cash crops which encourages industrial development.

Although there has been in the Luo area, since 1963, a moderate measure of economic progress - though hardly exceeding the demands of population growth - another observation by M. Whisson is still relevant. "The Kenya Luo live in an area which has almost become a backwater in the economic development of Kenya". Due to the economically backward condition of Nyanza, in the past the area developed

¹⁰² Oginga Odinga, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁰³ M. Whisson, op. cit., p. 1.

into a major labour supplier. And migrant labour inevitably has important social effects both on the localities from which it comes, and on the areas to which it goes. These are made particularly acute when the exporter is a close-knit society with a very simple economic organisation, and the workers are entering a western style economy with the values far removed from those which pertain to the tribal society.¹⁰⁵

As Odinga sees it: "the toll that the white rule exacted from Nyanza was labour not land. Our province became the country's largest labour reserve."¹⁰⁶

Factors mentioned in the previous section, the Luo background and factors on the ecological setting, help to explain the area within which the NLC arose and developed. There are also certain factors in this section that shall be mentioned again in Chapter Four and which help in explaining the relatively rapid spread and also some of the deeper causes of the NLC. The first section, particularly, will be referred to time and again in the subsequent chapters.

3. The Colonial Setting

(a) Introduction

While the Luo people were busy settling down in their present day homeland towards the end of the nineteenth century and evolving their socio-economic, political and religious institutions, Europe had embarked on the partition of Africa. It was only in a haphazard way that the Luo area became involved in the exploration

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Oginga Odinga, p. 23; B.A. Ogot, A history of the Southern Luo, p. 231.

and colonisation process. The real centre of interest was Buganda and its position as the source of the River Nile. This proved a bait for four different types of travellers who, however, in trying to reach Buganda by the shortest route possible, from Mombasa, reached Luo country. The four groups were: Arab traders, explorers, missionaries and emissaries or scouts for European governments.

Arab traders were the first on the scene. They sought for ivory, slaves and when they pioneered in 1857, the first direct route from Zanzibar and the coast through Maasai land to Lake Victoria, the Luo became also exposed to their slave raiding.¹⁰⁷

In 1875 Henry Morton Stanley circumnavigated the Lake and sailed between Rusinga Island and the shores of Lake Victoria. The first white man to follow the route after the Arab pioneers was Joseph Thomson who explored the route during the period 1883 and 1884. After Thomson, people like C.W. Hobley also travelled along the route upto Nyanza.

It is the activities of these explorers that aroused the interest of European powers who were still busy with the partition of Africa. The anglo-German agreement of 1880 secured for Britain, Uganda and the East African protectorate (Now Kenya). Uganda protectorate comprised of present Uganda and the whole of Western Kenya and part of the Rift Valley upto Naivasha. The borders were only changed to their present state in 1902. Britain assumed full responsibility of these areas in 1894 and 1895 respectively.¹⁰⁸

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B.A. Ogot, A history of the Southern Luo, p. 231;
Idem, Zamani, pp. 222 - 227; H.P. Gale, Uganda and Mill Hill Fathers
(London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1959), p. 107.

108

G.S. Were and D.A. Wilson, op. cit., p. 156.

The beginning of the British rule did not affect the Luo very much. The colonial administrators were few for the task, and, in any case, their preoccupation was centred around Uganda. Similarly, although from 1895 Missionary caravans went through Luo area, they were bent on reaching Uganda. However, to begin with, the British managed to effectively put to an end the wars that were going on by throwing their weight behind the loyal King of Wanga, Mumia, in his dealings with his traditional enemies. From 1896 to 1899 the Luo of Sakwa, Uyoma, Seme and Ugenya, were subdued by punitive expeditions.¹⁰⁹

In 1895 the building of Uganda Railway started and it reached Kisumu in 1901. The enterprise provided employment for some Luo as workmen and guards. It also promoted white settlement which was to have a profound effect on the whole of Kenya and on the Luo society through its immigrant labourers.¹¹⁰

In 1902, there was a border change; the Eastern Province of the Uganda Protectorate was transferred from Uganda to the East African Protectorate (Kenya). Kenya was going to be a settler colony. Between 1902 and 1920, the Luo were confronted with the European impact. The new pressures were brought about by three important factors: the colonial administration, Missionary work and white settlement.

(b) The colonial administration

In the northern part of Nyanza including present Western Province, the British achieved pacification by supporting Mumia, as has already been pointed out. It was South Nyanza that proved to be the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 171, 324. W.R. Ochieng', The Second word: more essays on Kenya history (Nairobi: EALB, 1977), pp. 77 - 107.

¹¹⁰ M. Whisson, The rise of Asembo and the curse of Kakia. Paper read at social science conference in Makerere Uganda in June, 1961.

most difficult for the consolidation of British dominance. Although the opposition of the Bantu Gusii necessitated several punitive expeditions, even the Luo got in serious trouble as is illustrated by two events: the rise of the cult of Mumbo and the German invasion of 1914. The cult of Mumbo, an anti-colonial movement, started from Alego and spread very fast into South Nyanza. Its leaders preached a complete rejection of everything European and a return to the African way of life. Mumbo prophets also prophesied the imminent departure of the colonialists. Shortly after it started, the Germans invaded South Nyanza, the British were forced to evacuate to regroup her forces. Urged on by the Mumbo prophecy and promises, the inhabitants of South Nyanza and Kisii looted government buildings and mission stations. By about 1916, however, the British returned and defeated Germans and the missionaries could now return.¹¹¹

After taking a firm hold, the government began to implement the system of indirect rule, whereby local chiefs, sub-chiefs and other officials were appointed.

(c) Missionary work

If independency is "basically a religious phenomenon arising out of a religious need",¹¹² a study of the religious background of the NLC, both traditional and christian, assumes an indispensable nature.

Nyanza's first missionaries were primarily an extension of the missionary enterprise in Buganda which followed upon Stanley's appeal in 1875. The Anglican Church Missionary Society (hence CMS) was the first to respond and arrived in 1877; two years

¹¹¹ A. Wipper, op. cit., pp. 24 - 41.

¹¹² D.B. Barret, Schism and renewal, p. 247.

later the Mill Hill Fathers arrived (hence MHF). The MHF were given a sphere of influence that started in Kampala and stretched into the present Kenya, almost as far as Naivasha.¹¹³ From the Nsambya part of Kampala, the MHF missionaries moved East until they founded in 1903 a Mission in Kisumu; the event marked the start of Catholic work among the Luo. Two years later, the CMS established herself, first, at Vihiga and moved to Maseno a year later. J. M. Lonsdale remarks:

"Both CMS and Mill Hill Fathers
relied heavily upon Buganda pastors
and teachers in the days before
Nyanza could provide its own".¹¹⁴

In 1903, the MHF started a Mission in Kisumu but as contact with the native population proved difficult in Kisumu, they opened a station at the native reserve at Ojola, about fourteen kilometres away, in October, 1904. The founder of the NLC had an opportunity of studying and working both in Kisumu and at Ojola.¹¹⁵ More of this will be discussed in the Third Chapter. During these early days Catholics gained many converts.

Right from the beginning, the Mission embarked on education. The schools were viewed as very significant if the catholic church at least wanted to expand rapidly and intended to have an influence on the future elite and cream of society.¹¹⁶ There was, however, acute

¹¹³ P. J. Divern, The Maria Legio, P. 56

¹¹⁴ J. M. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 5

¹¹⁵ H. P. Gale, op. cit., pp. 266 - 267

¹¹⁶ Roland Oliver, The Missionary factor in East Africa
(London: Longmans, 1967) p. 276.

shortage of personnel to do pastoral work and evangelisation. Secondly, the church ministers were not africanised, so inspite of the fact that Africans helped with work in the Missionary stations, they would never be given any status.

Any clear open clash between the Catholic Church and Luo society is not evident. F.B. Welbourn observes:

But in regard to tribal customs in general, ... the Roman Catholics have been less disturbed than other christians. They have regarded the customs which offend the conscience of Western Christianity do not necessarily endanger the soul's chance of salvation. 117

Catholic missionaries were, however, confident that education would gradually eliminate the unacceptable beliefs and practices. They were ill-prepared to understand the traditional society or the subtle, yet, disastrous effects of culture clash. The resulting breakdown of traditional beliefs and practices did not, however, result in open clash, but it smouldered under the surface and produced strains and stresses that were the results of disaffections. This kind of strain or stress would probably explain why Yohana Owalo, the founder of the NLC, managed, without any problems, to stop the Ojola catechists from reciting "Hail Mary" and the intercession of the saints.¹¹ The Catholic background of Yohana Owalo is very significant in this study and it will be mentioned time and again in the subsequent chapters.

Like the MIF, the CMS entered Nyanza from Uganda rather than from the Coast. In 1905 J.J. Willis was posted from Uganda to Maseno in Nyanza Province to start a Mission among the Luo. In Nyanza

117 F.B. Welbourn, The East African Christian (Nairobi: OUP 1965), p. 106.

118 H.P. Gale, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

there were already many protestant Missions and in 1907, under the instigation of J.J. Willis, they met to discuss spheres of influence and the Luo area became special CMS sphere.¹¹⁹ Willis even attempted to cover up the protestant divisions by initiating ecumenical conferences in 1908, 1913 and 1918. Perhaps it is these protestant divisions that was later to contribute to the causes of breakaway churches.

Between 1906 and 1912, Willis, as the leader of the CMS Mission in Nyanza, aimed at creating a native church that could be self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing.¹²⁰ The Luo showed a self-reliant spirit which met with approval of Willis as he made clear in an article in the "Uganda Notes" in 1916.¹²¹ This came to a halt when Nyanza was transferred to the Diocese of Mombasa in 1921.

In 1906, when Willis started the Mission station at Maseno, he adopted lessons he had learned in Uganda. He visited chiefs who were installed by the colonial government and asked them to send their sons to be educated at Maseno. Coincidentally, the government, in their attempt at westernisation, ordered for the education of the sons of chiefs in 1908. As early as 1904, Willis had already taken four sons of chiefs to study at Kaimosi before the establishment of CMS station at Maseno. In 1910, he had the first baptism and in 1912 the first Maseno graduates left school to work as teachers, church ministers and in some cases as chiefs. Maseno

¹¹⁹ M.G. Capon, Towards Unity in Kenya (Nairobi: CCK, 1962) p. 6. A description of the protestant Missions is given here. F.B. Welbourn, and B.A. Ogot, A place to feel at home, pp. 7 - 31.

¹²⁰ F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot, Ibid., p. 23.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 24 - 25.

Mission had a link with the founder of NLC in that from 1910 he was a teacher there and it is from Maseno that he moved out to start his own Movement. More on this connection will be discussed in Chapter Three.

From 1912 onwards, many other CMS schools were established in Nyanza. The main aim for establishment of schools was to convert the Africans. Whereas one was taught to read and write, the main text book was the Bible. The bush schools or smaller stations were merely catechumenate centres and unless one conformed to the religious requirements of the centre one was not accepted.

Another aim was to prepare those who became christians to live in the new society. This meant preparing the Luo for a christian life in a disintegrated society following the coming of Europeans. Another aim was that of teaching the sons of chiefs in a christian atmosphere so that when they become chiefs, they would influence the population to become christians.

From the outset, the CMS maintained relationship of respect with the Luo society. They did, however, oppose a handful of traditional institutions inimical to European ideas of morality. Consequently, inspite of the history of vigorous and progressive church growth, occasional reaction and religious protest had almost begun at once.

(d) The White settlers

The apparently uninhabited and fertile highland (Rift Valley) offered a promising prospect, of developing large agricultural estates. In 1902, regulations on land were laid for allocation of land .

122 E.H.O. Odwako, The church and education: the contribution of the CMS to education in Western Kenya 1905 - 1963 (Nairobi: M.A. Thesis, 1975), p. 53.

Settlers arrived from South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Britain. The main reason why settlers were invited was because the Uganda Railway needed customers. The white settlers came and encouraged the natives to develop their own resources to the point of making the railway viable. The white settlers were attracted to Kenya and on their arrival they demanded labour to work on their land. Although such compulsory labour was never officially sanctioned, taxes and rising needs for money acted as form of pressure or compulsory persuasion.¹²³

The Luo never gave up land but it was the migrant labour that was disastrous. The conscription during the First World War, later, also brought disastrous effects. Despite the friendly relations between the Luo and the European and the absence of settlers in the Luo homeland there was an anti-European undercurrent. As migrant workers, the Luo were heavily exposed to European racial and paternalistic attitude which did not allow the African to be accepted as an equal.

The disintegration of the society, the only normal result of the European impact, was evident as early as 1910. At the time, John Ainsworth, Nyanza Provincial Commissioner lamented:

with the best intentions in the world and from the highest motives people have made blunders through ignorance.... The whiteman has suddenly arrived; ignorant of the local conditions he has thrust himself on the aboriginal inhabitants who are in a state of lower barbarism; and he is filled with the desire to supplement native methods of action and thought and effect changes rather than let the natives work out their own salvation.¹²⁴

¹²³ W.R. Ochieng', The second word, p. 112 - 118.

¹²⁴ Ainsworth political Records 1908 - 1915, (Kenya National Archives, PC/NZA2/2), p. 2.

Although the lament sounds derogatory in some places, it formed the conclusion of the anthropological studies that Ainsworth undertook in Western Kenya.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show the setting within which the NLC arose. The Luo society, the colonial government and the christian missions, in interaction, seem to have formed a precedent for the rise not only of the NLC but of many other Independent churches.

The appearance of the British colonial government brought about profound modifications in social, political, economic and cultural structures. Politically, the British tried to apply to the Luo the indirect methods of administration; something that was only going to work after a lot of modification. The leader could now impose what he wanted on the people. The chief lost the confidence and respect of the people. By supporting collaborating chiefs against non-collaborationists, the administration was instrumental in promoting serious tensions between clans. The consequences of the colonial administration were important.

. There was the introduction of tax in 1900 which forced a monetary economy on the society. There were only two ways of paying taxes; by cultivating cash crops or by finding salaried work. The first had little success; the second attracted a great number of young men to the extent that the administration got concerned about local manual labour.

The introduction of taxes, the development of schooling, and the emigration of young men in search of salaried work undermined the authority of the head of the family. Of course, the disintegration of the family institution resulted in the deterioration of the traditional culture.

The political and economic change brought about by the coloniser could not have had any profound consequences as it did, had it not been accompanied by the efforts of the school master to introduce western religion and culture. Missionaries would, therefore, be associated with the government in the work of hastening the transformation of the society. The adoption of western customs and teaching seemed indispensable to a true understanding and practice of christianity.

It is within a situation where new forces were beginning to impinge on each other that the NLC arose. Disintegration was already taking place. Close knit structures of the society were affected; socio-economic patterns, participation in communal obligations and rights, even the spiritual view of life were disintegrating. As soon as the impact became felt, reaction started in the form of religious movements or political associations. In the next chapter, basing our thoughts on this kind of setting, one of these forms of reaction is discussed: the rise and origin of the NLC.

CHAPTER THREEORIGIN AND RISE OF THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH 1900 - 19121. Introduction

Yohana Owalo, the founder of the Nomiya Luo Church, (henceforth NLC) was born at Orenge (Maranginya Village) in Asembo Location, Siaya District, Nyanza Province.¹²⁵ He belonged to the Kochieng' clan and specifically to the Kocholla sub-clan.

J.J. Willis, in an undated manuscript, described Owalo's home area as "Ayoro's" Asembo.¹²⁶ Ayoro seems to have been the headman for this area.

Owalo was the third child born to Abor, son of Otonde and his second wife, Odimo, daughter of Kisoro.¹²⁷ Something happened at his birth which was taken as a sign of his future power. It is stated that a man had died in a home next to that of Abor. The day after the burial, a bull, with long sharp horns, went to the grave and dug up the earth on the grave with its horns and suddenly roused a long rattle snake which remained hanging and wriggling on the bull's head. With the snake on its horns, the bull walked straight to the hut of Owalo's mother where Owalo was being born at the time.¹²⁸ This was a real mystifying happening and one that

¹²⁵ Harun Nyakito, interview, Oboch, January, 12, 1980.

¹²⁶ J.J. Willis, Record book for catechists and students in Maseno, n.d. (1910 - 1912).

¹²⁷ Harun Nyakito, interview; Meshack Onyango, interview, Ndwara Asembo, December, 9, 1979; Saphira Okanja, interview, Oboch, December 15, 1979; Elija Okanda, interview, Seme Korango, December 16, 1979; Louise Otinda, interview, Ralingo Asembo, January 13, 1980.

¹²⁸ Yakobo Okech, interview, Konge Asembo, December 6, 1979; Ezekiel Onyango, interview, Konge Asembo, January 25, 1980; Ang'wen s/o Osure, interview, Oboch, January 28, 1980; Nathaniel Agingu Onyango, interview, Ujwang'a Asembo, February 19, 1980.

seemed, to observers, to portend that Owalo was to be a great man.

Like many who were born in pre-literate Kenya, his age can only be estimated by reference to some great event which took place during his childhood. Even this kind of estimation is not easy in his case, because he died in 1920 and any elderly person in the family is now dead. However, it can be estimated from available evidence that Owalo was born towards the close of the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ People who saw him claim that by the time of his death, he was in his late forties. One is inclined to conclude that if he was able to start a Mission in 1912, then he was an agemate of Chief Daniel Odindo and Shadrack Adem who were about forty years old by 1912.¹³⁰ Samuel Oyugi Ogut, puts the date of Owalo's birth at August, 1871; this is likely, but how he arrives at this date is uncertain.¹³¹

Owalo's father, Abor son of Otonde, was not, by traditional standards, a rich man.¹³² He kept a few cattle which most probably

129 Nyakito, interview; Okanja, interview; Otinda, interview; Okanda, interview; Benjamin Oundo, interview, Oboch, January 11, 1980; Yona Oyungu, interview, Nairobi, September 16, 1980; Clement Seje, interview, Nairobi, December 2, 1980; G.C. Owalo, unpublished Ms on the life of Yohana Owalo, 1975.

130 Michael Whisson, The rise of Asembo and the curse of Kikia.

131 S. Oyugi Ogut, Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya (Asembo Bay: 1978) p. 86.

132 Nyakito, interview; Otinda, interview; Oyungu, interview; Barnaba Adhinga, interview, Oboch, January 11, 1980; G.C. Owalo, discussion held, Oboch, November, 1979 to March, 1980.

was squandered, at his death, by his other sons. Musa Wera, one of Owalo's followers, used to despise him and often remarked scornfully at Owalo's poor background.¹³³ Abor had two wives. The first wife's name was Tado and she bore Philipo Obado and Mariko Ojode. The second wife, Odimo, bore Methuselah Nyunja, Samson Okech and Yohana Owalo. She also had three daughters whom we have not been able to trace.¹³⁴ It is likely that by the time Owalo started his religious movement, he was an orphan, since even those who were his followers, then, do not seem to remember having seen his parents.¹³⁵

Those who saw him claim that he was short-tempered; he neither liked defeat nor criticism; but he was quiet and hospitable.¹³⁶ Physically, he was short in stature, bow-legged, with a big and flat head, and a wide mouth. By any general standards, he was not a handsome man.¹³⁷ *Woj! => which general standards?*

Owalo was generally a good citizen and had developed good relations with the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth.¹³⁸ B.A. Ogot writes that, after Owalo had established his movement, "he demanded representation in the local council."¹³⁹ Whether or not he demanded it, from evidence, it is said that after

133 Ibid.

134 Oyungu, interview; James Ojuok, interview, Ougo Asembo, February 19, 1980.

135 The following are the followers who were interviewed: Okech, Oyungu, Okanda, Meshack Onyango, Otinda, Okanja, Oundo, Adhing'a, Ojuok, N.A. Onyango, Mathia Owade and Mariko Ouko.

136 Oyungu, interview.

137 Op. cit., interview.

138 Ibid., interviews.

139 B.A. Ogot, British administration in Central Nyanza District, p. 256.

1914, he acted as sub-headman for the Kochieng' clan, and managed to create compromise between the government and the people.¹⁴⁰

Bringing about this kind of compromise bore no strain on Owalo since, in the first place, Chief Daniel Odindo of Asembo was his friend. Secondly, Mango Ogalo, Owalo's friend and chief secretary to Ndeda, Chief of Gem, introduced Owalo to the latter. He talked to Ndeda about Owalo's intelligence and ability to speak English and Kiswahili. From 1914, Owalo also acted as Ndeda's interpreter and typed his letters.¹⁴¹

However, Owalo carried his official duties with a zeal that embarrassed his followers. He made sure that everybody under him, even his adherents, followed government directives. In case an adherent failed to do something, Owalo caned him thoroughly after the worship service on Sunday. His followers sent a delegation of three people to ask him to leave government work. Owalo argued that, because this was where he earned his living, he could not quit. The followers offered to till his land for him so that he could thereby earn his living. Henceforth, serious farm work was started on his piece of land and he safely quit government work, although he still associated closely with notable government officials, especially the District Commissioner for Central Nyanza or Kisumu District.¹⁴²

In this chapter we wish to record the origin and rise of the NLC with specific reference to the life of the founder before 1912, and give the possible reasons why he started the movement. Although Yohana Owalo came from a humble background, as we shall see, his life is intricately linked with the development of a new religious movement for the Luo Community between 1912 and 1920. The movement was the first of its kind in Kenya. The date when it actually started is open to question; various conflicting dates of origin are given in

140 Okech, interview; Okanda, interview; Oyungu, interview.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

the literature on him. However, in this dissertation, we have reached the conclusion that the movement was actively started in about March 1912 and was officially registered in 1914. These conclusions will be clarified in this chapter. Before 1914, the movement operated with no name. In 1914, when Mr. John Ainsworth according to registration regulations, wanted its name, Owalo asked for one day of prayer. The following day, he came back to Ainsworth and gave the name as "Nomiya Luo Mission," literally, "the Luo Mission that was given to me."¹⁴³ To date, the adherents of the church believe that Yohana Owalo, just like Jesus among the Jews, and Muhammad among the Arabs, is their prophet.¹⁴⁴

Nwshing

2. Owalo's early life and his conversion to christianity

One historian describes Yohana Owalo as one of the "more typical of African evangelists."¹⁴⁵ The process of conversion among the first African Christians and their initiative in evangelisation is one aspect of the planting of christianity in Kenya that has received very little attention. The personal sacrifices they made, why they embraced christianity, and what, in turn, they did or did not do for christ are factors that should be considered when a study of the first christians is undertaken.

Yohana Owalo can be considered as one of the first generation of christians in Nyanza. His home at Orengo was situated very near Chief Adhola's home at Lwak.¹⁴⁶ Before the construction of

¹⁴³ Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Oyungu, interview; Elekia Ogal, interview, Kisumu Manyatta, January 18, 1980; Jehoshaphat Opige, interview, Oboch, January 25, 1980.

¹⁴⁴ M.F. Perrin Jassy, op. cit., p. 91; C.f. S. Oyugi Ogut, Op. cit. p. 89.

¹⁴⁵ J.M. Lonsdale, (Op. cit., P. 208.

¹⁴⁶ M. Whisson, The rise of Asembo and the curse of Kakia.

the Uganda Railway line was completed, Adhola and his rival, Amala, used to lead porters from Asembo, carrying foodstuff for the rail workers in Kisumu. It was through this kind of contact that Adhola managed to get the position of Chief in Asembo. As early as 1898, the Asembo people, with Adhola as chief, helped Europeans to pacify the recalcitrant Uyoma people.¹⁴⁷ Adhola, realised very early that education was going to be the key to the possession of power in the area. He made contacts with Odera Ulalo of Gem, who had contacts with the first white missionaries in Nyanza. In 1904, Odera Ulalo asked J.J. Willis, the first Church Missionary Society's (hence CMS) agent in Nyanza, to visit Chief Adhola's area. When Willis visited the area, Adhola entertained him. Willis took Adhola's son, Odindo, to school at Kaimosi from where he moved to Maseno in 1906.¹⁴⁸ One Shadrack Adem, later Owalo's good friend, was present when Willis came. Usually, when a chief's son went to school he was given somebody to take care of him and his things. So two years after Odindo went to school, Shadrack Adem went to be his helper. Of course, these helpers were also usually allowed to study.¹⁴⁹

It is uncertain whether Owalo also joined Kaimosi with Odindo. Some informants claim that Owalo was in Kaimosi with Odindo before he moved to Kisumu.¹⁵⁰ H.P. Gale claims that Owalo was once a "Quaker" or a member of the Friends Africa Industrial Mission centred at Kaimosi, but he also does not specify when this happened.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ W.R. Ochieng', The second word, pp. 77 - 100.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Nyakito, interview; Meshack Onyango, interview; Sila Akinyi, discussions, Nairobi, August and September, 1980.

¹⁵¹ H.P. Gale, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

Evidence is lacking concerning his being at Kaimosi. It is however, likely that as early as 1900, Owalo, was already a frequent visitor to Kisumu. Probably during one of the visits in 1904 he met Kaimosi Old Boys who impressed him with their education and made him stay and study at Kibuye Mission. One such person who impressed Owalo, as Willis reports, was Daudi Kweto, a Kaimosi old boy, who worked in Kisumu, but who also voiced the fact that Europeans did not understand Africans.¹⁵²

By October 1905, Owalo was a student at the Roman Catholic Station, Kibuye, in the day school. He was here, in the school for four months, then he decided to work as a "Mission's boy", which he did for another four months. He was baptised here as Johannes in June, 1906. Shortly after this, he left Kisumu to work as a "houseboy" for a court judge, one Alexander Morrison, in Mombasa.¹⁵³ Morrison was a judge in Kisumu between 1904 and 1906, after which he was transferred to Mombasa. It is likely that they knew each other closely while in Kisumu.¹⁵⁴ In fact it seems that Morrison depended on Owalo for language acquaintance; this will be verified later.¹⁵⁵ Owalo was in Mombasa for about one year,¹⁵⁶ and he left when Morrison

152 J.J. Willis, op. cit.

153 Ibid.

154 Morrison's sick leave and leave from the Protectorate, Judicial 1/297 (File, Kenya National Archives.)

155 A. Morrison to Dr. A. Scott of Scottish Mission Kikuyu, letter, November 1909, (Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Archives, Microfilm).

156 J.J. Willis, Op. cit.

was also transferred to Nairobi.¹⁵⁷

It was while in Mombasa, that he started seeing visions which later led him to start a religious movement for the Luo. His adherents claim that he was a very religious person and that he read all the available scriptures thoroughly; in fact, when he came from Mombasa, he had the Holy Bible in Kiswahili. It is likely that he discussed deeply, certain religious issues, with Morrison who also had a religious background. Morrison was the son of an Anglican Pastor in England.¹⁵⁸

According to available evidence the first case of these visions took place before March 1, 1907.¹⁵⁹ Owalo heard a voice saying: "if you accept God's commission then you will be God's follower forever." Astounded by the voice, Owalo asked, "who?", "You", the voice replied. Whether or not Owalo was alone when he heard the voice is uncertain. Some informants said that Morrison was present; others said that two men from Kisumu Location were also with him.¹⁶⁰ That he was alone is probable.

157 Scottish Mission Kikuyu to Lydford, Assistant District Superintendent of Police, Kikuyu, May 17, 1909. (P.C.E.A. Archives - microfilm).

158 Adhing'a, interview; Okanja, interview; Okanda, interview; Ojuok, interview; Isaya Ndisi, interview, Manywanda Uyoma, February 17, 1980. See in the appendix C. Morrison's christian background.

159 Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church (Kisumu: Ramogi Press, 1957), pp. 118; Okanda, interview; Okech, interview.

160 Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church, p. 118.

On the first of March, 1907 something further happened. Owalo was taken in a vision to heaven by the Angel Gabriel (jibrael). A description of the way to heaven, as Owalo saw it, is given in the NLC prayer book. There were two roads: the narrow and unattractive one, on the right hand, led to heaven and the wide attractive one, on the left hand, led to hell. On his way to heaven he failed to see purgatory.¹⁶¹

On reaching the first heaven, Owalo gives the following descriptions:

It is a beautiful place, and all the nations of the earth wanted to enter in, but the angels closed the gate. When all nations of earth had gathered at the gate of heaven, the angels let the Jews in first, followed by the Arabs. After them, went in Yohana Owalo and the angels Raphael and Gabriel, all three entering together. Then the Europeans, the Goans and the Indian Bunyans attempted to enter but the angels closed the gates and chased them away; kicking them¹⁶²

Eventually, Owalo and the angels Gabriel and Raphael reached the first heaven, which is the abode of men. The first thing he enquired of the angel Gabriel was the whereabouts of the Pope. The angel seemed surprised. He asked Owalo as to who the Pope was. Owalo said that he was referring to the head of the Catholic Church. The angel said that the Pope had no place in the Kingdom of heaven because he allowed the faithful to adore images of Mary and Jesus. The angel continued to say that, even the holy mass was an unacceptable sacrifice before God and that, the only acceptable sacrifice was a broken and contrite heart. Owalo then asked where Mary was and the angel showed her to him in the midst of other women.¹⁶³

161 Ibid., p. 121

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

They proceeded to the second heaven, which is the abode of angels. He reported that there were indeed many angels.¹⁶⁴

They went to the third heaven which is the abode of God and Jesus. On arrival, he saw Jesus seated on the right hand of God. Leaving the accompanying angels behind, Owalo hurried to bow before Jesus. Jesus came forward and retorted: "You must not do that; I am a fellow servant with you; worship God."¹⁶⁵ Jesus the angels, and Owalo then bowed down to worship before God. God then proceeded to address Owalo in the following words:

Before me no God was formed, there is none beside me, nor shall there be any after me. But now the creation has turned away from me to worshipping images. Go! take a well sharpened knife to circumcise all men. He who hears it shall be well with him but he who refuses it leave him alone.¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, when Jesus, Owalo, and the angels were bowed down before God, as if seeing another vision, he saw the races of earth attempting to reach some very ripe fruit in heaven but in vain. The angel Gabriel told him to break all the ladders and raise up the one that he had been given without supporting it on anything. He raised the ladder and got the fruit.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps this was to show what nature his Mission to the Luo would take. His message was to be basically on God and he did not need anything else to help his followers reach God.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 117

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., This is reminiscent of what is recorded in Revelations 22:9 of the New Testament.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 118, reminiscent of Isaiah 43:10 and the command given to the prophet Muhammed by God to take a well sharpened sword.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

While in the third heaven, he was in the habit of bowing his head towards Jesus, but Jesus and the angel Gabriel scorned him, and reiterated to him that he should never do that but worship and teach about the one God.

Still in the third heaven, he realised or noticed that the Holy Spirit emanated from God in the form of smoke, and not from Jesus. In other words, if Jesus was God then the Spirit would have been seen emanating from him in this form.

It was in the third heaven that the sacrament which he ate in the Roman Catholic Church was found in him to be sin and he was cautioned against it.¹⁶⁸ To date his adherents abhor and do not practice this. One can conclude from his experience in the third heaven that when he came back to earth he was 'practically a unitarian.'¹⁶⁹

Finally, while still in the third heaven Owalo was given a long cord whose end he was to hold on earth. Jesus was to hold the other end of it in heaven.

According to the adherents who saw Owalo, this is the information that was given in Owalo's own handwriting in the book, Upanga Mkali, which they only managed to read and copy after his death.¹⁷⁰ Our observation here is that these are Owalo's recollections of what happened in the first, second and third heaven.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 121

¹⁶⁹ Willis, op. cit., M. Whisson, change and challenge, p. 154.

¹⁷⁰ Oyungu, interview; Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Ojuok, interview.

The length of time which he took in heaven, or the number of times he went to heaven and whether he was carried in a vision to heaven or was carried to heaven with his whole body, are factors difficult to ascertain. Owalo, according to adherents, rarely talked about his experience in heaven; he made it difficult for the followers to question him about it.¹⁷¹

After the above experience, Owalo reported to Morrison that; he wanted to leave his employment because God had called him to start a religion for the Luo people. Since Owalo was semi-literate, Morrison advised him to get further education. Since the demand for education was increasing in Nyanza, Morrison felt that, in future, people would not accept a religion without education.¹⁷² He further argued that, if Owalo did not get any education, then he was going to be viewed by Europeans and educated Africans as insane.¹⁷³

In mid 1907, Owalo came back to Ojola Catholic Mission,¹⁷⁴ with two objects in mind, namely, to get further education and at the same time, to fulfil God's commission. However, the angel Gabriel did not give him peace; he constantly visited Owalo to inquire why he had not undertaken the commission. It did not take long before Owalo was forced to leave Ojola, as has been observed:

¹⁷¹ One adherent E. Okanda says that when Owalo was in Maseno to answer a charge (will be mentioned later), he claimed he had been to heaven twelve times and had talked face to face with God. He asked those people to kill him if they thought he was lying but nobody laid a finger on him.

¹⁷² Oyungu, interview; Okanda, interview; Seje, interview; Seje claims that while Owalo was in Mombasa he joined Buxton High School to study. He was here with George Sewe of Alego, Jonathan Okwiri of Uyoma, John Paul Oti of Asembo and Samuel Asundi Misore of Uyoma.

¹⁷³ Oyungu, interview.

¹⁷⁴ Willis, *op. cit.*

... Work among the Nilotic Kavirondo was progressing. Ojola Mission promised a glorious future. The first native to be baptised there was an enormous help to the priest. He was zealous, extremely pious and helped the missionaries in the necessary translations and instructing the people. But how deceived one may be! It was customary to begin and end the instructions with "our Father" and "Hail Mary" and "the Glory". Sometime after, the priest began to notice that the catechumens did not answer the "Hail Mary". He questioned the catechists and to his horror and surprise learned, the first and only Christian among the Nilotic Kavirondo was a rank protestant who threw aside our lady and the intercession of the saints.¹⁷⁵

His adherents claim that when Owalo was finally pinned down, he declared to the priest that he did not agree with Catholic beliefs in: the existence of purgatory, the trinity, the sacrifice of the holy mass, the intercession of the saints, the pope as the infallible head and the bread and wine as the actual body and blood of christ. He would only stay here on condition that these were altered.¹⁷⁶ "He persisted in the protestant notions" and so he was sent away.¹⁷⁷ The catechumens, being contaminated with his "perverse spirit" could not be trusted. The priest made them to understand that a catholic was bound to believe the whole doctrine and in sending them away, he gave them three months leave in which to consider their position and to return if they wanted catholicism.¹⁷⁸

175 Roman Catholic report on the church in Kavirondo 1904 - 1925 (R.C. Kibuye), p. 2

176 Okanda, interview.

177 Roman Catholic report on Kavirondo, op. cit.

178 Ibid.

From the description given above one is inclined to conclude that, the Fundamental Protestant bias against Rome, the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church could have had a bearing on Owalo's attitude towards the office of the Pope and the Roman Catholic teaching. This strong protestant influence could have been as a result of the relationship with Morrison who was himself a protestant, because until then, Owalo had not been a member of any of the protestant churches. That he developed his bias independently cannot also be ruled out.

Before Owalo left Ojola, he was convinced that he needed to be circumcised. He asked Zakayo Ojwang' of Asembo, who was one of his close friends, to circumcise him. Since Ojwang' had never circumcised before, he advised Owalo to talk to another of their friends, Yakobo Okeyo, of Kisumu Karateng'. Probably his advice was sought because of the fact that his home bordered with the Banyore who practice circumcision. Okeyo, suggested to him to go to the muslims in Kisumu to be circumcised.¹⁷⁹ Owalo joined the muslims where he was circumcised and then baptised as Omari, It is likely that Owalo already had contacts with muslims while he was in Mombasa, otherwise one would not understand how he could just as easily agree to join the muslims. It is also likely that he was with the muslims for quite sometime. In fact, some of the early converts recall that he used to pray in Arabic.¹⁸⁰ His relations with Islam will be mentioned later, particularly in Chapter Five.

179 Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Oyungu, interview; Oyungu claims that in Mombasa Owalo became a practicing muslim and that he was even circumcised here. Mombasa is the hotch-potch of Islam in Kenya. This is a possibility but there is no information to back it up.

180 Ibid., They claim that Owalo owned the Quran and that he knew a lot of Arabic. This is probable because the Quran has not been traced.

Contrary to the view that muslims circumcised Owalo, J.J. Willis, reports that Owalo was circumcised by "a Roman Catholic Luo boy".¹⁸¹ However, this view is unlikely because circumcision is an art and Luo people do not circumcise, so an uncircumcised Luo boy would not have known how to do it. Secondly, Owalo seems to have had a fairly advanced knowledge of Islam; usually when one joins Islam he must be circumcised. Thirdly, there is no other evidence to back up this.

Towards the end of 1908, Owalo went back to Morrison, who was now Town Magistrate in Nairobi.¹⁸² While working as a "houseboy" for Morrison, he joined the newly established CMS school in Nairobi under Canon George Burns.¹⁸³ Whether he joined as a teacher or student is uncertain. Some of the early converts insist that he joined the school as a teacher. At the beginning of 1909 he left the station and went back to his home in Nyanza. Why he left is also uncertain, although his early converts would insist that he left because of doctrinal conflicts.

Some months later, with the help of Morrison, he joined the Church of Scotland Mission station at Kikuyu (henceforth CSM). Morrison, in introducing Owalo to Dr. Scott of Scottish Mission at Kikuyu, referred to him as: "a houseboy who wants to come to you a month from now and he has a wife and a two month old daughter at Kisumu and wants to take to Kikuyu with him".¹⁸⁴

181 Willis, op. cit.

182 Ibid., Judicial 1/297 (K.N.A.); Judicial file No. 1/474, Town Magistrate, Nairobi, 1908, (K.N.A.).

183 Ibid.; Willis, op. cit.

184 A. Morrison to Dr. Arthur Scott, letter, undated, n.d., February, 1909 (P.C.E.A. Archives, microfilm).

Owalo, had married Elizabeth Alila,¹⁸⁵ at the beginning of 1908, soon after he was sent away from Ojola. Elizabeth Alila was one of the first women students at Ojola.

In another letter, written in late February, Morrison says:

Here is John whose other name is Omari. He has got his wife and child, but would like to have a house, to have a small shamba to keep himself some food while at the Mission.¹⁸⁶

In the same letter, he urged that, in case of any difficulty, he should be contacted. This seems to be an indication of the intimacy that existed between Morrison and Owalo.

By May 1909, Owalo was already settled at Kikuyu. When he was entangled in a case which made him to be dragged to Dagoretti Prison, Mr. Lydford, Assistant District Superintendent of Prisons, Kikuyu, referred to him as a "Kavirondo boy working for the Mission".¹⁸⁷ In reply to this letter, Dr. Scott referred to him as "the Kavirondo boy called Johana here".¹⁸⁸ The position he held at the Mission is uncertain, but from other sources, it is said that he served as both

¹⁸⁵ Willis, op. cit.

¹⁸⁶ A. Morrison to Dr. A. Scott, letter, February 26, 1909 (P.C.E.A., Archives, microfilm)

¹⁸⁷ Lydford to Dr. Scott, letter, May 5, 1909 (P.C.E.A. microfilms). "The Somalis raided the boys house last night looked through his things and carried him off to Dagoretti without any warrant whatever from the government". Perhaps Owalo was suspected for being a thief.

¹⁸⁸ Reply to Lydford's letter, May 17, 1909 (P.C.E.A., Archives, microfilm).

teacher and student. His one time admirer, Isaya Ndisi, says that when Owalo joined Maseno, he knew carpentry and that he learned this at Kikuyu. J.J. Willis, reports that Owalo was an apprentice and knew typewriting. Industrial training was given and encouraged at Kikuyu, and it seems that Owalo embarked on learning one of the trades.¹⁸⁹ Conversely, B.A. Ogot, Oginga Odinga and most of Owalo's adherents claim that he was a teacher and that he taught the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.¹⁹⁰ One would, therefore, conclude that while he was employed by the Mission, he also seized the opportunity to learn because, at Kikuyu, even teachers were allowed to learn the trades.

At Kikuyu, Dr. Scott commenting on Owalo's character says:

The boy was in the employ of Mr. Morrison, late Town Magistrate of Nairobi, who gave him a most excellent character for the time he was with him, which was some two years. Since coming here, the boy has been exemplary in every way.¹⁹¹

This indicates the fact that the relationship between Owalo and Morrison was very close and that Morrison had a lot of impact on Owalo. You find also in some letters to Dr. Scott such friendly comments as "... Salaams to Mr. Omari."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Ndisi, interview; Okanda, interview; Seje, interview; Willis, op. cit.

¹⁹⁰ B.A. Ogot, *British Administration in Central Nyanza*, p. 256; Oginga Odinga, op. cit., p. 68; Oyungu, interview; Okanda, interview.

¹⁹¹ Reply to Lydford op. cit.

¹⁹² A. Morrison to Dr. Scott, letter, undated (Nov. 1909) (P.C.E.A. microfilm).

A year later, Owalo left Kikuyu. That the cause for his leaving was doctrinal is probable. Some of his adherents insist that Owalo left due to doctrinal reasons but there is no evidence. However, in a letter from Mr. Morrison to Dr. Scott there is the following information:-

I have got a transfer to Kisumu during December for language study and should like very much if you could send me Omari for the month. If so he could join me at Nairobi Station for that matter on the second of December.... 193

Owalo was away from Kikuyu during the month of December 1909. Whether Owalo went back to Kikuyu is difficult to ascertain. It is likely that during this period he met J.J. Willis who started persuading him to join Maseno staff in October 1910. He accepted this rather unwillingly, for, Willis wrote:

I hinted to him that however much he may gain by being at Kikuyu in the methods of English, he would lose the discipline of being among his own people and finding his own level: I took the same line that you took when here, as to the valuable work he might do (and I trust will yet do) if only he can be willing to be guided by what he reads in the Bible apart from pre-conceived ideas (a hard task for any of us)194

This quotation indicates that, as early as 1910, it had become evident to both Scott and Willis that Owalo held contrary beliefs, hence the mention of "pre-conceived ideas". While it is hard to

193 A. Morrison to Dr. A. Scott, letter, undated n.d. (Nov. 1909).

194 J.J. Willis, to Dr. A. Scott, letter, n.d. (13.9.1910) (P.C.E.A., microfilm).

say that Owalo left Kikuyu because of doctrinal or theological differences, it is fairly evident that Dr. Scott knew Owalo's view about certain theological issues. In fact, Willis, in the same letter, says to Scott:

Thank you very much for the time you took with regard to Johana, I saw him a hermit, because I felt it was an underhand thing to do, to write about and also saying a word to me about it. He himself feels it was so...¹⁹⁵

Though qualified in carpentry or apprenticeship and typewriting, Owalo taught reading, writing and Kiswahili in Maseno.¹⁹⁶ Willis reports that, Owalo was "not satisfactory as a teacher"¹⁹⁷ This statement conveys two meanings, either Owalo was not good at teaching or his religious belief made him a dangerous person to have in a CMS school. He shared the same house with Daudi Migot who also taught carpentry. After a short while in Maseno, he stopped worshipping with everybody else and started to worship in his house.¹⁹⁸ When Migot was asked about him, he revealed some of Owalo's convictions. Willis reports that "he refuses to worship with us at Adholas".¹⁹⁹ As a matter of discipline, Willis refused to confirm Owalo, by laying on of hands, to be full and mature member of the Body

195 Ibid.

196 Ndisi, interview.

197 J.J. Willis, o.p. cit.

198 Op. cit., Okanda, interview; Oyungu, interview.

199 Willis, op. cit.; Ndisi, interview.

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of Christ, and of the Anglican Church.²⁰⁰

Due to his suspect belief in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity and the christian practice of monogamy, and, in addition, his refusal to worship together with others, a council was called at Maseno in 1912 to settle his case. Gathered were, Archdeacon Willis, Canon Pleydell, Reverend Savile, Reverend Wright²⁰¹ and the Maseno school students, among whom were Daniel Odindo, Mathayo Onduso, Shadrack Adem, Reuben Omulo, Mathayo Opiyo, Yona Omolo and Daudi Migot.²⁰² There were three main problems. First, there was Owalo's insistence that God had called him to start a mission for the Luo. Secondly, there was his belief that Jesus was not God but a son of God and man like any other; a belief which stood counter to the Anglican doctrine of the Trinity. Finally, he insisted that God did not place any restrictions on how many wives a man should marry and that the idea of monogamy was basically European and not christian.²⁰³ Owalo was offered a piece of land at Kibos near Kisumu, where he was to build a station, where he would train catechists and then invite European priests to baptize the converts but he refused the offer. The Maseno students listened sympathetically to Owalo, because they thought he was insane. His

200

Ibid.

201

Okanda, op. cit.; Oyungu, op. cit.; Otinda, op. cit.; S. Oyugi Ogut, Kitap Lamo Mar Noniya, p. 86 - has the whole list of students, from all over Nyanza, who were present.

202

Ibid.

203

All the adherents interviewed hold this view.

action was daring. Mathayo Onduso actually asked him the fate of the Mission in the event of his death. He gave a very prophetic answer, "You stand the chance of leading it at my death". The answer was prophetic in the sense that, soon after they left Maseno, Mathayo Onduso and Daniel Odindo contemplated marrying second wives and many other Maseno students fell victims of polygamy. In spite of this, when they left the meeting, the students declared that they were not going to allow Owalo to spread his ideas in their specific areas. Mathayo Opiyo and one Okumbe son of Gek, declared that they were going to pursue Owalo hotly.²⁰⁴ No compromise was reached in this meeting and a lot of controversies followed.²⁰⁵ However, towards the end of 1912, when the first Maseno students graduated, Owalo also left for his home, Asembo, with the sole intention of fulfilling the commission of starting a religion for the Luo, hence founding of the NLC.

✓3. Causes of the Nomiya Luo Church

In the literature review our conclusion was that, no particular explanation, whether political, economic, social or psychological can exhaustively or exclusively explain the origin of any religious movement. It was also conceded, that although in certain movements some components appear to be prominent, all components are likely, in some degree to be implicated in any movement. It was also concluded that, the movements have complex causes that are overdetermined by multiple part causes that operate

204 Ibid.

205 J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., pp. 350 - 357.

effectively in the final analysis, only as totality. These conclusions are fairly applicable to the NLC whose causes are rather difficult to declare as simply this or the other cause.

J.M. Lonsdale suggests that, when one is looking at the causes of independent movements, like the NLC, then one should also consider its situation or environment. He gives four factors in Nyanza environment that determined the character of the movements. The first one is, the religious tug of war that existed in Nyanza. The European Missionaries were viewed as an auxiliary arm of the colonial government. Mutual understanding existed between the Missionaries and the government so the Africans concluded that, although their methods were different, they had the same objective. The second factor that determined the nature of the movements is, the more immediate frictions of foreign rule, such as taxation, which forced people to go out far from home to labour. Thirdly, the multiplicity of Missions brought confusion to the people. Moreover, in Nyanza independency was not purely an African phenomenon. Willis Hotchkiss of the Friends African Industrial Mission, decided to pull out of the Mission and establish an independent Mission in Lumbwa. Multiplicity of Missions was an invitation to the indigeneous religious heritage, which was interfered with, to react. It created a very suitable background or setting for these independent churches. ²⁰⁶ With these four factors in mind it is appropriate now to embark on the discussion of the causes of origin of the NLC.

The NLC arose out of a situation plagued with the effects which resulted from Western impact of the colonial government, christian Missionaries and the white settlers. They created the

background that favoured the rise of independency. Given this kind of situation, the question would be asked why Owalo started his religious movement. Did the movement arise because of the impact of the Europeans on the Community? Did he start it for the sake of the whole community or were his own personal experiences and feelings basic to the rise of the movement?

A lot of literature on Yohana Owalo, shows political causes as basic to the rise of the NLC. J.M. Lonsdale and A. Wipper suggest that Owalo utilised the movement as a vehicle for interclan rivalry, since he belonged to the clan traditionally opposed to the chiefly clan.²⁰⁷ Oginga Odinga says that the movement was a political protest and when Owalo was called to be questioned by the District Commissioner in a public baraza, he said, "Leave me to preach. I am preaching to Africans not whites".²⁰⁸ B.A. Ogot describes Owalo as the first christian rebel in Nyanza, who, on discovering the hypocrisy of "Westernism" decided to be a christian but on his own terms.²⁰⁹ In spite of these instances, it is still difficult to conclude that political reasons were basic to the rise of this movement. In his call, the only indication of rebellion is the instance when he noticed that Europeans, Indians-Bunyas and Goans were not allowed to get into heaven. The explanation of this would go as follows: since Owalo had no better means of

²⁰⁷ J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 208; A. Wipper, 'Masinde: A folk Hero', in B.A. Ogot, Hadith 3 (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971) p. 157.

²⁰⁸ Oginga Odinga, op. cit., pp. 68 - 69.

²⁰⁹ B. A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 262.

expressing his dissent, he was content, for the time being, with the idea that, in heaven, colonialists and missionaries shall have no place when the Luo, Arabs, and Jews will be living in splendour. One cannot deny or rule out the fact that politics was latent. He could have sought a movement that would free the Luo politically, socially, religiously, economically, and culturally from colonial domination but Owalo realised that, given a strong political overtone, his movement stood for a severe opposition from the colonial government. With his kind of experience, he read the signs of the times very well because, around this time, Europeans were acting negatively to such movements. Between 1913 - 1915 the cult of Mumbo in South Nyanza was being dealt with mercilessly.²¹⁰ In Malawi, the Chilembwe uprising was also crushed mercilessly.²¹¹ To prove that his movement was not politically subversive, Owalo was required to report to the District Commissioner in Kisumu beginning from 1912. He was also given a two year probation period, by the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth, before the movement could be registered.²¹² When the government realised that it was 'not subversive to good order and morality' he was allowed to register.²¹³ In fact, from 1914 onwards he even served as the sub-headman for Kochieng' clan.

Were the economic causes basic then? Owalo belonged to a poor family; perhaps he thought that he stood to gain, if he


210 A. Wipper, The rural rebels, pp. 32 - 40.

211 G. Shapperson, and T. Price, Independent African: John Chilembwe.

212 Oyungu, interview; Okanda, interview.

213 Kisumu District annual report 1919 - 1923 (DC/CNI/5/2 K.N.A.), p. 30

started his own religious movement. Once again, economics cannot be established as a basic cause, because all the economic ventures he started had reasons other than the gain they stood for. Take, for example, the establishment of a Mission station at Oboch. Owalo established the station so that the followers could have enough time together, to study and to go to Missions. Secondly, he established the station and welcomed resident adherents because, the First World War had just started and people were getting conscripted, so to keep some followers from conscription, they had to be in one place. Thirdly, for people to stay here, they had to eat and this meant that Owalo's farm had to be worked on. Beginning from 1916, the followers began to undertake serious farm work in his farm on River Odundu.²¹⁴ Again, it is difficult to assert whether the economic gains were basic to the rise of this movement. It is clear that by starting the movement he gained economically, however, it is not indicated anywhere that his aims were economic.



Culture clash or acculturation, seems to be a strong case for the rise and origin of the NLC. A lot about culture clash will be discussed in Chapter Five. As earlier indicated, the principal agents of European impact on the Luo were: an alien government, which introduced new administration that was different from the political organization to which the Luo were used; christian Missions, which introduced new religious beliefs and practices many of which were unknown to the Luo; formal education in schools, whereby reading, writing and arithmetic were taught; European settlers, who, having decided to make Kenya their home, were continuously instrumental in influencing the political issues and affairs which had strong repercussions on the lives of the people (migrant labour and taxation). In other words, these had real repercussions on the political,

religious, economic and social life of the Luo. The change brought about by Europeans would not have had as profound an effect as it did had it not been accompanied by the efforts of the school master and the missionary to introduce Western religion and culture. Adoption of European customs seemed indispensable to a true understanding of christianity.) The two missionary groups given to the evangelisation of Nyanza were the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the Catholic Society of the Mill Hill Fathers.

European occupation or impact resulted in political dependence. The Luo who were accustomed to consensus policies had now to obey orders. There were economic pressures. Taxes and school fees forced people to obtain cash and this was possible through migrant labour on white farms. This had detrimental effects on the society, particularly on the institution of the family. Although the Luo were willing and even eager to derive benefits from the new conditions, education and christianity disrupted traditional patterns as much as migrant labour did. Respect for taboos, structures and values on which the society depended for its security and harmony was growing low. Solidarity of the clan and family was under constant attack. The stability of tribal marriage patterns, including polygamy, the levirate, divorce and dowry were disintegrating and yet there were no new and secure alternatives. Since the traditional methods for obtaining leadership and prestige were no longer accepted, dissatisfaction and loss of identity resulted and emotional needs too did not receive the normal outlet. Subsequent stress possibly led to tension and unhappiness, loss of identity and sense of belonging.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ M. Whisson, Change and challenge, p. 63 - 163.

Christianity dressed in the Western garb was not really coming to grips with the emotional, moral and religious needs of the Luo Society. The society had a need for solution to existential problems such as fears of the forces of evil, the need for emotional outlet, and religious healing. Moreover, christianity introduced individual responsibility and salvation, which only led to superficial conversions; superficial in the sense that when faced with problems they sought traditional solutions.²¹⁶

Yohana Owalo lived within this set up and had the same experiences as other people. In fact, his was even a wider experience, because he had lived among people from the Coast, Central and Western Provinces so that at least he was aware of their reaction to colonialism. He, probably, longed for an African pattern of worship and a meaningful local community that formed a transition between the old and the new. In connection with the rise of the NLC, Erasto Muga writes that, the desire behind its formation was that of a church with a Luo Hero, a saviour of the people. His attitude represented rejection of missionary paternalism and certain Western Christian values, such as monogamy, which were integrated in christian teaching.²¹⁷

Some writers claim that people who start their own religious movements are relatively deprived.²¹⁸ Before this is accepted, it should be borne in mind that separation sometimes arises in schism from existing sects without operation of external causes. That Owalo was religiously dissatisfied can be inferred from the fact that he

²¹⁶ J.P. Divern, The Maria Legio, pp. 128 - 137.

²¹⁷ Erasto Muga, op. cit., p. 167.

²¹⁸ Bryan Wilson, Religious sects: a sociological study (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1970), p. 231.

moved from one denomination to another and even from christianity to Islam. The kind of christianity introduced did not seem suited to his needs and understanding. It looks like he needed an institution, claiming equality with christianity and Islam, for Africans. However, it was to be superior in quality to the type of christianity introduced by Europeans. When he went to the first, second and third heavens, God wanted to admit the Luo, like he had done to Arabs and Jews, but they had no prophet. Owalo was then given the Mission to make God's message relevant to the Luo needs, or the pressing issues of the day and, consequently, to usher the Luo, who accepted his message, into heaven.

There were also significant theological causes to the rise of the NLC. In the call of heavenly experience recorded early, such theological issues stand out quite clearly. He refuted the reliability of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. He only saw hell on his way to heaven; never saw purgatory. In the catechism there is teaching against the belief in purgatory. After a man's death he is ushered into heaven or hell according to his deeds on earth.²¹⁹ In the first heaven, the abode of men, he failed to see the Pope and he was informed that the Pope could not be allowed to enter heaven because he encouraged the faithful to use relics and images during worship and to believe in the intercession of the saints. Owalo was warned against these because they marred the image of God. This experience touched very closely on the cardinal Catholic belief in the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope, and the intercession of the saints, particularly that of Mary. In the third heaven another cardinal Catholic practice, that of the holy mass, was rendered as an unacceptable sacrifice before God.

²¹⁹ S. Oyungu Ogut, Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya, p. 53 and 50.

He was required to teach people that the only acceptable sacrifice was a broken and contrite heart.

Another important theological issue was connected with catholic practice of the sacrament of bread and wine, which they believed was the real or actual body and blood of christ. Owalo had tasted of the components of the sacrament, and this was found out in the third heaven. There is a very strong teaching concerning the above issues in the catechism.²²⁰

One significant theological difference that applied to all the churches he attended was the teaching on the Trinity, that Jesus Christ was not only a son of God but also of the same essence as God. In the third heaven, Owalo was stopped from worshipping Jesus, by Jesus himself. He was told that God alone was to be worshipped. In the hymns of the church, the supremacy of God is repeated time and again. It is said by adherents that, in his Bible, he scribbled out parts that seemed to portray Jesus as God. In the hymns, which he borrowed from the Anglican church, he replaced the word Jesus with Jehova. This could be the reason why B.A. Ogot, J.J. Willis, and M. Whisson have described him as a "Unitarian."²²¹ M. Whisson further comments that, the Unitarian Judge, Alexander Morrison, had impact on Owalo. Attempts have been made in the previous pages to show the intimate relationship that existed between Yohana Owalo and Alexander Morrison. This leads to the observation that these two, apart from working together on the study of Luo grammar, discussed serious theological thoughts.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 50, 54, 59.

²²¹ B.A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 256; J.J. Willis, op. cit.; M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, p. 154. For a hymn which shows the supremacy of God see p. 135, footnote 344.

The two most significant and immediate causes are: first, Owalo was heeding to a call by God. He was called by God in March 1907 but he was waiting for an opportune time. Secondly, the action of the council in Maseno led to his leaving Maseno to start his own Mission. Perhaps, this was the opportune time Owalo was waiting for and it came in 1912 after the decision of the council.

4. Conclusion

In a society that was changing already, with christianity providing the framework, certain important factors were overlooked. First the reality of the spiritual world of the Luo was overlooked. Visions, dreams, spirits and even their idea of God were considered futile. However, in Owalo's teaching, he placed a lot of stress on the spiritual world, especially on angels and, during his trip to heaven he was under the escort of Gabriel and Raphael. It can be inferred that, for him, angels comfortably took the place of the spirits. Secondly, the healing world was ignored and rejected as futile, however, Owalo prayed for the sick and exorcised the possessed. Thirdly, the importance of polygamy and the levirate was ignored; however, Owalo accepted these as practical within his movement.

Apart from the factors that were overlooked, there were many factors that people did not understand in the christian teaching. But people lacked the courage either to declare that they did not understand or to coin out something suitable. From this chapter, one can conclude that, Owalo was not a weak and frivolous character but was involved in a most serious search for truth about many issues. In any case, he had a wider experience than his colleagues. He had come into contact with Coastal, Central and Eastern Provinces' peoples and had contact with Europeans, Indian Bunyans, Goans and Arabs. He knew the beliefs of some of the christian denominations in Kenya and had even become a muslim.

It would probably be fair to view Owalo as a courageous person who noted a problem and sought a solution. When he had coined out what was relevant to a people who had to adjust to change, he started propagating it in 1912. He was mainly concerned with his tribe, the Luo and this concern has continued to affect the development of the membership of the church.

The following points can also be added from this study: One, that Owalo was an original and imaginative thinker, despite his limited education. Two, he had the charisma of leadership which made it possible for him to have followers. Three, Owalo's movement was both religious and political, but the political aspect was disguised in his theology.

From observation, the movement was an attempt by a person in a rapidly changing society to create a kind of dialogue in that he looked for meaningful experiences in different traditions. He created a dialogue between Luo traditional beliefs, Islam and christianity. He used the idea of the centrality of God which is evident in the three traditions. He related every other idea to this central idea of God, be it the levirate, circumcision and polygamy, hence we have the beliefs and practices of the NLC. The aim of Chapter Three has been to discuss the rise and origin of the NLC from 1900 - 1912. From the study, particularly of the causes of the NLC, the conclusion has been reached that, one should not point at a single cause and call it the reason for the rise of a movement, because no cause is satisfactory in itself. The movement has complex causes, and in subsequent chapters reasons for the rise of the NLC will be referred to time and again.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPREAD AND ATTRACTIONS OF THE NOMIYA IJO CHURCH

1. Introduction

The real innovator of any movement is not the advocate or the founder but the acceptor.²²³ The achievement of the advocate was, in this case, the effective communication of his ideas that ensured acceptance by the people. To accomplish this, as already shown in the previous chapter, he himself had to undergo a change from a low status church agent to a prophet with direct revelation. Without this, he could not act in defiance of Mission or colonial authority. He also had to understand the local situation, its needs and dissatisfactions and offer constructive programme for its alleviation. The programme had to be communicated to the people he wanted to win and accepted by them. It was the people's acceptance that created the prophet. When Yohana Owalo appeared in Asembo, he became popularly known as Nabi (Prophet) and his special revelation became the article of faith, inspite of the fact that nobody could ascertain that he had actually gone to heaven.

2. The spread of NLC during the Inter-war period

Towards the end of 1912,²²⁴ Yohana Owalo, and his wife, Elizabeth Alila, left Maseno for his home area, Orengo (Marang'inya village), where he built the first church. When he arrived he taught and

²²³ A.R. Tippet, Solomon's Island's christianity (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), p. 241.

²²⁴ Kisumu District Annual Report 1919 - 1923, (DC/CN/1/5/2, K.N.A.).

²²⁵ Nyakito, interview; Okanja, interview; Otinda, interviews; M. Onyango, interviews; E. Okanda, interviews; N.A. Onyangó, interviews.

preached. His first converts were: Petro Ouma, Nuhu Bala, Ibrahim Odiyo, Luka Siwalo, and Jairo Ondoro.²²⁶ He encouraged the people at Orengo to embark seriously on education. In fact, he started teaching people to read and write.

In 1914, Owalo, moved to Oboch. He was accompanied by Petro Ouma; the rest of the converts stayed behind to run the school and to develop the church at Orengo.²²⁷ A number of reasons are given why he left Orengo. First, traditionally, among the Luo, prominence was associated with old age or being elderly. However, in his family Owalo was the last born son of a second wife. Most informants said that the elder members of his family did not welcome him so he had to leave Orengo.²²⁸ This reason is unlikely because his brothers, Obado (Philipo) Nyunja (Methuselah) and Okech (Mariko), became his followers later. A number of adherents believe that from Maseno he started to work in Oboch immediately. This is not likely because people interviewed in the neighbourhood of Oboch claim that Owalo arrived here in 1914. Secondly, some informants say that there was no land left for Owalo at Orengo on which to establish himself. This is also unlikely because the system of land tenure was such that each person was well provided for, even when he was away. Thirdly, some informants say that, since Owalo got married before his elder brothers did, traditionally, he was not allowed to build a house or to stay within his father's homestead. He had to stay in a relative's home. This is likely, but it still does not explain why he particularly chose to go to stay at Oboch and not with other relatives who lived close to his home. The final and possible reason

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 Osure Angwen, interview; and Gondi; interview.

why he moved from Orengo, is that, Oboch was more centrally situated than Orengo. It stood at the borders of Gem, Seme and Asembo locations and, therefore, a very ideal place to start propagating an influence.²²⁹

Before moving to Oboch, Owalo and his followers worshipped on Saturdays. Some of his adherents say that he worshipped on Saturday for about four years, others mention a period of two years, and still others say it was only one day.²³⁰ It is, however, likely that he worshipped on Saturday beginning from 1912 upto 1914, when he moved over to Oboch. At Oboch, he worshipped for about one to four Saturdays. We have taken this view because, at this particular time, Daniel Odindo, who persuaded him to change from Saturday to Sunday, had just taken over the chieftainship of Asembo from Adhola. Odindo had come back from Kisumu, where he served under the District Commissioner, full of enthusiasm, compiling books of instructions for the elders. Particularly noteworthy was his appeal for "co-operation from the clothed persons, ... men of sense".²³¹ In the same year, Owalo was made sub-headman for Kochieng'. He was supposed to attend the local council's meetings to give reports for the week. If he worshipped on Saturday, then he missed council meetings. Secondly, if he worshipped on Saturday, many people were going to use membership of his church as excuse for not working on Saturday.²³² Odindo, through headman Anderea Awiti,

229 ibid., James Nyada, interview, Oboch, January 25 1980.

230 Even those who were alive at this particular time do not clearly recall the length of time.

231 Kisumu District Annual Report: Confidential report on chiefs (DC/CN 1/5/3 K.N.A.), Most of those interviewed claimed that it is Chief Odindo who persuaded Owalo to change from Saturday to Sunday.

232 Nyakito, interview; Okech, interviews; Osure, interviews.

persuaded Owalo to turn to Sunday worship for the sake of unity. Henceforth, Owalo worshipped on Sunday. This later caused a split in the church.²³³

After settling down, Owalo undertook serious evangelism. Already, he had converts in Asembo and the number was ever growing. He was also getting converts from the immediate neighbours of Asembo, in Seme, and Gem. The spread of the movement was fairly fast.²³⁴

On his arrival at Oboch, Owalo was given land, by his cousins, the Arika's, on which to build.²³⁵ He started to visit the people and invited, especially, the elders to attend services. He sought after these people in beer drinking parties, funeral ceremonies, and many other social gatherings.²³⁶ The people he met and preached to were almost virtually naked. The old men wore skins fastened by a string from the neck and let down in front covering the body from about the abdomen to the knee. Old women wore a skin around the waist which fell to the knee and clothed them behind and before. It was people dressed in this manner that formed the bulk of his followers.²³⁷ This is probably one good reason why Odindo sought his co-operation. He was in contact with the people Odindo sought to change.

The following elders, in Oboch area, frequented his

²³³ Okanda, interviews; Oyungu, interviews.

²³⁴ B.A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 263; J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit. p. 354.

²³⁵ The information was given by people, interviewed who live in the neighbourhood of Oboch who were not necessarily adherents. (See Appendix C, no. 1, 8, 49).

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Political Record Book 1902-1929, (DC/CN 3/1, K.N.A.).

meetings: Odera Adiedo, Mataara Angira, Osure Arika, Sinda Ogula and Mbadi Nyakemba. Meetings were held in Owalo's home under a big tree. ²³⁸ He taught them about the greatness of God and reminded them that he was teaching them about the God they always worshipped. These elderly people, other than getting converted, offered their children to be taught and converted. ²³⁹

One important factor which boosted his ministry is that he arrived in Oboch when the First World War was starting and people were getting recruited. Many young people, especially those of recruitment age, came to take refuge in his accommodative home. It is at this time that he started having resident followers. He asked the District Commissioner not to conscript certain of his followers, like Yona Oyungu and Yakobo Okech. These resident followers visited their homes only once in a while. Owalo started farming extensively on the River Odundu and planted maize, millet and sugarcane. His followers agreed to look after the farm from 1916 on condition that Owalo gave up his job as sub-headman. When they had no preaching mission, they worked on the farm. Owalo also raised poultry, and his son Samuel Nyang'ala and one Elijah Okanda were in charge. ²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Nyakito, interviews; Okanda, interview; Otinda, interview; G.C. Owalo, unpublished Ms.

²³⁹ Ibid., Oyungu, interviews; Ojuok, interview; Gondi, interview; Okech, interview; Okanja, interview.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

The development of his work was helped further by one headman, Akech, of Seme Korango area. Akech saw the necessity of education for the young people. He encouraged old men of neighbouring Seme to give their children to be taught by Owalo. Since these old men knew Owalo, they sent not only their children to be taught but also encouraged other people to send their children to school. In the newly started school, Owalo taught reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. Under religion, he taught songs and Bible stories. He used catholic tunes and many Anglican songs which he altered slightly. After sometime, he started teaching the Anglican catechism, which he only altered slightly to fit in with the one he made in 1919.²⁴¹

His message was not lacking in dynamism. As it spread into the neighbouring clans and locations, many converts were won, to the extent that Missionary churches began to view it as a threat. At Orengo, among the new converts were his brothers Obado, Nyunja, Okech and Ojode. He quite often sent people from Oboch to go and teach these new converts the catechism.²⁴²

From Orengo, Owalo's message spread to Kanyikela, mainly the Ndwarra area. It is difficult to ascertain the date when this happened, however, it is likely that Owalo's message did reach Ndwarra before 1914. The first convert was Amolo son of Nengo, who won Suleman Odundo, and Meshack Onyango. These two people had a strong impact on Kanyikela so that today there is a strong hold of the NLC in this area.²⁴³

241 Ibid.

242 G.C. Owalo, unpublished Ms.

243 Ibid.

Right at the start of his Mission, he won a significant person from Asembo Kabondo, Petro Ouma. Many young people from Kabondo joined him and attended the newly started school at Orengo. One such young person was Nathaniel Agingu Onyango. The movement had a lot of impact on Kabondo in the 1920's.²⁴⁴

Onia Kandaria, another neighbouring clan, was also reached before 1914. The first convert was Zakaria Owuor Wera. One other area in Asembo where his influence reached was Ramba area among the Kakia. The Kakia are friends of the Kochieng clan so there were no major problems in getting converts. He got converts mainly from the Jok Onyango sub-clan. In fact, two of his first converts, Ibrahim Odiyo and Luka Siwalo, were from Kakia. He also got converts from the Asembo Kanyigoro, KanyaKala and Kolal. Most of his converts, however, were from the Kochieng' clan.²⁴⁵ To date the movement has more adherents in Asembo than anywhere else.

The first converts from Seme were those who stayed in the neighbourhood of Oboch. Onyango son of Aganda, of Korango Seme, who was possessed by spirits was told by the spirits to sell a bull and buy school uniforms for whoever joined Owalo's school.²⁴⁶ Yona Oyungu, one of the earliest converts in Seme, from Alungo, was given the responsibility of convincing the young people of Korango to join school. Onyango Aganda also persuaded young people like Elijah Okanda to attend school. Whoever attended school was provided with the school uniform. Korango area has quite a number of converts, and it

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid.

246 The spirit which possessed him was called Nyar dier nam - the daughter of the centre of the Lake.

has one of the most thriving of the NLC churches at Silo Korango.²⁴⁷

Beginning from 1915, with the help of another convert, Samuel Ogombo, Yona Oyungu started preaching in Alungo area of Seme. Samuel Ogombo, had quit Ojola Roman Catholic Station in 1914 because he was convinced that what Owalo preached was true. Yona Oyungu was a very enthusiastic evangelist and it would not be wrong to conclude he did the most of evangelical work.²⁴⁸

Owalo's message reached Koruenje and Kowe Jusa of Seme in 1915 and 1916, respectively. Zakayo Abinda Atila and Barnaba Adhing'a, both from Kadipir clan, got converted and then preached in Koruenje and Kowe Jusa. In East Seme, Owalo made a personal visit to pray for the wife of Suleman Owiti who was barren. She later bore a son whom she named Nahashon Akelo. From this particular home, Owalo's message spread to the neighbouring areas.

Asher Odingo of Seme Kakola visited his maternal uncles in Asembo Kochieng' and got converted. He went and evangelised in his home area. At the same time, another convert, Joshua Ombija, evangelised in Simo area of Seme. Kijana area was evangelised by Samuel Ogombo.²⁴⁹

247 Yona Oyungu, interview; E. Okando, interview.

248 Ibid. Yona Oyungu, as claimed by my informants, is quite conversant with the early history of the NLC because of his photographic memory and the fact that he participated fully in the movement right from the beginning.

249 G.C. Owalo, Ms.; Yona Oyungu, interview; Barnaba Adhing'a, interview; Okanda, interview.

During a visit to Asembo, one Henry Alemba of Uyoma became a NLC convert. When he went back to Uyoma he started preaching. In 1913, Ibrahim Odiyo and Nuhu Bala visited Uyoma Katweng'a and stayed in the home of a new convert near Lweya Anglican school. The sub-chief took hold of Henry Alemba and beat him because he suspected that, Alemba had invited Odiyo and Bala. Owalo was infuriated and decided to visit Uyoma. One Zakayo Nyanyuok and Mathayo Opiyo, who were together with Owalo in Maseno, reported him to the Chief of Uyoma. Since the chief could not deal effectively with Owalo, the two decided to report Owalo's case to the District Commissioner. Owalo was summoned to Maseno to answer charges before them; the District Commissioner and the Provincial Commissioner, and J.J. Willis, Ezekiel Apindi, John Ming'ala and Simeon Nyende. Owalo was accused of two things: first, that he was cheating people that he had a message revealed by God; secondly, that he was snatching converts from the Anglican Church in Uyoma. Owalo won the case; and soon after this, the two year probation period came to an end and his movement was registered as Nomiya Luo Mission.²⁵⁰ In spite of this, Owalo never had a stronghold in Uyoma. There were very few converts in Katweng'a but after Owalo's death people from other clans also started accepting the movement.

Owalo also managed to win converts in the white settled areas. In Mbogo Vale, they visited Shadrack Odongo of Seme, who was working as the head of the labourers. Odongo, came from his home already converted, and won converts for the movement in Mbogo Vale. He invited Owalo to baptise the new converts. After this

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A group of 7 people led by James Okumu, interview, Uyoma Kokiri, February 16, 1980. Yona Oyungu, interview; N.A. Onyango, interview.

first visit, Owalo sent Jairo Ondoro to be the resident teacher there. Another settlement area, where his influence reached, was Kibigori. Johana Osoga of Kibigori, during a visit to Kisumu Manyatta, got converted and on his return to Kibigori started to evangelise. He asked Yona Oyungu to help him in this venture and twice Yohana Owalo visited the area and baptised converts. Another settled area, where there were converts, was Ngengi Marboi. It is probable that the white settlement areas were reached before 1918.²⁵¹

Owalo also visited and got converts in South Nyanza. Arius Manyala of Kanyada had married three wives so he was refused baptism by the Seventh Day Adventist Missionaries in Gendia. There were trade links between South Nyanza and Asembo across Lake Victoria. Some of the early converts, like Petro Ouma, were involved in the trade. It is during one of their visits that they met Arius Manyala and introduced him to Owalo's message. He took interest and decided to visit Asembo. He was converted and then baptised. Owalo later visited Kanyada to baptise new converts.²⁵²

At the end of the First World War, Owalo went with two adherents to the war camp in Bombo, Uganda. One of his followers had preached and won a convert who wanted baptism. Owalo had two

²⁵¹ Yona Oyungu, interview; Yakobo Okech, interview; Elijah Okanda, interview; The three claim they visited these areas a number of times with Owalo.

²⁵² Conversion of Arius Manyala is known by almost all adherents especially from South Nyanza. This was confirmed during the March 1, festival when the life history of the movement is usually cited, on March 1, 1980. The most vivid information on his conversion was given by Okech, M. Onyango, and Okanda.

converts in the camp, Daudi Abaja and Luka Onyango. The new convert was Musa Awuor, a man of Sakwa.²⁵³ After the war these three men took responsibility of evangelising Sakwa Location. Daudi Abaja, during his preaching tour in Sakwa, operated from the home of Daniel Owaga in Karabuor of Siraongo near Lake Victoria. Musa Awuor, Luka Onyango, Ezekiel Oyo, and Timotheo Obiero son of Ondiek Auko asked Owalo in 1919 to visit Sakwa Kamnara. Already there were converts and they wanted Owalo to baptise them.²⁵⁴ Timotheo was with Owalo in Maseno. He obtained the necessary education for chiefs' sons and was supposed to become the next chief of Sakwa but he lost this opportunity when he married a second wife.²⁵⁵ He became Owalo's convert and won several people to the movement.²⁵⁶ There are several adherents in Sakwa at present.

Between 1914 and 1916 some parts of Yimbo were also already evangelised by some of Owalo's disciples. Yona Oyungu visited the area and stayed in the home of Odero son of Anam. He won Ishmael Tiang', Zedekiah Ng'ong'a and Shadrack Sihar, who later became serious NC evangelists. On his way to Yimbo, Yona usually went through Sakwa where he got some of the converts, to accompany him. His work was mainly based on Yimbo Kadimo. Another person that worked in Yimbo, mainly Kadimo and Kanyibok area, was Musa Awuor. From mid 1919, he operated from the home of Zedekia Ng'ong'a. During the same year, they invited Owalo to Yimbo to baptise the new converts.²⁵⁷ The areas, in Yimbo, mostly

253 Yona Oyungu, interview; E. Okanda, interview.

254 Ibid.

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.

257 Ibid.

influenced by the NLC are Kadimo and Kanyibok, and it is likely that these are the areas where evangelism was largely concentrated. At present, the influence of the church is affected by constant feuds and splits in the area. These are explained in page 110 and following.

Another area concentrated with the NLC adherents is Kisumu Manyatta. It came under the influence of Yohana Owalo when an Anglican priest refused to baptise Otieno Opalo (Samuel), Akech Alam (Simeon) and Ogola Onyuka (Yakobo) because they had taken second wives.²⁵⁸ Jairo Owino, a government interpreter in the District Commissioner's office in Kisumu; introduced Samuel Otieno to Owalo. They invited Owalo to visit Manyatta towards the end of 1918. The following were some of the converts: Samuel Otieno, Zakayo Dwasi, Naman Oloo, Justo Dwasi, Simeon Akech and Ayubu Mugoya. Many Africans gathered to witness the occasion of the baptism of these people because never before had they seen an African baptise.²⁵⁹ Since the new converts had to be taught the doctrine of the church, Owalo organised things in such a way that, the resident followers at Oboch visited Kisumu and stayed for two weeks in turns. However, when this was not proving very successful, Owalo sent Yona Oyungu to be a resident Pastor there. Yona got involved with teaching the following, reading, writing music and prayers.²⁶⁰

Samuel Otieno worked as a butcher in Manyatta. He bought cattle for slaughter from Nickodemo Tambo and Elijah Ogilo

258 Ibid.; Yakobo Okech, interview; S. Akinyi, interview.

259 Ibid.; G.C. Owalo, unpublished Ms.

260 Ibid.

of Nyakach. These two were cattle traders who operated between Nyakach, Samia, Mumias and Butere through Kisumu. On their way, they usually rested in Manyatta in the home of Samuel Otieno. After Otieno's conversion, they also took interest in this new religious movement. With ease, they accepted the movement's teachings because, unlike all others, the movement accepted polygamy.²⁶¹ When they became converts, they invited Owalo to visit Nyakach in late 1918. They had won to the movement people like Isaya Anisi, Naaman Matin, Absalom Awuonda, Benjamin Oundo and Jeremiah Nango. The converts were mainly from Nyabondo area of Nyakach. When Owalo visited Nyakach, he baptised ten of the new converts.²⁶² He visited Nyakach again in December, 1919, just before his death. He took with him Saulo Awuor, whom he appointed as pastor. In Nyakach, he met face to face with opposition from Mr. Innes of the African Inland Mission at Nyabondo.²⁶³

Gem also got the influence of NLC through Kisumu Manyatta. Joel Osumba and Pilipo Kasera, both of Gem Ahono (Rabour), got converted through the Manyatta converts. They went back to Ahono and began evangelising. They won a few converts, such as James Abiya, Mathayo Onduso, Jairo Owino, and Wilson Obilo.²⁶⁴ Some men from Manyatta also went to Gem Kathomo and Ramula and won converts. The impact of the movement was not felt as strongly at this particular time as it was, later, after the death of Yohana Owalo.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Ibid.; Benjamin Oundo, interview. A few months after the interview, in April, 1980, Benjamin Oundo, then Archbishop of NLC, died of lung cancer. He saw Owalo during Owalo's visits in Nyakach.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.; Reuben Abiya, interview.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Baranaba Adhing'a, one of the earliest converts, claimed that by the time of the death of Owalo, there were five hundred and three registered members.²⁶⁶ However, B.A. Ogot and J.M. Lonsdale say that, within the next few years following 1912, the number of followers went up to ten thousand within Central Nyanza alone.²⁶⁷ It looks like the growth in numbers was rapid. If it was not a force with which to reckon, the church Missionary Society, (henceforth CMS), the Roman Catholic (henceforth RC) and the African Inland Mission (henceforth AIM), would not have wrestled with the NLC. In the Catholic report of 1900 - 1914, the Catholic priest at Ojola wrote that when Owalo started catechuminate the NLC seemed in the beginning a real menace to catholicism.²⁶⁸ Even the colonial government held it suspect for two years and in an official report it is recorded:

The religion called "Nomia" which was started some ten years ago in Asembo continues to flourish in that part of the District and there are several adherents. The first high priest Johana Owalo who after a lot of controversy was given a letter by Mr. Ainsworth authorising him to continue his teaching as it was not subversive to good order and morality.²⁶⁹

A.E. Pleydell, then in charge of Maseno, also complained of Owalo's activities to Mr. John Ainsworth. But Ainsworth, after a series of enquiries, gave Owalo permission to continue baptising, objecting

²⁶⁶ Barnaba Adhing'a, Sermon, Oboch, January 11, 1980.

²⁶⁷ B.A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 263; J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., pp. 356 - 358.

²⁶⁸ Catholic report on Ojola Mission 1900 - 1914 (Kibuye Mission records); H.P. Gale, op. cit., p. 279.

²⁶⁹ Kisumu District Annual Report, 1919 - 1923. (DC/CN 1/5/2 K.N.A.).

only to the prophet's avowed encouragement of polygamy among christians. However, Ainsworth agreed with him that it was a travesty of christianity to put away the wives of polygamous converts.²⁷⁰ The movement was registered under the name of Nomiya Luo Mission (The Mission that was given to me to the Luo) in 1914. Henceforth, it came to be a movement recognised by both Missionaries and the colonial government.

Owalo gained the support of a large part of his clan, and the support expanded until there were branches all over Nyanza, but he did not live long to see further developments. Just around the christmas of 1919, Owalo fell sick, when he had come back from Nyakach. It is likely that he had contacted small pox which affected the District during the period between 1917 and 1920, although, the adherents just call the sickness, plague. On January 11, 1920, he died. A number of explanations were attributed to his death, some of which are: that as God's prophet, he was taken early enough by God, to ensure that he did not indulge in evil; secondly, that he was bewitched by one Musa Wera.²⁷¹

People gathered at Oboch to mourn him. Chief Daniel Odindo took all the funeral responsibilities.²⁷² People of Asembo and neighbouring Seme, who were not converts, mourned Owalo in the

²⁷⁰ J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 356.

²⁷¹ Otinda, interview; Okanja, interviews; Oyungu, interviews; Okanda, interviews; and all other informants, that were interviewed. The claim that Musa Wera bewitched him is based on the fact that, after his death, his step brother Pilipo Obado had a dream in which Owalo was telling him to stop Musa Wera from taking over the leadership of the church because he was responsible for Owalo's death.

²⁷² Mentioned by every person who gave a sermon during the memorial service, January 11, 1980. Some of these were, E. Okanda, B. Adhing'a, B. Oundo, G.C. Owalo, N. Cng'awa and Mathayo Orwa.

traditional way.²⁷³ Following the death of a man, the men of the lineage gathered fully armed for war in the home of the dead man. Some ran about the home of the dead man, waving their weapons and spearing imaginary foes and evil spirits. They gathered all their cattle together and covered themselves with ashes from the fire place of the dead man's first wife. They drove the cattle to the boundary of the subtribal area where they challenged enemies to take their cattle. This sort of defiance was largely ritual. They tied a fast-growing creeper, Bwombwe, and rushed back home singing and dancing. Owalo was buried the same day. His faithful followers offered the final prayers and lowered the coffin into the grave. (Bwombwe was tied around the waist).

His followers expected a resurrection so they held all night prayer meetings on Korango, Kaonje, Abuyu and Rambugu hills. When they realised that a resurrection was unlikely, they decided to settle down, build up and stabilise the church. Before the end of that year, Petro Ouma was invited to Gem to baptise new converts. He visited Ahono, Ramula and Gombe in Gem and baptised over sixty new converts. To date, these are some of the strong-holds of the NLC in Gem.²⁷⁴ In 1924 Yona Oyungu, moved to Gem to be the resident pastor. He stayed in Ahono and along with the converts in Gem he evangelised in Gem. He stayed in Gem until 1934 when he went to Kituamba.²⁷⁵

In 1934, Yona Oyungu, left Gem for Kituamba farm, near Nairobi. While in Kituamba, he tried to preach to people in other

²⁷³ Nyakito, interview; Osure, interview; Gondi, interview; Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Otinda, interview.

²⁷⁴ Okanda, interview ; Oyungu, interview; Abiya, interviews.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

settled areas such as Kilimambogo, Maragua, Pundamilia, and Makuyu. He also preached in Gatuanyaga, Ruiru, Karamaini, Juja Kalimoni, Juja Farm, Kamiti and Kitito. Yona Oyungu baptised over fifty people. Other tribes in the area were reluctant to accept his message. He only managed to get converts from the Luo migrant workers, some of whom came from his home area.²⁷⁶ There were also converts in other settled areas near Nakuru who also embarked on serious evangelism, for example, Samuel Ogombo and Zakayo Dwasi were in Solai.²⁷⁷ Yona was called back to Nyanza, by the Bishop of the NLC, to work as Archdeacon.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to describe step by step how the movement spread from one place to the next. However, from the description given above, it is evident that the advance of the African NLC did not come about by an organised effort of evangelisation by the leadership, but either by a migratory movement of one person, which has continued to date, or through the initiative of local adherents. The church developed through contact. A new community formed around the first convert or converts, for among the Luo, a man of piety draws people to himself. Other groups were formed as disciples multiplied and spread out from the initial centre. The best illustration would be that of Tanzania's North Mara, which as yet is not mentioned. The NLC was introduced in North Mara in 1929 by one Nickodemu Siwa who reached here accidentally while searching for pasture. He settled at Ochuma where he formed the first community. With the development of the movement in the area, he became the Bishop, then relinquishing daily affairs to his assistant, he settled in another area of the District because the pasture was exhausted. After settling down in North Mara he then

276 Ibid.

277 Ibid.

invited other members from Kenya to go and baptise. Petro Ouma, during his term of office visited the area. People like Yakobo Okech, Yona Oyungu and Benjamin Oundo also visited the area to baptise and to strengthen the new converts.²⁷⁸

This sort of growth ran a risk of slackening off as the initial dynamism of the movement gave way to routine. This is fairly applicable to the NLC, for soon after the death of the founder, the evangelical impetus began slackening. After 1920, there were adherents in North Mara District of Tanzania, Gem Ahono and Alego. Expansion continued up to the early 1930 and the Government report in 1933 said, "Nomiya Luo Mission (African) continues to gain ground and is spreading its activities in South Kavirondo and among the Luo in settled areas".²⁷⁹ However, soon after 1934, the government report said that, "The Nomiya Luo Church continues to function but I have not heard it spreading."²⁸⁰ Whereas the spread of the movement could have been curbed by the pattern it took, the most serious problems that drew it back were connected with internal feuds. The church experienced crisis at the death of the founder. Beginning from 1920 it survived sixteen and a half years in crisis over leadership.

3. The nature and attractions of the NLC

When the rate of growth of any church becomes so rapid, one is faced with questions such as: why were people joining

²⁷⁸ Oyungu, interview; Okech, interview; Oundo, interview; Adhinga, interview.

²⁷⁹ Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1932 - 34, (DC/CN 1/6/2 K.N.A.), p. 25.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

the movement? What was the movement offering? What features did it display that made it attractive? In this section, an attempt is made to bring out the factors that made the movement attractive.

First, when Owalo appeared in Asembo, it is likely that he had recognised the situation felt by the Luo Community as a whole in the face of colonialism. He capitalised on this situation and then made it articulate. Right from the beginning of the twentieth century, there were already three conflicting groups in Nyanza, the colonial government, the christian missions and the Luo Society. Owalo introduced a movement that was attuned to the traditional fears, needs and aspirations. There are several cultural practices of the Luo that the Europeans, especially missionaries, abhorred right from the start and against which they attempted to work. For example, missionaries regarded the Luo practice of polygamy as offensive to christian morals, therefore, the baptism of polygamous men and of women and children of such marriage, was not allowed. Conversely, Owalo felt that the insistence on monogamy was not biblical since godly men like David, Abraham and Solomon practised it and were not punished for it. Owalo actually stopped Daudi Migot, his colleague in Maseno, from sending away his second wife, saying that it was more acceptable before God to be polygamous than to be adulterous.²⁸¹ People like Samuel Otieno of Manyatta, Nickodemu Tambo of Nyakach, and many others accepted the movement because of its attitude towards polygamy. Most informants said they appreciated this factor in the movement.

Another practice abhorred by Europeans was the practice whereby on a man's death, his wife was inherited by his brother and

²⁸¹ CMS (CPK Maseno South) Marriage records 1908 - 1924; Yona Ojungu, interview; E. Okanda, interview; I met Daudi Migot's second wife and she related the incident very vividly. She is a staunch NLC adherent and the only living person, left in Migot's home, January 18, 1980, Wang'arot Seme.

through her he was to raise children to carry on the line. This offended the church's laws as to the degrees of relationship within which marriage might take place. In the view of the missionaries, the practice posed a serious threat to a widow's ability to remain steadfast in her loyalty to the church. In the early years of the British administration, the christian widows were protected by the marriage ordinance of 1912, the missions and the government wanted to confront this issue but no satisfactory solution was reached.²⁸² According to the Luo, the practice of the levirate ensured that the widows and their children had their rights to a secure home. To date, it is the practice of NLC to ensure that widows are inherited and they claim a biblical basis for it.²⁸³

Owalo appeared to offer direction. His was an attempt to build a community out of the broken pieces of the old and the ill adopted offerings of the new. He recognised the importance of witchcraft and ancestral spirits among the Luo and regarded them as factors to be dealt with through the ministry of the church. Due to this recognition, he promised healing of both the mental and physical illness of the members of the church. Several cases are cited by adherents, of people he healed and exorcised. Exorcism is still a common practice within the church.²⁸⁴ The tolerance shown towards polygamy, the levirate and other traditional patterns was compensated for by the vigorous and legalistic taboos on drinking, smoking, dancing and wearing of shoes in holy places. Traditional religious concepts and practices were re-interpreted in a christian sense. This kind of re-interpretation looked very

²⁸² L.P.Spencer, Defence and protection of converts: Kenya mission and the inheritance of widows. Journal of Religion in Africa, volume 5, 1973, p. 108.

²⁸³ Bible references to the levirate are: Genesis 38, Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Ruth 4. It is likely that this traditional practice was incorporated very easily after Owalo saw these references.

²⁸⁴ On December 2, 1979, during a funeral ceremony, a possessed woman was exorcised. There was a lot of singing and dancing after the spirits left the woman.

acceptable to people living within the changing circumstances.

Secondly, the movement was meeting a need which existed in the society disturbed by the impact of European colonialism. Europeans brought a style of life which the people could neither provide from their resources nor accept without disruption. They paid little attention to cultural beliefs and practices of the Luo in spite of the warning given by, the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth that:

all persons who have dealings with the natives of this country to investigate their customs and beliefs before attempting to govern them, to proselyte them, to trade with them, or to live amongst them and employ them as labourers, for it is only by understanding and appreciating their superstitions and habits that one can hope to win their sympathy and affection. 285

After setting in to disrupt this kind of community the Europeans failed to offer any alternative community to replace the lost solidarity of the society. Even those who accepted the new trend of things, did not stay in long enough, since there was no wholesale acceptance of the new ideas. By introducing the new movement Owalo was providing a home, a community, for those who felt affected by the disruption. In fact the First World War disrupted the traditional patterns even further and therefore those who joined the NLC found it accommodative.

Thirdly, Owalo's personality also played a significant part in the formation, development and the nature of the message of the church. The movement, as we have seen, was a production of a

revelation received by him directly by divine will. He visited the first, second and third heavens where he got a doctrine. Through the account given of the supernatural world, the character of the mission and the message can be perceived.

The important element was the role of the prophet in relation to the movement of which he was the founder. He was chosen by God to be the interpreter of God's will for men and their guide on their way to salvation. Before the message was communicated to the rest of humanity, the call of the prophet and the promise of salvation was first addressed to the Luo, the particular group of which he was a member. He was to be the intermediary between God and his people.

Through him, the group was going to be made equal to other races, to ethnic and social groups dominant in the material world, and even better than some, like the Europeans, Goans, and the Indian Banyans, who were kicked out of heaven by the angels. The people of Owalo became a chosen people, like Jews and Arabs, because, henceforth, they also possessed in him a direct line with heaven. The prophet, therefore, was the incarnation of every desirable quality and, through him, the people participated in the revelation of which he was the instrument. The relations of Owalo and the people, on one side, was, therefore, an essential part of his message.

In spite of the fact that the church does not seem to be quite clear as to whether Owalo was a messiah or a divine person, what mattered was the divine character of the message and the revelation which continued throughout his career as a prophet.²⁸⁶ In other words,

²⁸⁶ Some of my informants claimed that Owalo said in 1914 that by that time he had gone to heaven 12 times. His wife too confessed that Owalo used to disappear and reappear during the night without necessarily going through the doors or windows.

a direct communication with God was the source of the movement's dynamism and without it the church would have died a natural death or simply stagnated. The charisma in Owalo, which was associated closely with the divine revelation, made one to claim and gain obedience and respect of his fellows in the Luo community. The pattern of fasting, visions and returning with power is a feature of many stories of how a 'Jabilo',²⁸⁷ among the Luo, gained his power. The charismatic person was usually the arbiter in society, he had the energy and personality to unite people and to turn the society in the direction of his ambition and to bring order where there were problems. The personality of Owalo, particularly after the heavenly experience, was such that it commanded obedience and respect, especially when he could be considered a charismatic person. Certainly, not every Luo joined him, but those who joined him recognised his charismatic gifts. A charismatic person usually appeared in the hour of need, so Owalo showed a masterly judgement in the selection of his moment.

The NLC was also an African movement, not only in its leadership and the growing membership, but especially in its attempt to come to terms with the African existential situation. This African-ness was at first a definite asset. Through it God's word was made to belong to the Luo, thus the Luo self respect was regained. To date one of the articles of faith is that the NLC will provide eternal life for all its adherents.

4. Internal feuds and splits and their effects on the spread or dynamics of the Church 1920 - 1980

A real crisis developed in 1920 when Yohana Owalo died.

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During his life time, his dominant personality held the church together but death diminished this influence and rival disciples became the eponymous heroes of fresh disunion. In the case of the death of Owalo, there was no careful planning and there was uncertainty as to whom the succession belonged. and who would actually take it. Turmoil of succession followed.

There were prominent personalities such as Yona Oyungu, Petro Ouma, Ibrahim Odiyo, Samuel Ogombo, and Musa Wera among whom a leader was to be picked. Due to the fact that Petro Ouma led in the last prayer at the funeral of Owalo, people took it for granted that he was leader. Seventy days after Owalo's death people went back to his graveside and Petro Ouma was unanimously declared leader.²⁸⁸ Six months after this, people still united under Petro.

There was peace because men like Wera and Okech were not circumcised and, according to the church regulations, could not aspire for any position of leadership. However, in April, 1920, they were circumcised. Henceforth, in the next sixteen and a half years, they were to be dominant in the feuds and splits within the church.²⁸⁹

Serious problems started in June, 1920 when Petro Ouma was invited to baptise new converts in Gem. Musa Wera and Yokobo Okech, men of Kochieng' clan, sent somebody to spy on how much money Petro was paid for baptising people. When they got the report, they planned to overthrow Petro. There were two important reasons why this happened. One, some informants say that since the movement was started by a Kochieng' man, the Kochieng'

²⁸⁸ Nyakito, interview; Osure, interview; Gondi, interview; Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Okanja, interview. On the significance of 70 days - see p. 188.

²⁸⁹ Okanda, interview; Oyungu, interview.

people now had the rights to lead it; two, other informants claim that, after realising the financial gains entailed in the movement they demanded to lead what was theirs by right of lineage.²⁹⁰

In July, 1920, soon after Petro circumcised Elijah Okanda, Isaya Dinga, Sila Okeu and Luka Siwalo, a plan to kill him was hatched. The secret was revealed by Ochola son of Osiga, who reported it to Chief Daniel Odindo. Odindo cautioned these people against killing Petro. However, this went unheeded and Petro had to flee to Korango hills in Seme with those who were healing, following their circumcision. They stayed here for two months, supported by adherents in Seme Korango. Petro moved off to his home in Kabondo, in October 1920.²⁹¹

Petro, still acting as leader of the followers he got after he left Oboch, named his centre "Ujwang'a" (discarded). He got sympathy from converts in Seme, Gem, Nyakach and other parts of Asembo, Uyoma, and Yimbo. Oboch was left with very few people. All ceremonies that used to be done at Oboch were now held at Ujwang'a. Petro picked on Meshack Onyango to help him as Secretary, Archdeacon and the chief circumciser or shariff. Peacefully they worked together for some years. Nevertheless, a split which has plagued the church upto today had occurred.²⁹²

Meanwhile, at Oboch, Yakobo Okech had taken over the leadership. He was in charge from about October, 1920 to July, 1921 when his wife died. There already existed strong differences

290 Ibid.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

between him and Musa Wera. He claimed that Musa had bewitched his wife and was also planning to wipe out his whole family through magic. Yakobo gave up the position of leadership and decided to follow Petro who was now at Ujwang'a. At this time Musa was known to be in contact with Daniel Odongo Anyango, a magician in Alego, who claimed to be a convert. Musa frequented Alego, indeed they got a few more converts in Alego. Those who attended the meetings in Alego claim that some of the things Odongo and Musa did were unusual.²⁹³

In the 1922 District Annual Report, it is recorded that Musa Wera was the "present high Priest". Since Musa lacked the leadership qualities, he did not stay in the position for long. In 1926 he handed over the position of leadership to James Ojuok but took it again in 1928.²⁹⁴ He led the movement until 1930 when he realised that almost everybody had left him and gone to Ujwang'a under Petro's leadership. Key people of Kochieng', like Ibrahim Odiyo and Philipo Obado left Oboch in 1926. By 1931 Oboch was in bushes, since nobody ever went there again.²⁹⁵

Between February and June, 1930, trouble erupted from elsewhere. Elisha Adet, son of Adet of Some Kobita, erstwhile of the Nomiya Church fell out with the Bishop. He had a call from God to go and live in Chula Ndere, in Lake Victoria, where he was to receive instructions and commandments. He persuaded twelve women and some men to accompany him and they would be safe from the imminent end of the world. He was ordered by Mr. Porter, the

²⁹³ Sara Dinga, interview, Silo Korango Seme, March 4, 1980.

²⁹⁴ Kisumu District Annual report 1919 - 1923, (DC/CN 1/5/2), p. 30.

²⁹⁵ Condi, interview; Ojuok, himself refused to admit this. He is not an adherent now and has turned into an alcoholic. Oyungu, interview.

Assistant District Commissioner, not to go to the Island as it was infested with tse tse fly. He replied that God had told him he would be safe. He refused to stay on the mainland till the medical officer could investigate the situation. They went to the Island in boats. They got food from the lake shore. In May, 1930 when they returned ashore for food, the government took action against them. Five of the men were imprisoned for six months, the rest were imprisoned for two months, and Adet himself was kept under serious observation. By July, 1930, nobody had dared return to the Island and the government confiscated all canoes. The NLC, led by Petro Ouma, failed to recognise Elisha Adet as a prophet.²⁹⁶

At Ujwang'a, other problems were in the making. Feuds started between Petro Ouma and Meshack Onyango. Onyango wanted to be given the title of Bishop, but when Petro refused, he endowed upon himself the title of Archbishop. At this time, several people called themselves Bishop. In the Nyanza Annual Provincial Report of 1934 it is recorded: "The African Nomiya Mission continues to function with a host of dignitaries but their influence does not seem to be spreading."²⁹⁷

From the above description, it is evident that, for several years, there was no peace. This was during the period between 1920 and 1936. Towards the end of this period, Zakayo Dwasi, then working for a certain whiteman in the settled areas, got concerned and convened a meeting which nobody attended. Problems between Petro Ouma and Meshack Onyango were mounting. Dwasi organised a council

²⁹⁶ District Intelligence Report, June, 1930, (PC/NZA 3/45/12 1930 - 31, K.N.A.).

²⁹⁷ Nyanza Provincial Annual report 1934 (PC/NZA/1/40, K.N.A., p. 14).

of five people to go and meet the chief in an attempt to solve the problems. No solution was found. The six men wrote a letter, which they gave Petro to take to the Central Nyanza District Commissioner (D.C.) in November, 1937.²⁹⁸ The D.C. advised Petro to call a meeting on November 18, 1937 to solve the problems. The meeting was held in Manyatta, Samuel Otieno's home, and it was unanimously agreed ~~that~~ Petro Ouma should be the Bishop. At the meeting, Meshack Onyango agreed to revert to Arch-deacon and the Bishop was acclaimed the spiritual head and the Pastors agreed to serve under him.²⁹⁹

This, however, did not end any problems, for on September 27, 1938, the

Nomiya Luo Mission came with their Bishop to see the D.C. about a split in their ranks. Their main complaint was that Meshack Onyango the arch-deacon had tried to usurp the authority of the Bishop. They agreed that Meshack should be demoted from his exalted position and Yona Oyungu who lives in Nairobi was elected arch-deacon in his place.³⁰⁰

For the first time, the NLC had one overall leader, since the death of Yohana Owalo. Yona Oyungu was recalled from Kituamba and he arrived in Nyanza in 1939. He stayed in Gem Ahono.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ S.S. Oundo, Kitap Lamo gi Wende mar Nomiya Luo Church. unpublished.

²⁹⁹ Provincial Intelligence Reports Nyanza, September, 1936 - December, 1938, (Dec. 1937, PC/NZA 4/5/2, K.N.A.).

³⁰⁰ Central Kavirondo Political Record: Historical and customs. (Report by D.C. C.N. August 13, 1938, DC/CN 3/1) or Provincial Intelligence Reports Nyanza, September, 1936 - December, 1938, p. 3.

³⁰¹ Oyungu, interview; Abiya, interview.

After Yona arrived back, Petro called an elders' meeting to discuss issues concerning the growth of the church. They decided to produce a prayer book, which went out of print soon after its production. It contained all the prayers as they were recorded in Johana Owalo's book "Upanga Mkali" without any additions. The present prayer book, which has also gone out of print, has a lot of additions. Leaders of the churches were also picked: Isaya Olwande pastor for Asembo, Daudi Omwayo pastor for Seme, and Benjamin Oundo, pastor for Nyakach. They also agreed that, henceforth, all social gatherings and committees be held at Oboch and that Oboch was to be rebuilt and taken care of.³⁰²

This agreement was also shortlived. Petro Ouma had sworn in 1921 that he would never go to Oboch again and he was not going to break the oath. By 1940, it was quite clear to the people that Petro would not break his vow and yet Oboch was supposed to be their centre. Another thing happened which made people furious, in 1940, Petro withheld money allocated for the education of children from Sila Adera. He also decided to eliminate some pastors from their positions of leadership.³⁰³

~~X~~ These pastors, who were relieved of their duties, called Yona Oyungu to a meeting in Yakobo Okech's home. Already there were problems between Yona and Petro to the extent that Yona was taking sides with Meshack Onyango. Yona was asked to call a meeting at Oboch. In the meeting they were to discuss the rebuilding of Oboch church and school. Yona was convinced by Samuel Ogombo, Suleman Ng'iendo, Baalam Oyata and others that he was the right man to call this meeting at Oboch and also to rebuild the centre. In

302 Ibid.

303 Ibid., Okanda, interview.

June 1947, a meeting was called at Oboch, and, once again, Yona was elected to rebuild Oboch. Yona immediately reported to the Provincial Commissioner and the Provincial Education Officer that he wanted to start a school at Oboch and he was allowed to do so.³⁰⁴

Those who gathered behind Yona were called Nyithind Kiye (orphans). In Uyoma, Kabuong' area, there were one hundred and fifty followers. Kadongo in Kisumu had over one hundred and fifty people. Alungo in Seme had one hundred and thirty eight people. Majengo in Yimbo had one hundred and eighty seven followers. Manywanda in Seme had one hundred and sixty five followers. Nyandwa, Miruka, Abunga, Korwenje, Keruya, Koker, Kindu and Kijana in Seme had six hundred and ninety seven followers. Every adherent in Gem, Kisumu Manyatta, and Kochieng' clan in Asembo followed behind Yona. Adherents in Asembo, Uyoma, Sakwa, Yimbo and Nyakach were divided. The rebuilding of Oboch started and the building materials, wood and grass, were transported from Gem Ahono. Houses were built; a church was put up and serious schooling started. Yona Oyungu was both teacher and Bishop, and Adrea Ombewa became his arch-deacon.³⁰⁵

On December 20, 1947, another meeting was called at Oboch to discuss the social activities supposed to take place the following year during the memorial service of Owalo's death. They planned for sports and music competition, and competition in neatness. These were to take place after the memorial service itself. People spent at least two days at Oboch for all these activities to take place.³⁰⁶

304 Oyungu, interview; Abiya, interview; Okanda, interview; Okumu, interview.

305 This information was obtained from a song book and record book, kept at Oboch. The book was handwritten by Yona Oyungu.

306 Ibid.

At Oboch Yona and Yakobo introduced what is known today as Mony, the all night meetings which were meant to send the devil away. People spent whole nights together singing songs accompanied by drumbeats, jingles and clapping of hands and dancing. Included were also the reading of Bible passages and sermons given by many people. This pulled people away from Petro. In fact, even Petro's wife, Saphira Okanja, moved over to Oboch.³⁰⁷

At the beginning of 1948, the whole group, led by Yona, went to Rapogi in Seme to open the church and school there. After the opening ceremony, there was mony, and the following day, several people were baptised.³⁰⁸ This state of affairs was causing concern not only to those who followed after Petro but also to the government officials in the area, and in 1949 a meeting was called to reconcile the two parties. An official report has the following information:

The oldest ... independent religious sect ... Nomiya Luo Union continued to be a respectable and law abiding body but has itself suffered a schism. Most of the adherents in Gem and Seme locations under leadership of "archdeacon" John M. Oyungu have broken away from the main body in Asembo location under "Bishop" Petro Ouma, whom they have declined to recognise any longer as their leader. At their own request, the D.C. called all adherents of the sect in an unsuccessful attempt to assist them to reconcile their differences.³⁰⁹

In the same report, it was suggested that the only hopeful chance of achieving reconciliation was to probably get both sides to recognise the son of the deceased founder of the church as the new Bishop. At this time, the members were faithfully contributing to

³⁰⁷ Oyungu, interview; Okech, interview.

³⁰⁸ Song book kept at Oboch, op. cit.

³⁰⁹ Central Kavirondo Political Records, Op. cit.

the cost of his education but he was in no hurry to complete his education or to take up the leadership. The split, therefore, continued to exist.³¹⁰

In 1952, however, one Harun Nyakito of Asembo Kochieng', tired with these differences, decided to invite the D.C., once again, to come and sort out the differences. This was on October 15, 1952. The D.C., Mr. Williams, invited five chiefs; Jason Gor of Asembo, Elijah Bonyo of Sakwa, Bathlomayo Nyabola of Uyoma, Melchizedek Nindo of Seme and Zakayo Ochieng' of Gem. In this meeting, it was agreed that Petro Ouma remain as leader until when Owalo's son was ready to take over leadership.³¹¹ Yona was told to wait for the position until after Petro's death. Disappointed, Yona went away to stay in Kabondo in South Nyanza. He later joined the splinter group, Nomiya Luo Sabbato, and later split from this to form his own movement Nomiya Ligangla Mabith gi Sabbato (I was given a sharp sword and Sabbatarianism).³¹²

In January 11, 1954 Petro Ouma revoked his vow and visited Oboch for the first time in thirty three years. Soon after this he fell sick and had to stay for a long time in Maseno Hospital until his death in November, the same year.³¹³ Some informants seemed to connect the visit to Oboch with his death, in that according to Luo traditions the breaking of such a vow meant death. During the

³¹⁰ District Annual Report 1950, Religious Sects, (DC/CN 1/2/2 K.N.A.), p. 2. See Appendix C, No. 9, p. 239.

³¹¹ Okanda, interview; Nyakito, interview; Oyungu, interview; G.C. Owalo, interview.

³¹² Rosbella Koga, interview, Kisumu Manyatta, January 28, 1980.

³¹³ Visited Petro Ouma's grave site in Kabondo. Most of my informants did not believe that Petro's death was just a natural calamity, they associate it with the vow and the subsequent visit to Oboch.

period between 1952 and 1954 serious rivalry existed between Yakobo Okech and Petro Ouma. Yakobo Okech has since been connected with quite a number of feuds within the church.³¹⁴

X On his death bed, Petro handed over leadership of the NLC to Gideon Charles Owalo who was then a teacher at Maseno. G.C. Owalo led the church quite peacefully and, being an educationist himself, he attempted to develop the NLC schools. Benjamin Oundo became his Arch-deacon. The church enjoyed latent peace until 1956.

In 1956 a problem sparked off on the issue of the Sabbath. Some followers felt that it was time they went back to worship on Saturday. Others felt that going back to Saturday was not easy after so long. The situation was now ripe for a split. This idea was not new. In 1925, Samuel Ogombo and Paulo Owang' had started reminding people that, in 1914 Owalo had asked the followers to revert to Saturday when the conditions allowed for it. At this time they did not get support. In 1940's Paulo Owang' and his sons Simeon Ndara and Jakobo Ayoro moved to South Nyanza and stayed at Lambwe Valley. Elijah Ogong'a also moved to South Nyanza and he was made a pastor. In 1956, with the influence of Seventh Day Adventists in South Nyanza, they vehemently opposed Sunday worship. In 1957, they became the first people to split permanently from the NLC and in 1958 they got registered by the Registrar General of Societies as Nomiya Luo Sabbath and it developed its base in South Nyanza.³¹⁵

314 Recorded minutes of Nomiya Education Committee, 1952 - 1954.

315 Caleb Asembo, interview, Ralingo E. Asembo, January 13, 1980; Yona Oyungu, interview.

In 1960 their evangelist, Sila Okeu, came to preach in Central Nyanza where already the NLC was experiencing other problems. He won key figures like Abednego Lwalo, Joshwa Owino and Sila Adera who were under the NLC disciplinary action. By 1963 they had many converts from Central Nyanza, they were also joined by the JokOnyango adherents of Kakia clan who felt that the NLC was doing an injustice to them. Ibrahim Odiyo who was a pastor of Kakia had died and they expected that Esau Odindo of Kakia would take over but the NLC leaders put Zablon Ndiege of Kochieng' clan. However, in 1976 they all moved back to the NLC.³¹⁶ By 1970 the church already had two thousand adherents but by 1976 it had gone down to one thousand adherents only.³¹⁷

While this split was taking place, another problem was also coming to a head in the NLC. G.C. Owalo who led the church since 1954, handed over leadership to Benjamin Oundo in 1960 so he could concentrate his abilities on Nomiya Luo Church schools. However, Oundo's leadership was not readily accepted by all adherents, especially from the Kochieng' clan. In May 1960, in one social gathering the split occurred and one group went behind G.C. Owalo, while the other group went behind B. Oundo. Oundo's followers were called Oriere and G.C. Owalo's group Odol. Each group claimed that it was the main Nomiya church and this was worsened by the fact that each group had the church's registration certificate.³¹⁸

316

Ibid.

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D.B. Barret, G.K. Mambo, J. MacLaughlin, M.J. McVeigh "eds" Kenya Churches handbook (Kisumu: Evangel Press, 1973) p. 248. Annual returns 1970, Registrar General's Office, August, 1980. The reliability of these figures is hard to ascertain.

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Okanda, interview; Okech, interview; Oundo, interview; G.C. Owalo, interview; Oyungu, interview; Okanja, interview; Okumu, interview; Abija, interview.

In fact, in December 1961, Ismael Anguka, on behalf of Bishop Oundo, wrote to the Registrar General of Societies to confirm that Oundo was Bishop, and that the headquarters of the church had been moved from Oboch to Sondu.³¹⁹

The other group realised too late when Oriere group had already made contacts with the government. They wrote an urgent letter in 1962 to say that NLC headquarters was still at Oboch, but this was too late. In December of 1962, G.C. Owalo sent the annual report of the church; at the same time Oundo sent an annual report.³²⁰

Oriere group took this opportunity to alter the constitution of the church. In November 26, 1963, they sent a letter to alter section 12 (a) of the Constitution which said that the "direct descendant of Yohana Owalo will normally succeed to the leadership of the church at the age of thirty". This was altered to allow anybody to be elected into the church hierarchy. The only qualifications required was the age of forty and above, and being conversant with the true history of the church.³²¹

³¹⁹ The General Secretary, I. Anguka, to Registrar General of Societies, letter, August 28, 1961.

³²⁰ G.C. Owalo, to Registrar General of Societies, Annual Returns, December 15, 1962. B. Oundo, to Registrar General of Societies, Annual Returns, May 21, 1962.

³²¹ B. Oundo, letter to Registrar General of Societies, November 26, 1963.

This new insertion meant that G.C. Owalo could not lead the church since he was under forty and was also not conversant with the history of the church, because until 1954 he was a member of the Anglican church. They also added something to the constitution in connection with branch churches which rendered the church in Asembo merely a branch of the mainstream Nomiya Luo Church.³²²

Both groups sent the annual reports. While, according to G.C. Owalo, the Odol group had 27,964 members; according to B. Oundo the Oriere group had 50,214 members with a very well representative leadership.³²³ This clearly indicates that Odol had far fewer members than Oriere. However, the figures, especially of the Oriere members, would cast a doubt because, before the split, the number had only slightly exceeded thirty thousand. Had the split then stirred up a new vigour towards evangelism? It is unlikely that there was serious evangelism at this time of squabbles. This leaves the above figures questionable.

Meanwhile there was also another problem that was undermining the church. On January 14, 1961, Johannes Juma Owigo arrived in Asembo. He had been a mission's boy at the Nyandago Catholic Mission in South Nyanza. In South Nyanza, he had first joined Nomiya Luo Sabbatto but he was not welcomed, so in 1961 he joined the NLC. Juma went around preaching, healing and exorcising. His message was mainly based on Muya (Holy Spirit) and many people began to receive Muya in Seme and Asembo. They threw away their charms and confessed involvement in witchcraft. When the number was growing beyond the scope of one person, he chose helpers or doctors from those who had already received Muya. The leadership of NLC

322 Ibid.

323 Annual Returns to the Registrar General of Societies
December 1963.

was getting irritated by his movements and the fact that, already he had a large following.³²⁴

When Juma first came to Asembo, he stayed in the home of Mathia Owade in Ujwang'a. Mathia was a member of Odol group. The problems started when Juma announced an unfavourable prophecy about Yakobo Okech. Yakobo Okech was fairly embarrassed by the prophecy so he declared to the NLC hierarchy that Juma was unacceptable. However, this did not affect Juma's ministry; he preached and healed all over Seme and Kisumu amongst the NLC adherents. In Oboch area, he healed a mad woman, and he was taken by Odol leaders to the chief's Baraza in Nyilima Asembo to be charged. Nothing was found against him and he was released. In fact, in 1963, the chief invited him to visit his home.³²⁵

In 1964, the Oriere and Odol groups realised that they had a common enemy to fight. G.C. Owalo convened a meeting at the home of Zaddock Ooro, a staunch member of Oriere group. The meeting took twenty four hours since nobody was ready to compromise. They decided to conclude by using the secret ballot. According to the ballot Benjamin Oundo won the position of the head of the NLC, with G.C. Owalo as his assistant. Some new ranks were added into the hierarchy of the church. Henceforth, the head of the church, was referred to as the Arch-Bishop and his assistant, the Assistant Arch-Bishop. The two groups re-united and were now able to face a common enemy.³²⁶

³²⁴ Ainea Owalo, interview, Kijana Seme, January 12, 1980. Abishai Okech, interview, Kijana, January 14, 1980: Nyakito, interview; Okanja, interview.

³²⁵ Ibid. Juma prophesied that Yakobo practised witchcraft. Juma became the enemy of the whole of the NLC.

³²⁶ G.C. Owalo, interview; B. Oundo, interview; Zaddock Ooro, interview, Ougo Asembo, February 22, 1980. Naphtali Ong'awa, interview, Kisumu Manyatta, February 24, 1980.

Due to the division many people were weary and when Juma arrived they easily joined him. The NLC leaders, after 1964, did not fight against Juma as a person but against Muya. Several councils were called to ask these people to denounce the Muya experience but they would not. One meeting was called in Nyiera in Seme but it was fruitless. From November 16, 1967, Muya people were officially excommunicated from the NLC. Nyanza Provincial Police, started patrolling the areas where Muya people were. Juma was picked up one time and taken before the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. Charles Murgor, who advised him to start his own religious movement. However, Muya people continued to attend the NLC services; the police picked them up each time. They considered these constant threats from the police as persecution.³²⁷

Finally, in 1969, they decided to start the movement called Nomiya Luo Roho which was registered on January 14, 1969. Zablon Ndiege of the NLC discarded his position as pastor and became the first Arch-Bishop. Elijah Adhiambo and Ainea Owalo both of the NLC became Archdeacons. Johannes Juma was not given any position of leadership because he was not circumcised. In 1971 he broke off from the group to form the Holy Ghost Coptic Church of Africa. A group of people followed him but after a year they moved off because what Juma taught and did was not in line with what Yohana Owalo taught. Some who left Juma rejoined the NLC, others rejoined Nomiya Luo Roho, still others started their own religious movements. For example Ainea Owalo, broke off and formed Nomiya Church of Gospels, which has a lot of catholic and pentecostal orientation. Some of their practices are the things Yohana Owalo could not reconcile himself to in the Catholic Church.³²⁸

³²⁷ The official declaration of excommunication circular dated January 7, 1964, by the Secretary, Solomon Oiro.

³²⁸ Ibid.

There have been several splits from Namiya Luo Roho Church: Namiya Holy Trinity, Namiya Roho Sabbato, and Namiya Fueny Maler (New revelation). The more the splits, the greater the loss of people to them. The NLC has not only lost people to its splinter groups but also to the groups that have split from the splinter groups. 329

Between 1969 and 1975, there was relative peace. Problem started again in 1976, within the church leadership. The Administrative Secretary of the church had problems with the police. He needed certain compensations which were personal but he claimed that the property wasted by the police belonged to the church and, therefore, it would sue the police. When the Arch-Bishop realised this, he led a delegation to the Provincial Commissioner to defend the position of the church. The secretary never attended any leaders' meetings until in 1977 when he called his own meeting, where he chose new leaders for the church. The list was sent to the Registrar General of Societies. Meanwhile the now deposed Arch-Bishop of the NLC also chose a new Administrative Secretary.³³⁰

It was evident that there were two forces at work within the NLC. The Registrar General of Societies realised that a dispute had occurred among the members or officers of the NLC, as a result of which he was not sure as to the identity of the persons who had been properly constituted as officers of the society. He required the church to produce to him, within one month, the lawful officers of the church. On December 15, 1979, at a meeting in Oboch, the old leaders retained their position except for the old administrative

330 Ainea Owalo, interview; Nyakito, interview; Oundo, interview; Ong'awa, interview; G.C. Owalo, interview; Abishai Okech, interview; Adhing'a, interview; Minutes of the special conference of the synod of the NLC held at Asego Church in Kanyada pastorate Homa Bay, June 11, 1978; included in the appendix.

secretary. Those who followed after the old Administrative Secretary were officially excommunicated.³³¹ Although excommunication is not the best way to achieve peace, it can be confidently said that temporarily, the NLC achieved the peace it needed for development.

There are a number of factors that led to this particular problem. The main issue was concerning the name of the church. In 1975 the Archbishop had signed an agreement that by the year 1978 the name of the Church was to be changed to Nomiya Church of Africa, so that the church would look presentable to all Africans. By 1978 the Archbishop had changed his mind about the whole idea. The Administrative Secretary went ahead and wrote a letter to the Registrar General of Societies that the church had changed its name and its leaders.³³² The rest of the factors were very personal and are beyond the scope of this study.

Unfortunately for the church it lost the Archbishop B. Oundo, who struggled with the church through turmoil since 1960, in April 1980. That this has opened further channels for trouble should not be overlooked. From the above description, it is evident that the church has never had any period without problems. Behind these problems, it is rare that one sees doctrinal differences. It is the desire for leadership that has been the cause of problems.

One problem that the church is undergoing is connected with a cardinal doctrinal stand. Some adherents have experienced the impact of the East African Revival. This started particularly in the 1960s and at the moment there are many adherents in Asembo,

331 Letter from the Registrar General of Societies, November 19, 1979, Society's files.

332 Ainea Owalo, interview; Nyakito, interview; Okumu, interview. The Asego Declaration, June 11, 1978.

Seme, Uyoma and Yimbo who claim that they are "saved" because they have been washed by the blood of Jesus. They have discarded certain of the beliefs and practices of the NLC although they are still adherents. They sing quite a number of songs which stress the Lordship of Jesus and his prominence as a member of the Trinity. However, when asked how Jesus relates to God, they insist that he is just a son and a messenger of God.³³³ To these people the place of Jesus is not very clear.

The problem has become so acute because some members of the church leadership also claim they are "saved"; when leaders also get involved, finding a solution becomes fairly difficult.³³⁴ In their case excommunication will not be an answer otherwise the church will lose almost one quarter of its members. The movement is becoming quite popular and has almost permeated every area where the church is. During the memorial service in January, 1980, it was not infrequent to hear the Revival greeting "Ruoth Opaki" (Praise the Lord)" amongst these people while the normal Nemiya greeting is "Mrembe" or "Okwe" which means "Peace be with you." Probably, this religious enthusiasm can be of great service to the church while it remains effectively within the life of the church, but it can also be a serious menace if it tends to oppose the church's witness and worship or beliefs and practices. >

Disputes have plagued the church since the death of the founder. The disputes have been very frequent and some have resulted in splits.

³³³ This issue was discussed at length with the leaders of the church. It was also discussed with those who claim they have the experience, like Saphira Okanja, Peres Owalo, Rahel Okungu and Sarah Dinga.

³³⁴ The Treasurer of NLC Mariko Ouko is "saved" and several pastors, Arch-deacons and Rural Deans.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the following observations may be made. One, that the study of the life or ministry of a founding prophet is normally curtailed by the mysterious circumstances of his confirmation. Everything seems to revolve around his personality. If there is any evangelism or peace within the movement, it is because of him. After the death of Owalo the movement acquired new leaders who did not have the same mysterious experience or dedication as Owalo and this has resulted in problems for the church.

Two, in his book, Upanga Mkali, Owalo did not state clearly how leadership should be passed from one person to the next. He also did not leave a will to say who should take over from him. These factors account for the quarrels, squabbles and fights over leadership and splits that have taken place within the church.

Three, up to now the NLC has not established a Bible School or theological college where its leaders might be trained. Apparently academic education is not considered necessary in leadership selection. For this reason, the future of the NLC is dark, for it will continue to be threatened by splits and feuds - until there is formal training of leaders to establish the central doctrine and practice of the NLC. It is only a properly trained leadership which can lead well and provide responsible pastoral care for the members of the fold.

CHAPTER FIVE

DESCRIPTION OF THE NCMIYA LUO CHURCH

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the Nomiya Luo Church

is examined as a system of thought and practice. Attempt is also made to determine the features which may be classed as borrowed from the Luo, Muslim and Jewish Religions. A brief reconstruction of the basic theology or doctrine is made in order to ascertain as to whether or not any changes have taken place. The only written sources of the beliefs, doctrine, practices and organisation of the NLC are the prayer book, the song book and the constitution. We start off this section by the discussion on the doctrine and beliefs of the NLC.

2. THE DOCTRINE OF THE NLC

At first sight, what Owalo taught looks very sketchy but, without any doubt, it played and still plays a significant role in the life of the NLC. The doctrine emanated from Owalo himself. He effected the first synthesis between different doctrinal sources. On the one hand, he used the Bible and the Missionary teaching as sources, on the other hand, the Luo beliefs along with the teaching of Islam.³³⁵ Due to the kind of synthesis produced by Owalo, H.H. Ocholla-Okoth, describes him, as "a rolling stone that gathers no moss". He further claims that, Owalo did not wait to be thoroughly instructed on any one religion or religious organisation, and as a result, there are several contradictions in his doctrine. He sees contradiction, mainly in the fact that, The Apostles Creed

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Adherents also notice that they have similarities with Islam. In fact Arch-deacon Reuben Abiya of Nyakwere, uses a small Moslem prayer book when exorcising.

and the Lord's Prayer are still used by the church and yet they stand as the declaration of faith for the churches Owalo was opposed to.³³⁶ After looking closely at the information given in the prayer book, the opinion held here is that, Ocholla is mistaken. Owalo made sure that whatever he included was in line with a central theme, Jehova God. In the Apostles Creed, he included the word messenger (Jooto) before Jesus' name to show that although Jesus' death and resurrection are significant, he is no more than a son and messenger of God. Secondly, the Lord's prayer, is a prayer offered to God not to Jesus. The main object here is to reconstruct Owalo's basic doctrine and how it has developed since his death.

a. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Owalo is not deified by his followers, rather he is referred to, in both the liturgy and songs, as Nabi (Prophet). It is very clear in his call that he is no more than a man imbued with power to fulfill a commission. His Mission was to call all Luo People to follow God. After fulfilling his Mission, he died and went to the first heaven; the abode of men; Jews, Arabs and the Luo. In their songs, the adherents frequently sing, about going to heaven, to the place where their Nabi has gone.³³⁷

The most striking impression one gets from the study of the liturgy and the hymns is the centrality given to God. Informants say that, initially, regular Anglican hymns were used, but were altered to fit in with the central theme of God. Thus he cancelled the name of Jesus and inserted Jehova. Such common Anglican hymns as:

³³⁶ H.H. Ocholla-Okoth, Religious development and division in the Nandiya Luo Church. Paper read at Historical Association of Kenya annual conference, 1976.

³³⁷ It seems like there is no Luo equivalent for the word Nabi which is Jewish in origin.

"Come to Jesus" and "The Great Physician now is near" are altered. For example, the first verse of the Great Physician now takes this form:-

The Lord Jehova is now near,
He has come to help us,
His voice thrills our hearts,
Oh, hear the voice of Jehova.³³⁸

The demand for the centrality of God is seen in Owalo's call where God declares His omnipresence, Omniscience and omnipotence. Owalo had the experience of being in both the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Although Catholics and Protestants are monotheistic, believing that there is only one God, they teach that there are three persons in the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Godhead are considered equal, existing together from and to all eternity. They possess the same divine nature, and are all united in thought, will and being. Owalo, however, saw no scriptural warranty for this, therefore, he considered it an error. He held that the Bible did not teach that Jesus was God but only conveyed the idea that Jesus was a religious leader, not an infallible divine being. He considered Jesus as a naturally inspired leader and one that brought salvation to the Jews.³³⁹ He ranked Jesus along with Moses, Muhammed and the rest of the prophets and this is evidenced in one of the Common Prayers:-

338

S.S.A. Oundo, Kitap wer mar Nomiya Luo Church, p. 22.

339

Kitap Lamo Mar Nomiya Luo Church, p. 22.

Yehova Nyasach Yesu,
Kendo Nyasach Musa,
Kendo Nyasach Elijah,
Kendo Nyasach Muhammedi,

Jehova Nyasach Mayahudi,
Kendo Nyasach Wa Arabu,
Kendo Nyasach Luo.

Lord God of Jesus,
And God of Moses,
And God of Elijah,
And God of Muhammed,

Lord God of the Jews,
And God of the Arabs,
And God of the Luo. 340

Although in the theology of the NLC the doctrine on Jesus is not very clearly developed if one reconstructs what Owalo taught or said about Jesus, one reaches certain conclusions. First, he saw Jesus as a perfect man, endowed with power to perform miracles to furnish evidence that God had sent him. Secondly, Owalo taught that Jesus died and rose from the dead and this became the source and means of Man's salvation from sin and hell.³⁴¹ Although to date adherents do not celebrate the Holy Communion, they observe Easter. Owalo's Christology developed from the experience he had in the third heaven where Jesus rebuked him, telling him that God alone was worthy of any worship. Jesus declared that both of them were equal as both were messengers of God, and encouraged Yohana Owalo that, on his return to earth, he should only preach the gospel of God, to the Luo people.³⁴² It is probably the fact that he

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 71 - 73

³⁴² The revised constitution May, 1973, p. 1.

associated with a unitarian (Alexander Morrison), that made him insist that, the Anglican Church (henceforth A.C.), especially, was wrong to worship 'three Gods', and forced him to leave it. The theology that left Jesus out was easily understood by the Luo. Missionaries had presented Jesus as God incarnate, the saviour of the world and the solution to all of Man's problems. Traditionally, the attributes of Jesus, particularly the incarnation, was out of the picture, making it rather difficult to grasp the relationship between Jesus and God. Owalo's explanation sounded acceptably simple to his adherents.

One should, however, not forget to mention the fact that Owalo recognised the superiority of Jesus. This is clearly indicated in the fact that when Owalo was leaving heaven, he was given the end of a cord to hold on earth, while Jesus held its other end in heaven. Thus adherents of Owalo have continued to celebrate the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Due to the position allotted to Jesus by the NLC, problems arise when an attempt is made to classify it. Is it a christian denomination or is it just a religion in its own right? Most churches are usually christocentric and this makes it difficult to classify a church that is not christocentric. Most informants could not explain clearly why they have continued to use the title 'church'. The conclusion reached here is that if the word 'church' is basically Christian then may be the adherents have not realised that 'church' is restricted to a religion that is Christocentric and hence the continued use of the word 'church'. Probably the present pressures caused by those who have been influenced by the East African Revival will now make the NLC to set out clearly its stand. If it is a church then the conclusion here is that it is a unique sort of church with unique sort of Christians.

Concerning the Holy Spirit Owalo said very little. In his

call, he saw the Spirit coming out of God's mouth in the form of smoke. In the church he taught that only a few men picked by God for some mission were filled with that Spirit.³⁴³ His silence over the issue of the Holy Spirit could, probably, date the movement, that is, it started before the start of spirit movements in Kenya.

Because of the confusion brought about by the idea of three persons in the Godhead, Owalo tried to come up with a clearly and easily understood view. He sought for what was central in the religious teaching of the time and he found the idea of God in the Luo religion, Islam and Christianity. This is why in the NLC doctrine God takes prominence.

Owalo, taught that God was omnipotent. This is seen in one of the hymnals he composed which is entitled 'Nyasaye Maduong' (God who is great).

God who is great x2
We have come to worship you;
Your might is great
And your might is great,
There is none like you.
All angels and prophets worship you
They all worship you.

All things visible and invisible,
were created by him,
'Heaven and earth let us cry to him
All these worship you. 344

In the liturgy there are also significant words which tell of the Greatness of God and are recited during every service. One example

343 Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church, p. 73

344 S.S. Oundo, Kitap wer, p. 1.

is:-

Leader: Nyasaye duong' (God is great).
Congregation: Nyasaye duong' (God is great).
Leader: Duong'ni duong' (Your might is great).
Congregation: Duong'ni duong' (Your might is great).³⁴⁵

This prayer is repeated six times and it refers to the greatness and might of the deity. There is one significant prayer which also refers to the greatness of God which is entitled the "the prayer of God".

Leader: Our Lord God who is in heaven,
Congregation: Our Lord God who is in heaven,
Leader: We kneel before you,
Congregation: repeats this
Leader: Because you are very great.
Congregation: repeats
Leader: No king on earth can be compared to you
because you are above them all.
Congregation: repeats
Leader: It is you who called us to yourself.³⁴⁶

In the last part of this prayer, God is also presented as the peoples King or refuge in heaven. The prayer continues as follows:-

Leader: Because of your love for us, you called us to
yourself.
Congregation: repeats
Leader: You bore us ,
Congregation: repeats
Leader: You care about us everyday,
Congregation: repeats
Leader: From your seat in heaven hear our prayer.
Congregation: repeats
Leader: According to the love of the father of Jesus
Christ,
Congregation: repeats. ³⁴⁷

345 Kitap Lamo Mar Nomiya, op. cit., pp. 26 - 27.

346 Ibid., p. 9.

347 Ibid.

Because he took keen interest in the people and had called them through Owalo, He could respond positively to their request. His greatness, therefore, was a source of security for the followers both here on earth and in heaven.

Owalo also presented God as Omniscient, in the fact that He is all knowing. He knew all things that occurred in the past, and all that was currently taking place and, all that was going to take place in the physical and moral order. For Him to know perfectly all things, Owalo described Him as one without a beginning or an end: He was not created and He would never die. He is described as knowledge of the knowledgeable, might of the mighty, life of the living, mercy of the merciful and Lord of Lords.³⁴⁸ God's omniscience is not put forward clearly in the prayer book and so most of the conclusions are inferred. In the catechism the question "who is God?" is answered as follows:-

God is the one with the ability to do all things,
He has no beginning; He always was, He is and will
always be. He is everywhere. He can do all things;
He knows and sees all things, even our most secret
thoughts. 349

Owalo, as can be viewed in the above quotation, presented God as omnipresent, in that through His power and operation He is everywhere. Owalo accorded all importance to God. This afforded the salvation for the Luo or the adherents. His main thoughts concerning God seem to have been derived from the Old Testament of the Bible, in spite of the fact that he also recognised the New Testament.

348 Ibid., pp. 22 - 23.

349 Ibid., p. 61.

b. Scripture

In the NLC constitution it is indicated that:-

The church shall receive all the canonical scriptures of Yohana Owalo as contained in Nomiya Luo Church Prayer book, Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith, given by the inspiration of God, and containing all things necessary for salvation. 350

It is soon after Owalo's death that adherents got access into Owalo's handwritten book, Upanga Mkali, and copied down the prayers and the story about Owalo's visit to heaven. These prayers were very significant to the adherents, so that they decided to publish the first prayer book in the 1940s, from these handwritten extracts. This first publications got out of print soon after. In 1959 another prayer book, with some new additions, went in print. This was the last prayer book printed but at the moment there are plans to get it in print again. When this new prayer book finally comes out it will be more elaborate than the previous ones, with particularly, a number of additions on the doctrine.³⁵¹

What is really basic and important in the prayer book is the order of the evening service, morning service, Sunday service, purification and baptismal services, marriage and funeral services. From observation, the basic hymns and prayers for any meeting are known by heart by all adherents. Much as each individual would like to own a copy of the prayer book, they rarely use the books

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The NLC Revised Constitution, May 1973, P. I.

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G.C. Owalo, Assistant Archbishop, is working on a draft of the proposed prayer book.

during any service since they know the contents by heart. Learning important things by heart is one important aspect of the NLC. According to the NLC members, the prayer book is scripture since it contains what was given to Owalo by the inspiration of God.

The Old and New Testaments are accepted and in this source of reference, justification is found for the NLC beliefs, and practices, whether these refer to angels, exorcism, miracles, polygamy and the levirate. Owalo himself, as early as 1908, owned a Holy Bible written in Kiswahili. By the time he started his movement he had read it through.³⁵² His understanding of the Bible seems to have been better than those of his contemporaries. From the beliefs and practices of the NLC one thinks that Owalo had the basis of his doctrine in the Old Testament. This view is also put forward by Erasto Muga when he says that, the movement has some Luo practices, backed up with equivalent Old Testament practices.³⁵³ Unlike this view, in the constitution of the Church it is stated that Owalo's doctrine is based on what he received directly from God.³⁵⁴ However, informants answered in the affirmative when they were asked whether some of their beliefs and practices have Luo equivalents. They recounted such instances as the practice of polygamy and the levirate.³⁵⁵ In spite of such equivalents, it is clear that there are a number of beliefs and practices that are not equivalent. It would, therefore, be a wrong assertion to insist that Owalo picked only the Luo equivalents of the Old Testament. The position held here is that the Luo

³⁵² Okanda, interview; Meshack Onyango, interview; Yona Oungo, interview; Nyakito, interview. They claim that Owalo helped in the translation of one of the gospels but they give conflicting information about the particulars of the gospel he translated.

³⁵³ Erasto Muga, op. cit., p. 148.

³⁵⁴ The revised constitution, May 1973.

³⁵⁵ All my informants answered this question in the affirmative.

traditional beliefs and the Old Testament were just some of his sources.

Despite the fact that Owalo seems to have grasped his sources very well, from observation, most of the adherents do not seem to have the same ability. During research, it was realised that no attempt was made by the adherents to obtain a balanced understanding of the Bible in its whole context. Texts were chosen to suit the particular occasion for which a literal interpretation of the relevant passage was adopted and, from what the Bible said there was no appeal. For example, in a sermon given during the circumcision ceremony of a baby boy, the scripture read as follows:- "And certain Men which came from Judea taught brethren and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved".³⁵⁶ This was subsequently backed up by other texts which had some support for the thesis being advanced,³⁵⁷ yet without realising that, that verse led to a discussion which concluded that gentiles needed not necessarily be circumcised.

In conclusion, the NLC prayer book, the Old and New Testaments are the scriptures of the NLC. The New Testament is rarely used; it is used only when the particular reference is made literally to the particular problem or situation in the church. It is because of their use of Christian scriptures that one can conclude that they are christians, otherwise it can be viewed as a religion in its own right. And because they refer to the movement as a church, they are christians with a unique sort of church.

³⁵⁶ The Bible, Acts of the Apostles 15:6. This quotation is a good example of misappropriation of biblical texts.

³⁵⁷ Meeting, Ralingo Asembo Kania, January 13, 1980.

(c) The Church

In the liturgy, the NLC is viewed as the only Luo religion, meant and ordained by God for the Luo and ranks only with Judaism and Islam. For any people to have a religion they must first find a prophet the like of Owalo, Mohammed and Jesus. The use of the word ^{Church} religion here sounds rather ironical, but the fact is that, although the movement has been called the NLC since 1956, the adherents do not refer to it as Kanisa (denomination) but as Dini (Religion). The adherents believe that, now, they rank with Jews and Arabs who also have their own prophets.

Since 1912 the church has been dominated by Luo people. When its influence reached North Mara in Tanzania, in 1929, a few Tanzanians accepted it, but they altered the name to suit them, and they also altered certain parts of the liturgy to make the movement suitable and acceptable. In Tanzania, the movement is called Nomiya African Church of Sabbath.³⁵⁸

The influence of the NLC has not penetrated the Luhya, Kisii and Kalenjin neighbours. On the Luhya - Luo borders, there are a few Luhya adherents. A Luhya adherent when interviewed said that most Luhya find it hard to accept the movement because they associate it with the pride of the Luo. They fear Luo domination. He said that at the beginning, they resisted a lot but at the moment there are converts among the Wanyore, Kisa and Maragoli. A new convert from Bunyore reckoned that they would feel more comfortable if the name of the movement was altered to fit in everybody.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Oyungu, interviews. He stayed in Tanzania from 1956 upto 1970 and was even made Bishop of the Church there.

³⁵⁹ Abiya, interview.

In fact, the movement, due to the name and certain others of its beliefs, has cut itself from the World Christianity and, as it has turned out, also from other independent churches in Kenya. It should not be forgotten, however, that in 1957, G.C. Owalo, then Bishop of the NLC called a meeting at which he proposed the formation of a council of Independent African Churches to be known as the Christian Evangelists Council of Kenya (C.E.C.K.) The meeting was attended by Bishop J. Ajuoga of the Church of Christ in Africa and Zakayo Kivuli of African Israel Nineveh Church. They decided that the formation of such a council would lead to better understanding, not only between the independent churches but also between the independents and the missionary started churches. A further meeting in July, 1958 was attended By G.C. Owalo, but Ajuoga failed to appear. Soon after, Ajuoga started his own ecumenical movement, The United Churches of Africa and Zakayo Kivuli started The Kenya Africa Independent Churches Fellowship.³⁶⁰ The NLC joined none of these, but it attempted to join the Christian Council of Kenya (C.C.K.) but in vain. The movement probably sought to join in or to form an ecumenical movement because, it is one of their basic aims to "seek for visible unity with other religious groups".³⁶¹ The consequences of isolation, one wants to say, can be disastrous not only for the content of the movement but also the enrichment of this content.

On the doctrine of Man the constitution has the following to say:

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F.B. Welbourn, B.A. Ogot, A place to feel at home, p. 107; G.C. Owalo, interview.

³⁶¹ The NLC Revised Constitution, May 1973, P. 2.

All men are of equal value and dignity in the sight of God and while careful to provide for the special needs of different people committed to its charge, it allows no discrimination in the membership and the Government of the Church based solely on the grounds of racial difference. 362

The NLC, however, teaches differently. The NLC is referred to frequently as "Dini Marwa Mar Luo ni"³⁶³ particularly in the songs and the sermons. There is one song where God is referred to as calling all Luo to come and worship him:

God loves, all Luo people,
all Luo people, all Luo people;
God loves, all Luo people,
all Luo people, all Luo people.

God is calling all Luo people,
He calls the Luo,
All Luo people who worship him
Come, let us kneel down before him.
When facing Kiblai. 364

It is evident that Owalo never thought of the movement's influencing anybody beyond the borders of the Luo people. He, probably, only sought a religion, acceptable to his people. The Luo people had problems peculiar to themselves. If every religion is started to answer such peculiar cultural problems, then Owalo also started the NLC, then Nomiya Luo Mission, for this purpose. If anything, it was his people's culture and problems that he knew most. And it

362 Ibid.

363 The direct translation which probably would not make any sense is "This religion of ours for the Luo" which said differently would be, This religion belonging to the Luo.

364 S.S.A. Oundo, Op. cit., pp. 26 and 67.

is the question in his mind and his people's minds that he sought to answer. It is expected, therefore, that although the NLC served a good purpose among the Luo, at that time, it has had problems serving a purpose among other people. The movement has received heavy resistance, usually, due to its name which shows that it is meant for the Luo. One adherent, Yona Oyungu, says that when he evangelised in the settled areas near Nairobi in the 1930s, he only won Luo converts, the rest refused to join a Luo venture.³⁶⁵ Most of the church leaders, who were interviewed, did not opt for a change in the name of the church. They argued that even the Anglican Church has had influence the world over while still retaining the English name. Between 1976 and 1979 the church experienced a crisis because one group of people felt that it was high time the church changed its name. This group was excommunicated in December, 1979 and the name remained unchanged.

(d) Factors that might bring change in the doctrine of the Church

When a message is received by people it straightaway undergoes some change, as the receivers try to understand it and probably experience it. Such change is usually not evident and one would find it difficult to ascertain it. The same thing is likely to have happened to the doctrine of the NLC. Certainly, the initial doctrine got diffused and a new one was obtained in an attempt by followers to understand what the founder had taught. Certain factors, particularly in the doctrine have been rather difficult to change. These form the core of the movement and

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Oyungu, interview; Abiya, interview.

an example is the central concept that of God. The factor that has contributed to the retention of the core is the existence of adherents who were taught by Owalo himself.³⁶⁶ These people are so conservative and their presence has made it hard to implement certain changes. In fact most adherents respect them even more than the church leaders. It is their resistance to any change that has also led to splits. The splinter groups have gone on their way to highlight factors, that the conservatives consider, contrary to what Owalo taught.

Take the case of Nomiya Luo Roho. Beginning from 1961 some of the NLC members had the experience of the Holy Spirit. They stressed the fact that Owalo taught that the Holy Spirit, could possess any one chosen by God and, therefore, they were the chosen ones. These people have the ability to heal, exorcise and prophesy. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit they are able to sing, jump and clap their hands very forcefully and uncontrallably. The issue at stake is, these members are itinerant, in that, one can just as easily move from this movement to the NLC. Their experience, would not desert them at all. In a normal NEC service, it is not uncommon to hear such sounds as "eeeh" from a person. Sometimes a person just slips into unconsciousness and has to be held by other people. Although, the change is not clear enough, one wants to say that change is taking place in people's attitudes or hearts. The people with this experience are welcomed even by the Pentecostal Churches around.

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Some of those who are still alive are:-
Elijah Okanda, Yona Oyungu, Yakobo Okech, Mathia Owade, Baranaba Adhing'a, Louise Otinda, Saphira Okanja, Meshack Onyango, and B. Oundo only died very recently.

On the fourteenth of January usually those who have had the experience of the Holy Spirit hold an all night meeting.³⁶⁷ In this meeting there are adherents of the NLC, Namiya Luo Roho, Namiya Church of Gospellers and Namiya Roho Sabbato. During the meetings candles are lit and each person is supposed to carry a burning candle. The Holy water is splashed on the people. Incense is burned throughout the night. The alter is well decorated and people sing and dance around it. During the meeting they exorcise, pray for the sick and those who need blessing. Exclamations such as "ee Jesus" and "God Jesus" are not uncommon. This is an indication that there is a drift back to some Catholic practices that Owalo abhored.

There is also the group of the "saved" that has been a strong force within the church since the early sixties. In 1976 the executive committee of the church sent a circular threatening them with excommunication. However, until 1980 no solution had been found by the church. In January, 1980 the saved group held a meeting at Powo in East Asembo in which they were joined in full force by members of the Anglican revival group. In practice these people put a lot of stress on the Lordship of Jesus. Once again this is indicative of the change taking place in peoples attitudes or minds. The group is growing rapidly and is beginning to discard some of the NLC practices. This movement can be of great service to the church as a whole while it remains effectively within the life of the church but it can be a serious menace if it tends to destroy the church's united witness and worship.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ The writer attended a meeting on January 14, 1980 held at Kambudi in Seme. 14th January is when Juma arrived in Asembo.

³⁶⁸ Sarah Dinga, interview; Rachel Okungu, interview, January 28, and 29, 1980. Eli Obilo, Uyoma Koki, February 24, 1980.

In spite of attempts at conservatism, it is evident that there have been changes for the better or the worst in the belief system of the church. In the prayer book written in 1959 several new prayers, other than those of the founder, are found. The new prayers, include prayers for the school children, planting and harvesting seasons and the periods of sadness and joy.

The conclusion here is that the doctrine as stated in the constitution and the liturgy may not show any vivid change, but the doctrine as it is implanted in the hearts and minds of people undergoes constant change especially as the individuals relate to other people. Whereas, one cannot predict what changes might take place within the NLC doctrine in future, one wants to say that, if change occurs then it is likely there are going to be very many splits in the church.

3. RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OF THE NLC

On becoming detached from everyday life, the religious life of the NLC has elaborated a system of activities and forms of expression proper to itself. Some of the activities have the object of rendering due homage to the deity and relating the faithful to Him; these are worship and sacramental acts. Others have the aim of helping adherents escape from evils that overwhelm them; through the activities and expressions they experience the divine. In different degrees one discovers God when he tries to make himself heard by God.

(a) Worship

In the life of any religious group worship plays a big role in the life of its members in that, through it, relationship with the divinity and other men is created. Worship, amongst the NLC members include three different services: the daily morning and evening prayers and the weekly Sabbath worship. There are usually other meetings and these will be discussed later in the

chapter.

When Owalo started teaching, people of a particular area met together in the morning before sun-rise and evening, before sunset to pray together. In the village, a bell was usually rung to indicate to the people that it was time for a meeting. As the movement grew people now resorted to small or group worship. At the moment the two services are simply family prayers. This is not to say that the practice has completely died because in places like Kisumu Manyatta it is continuing and in Asembo Kabondo (Ka Petro) the practice has survived.³⁶⁹ The service is short. A few songs are sung and then they offer prayers of confession and finalise with the prayer of dedication of the soul to God.

When Owalo started the movement, the weekly sabbath worship was celebrated on Saturdays. In our view he chose Saturday in order to distinguish the movement from others and affirm the character of the followers as a chosen people by drawing a parallel between themselves and the Jewish people. Due to the pressure from the Colonial Government, Owalo changed the day of worship to Sunday. To date the Sunday service is significant, First, it is the Sabbath rest; the day when God himself rested. Secondly, it is the only gathering where people meet to fellowship. It is sin to miss the Sabbath service for no good reason, because it is during this service that the faithful meet together and, as a community, turn their hearts and worship to God.

The weekly service is conducted by either a lay reader or the church teacher. Most of these are either middle aged men or elderly men with very little education. The service begins at nine o'clock in the morning, if people have arrived on time. Before discussing the nature of the different ceremonies the order of service is given below in outline form:-

- (i) Song: Great God, we have come to worship you.
- (ii) Prayer: (People kneel) The leader prays in his own words
- (iii) Song: (seated) Today is the Lord's sabbath.
- (iv) Prayer: The leader offers a reconciliatory prayer in his own words.
- (v) Song: He who is present everywhere, is God.
- (vi) Prayer: (Standing) prayer from the prayer book, of reminder about necessity of repentance
- (vii) Prayer: (Kneeling) (a) The prayer of God.
(b) Prayer of the omnipresent God.
(c) The prayer of penitence.
(d) The Lord's prayer.
(e) The Gloria.
- (viii) Song: (Standing) All ye people who dwell on earth.
- (ix) Exhortation: Bible passages, connected with what should be done to sin, are read.
- (x) Everybody joins in the prayer of penitence.
- (xi) Song: God has commanded that he is one.
- (xii) The ten commandments are read by one person from the congregation.
- (xiii) All who are baptised stand to say together, The Apostles Creed.
- (xiv) Song: Glory be to the Father.
- (xv) Prayer: (Kneeling) The Litany.
- (xvi) Prayers: offered in the leaders own words.
- (xvii) The Reading from the Bible (sitting).
- (xviii) Song: The Great God has drawn near.
- (xix) Prayer: (Kneeling) The prayer to Jehova.
Prayer in the leader's own words.
- (xx) Song: Any song.
- (xxi) SERMON ;
- (xxii) Offertory hymn: God gave the ten commandments.

- (xxiii) Songs: (Standing) 'Come let us sing to him' and
'Glory be to him' and 'Glory be to the father.'
- (xxiv) Final prayer offered by two or three people including
the leader. (People are dismissed).³⁷⁰

Apart from the sermon, the Bible readings and a few other prayers, everything in this outline is fixed. It is due to this, that the adherents know every prayer and every song by heart. The weekly sabbath worship is by nature an act in common. It brings together the local members of the chosen people to pray to God who has revealed a way of salvation to them. To attain the fullness of religious experience, it is necessary to share in the communal activities. It provides rest from the tensions and daily cares of the week. The service normally begins about ten o'clock in the morning and ends at about noon.

Along with worship goes the religious expression and experience of the people. Usually, expression comes first before experience. One form of religious expression, in the NLC, is prayer. Vocal prayer recited or sung is practiced. Prayer is exclusively addressed to God. Any item can be committed to Him; there are prayers for the church leadership, the Government and the Africans who were long neglected by other races. Prayer generally constitutes an important element in worship. Individuals pray in the morning, evening and any other time and if the Pastor is near he leads in prayers. The communal prayers fall on Sunday or during the special yearly festivals. Prayer is done in several positions, while kneeling, standing, or sitting, whichever suits the person praying.

370. Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church, Op. cit., pp. 7 - 27.

Another form or expression already noted is music. Singing is specifically communal and especially appreciated by women. Women lead in solos quite often. The repertoire of the church is composed, in part, of hymns of Missionary origin, with melody, rhythm and words adopted from western hymns; the words are often altered, especially where a particular work does not fit in with their belief system. But it also has a rich stock of songs based on traditional rhythms and melodies to which words of biblical inspiration have been adopted. There are also some whose tunes sound Islamic in origin, for example, the tune in which Nyakalaga en Nyasaye* is sung.³⁷¹

During Mony (all night meeting) and other ceremonies, other than the Sunday Sabbath, they sing songs borrowed from other Independent African Churches, which have a fast and strongly accented rhythm accompanied by drumbeats and jingle bells. The doctrinal content of such songs is never considered. The songs are usually composed of a phrase repeated with some variations and dialogue between the soloist and the congregation. There are two good examples of these songs given below:-

1. Solo: Ting'a Malo Ting'a malo Yesu;
Congregation: Rahiri gach polo ting'a malo.
Solo: Lift me up, lift me up, Jesus;
Congregation: The huge train of heaven lift me up.

2. Solo: Okumbana, Yesu Okumbana in
Congregation: Okumbana, Yesu, Okumbana in
Solo: My shield is Jesus, He is my shield
Congregation: My shield is Jesus, He is my shield.

³⁷¹Nyakalaga en Nyasaye:- The omnipresent God,

S. S. Oundo Op. cit. p. 2. The conclusion was reached after discussion with James Nyada, who has lived for several years with moslems in Sultan Hamud and Mombasa. For an example of western hymns see p. 131 and 132.

These tunes, from other independent churches, have been trickling in due to the people, who have received the Holy Spirit, or are 'saved'. As they have associated closely with those from other churches, who have the same experience as them, they have borrowed their songs without bothering to change certain words that conflict with their doctrine. These songs are referred to as Suda songs and are not included in the NLC song book.³⁷²

Other songs are original and were composed by the founder and the faithful. Most of these songs are addressed to the deity. God is praised and thanked in the songs for providing a way of salvation to the Luo. One person who has composed quite a number of songs is Yona Oyungu (Ramogi) who claims that he got most of the songs through dreams. The songs are divided in such a way that, each is sung according to the particular occasion it best fits in with. For example, there are specific songs sung during baptism, a funeral service, a circumcision ceremony or a purification service and one would not hear a song meant for one occasion sung during another occasion. Of course, there are also songs which can be sung at any time.

Singing has some psychological satisfaction which it gives the people; it helps them to get freedom from the tensions of daily life. Singing is also connected with processions which are not all that frequent. This takes place mainly during a funeral ceremony, when the faithful walk around the home singing and praying over the coffin which they carry along or during a baptismal ceremony when people march to the river from church. Singing gives people the marching pace. Usually, during any singing session when the music touches a person he stands to dance.

One is allowed to dance while remaining in his place, keeping time to the rhythm of the singing with his body.

Religious expression, whether it be prayer, or music, serves as an aid to communication with Jehova God. It also serves to establish a sense or state of unity within the church. It is on their unity as a religious movement that the experience of eternal life and salvation depends. When a church fails to offer to the faithful forms of expression that are valued and satisfying to them, the church is a failure.

(b) Sacraments

Sacraments in this section will stand for the solemn religious ceremonies in the NLC which are believed to be accompanied by great spiritual benefits. This section is going to be discussed under the following headings: baptism, confession, ordination and marriage.

Baptism is a sacrament which stands as a sign of salvation and conversion and it is the most significant sacrament in the NLC. It introduces a person into the spiritual community. In the catechism baptism is described as the sacrament which cleanses one from the original sin and the sins committed by a person until his conversion. After baptism one becomes a christian, a child of God, and a member of the universal church. At baptism one denounces, publicly, the devil and all his ways and makes a covenant with God to be a follower of Christ until death.³⁷³

↑ not usual?

At baptism one is assured of getting into heaven because the relationship is now made right. The newly baptised person is warned against committing any sin again, particularly, the seven

deadly sins: pride, coveteousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. The above section is exactly like that of the Catholic catechism and it is likely that the founder borrowed this from there.³⁷⁴

Before baptism one goes under very serious teaching. One is taught that after death there are only two places to go to; heaven and hell. Whether one is going to hell or heaven is determined by the life he lives on earth. There is no such place as purgatory where one can make amends. There is also teaching against the Catholic practice of the Holy Mass. The Holy Mass is an unacceptable sacrifice to God. There is thorough teaching on the life and teaching of John the Baptist. Explanation is also given with regard to the relationship between Mary and God and that of Jesus and God. There is a stress on the fact that Jesus was but a son of God and not God, so he should not be regarded as such.³⁷⁵ The life history of the Hebrew people is also taught, particularly, how God made them a chosen people through Abraham.³⁷⁶ This, of course, parallels the belief that the NLC members are also a chosen people.

The greatest sin which can be committed against God, is, the worship of idols or deification of any mortal being like Mary and Jesus. If any person is a messenger, he should get his due respect as a messenger. In like manner Jesus should get his due

374 Ibid.

375 Ibid., pp. 71 - 73.

376 Ibid., p. 73.

respect as a messenger and not as God. The catechism is concluded in the following words;

God is only one,
He does not have a brother,
a father,
a mother or
a creator.
But he alone is the great God above all gods,
He has always been, will always be. I want to
plead with Him, love, praise, honour and work for him, Amen.³⁷⁷

The NLC baptism is done by immersion but only in the name of the Father, since the divinity of Jesus is not recognised. The act is preceded by public confession and renunciation of sins. They promise that, henceforth, they will not engage in silly conversation and lies but instead will use the time to work for God; helping the widows and the fatherless. They have to promise that they will give up the devil and all his ways.³⁷⁸ This has an equivalent in the Anglican prayer book.³⁷⁹

During research several baptismal ceremonies were witnessed and the photographs are included in the appendix. The ceremony was done in the River Odundu, near Oboch. Baptism was done by immersion; songs, prayers and sermons followed one another for nearly one hour. The catechumens were plunged in as the faithful sung. Coming out they sought for private places to change their wet clothing. When all were baptised songs were sung as, the procession marched back to the church for final prayer and the giving out of certificates to the baptised.

377 Ibid., p. 75.

378 Ibid., pp. 76 - 77.

379. Kitap Lamo (Book of Common Prayer with additional services and prayers in Dholuo, C.P.K. (Revised Ed.), 1968) (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1976) p. 93.

Due to the fact that baptism is a condition for salvation, the catechumens are required to sincerely confess their sins and renounce evil. The criterion for salvation becomes, after baptism, the respect shown to the principles of the church as they are taught by the group. Whoever makes himself part of it and conforms to its practices is automatically entitled to eternal life. During baptism one may get a new name which must be of biblical origin.

Another significant sacrament is that of confession. Individual confession of sins takes place only once, just before baptism. While the Assembly sings at the time of the weekly sabbath worship a new person can stand and publicly avow his sins. Subsequently, individual public confessions are unnecessary. Confession of general sin by the whole community of the local believers are numerous. In fact, such prayers form the bulk of prayers read from the prayer book, during the weekly sabbath meeting. People are reminded right at the start of the service that it is only a broken and contrite heart that is an acceptable sacrifice to God³⁸⁰ and they are, therefore told to:-

 Rend your hearts and not your clothing.
 Return to the Lord your God, for He is steadfast
 in love and mercy and is slow to anger. He
 hates evil but if any one turns away from his
 wickedness and does good He grants him
 eternal life.³⁸¹

A very significant aspect of the confession is the belief that when Adam and Eve sinned they repented and were forgiven. The followers are also given the same opportunity as Adam and Eve. During the weekly sabbath worship they are reminded that

³⁸⁰ Kitap Lamo Mar Nomiya Luo Church op. cit. mp 3.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

they are not worthy to even appear before God because of their sin against Him, the angels and the saints. If any one in the congregation realises his sin, it suffices for him to confess it sincerely, and to turn away from it completely. Sin leads to eternal hell fire.³⁸² Normally the leader of the service leads in all the prayers of penance but just before the sermon the whole congregation joins in the prayer:

Our heavenly father, we have erred and strayed from your way like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy law. We have left undone those things we ought to have done and we have done those which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. Oh, Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare those who are penitent according to your promises declared to use in Jesus Christ, our saviour. And grant most merciful Father: for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of your holy name. Amen. 383

To affirm their belief, they recite the Apostles Creed soon after this and as noted earlier they change the word Lord in the creed to saviour. Upto this stage, what is in the prayer book is equivalent to the Anglican one almost word for word.³⁸⁴

Ordination is another significant sacrament. For anybody to have spiritual authority in the church he has to be ordained. The first ordination was performed by Owalo himself. In 1917 when he baptised and circumcised Petro Ouma, Ibrahim Odiyo, Samuel Ogombo, Nuhu Bala and Musa Wera, he gave them authority to baptise and lead the church. The ordination ceremony was very simple. After the service, he took the

382 Ibid., pp. 8 - 14

383 Ibid., p. 14.

384 Kitap Lamo (C.P.K.), op. cit., pp. 1 - 3.

ordinands to the river where they helped baptise some new converts. They, however, never baptised anybody again until after Owalo's death. The leadership they were ordained to was not specified.³⁸⁵

After Owalo's death, the Bishops never had any special ordination. Once a person was unanimously accepted, he just assumed the office. Ordination ceremony was not possible because serious rivalry existed so that if any one was ordained, the other group did not recognise his ordination as valid.³⁸⁶

The idea of elaborate ordination has developed since 1970, when the highest title in the hierarchy of the church began to be referred as the "archbishop". In 1974, people with the following ranks were ordained: archbishop, bishop, archdeacons, ruraldeans, pastors, layreaders and teachers. Since then it is the practice that, it is the ordination that validates the position held in the church hierarchy.³⁸⁷

At ordination, the leader is provided with colourful robes of office. Each position has its different colour of robes. Each teacher is provided with the plastic collars. Ordination ceremony is held mainly during the religious festivals, of either January eleventh or March first, for spiritual reasons and for consideration of hierarchical control. *Women, however, are never ordained, because they are barred from active participation as preachers, pastors or layreaders. They play such roles as, leading in songs during meetings or cleaning the place of meeting. More on ordination will be discussed under policy and organisation.

³⁸⁵ Otinda, interview; Okanja, interview; Okanda, interview; Oyungu, interview; Abiya, interview.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Special circular/73, to all the NLC members, from the Administrative Secretary, October 1, 1973.

Yohana Owalo christianised the customary marriage and integrated it into the religious and social life of the people. His attitude towards polygamy enabled polygamists and junior wives to join the church without being thought of as living in sin by the rest of the members. He recognised the social significance of this type of marriage to the Luo people and, therefore, if anybody wanted to marry, he advised him to negotiate with the parents of the girl and to pay the whole dowry according to the traditional system.³⁸⁸

At first Owalo thought that after the payment of dowry, then the marriages would be registered by the District Commissioner. Owalo then took the following men with their wives to Kisumu: Musa Wera, Elisha Guer, Nuhu Bala, Yakobo Okech, Enoka Othoro, Luka Siwalo, Zakayo Obinda and Ibrahim Odiyo; to get their marriages registered. He met Jairo Owino, the District Commissioner's interpreter, who explained to him that only one wife could be registered, so that, in case of divorce, the courts would know how to deal with it. Owalo insisted that his limit could not go below four wives, so no marriage was registered.³⁸⁹ He had to work out his own system of marrying people. Henceforth, when dowry was paid, the faithful gathered in the home of the man, then they would go and collect the girl. The marriage was not consummated the first day; the man spent the evening with Owalo who prayed together with him.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Gondi, interview; Ojuok, interview; Nyakito, interview; Okanda, interview.

³⁸⁹ Oyungu, interview; Otinda, interview; Otinda claims that her husband Ibrahim Odiyo took her along on this particular occasion. This was probably in 1917.

³⁹⁰ Informants claim that, it is a breach of this marriage regulation that caused the difference between Owalo and Musa Wera. Wera broke this regulation.

At the moment, however, all wishing to marry notify the church leader in the area prior to the engagement, at least three months, so that it can be announced at the bride's and groom's home church, if this is the first wife.³⁹¹ Usually the bride and groom go to the District Commissioner's office to get the marriage registered. After, this they go to the church for the church ceremony and the reception. If the marriage is to a second or third wife, it is announced in the churches. After the dowry is fully paid, the faithful will gather at the man's home and then go for the woman. When the woman arrives there is prayer and a small party for the two. It is a rule in the church that all church leaders may marry at most four wives or less. Those not aspiring for any position of leadership may marry as many wives as they are able to keep peacefully.

While Catholics believe in the seven sacraments ordained by Christ as channels through which the individual received sanctifying grace, Owalo only saw the above mentioned four as significant. Of these four he recognised two as most important, that of baptism and penance because they cleanse the sinner from the original sin and bring reconciliation between the sinful man and God.³⁹²

(c) Some observances and practices

(i) Exorcism

One of the reproaches made by the Luo to Missionary churches was that they paid no attention to the phenomenon of spirit possession. Possession, in itself did not seem to be bad, for

391 The NLC Revised Constitution, May 1973, P. 29.

392 Kitap Lam mar Nomiya Luo Church, pp. 68 - 70.

traditionally it was viewed as source of appreciated gifts, the gifts of prophecy and of tongues, and the power of controlling the spirits of nature. However, uncontrolled, it was dangerous as then, the spirits acted with violence and incoherence in the bodies of their hosts, doing harm to them and those around them. There were experts capable of disciplining them, with the help of a generally long and costly treatment; the patient then gained control over the spirits.³⁹³ Owalo, like the Missionaries, rejected this as belonging to the category of demons. His dreams, intuitions, and gifts of prophecy seemed to be a replacement of this. He made possible the direct communication and inspiration with the spiritual world to all instead of, as in the traditional society, being reserved to a specialist. He introduced exorcism as an important aspect of the warfare against evil.

Before any exorcism was done, the person possessed had to give his consent. After this, any objects consecrated to the spirits or having any magical significance were gathered up and burned up before an assembled group. Prayer was offered and the patient went into convulsions. Owalo used the Bible and "Upanga Mkali" as the source of power. As the patient grew calmer, he placed the two books on his head and bade the spirit to go out. Usually, this took place at the house of the patient or the church at Oboch. The exorcism, usually, took place at night under a full moon with the whole community of new converts, in the particular area, gathered around Owalo and the patient, all dressed in the new white robes.³⁹⁴ The exorcism ceremony has

³⁹³ M.F. Parrin Jassy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 26 - 27; M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, pp. 9 - 12.

³⁹⁴ Oyungu, interview; Okanda, interview; Okech, interview.

become even more elaborate at the moment.

At present, the exorcism ceremony begins with singing, first at a slow rhythm then at a fast rhythm with hand clapping. The men sit on chairs placed in a row facing women seated on the ground with the children, young boys and girls. Usually over two hundred adults gather for this ceremony. People sing by a movement of their heads and shoulders forward, to the right, backward and again forward. Some get up and begin to dance with their eyes closed and arms extended in a gesture of supplication. The singing goes on for about twenty minutes without slackening. In a calm voice, the Bishop invites the leaders to arrange themselves around the patient (often a woman) who is to be exorcised. The patient kneels on the ground. A hymn is sung with a very slow rhythm in an atmosphere overheated by a dialogue between the Bishop and the spirits. The patient hiccoughs and begins to wail and tremble. The Bishop leans over her and touches her shoulders with the Bible, song book and prayer book. The patient writhes violently, sobs and screams and the spirit is rebuked and ordered out. The singing by the congregation continues. It goes on for over half an hour while the patient is waited for to calm down. When the patient finally stops there is a lot of singing in which she also joins happily. The patient is warned by the Bishop not to touch anything magical. Her hair is cut and she is made to eat the foods that the spirit had forbidden her.³⁹⁵

Owalo, also forbade his followers, who were not possessed or who had been exorcised, from meddling in magic and sorcery. He saw this as evil and the followers were told to have nothing to do with the manipulation of supernatural forces by traditional

³⁹⁵ Meetings, attended at Konge in Asembo East, and Ralingo in Asembo West on December 9, 1979 and January 28, 1980 respectively. Exorcism of two different people was witnessed. The hair of the exorcised is cut as a sign of cleansing. She eats the foods to show her deliverance from the restrictions of the spirit.

methods. Informants recounted people (followers) who got involved with magic and who, consequently, ended badly.³⁹⁶ If an adherent was, himself, dominated of the spirit of sorcery or magic he could have himself delivered. Exorcism is a practice that has survived inspite of the internal feuds in the church. Some informants said that, it was, probably, due to the fact that Moslems involved in magic and sorcery, that Owalo left them.

(ii) Laws and Prohibitions

Owalo proposed to his converts a way of salvation, with rules, prohibitions and means of action, which assured them of protection from and victory over evil in this world and a place among the chosen at the last judgement. The rules and prohibitions stood as forms of protection and struggle against evil.

Owalo adopted food taboos for his followers, based on the prohibitions found in the book of Leviticus. The food taboos also have equivalents in the Quran, thus making it difficult to assert whether they were borrowed from the Bible or the Quran. Since Owalo had the experience of being in the two religious groups, it is likely that he found the taboos in both of them and because they were commanded by the central personality (God), he adopted them. The adherents were forbidden from eating such foods as: fish without scales, pigs, and animals that had died of old age, illness or animals that were strangled.

They were also forbidden from smoking or chewing tobacco, drinking alcohol, dancing and involving in all traditional religious and medicinal practices, whatsoever. Tobacco was apparently viewed as having hallucinatory properties. Likewise, beer was seen as

³⁹⁶ Informants, related to me the kind of lives Musa Wera and James Ojuok led. These people are known to have been involved with a magician in Alego soon after Owalo's death. Musa Wera was not an adherent at the time of his death and James Ojuok is a drunkard at the moment.

destructive to health and well being of families. Dancing was connected with the evening parties at which sexual prohibitions were transgressed.³⁹⁷ The old men, however, complained against prohibitions on drinking. It was the tradition of the Luo that when dowry negotiations were taking place, beer had to be served to the son-in-law to be and his group. The old men could not conceive of any other form of entertainment if beer was left out. Owalo recognised the fact that, if he imposed this, he would lose followers all together, so he allowed the elders to drink a little during such occasions. However, he prohibited those that he appointed to be leaders of the movement from any involvement with beer.³⁹⁸

Still other prohibitions were introduced. He taught that the faithful were to remove shoes before entering the place of worship as a sign of humility. Once again, the practice seems to have stemmed from both the Quran and the Old Testament of the Bible. Most informants claimed that, Owalo borrowed the idea from Islam. The origin of the practice remains uncertain because, still other informants claim that, Owalo was only applying a biblical principle obtained from the Old Testament. However, it is likely that, while Owalo was aware of the two Bible verses on the removal of shoes, it is his experience among the muslims that led to his adoption of the practice. The practice has continued to date and is strictly stated in the constitution.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ All informants, mentioned this. It is also mentioned in the Revised Constitution of 1973, p. 4.

³⁹⁸ Nyakito, interview; Oyungu, interview; Okech, interview; Okanda, interview; Osure, interview; G.C. Owalo, interview.

³⁹⁹ Revised Constitution 1973, p. 28. This was also witnessed during research. Every meeting which was attended everybody had to remove shoes, and in case one forgot, he was reminded to do so. The Bible references are:- Exodus 3⁵ and Joshua 5¹⁵.

In the constitution it is written:-

at all times when offering supplications or prayers to Jehova God, or when conducting any services, it will and must be strictly observed that the congregation faces the Holy land Middle East - better known to members of the church as "KIBLA". All dead shall also be buried with their heads facing Kibla... 400

"KIBLA" is probably derived from the Islamic word Ka'ba or Quibla (Mecca - Kiblai in Kiswahili). Most informants did not know the origin or root of the word and insisted that it was given to Owalo in the third heaven. As said in the constitution, all churches are built facing Kibla, any meeting held even if it is in the open air, people must ascertain that they are facing Kibla, and all dead adherents must be buried with their heads facing Kibla. The use of the word Kibla leads to the conclusion that Owalo borrowed it from Islam, and, in any case, it is the Muslims who are very strict concerning the direction to be faced during prayer. Owalo also started building a brick church facing Kibla but he died before finishing and, henceforth, followers have also built churches which face the same direction.⁴⁰¹

Owalo also realised that the distinction between sinners and the elect included clothes. Men were to wear white robes and white caps on their heads. Women wore white dresses only and, beginning from 1947, headscarfs were introduced for the women. The dresses have continued to be viewed by adherents as a sign of purity. Some informants said that Owalo borrowed this practice from Islam but that he altered a few things. Whereas Muslim women dress in black during services, Owalo introduced white dresses for

⁴⁰⁰ Revised Constitution 1973, p. 4; S.S. A. Oundo, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴⁰¹ Oyungu, interview; Okech, interview; Okanja, interview, Okanda, interview; S. Abul A'la Maududi, Fundamentals of Islam (Worship in Islam) part 2, Nairobi: Islamic Foundation, 1978) p. 5.

the women. This distinctive dress and food prohibitions gave the adherents a feeling that by doing what others did not do they belonged to a superior group. Yearly, there is a dress competition among the NLC churches and the church group with the best made, well fitting white dress wins prizes and that becomes the recommended pattern for all NLC women's dresses during the year.⁴⁰²

Owalo adopted circumcision rite as essential to full membership of the church. The Luo do not circumcise their males and, therefore, this aspect of his teaching met with some opposition. The elders felt that, this was a tradition of their arch-enemies the Kalenjin or "Lango". He was very cautious about introducing this practice, such that, the first circumcisions took place in 1917 after some of his adherents demanded to know why they could not be allowed to participate in some duties of the church. The first adherents to be circumcised were Petro Ouma, Nuhu Bala, and Samuel Ogombo. Owalo did not circumcise them. They circumcised each other; Owalo only gave them instructions on how to do it. Before his death, the second lot to be circumcised, this time, by Samuel Ogombo were: Elijah Ongong'a, Jairo Ondoro, Luka Siwalo, Simeon Ayoki and Yona Oyungu. After his death, many people came forward to be circumcised because, without circumcision, one could not become a church leader.⁴⁰³ This is a practice that adherents are very proud of, in that, it is unique and, therefore, sets them apart.

402 Revised Constitution 1973, p. 29; White is the common dress. In any meeting those in white sit in front; those in other colours sit at the back.

403 All informants talked about circumcision. It is significant, particularly if one wants to aspire for leadership. And even if not just for this, it is shameful for a male adherent not to be circumcised. For more information on circumcision see quotation in page 66 and discussion in page 70.

Owalo possibly borrowed the practice from Islam, first, because this is where he was circumcised and secondly, because of the use of the Islamic word "Sharrif" for the person who performs the operation. Some of his adherents insist that, Owalo found the instruction in the Bible, still others insist that, he got the instruction to circumcise from heaven. Those who insist on a biblical basis, base their argument on the instructions given to Moses and Abraham. The others base their arguments on the call, where Owalo is instructed by God to carry up a sharp sword and circumcise all the boys. Circumcision is one factor that was and continues to be a drawback in the development of the church. People of Alego and Ugenya literally refused the movement because of circumcision. There were a few converts in Alego Kadenge, Nyajuok and Uradi but they backsided when they were told about circumcision.⁴⁰⁴

Circumcision as introduced by Owalo, was not very elaborate. When a person was circumcised, he healed in the small houses built at Oboch for this purpose. After healing there was no ceremony. However, one wants to say that circumcision is one aspect of the NLC that has undergone change. In 1953, the circumcision of children was started and at present most of the middle aged adherents (men) claim that they were circumcised eight days after birth. The adherents based this new introduction on the book of Leviticus in the Bible. All newly born baby boys were confined in a place that was convenient for the parents and the leader of the church. After the eighth day the child was circumcised. On this occasion a woman who is over 45 years of age, the pastor and the sharrif did the work. They underwent ritual cleansing before they performed the operation. After the operation the baby boy was kept indoors for

another twenty five days. Since the girls are not circumcised, the baby girl was kept indoors for sixty six days. On the fourteenth day, during this period, the baby girl was baptised. This period is called purification period. During this period the mother, being unclean, was not expected to touch the Bible, the prayer book and the church dress. During this period the mother and child were taken care of by another woman who had reached menopause. The unclean woman's husband was not to share the same bed with her, touch the child, and have sex with any other woman. At the end of this period, some guests were invited to stay overnight in the home of the mother of the child. Very early the following morning, a hen was sacrificed and roasted and then eaten by all who had participated in the all night meeting. This sacrifice is considered, by the NLC, as the communion rite, the sacrificial meal. That very morning the mother and child went to church for prayers and blessing by the pastor.⁴⁰⁵

In 1947 one Absalom Okech and Charles Oyieyo of Kasagam were circumcised. Since they were rich men they felt that they needed to mark the occasion with celebrations. They invited several friends who came over to share in their joy. People all over copied this, thus celebrations after healing became very elaborate. In 1950 especially when the first Luo translation of the Old Testament was published the NLC adherents read about the ceremonies that accompanied circumcision and to date the practice is given a biblical basis.⁴⁰⁶

During research, several such celebrations were witnessed and a short description of one is given below. The Sunday service

⁴⁰⁵ Oyungu, interview; Sara Ding'a, interview; Rosbella Koga, interview; Rahel Okungu, interview.

⁴⁰⁶ Oyungu, interviews; Eli Obilo, interview.

was held in the home where purification was to be done. The service went normally, except that the Bible readings were specifically chose to fit the occasion. Seven different passages were read by seven people. Three people were given the opportunity to preach the sermon. The three sermons were wholly based on circumcision. After the sermons, the final prayer was offered for the mother and child who were seated before the pastor. The meeting then took a different turn, singing went on, but this time accompanied by drums and jingle bells. The mother and child were given gifts. After this, all who attended the meeting ate together; a lot of food was prepared on this occasion. The occasion is referred to as Sawo⁴⁰⁷ (communion).

To conclude, one wants to say that, Owalo held out a way of salvation, to his followers that was clear and simple. The followers became the elect by recognising and abiding by what he taught. In other words, therefore, the elect recognised each other by their customs and costumes. The purity of the group was preserved by the observation of the commandments of the group. A person's relationship with God was also boosted if the prohibitions were followed, for God created Man; "to know him, to love him and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in heaven."⁴⁰⁸ The person of Owalo certainly played an important part in the piety of the faithful and the application of his teaching.

4. POLITY AND ORGANISATION

(a) Overview

A study of the doctrine, observance and practice of the

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Meeting, Ralingo in Asembo Kikia, January 13, 1980.

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Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church, p. 68.

NLC has demonstrated to us the importance of the role played by the group in which it was formed. Now, therefore, before coming to the end of this section, a description of the framework in which it developed and which gave it meaning is in order.

In some literature dealing with independent churches, the importance of leadership is stressed. The churches are seen as allowing outlets for expression of leadership qualities and as a corollary, are faced with a high incidence of leadership disputes.⁴⁰⁹ In this section we look at the NLC's leadership and organisation in some details.

The NLC has developed its form of leadership with time. It has changed the structure until the present form is almost typically Anglican. When Owalo started the movement, he established what seems as a paramount chief type of leadership, in that his leadership went beyond the clan boundaries; he had followers all over Nyanza Province. Occasionally, among the Luo, a leader was recognised by many people if he had charisma. This leader appeared either as a prophet - diviner or a warrior with great powers. With the establishment of the NLC, Owalo was mingling the Luo leadership pattern and the Christian leadership pattern. The Church became his ethnic group or tribe, in fact he insisted that, true Luos could only be his followers. He started off something that has been in practice to date. Leaders of the church have been selected from any clan in Nyanza, although, as noted earlier, this also has been a source of contention in the church.

⁴⁰⁹ Martin West, Bishops and Prophets in black city (Claremont: David Philip publisher, 1975), pp. 49 and 74 - 75.

The first major crisis experienced by an independent church is, usually, likely to occur with the death of the founder and the subsequent appointment of the successor. Owalo did not designate his successor during his life time. He had no son to inherit the leadership. Although he had followers who were capable of leadership, particularly after being with him, he never picked on any as the overall leader at his death. After his death the following followers vied, with one another, for the position of leadership; Petro Ouma, Musa Wera and Yakobo Okech. Most converts, especially those who did not belong to the Kochieng' clan, picked on Petro Ouma to take over leadership. Henceforth, the title Bishop is used for the leader. He had both spiritual control and administrative control over the people. He was regarded with high honour, for most people believed that after Owalo's death the cord which he had been given to hold on earth was now held by the successor.⁴¹⁰

Petro Ouma took over the leadership of the church without any special ordination. He did not stay as the overall leader for long, because soon there were other claimants for the position. Musa Wera and Yakobo Okech, with their group of supporters mainly from the Kochieng' clan, chased Petro from Oboch. Meanwhile, Petro and his supporters went to his home in Ujwang'a and he operated as their bishop from there. A split had occurred due to leadership.⁴¹¹

In 1933, Petro introduced new positions in the leadership structure, that is, secretary, treasurer and archdeacon. He appointed Meshack Onyango to hold all these posts. Problems continued in the NLC because various people began to be referred to

⁴¹⁰ The incident is already related in greater detail in Chapter Four.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

as Bishop; some adherents began to see the necessity of unity. They called a meeting that unanimously recognised Petro as leader. Yona Oyungu was then appointed archdeacon and three other leaders (Pastors) were appointed to represent, Semu, Asembo, and Nyakach in 1938. Between 1938 and 1945 there was relative peace. In 1945, however, new problems arose and Yona Oyungu became Bishop over a group of people called Nyithind Kiye (orphans). The group rebuilt Oboch. In 1953, due to pressure from the colonial government, Yona Oyungu had to quit the position and Petro Ouma was once again recognised as the overall bishop of the NLC. In November, 1954, Petro Ouma died and G.C. Owalo took over as Bishop.⁴¹²

G.C. Owalo, while writing the first constitution of the church, included the following on leadership:- "The direct descendant of the spiritual leadership will normally succeed to the spiritual leadership of the church when at the majority age of thirty or more years."⁴¹³ This has not worked, because G.C. Owalo himself was born as a result of levirate marriage. After Owalo's death, his wife, Elizabeth Alila was remarried by his brother Methuselah Nyunja with whom she bore G.C. Owalo.⁴¹⁴

During G.C. Owalo's leadership, the area of Jurisdiction was divided into two pastorates, managed by two pastors. The first pastorate included central and North Nyanza. The second included

412 Ibid.

413 The Nomiya Luo Church Constitution, 1956, (prepared by G.C. Owalo), p. 7.

414 G.C. Owalo, interviews.

South Nyanza, Kericho and North Mara District of Tanganyika. The leadership now included two pastors, locational teachers, preachers and layreaders.

The Bishop, the overall head, had the duties of: managing church affairs and ensuring that the laws of the church were obeyed. He was to preside over all meetings of the church synod and to officiate during their yearly festivals of January 11 and March 1.

The archdeacon was to assist the bishop in every way and to act for him whenever required. In the absence of the bishop, he assumed the powers and discharged the duties of the bishop.

The chief pastor, who was the direct representative of the bishop, had under him locational priests and layreaders who were directly responsible for the small communities. The priests and layreaders were responsible for informing the pastor and the bishop of any matter that could disturb the peace of the church. They led in the Sunday Sabbath service and other services and also officiated in marriage and funeral ceremonies.

Lay posts like those of the general secretary, and treasurer were also introduced. The general secretary was responsible for all church correspondence, and the administration of the church. The treasurer was responsible for all the church money, for keeping all the books and accounts correctly. He also kept the church committee informed of the revenue and expenditure.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ The NLG Constitution 1956, p. 10-13.

This was the pattern of leadership until 1972 when the whole hierarchy was revised and even made more elaborate. A number of writers have commented on the fact that independent churches have such elaborate hierarchies. Wishlade refers to the high proportion of officials to members,⁴¹⁶ while Sundkler suggests that one main weakness of the independent churches is that they are overstaffed to an extent "which could often be described as absurd."⁴¹⁷ However, members within the respective hierarchies have clearly defined duties and rights.

(b) The Ministry and its function

The power structure, of the NLC consists of several gradations. The supreme and final authority is the synod, whose chairman is the archbishop. The synod consists of the archbishop and his assistant, the bishops, the archdeacons, the ruraldeans, pastors and layreaders. Also included are, the administrative secretary and the treasurer who are not necessarily ordained churchmen. The synod meets annually to discuss issues affecting the church. The synod makes the final decisions about any issues in the church. It enacts laws and regulations for the management affairs of the church.⁴¹⁸

Several categories of office bearers comprise archbishop, four types of bishops, archdeacons, rural deans, pastors, layreaders and teachers. In the constitution, it is stated that the:-

⁴¹⁶ R. Wishlade, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴¹⁷ B.G.M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, p. 127.

⁴¹⁸ Revised Constitution, 1973, pp. 6 - 14.

church teaches and holds that from the Apostles' time there have been in God's church, the orders of the Archbishop, Assistant Archbishop, Bishops, Archdeacons, Rural deans, Pastors, Layreaders, and no man shall be ... permitted to execute any of the said offices, except he be called, tried, examined and admitted thereunto, according to an ordinal approved in accordance with Article 1 of this constitution, or has had formal episcopal consecration or ordination in some church whose orders are ... recognised and accepted in accordance with the constitution of this church

(Anybody who has) received authority to minister in the church owe canonical obedience in all things lawful and honest to this church to the terms of the constitution of Nomiya Luo Church as it may from time to time be authorised. 419

The archbishop is not appointed for life, although this seems to be the trend. He is the symbol of unity and has overall responsibility on all church administration and is the sole spiritual head of the faith. He is chairman of all synod conferences, although, he is not allowed, on his own, to release statements or take actions on his own without the authority of the synod. He is assisted by an assistant archbishop who can assume full responsibility over the church in his absence.⁴²⁰

The bishop is in charge of a diocese and he is assisted in the diocese by an archdeacon who also has diocesan responsibility for the whole diocese. There are five dioceses at the moment: Oboch, Nyakwere, Ng'iya, Kwoyo and Milambo. Oboch and Nyakwere are in Siaya District. Kwoyo comprises of Kisumu District. Milambo and Ng'iya comprises of South Nyanza, Kisii Districts and North Mara District of Tanzania. The division into dioceses has caused problems that will be discussed later. For each diocese there is a bishop: the bishop for Oboch is Yakobo Okech; for Nyakwere is Charles Odhiambo; for Kwoyo is Naphtali Ong'awa; for Milambo is

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p.3. The categories of leaders is equivalent to that of the Church of the Province of Kenya.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

Mathayo Auko; and for Ng'iya is Shem Obura. The bishop plays a relatively small part, even in his own parish in the religious activities of his area which he visits periodically. During religious ceremonies, he officiates, otherwise, he is not given charge over a church which is his own. He has the right to baptise, circumcise, admit new members and ordain lesser officials. Usually they can get promoted especially when the archbishop dies or resigns. The archdeacon, as already said, works hand in hand with the bishop. In the absence of the bishop, he assumes his power. His name is usually submitted by the diocese to the synod, which usually only sanctions.

The rural dean is in charge of a group of pastorates combined for administrative and consultative purposes. He is the head of pastorates' consultative or administrative group, and he is responsible for implementation of requirements and development of initiatives of the diocese. A pastorate has several churches within it and the pastor, with pastoral responsibility, is in charge of it. Usually, a geographical area or preferably an administrative location is made a pastorate. It is also not unusual to find more than two pastorates within one location.

Next to the pastor is the layreader who is usually chosen by the community. At the level of the local church, responsibility rests on the layreader. He is in charge of a few churches grouped together within a pastorate. He conducts the weekly worship and prepares catechumens for baptism.

The lowest rung of ecclesiastic leadership is held by the preacher or teacher. He may be in charge of a congregation, if not, his role may be confined to preaching, praying, and reading passages from the Bible during the services.⁴²¹

⁴²¹ Ibid., pp. 4 - 5 and 27.

One other important office and one that has caused problems for the church is that of the sharrif. Every leader claims to be able to circumcise. There are the offices of the chief sharrif who is in charge of all sharrifs in the NLC, the diocesan sharrif and in the pastorate the office of the sharrif ranks with that of the pastor. In the pastorate, the sharrif is co-chairman with the pastor in the pastorate council. There are bishops, archdeacons and rural deans who also serve as sharrifs so that in a pastorate, inspite of the fact that there should be only four recognised sharrifs, people will go for any other person who claims to have the ability to circumcise. In March 1976, it was decreed by the synod that the pastorates should stop the sharrifs who are not ordained from practising, however, it is unlikely that anything was done.⁴²²

In the NLC titles are particularly important. In the church age is also important in conferring status and so also is marriage. The ideal leader in addition to being male, is at least middle aged and married. The leader must know how to read and write but apparently high degree of education is not required. All the members of the hierarchy had minimum education of upto about standard five primary level, apart from the assistant archbishop who has upto university education. Of all the leaders only a few are converts, the rest are born into the movement.

Before one can hold any position of spiritual leadership, he has to be ordained. One ordination ceremony was witnessed by the author on January 11, 1980. The assistant archbishop, some bishops, archdeacons, rural deans, pastors and layreaders were to be ordained. As a custom, all leaders to be ordained are

ordained in the presence of an assembly composed of high church dignitaries and delegates of local communities gathered at the headquarters, Oboch. All members to be ordained went into a small room within the church building. They were joined by the archbishop and other ordained bishops. The ordinands were dressed up in the new robes of office, as appropriate Bible passages connected with leadership were read and appropriate songs were sung. When all were dressed, they walked in a procession, led by the archbishop. The procession went round the church, then towards the grave of the founder of the NLC, they bowed down and prayed then proceeded into the church. The marching song was "ye servants of the Lord". As they entered the church, the congregation stood and joined in the song. The procession went upto the front of the church. They sat down and the service went on like the normal Sunday Sabbath service except that appropriate Bible passages were chosen to fit the occasion. At the end of the service the ordination ceremony began. The first person to be ordained was the assistant archbishop. He was made to swear that he will undertake responsibilities embodied in the office of the archbishop. After this the assistant archbishop took the responsibility of swearing in other leaders. The bishops were ordained first, followed by the archdeacons, then the rural deans and finally the pastors. One of the newly ordained bishops offered the final prayer. As a final test of the ordinands' abilities, they were given catechists to test loudly before the congregation. After this the bishops led the catechists to the river to baptise them. Baptising new converts is one of the duties delegated to the bishops. . On this particular occasion there was a lot of singing and dancing.⁴²³

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Religious Festival to commemorate the death of Owalo, at Oboch, on January 11, 1980. Witnessed by the author.

The description given above points to some important aspects of leadership. First, any leader must be properly consecrated and this must be done in the presence of most of the church adherents and other leaders. Secondly, during this ceremony, the duties of each leader are made quite clear so that there are no conflicts.

Apparently, this was the second ordination in the history of the NLC. The first ordination took place in 1976. Before this, people were just voted into certain positions without any special ceremonies. It should be noted that leadership is vied for by the people mainly because of prestige and not necessarily for financial gains. The leaders are only part time clerics because the church does not pay for their upkeep. They may hold a full time job or cultivate their fields, for their upkeep. This is one particular weakness of the church.

Leadership is an important aspect of the church: the hierarchy provides outlets for the exercise of leadership abilities and at the same time ascribes status to office bearers. Those who do not find immediate scope for advancement within the church are potential seceders, unless new positions, are created for them, with new responsibilities. Most problems that have arisen in the church are usually centred around leadership. There are such problems such as a leader embezzling funds, or one leader usurping the rightful role of another or contravention of the church constitution by another leader.

(c) Central administration and local government

According to the constitution the movement's headquarters is at Oboch where all administrative offices should be built and where all synod meetings should be held. The residence of the archbishop, according to the constitution, should be Oboch. At Oboch, however, there is only an unfinished large church building which has been standing since 1960. The archbishop does not stay

there, because he is only a part time cleric; the church does not pay for his services or provide his means of livelihood. Apart from the two yearly festivals held here, one would say that Oboch has not fulfilled what is embodied in the constitution.⁴²⁴

The constitution lays down that there shall be general secretaries, administrative secretaries and their assistants as members of the synod. They form what is referred to in the constitution as the house of laity. The secretaries are responsible for all administrative matters of the church and correspondences of the church. Within the Diocesan councils and Pastorate Councils, there are also secretaries responsible for all correspondences. The secretary issues notices convening all meetings of the synod, diocesan council or pastorate council, and he is directly responsible for keeping minutes of all meetings and preserves all records of the proceedings of the church.⁴²⁵

The constitution also provides for the office of treasurer. There are treasurers for the headquarter or synod, diocese, pastorate and the individual churches. The responsibility of the treasurer is to receive money and to keep proper records. The duties of the treasurer, since the death of the founder, have not been properly done. As such some money, contributed by the members, have found channels into the pockets of other leaders of the church. At the moment an attempt is being made to ensure that all money is channelled into one central place. This, however, has not seen much success. By 1938 the church already had a bank account. They have had the account all this while, but always with very little money because they have not succeeded

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The NLC Revised Constitution, May 1973, P. I.

425

Ibid., pp. 28 and 29.

in channelling money from the churches to the bank. They are trying to do this, at present, by issuing receipt books to every treasurer, but with little if any success.⁴²⁶

Though centralised, the movement has a variety of subdivisions. The constitution mentions diocese, pastorates and churches as the responsibility of the respective ecclesiastical orderlies though it does not specify what each term means. The jurisdiction of the bishop and the archdeacon is the diocese. There are many churches within a diocese. The pastorate is a centre of which the pastor is in charge. It consists of several outstations. The pastorate is not very big, because in most cases the pastor can walk to the churches. The churches are built within easy reach of the members who have to come on foot and this explains partly the movement's attraction and its followers' loyalty in attending religious services. In an area like Konge in Asembo, there are about six churches within a distance of less than half a mile. The buildings are mostly made of mud walls and an aluminium roof. They are mainly semi-permanent and can hold a congregation of about ninety people. The unfinished church building at Oboch seems to be the largest church.

The church has had problems, especially, connected with the organisation and leadership of the church. Whole pastorates have seceded to join and form their own diocese because they are not in favour of a particular bishop or archdeacon. Nyakwere diocese was formed as a result of this, such that, at present there are whole pastorates in Uyoma and Yimbo that belong to Nyakwere whose centre is in Gem Ahono, and yet Oboch is very near to them. Some churches have also quit their pastorates

to join others or even individuals from certain churches have moved out to build their own churches. According to the church regulations, churches should at least have a distance of about half a mile between them. However, in Asembo Gangu A church and Gangu B church are not more than a hundred metres away from each other. During research it was quite common to meet people attending services in churches quite far from their homes, while leaving church buildings just next to their homes. This happens because, either the individual hates the teacher responsible for the church, or some members of the congregation. Some individuals have also moved away to avoid discipline.

(d) Material Organisation

This includes a certain number of adjuncts: churches and finances. They possess a place of worship, usually, consisting in a building and an enclosure. The churches have two doors, and they are not really big. They are scattered so that within a single clan there are, usually, more than twenty churches. The churches, as already said, are built close at hand so that time and money are not wasted in commuting. Thus, instead of large cathedral - like churches, they build small numerous enclosures sprinkled all over. The pieces of land where buildings are put up are usually offered by adherents and according to the constitution, the church sites should be registered as church property with the Ministry of Lands and Settlement. Thereafter, the donor should have no right to claim it back even if he ceases to be a member of the church.⁴²⁷ However, whenever an adherent has donated land for building a church, no action has been taken to ensure that it is registered, so that, the movement has not only lost people but also church buildings, particularly, when

the donors of land decide to move to splinter groups or other denominations.

The church's financial needs are catered for in various ways. Each week a collection is taken during the service. People usually give five cents or ten cents pieces. The most that one can give is twenty cents. Efforts are made to encourage them to be generous. Whether it is the church treasurer or the church teacher that takes the money is not clear.

Contributions are usually appealed for when the need arises, for example, when the church has visitors to entertain. Another source of church finance is the regular subscription made by every faithful member of the church. The amount to be paid by the members is set by the synod. The money is usually supposed to be handed over by the preacher to the Central pool. Any new convert gets registered only after paying five shillings, if it is a man and two shillings, if it is a woman and this also serves as another source of funds. Also one other source of finance is the amount of money paid by the convert after baptism. Usually, circumcision is also paid for and so the sharrif gets the money. Possibly this is the reason why many people in the church claim that they are able to circumcise. Finally, at the end of each year there is usually a thanks-giving contribution made by the adherents. The members are provided with empty envelopes in which to put one tenth of their annual income. It is this amount of money that is divided amongst the clerics as a token of thanks for their service.⁴²⁸ The money is divided in such a way that people with higher posts get more money.

The treasurer's duty is to ensure that all money received by the churches, pastorates and dioceses and the synod, is fully accounted for. Each diocese, therefore, should employ

a qualified accountant to audit the books of accounts. Each pastorate is required to submit a financial report annually to the diocese. According to the constitution, every church, pastorate, and diocese is allowed to keep a certain amount of money.⁴²⁹ However, inspite of what is clearly set out in the constitution, the church has always had problems over finances. Collection of money is rarely done beyond the level of the local community and the religious leaders are responsible for seeing that the money reaches the echelons of the hierarchy. In the NLC the circulation of money from the base to the summit is not as strictly controlled as stated in the constitution. By the time any amount of money reaches the summit almost three quarters of it is gone. The leaders responsible take portions without indicating at all.⁴³⁰ The problem is not new in the church. Since the death of Yohana Owalo, problems related to finances have plagued the church with resultant splits and rivalries. During research some informants quoted names of some leaders who have been known for embezzling funds. One should think that, unless the church starts employing full time clergy, money will continue to pose problems.

(e) The Laity

Despite the observable schismatic trends in the movement, there is a great inner and outer unity. The whole group is strengthened in its internal cohesion by two features. First,

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 24. The constitution does not specify the amount of money.

⁴³⁰ Annual financial reports are usually given during the January 11, festival and usually some leaders do not appear. The leaders are expected on this occasion to hand all the church money in their custody. During the March 1 festival, after the overall treasurer has worked out the percentage, the leaders get a small pay according to what was contributed in their jurisdiction.

their common external symbol; special dresses and veils, entry into the worship place and circumcision. And secondly, common taboos also forge bonds of togetherness, integration and identity. Common symbols, taboos and other features of beliefs and practice bind the whole group. The group feels unique and the idea of their separateness, even in case of division, holds them together.

The smallest group of the lay people consists of a religious unit, within which weekly common or sabbath worship takes place. Members are usually very few because the churches are many and within short distances. The number of women is bigger than that of men. They direct the singing and organise the prayer for the sick, but they are never assigned any priestly function. At present there are a few women who preach during Mony but they are women who have reached menopause. Women who have not reached menopause are considered unclean.

Within this group, particularly in the countryside, there almost no young people. Young people are found in towns because of the current problem of rural-urban migrations. At the moment, they have built a very modern church in Nairobi and this church is recognised as a pastorate. The Nairobi Eastleigh church composes of a adherents from different districts and locations in Nyanza Province. There are also adherents in Nakuru, Mombasa, Eldoret and Kitale but they have not built any churches, so they meet either in private houses or county social halls.

The lay people play a very prominent part in the movement, not as passive onlookers but as participating members. Their role is not just that of providing materially for the church, they are always travelling for religious purposes. This small community is the framework for celebrating social events, especially, religious festivals, marriages and funerals.

There are two significant religious festivals which were

developed after the death of Yohana Owalo; the eleventh of January, the day of Yohana Owalo's death, and the first of March, which is the day Owalo was taken to heaven and given his message. Celebrations on the eleventh of January, started on the anniversary of 1921. Before this, adherents used to gather on Christmas eve and boxing day, for prayers, sports and music competition. After Owalo's death, activities were transferred to January 11. The first celebration was led by Yakobo Okech. During the celebration, the field which was at Oboch was fenced and people paid entry fee. The winners in any activity were given prizes. This became a yearly practice, increasing in greatness as the years went by. Between 1922 and 1936 the celebrations were done at Oboch and Ujwang'a because there had been a split; in 1937, once again, all adherents joined at Oboch for the celebrations. The field at Oboch was called Fap Kanvegongo. Around 1959 the sports, music and other celebrations stopped. In 1959, during the government organised Magwena Sports, a quarrel ensued between a man from Sakwa and another from Onia in Asembo. They swore to kill each other during the Oboch sports. During the Oboch sports the Sakwa man was killed by the man from Asembo. Subsequently, the government proscribed the sports and the music festivals. The NLC adherents were only allowed to go to Oboch for prayers on the eleventh of January. At present an attempt is being made to do the same things again.⁴³¹ On January 11, 1980 for the first time since 1959 there was included music competition and a few other activities. But again informants said that this was not as elaborate as it used to be before 1959.⁴³²

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Okech, interview; Oyungu, interview; Ojuok, interview; Nyakito, interview; Okanda, interview; Opige, interview; Nyala, interview.

432

The author had the opportunity of attending the January 11, 1980 celebrations. This has not replaced christmas but christmas celebration is not as elaborate.

The March 1, celebrations were started in 1948, but most people did not see the necessity. A small number of people gathered at Owalo's grave side to pray and to commemorate the day when the prophet went to heaven. By 1962 the number of attendants was beginning to grow. After the reunion in 1964 the number of attendants, the following year, was very big.⁴³³ The number has continued to increase so that during the 1980 celebrations there were over four thousand people gathered at Oboch.⁴³⁴ On February 29, 1980, people began to arrive for the March 1, meeting. There followed the whole night meeting which went on upto eleven o'clock the following day. The readings for the evening were based on the last six chapters of the prayer book, which gives the story of Owalo's experiences in the first, second and third heavens.⁴³⁵ The six sermons preached that evening were based on his experience. The six chapters are reconstructed in the third chapter of this dissertation. From the six sermons given that evening certain inferences could be made. First, that this day is regarded as a day of salvation; it is this experience that has afforded the Luo the chance of going to heaven. Secondly, it is on this day that members meet to get a new experience or refreshment. Finally, the experience here is expected to have a new impact on the adherents, so that their lives are changed for the better.

On this particular occasion a lot of stress is placed on the future happiness that awaits the faithful whose salvation is

433 Interviews, op. cit.

434 On March 1, 1980, the number of people was found to be over 4,000 after counting.

435 Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church, pp. 117 - 121.

guaranteed by the observance of the prescribed taboos. This belief is embodied in the song:-

Life in heaven will be sweet forever,
Love in heaven will not be comparable to earth's love
O Jehova give us victory
So we can win the golden crown
When we are ushered into heaven
by the angels. 436

One other important social event is the funeral. The observation of funerals is an event of considerable importance. It is of sacred importance to be at the burial of a relative, or another adherent. Those who attend are dressed in the church uniform and there is a lot of singing. The scripture readings and the sermons are intended to console the relatives of the deceased by promise of a resurrection. After the burial people disperse.⁴³⁷

Seventy days later the people are to return to the grave to pray and feast. They believe that on this particular day, their prayers are supposed to usher the deceased into heaven. A lot of songs about the beauty of heaven and the singing jubilant angels are sang. Henceforth, if it is a man who died, the wife is free to remarry.⁴³⁸

436 S.S.A. Oundo, op. cit., p. 62.

437 Burial ceremony, the Archbishop Benjamin Oundo, Nyabondo (Nyakach), attended on April 4, 1980.

438 The author attended several such ceremonies: Konge Asembo, ceremony after death of J. Onyang', a young man who was drowned, December 2, 1979. Asembo Kanyikela, Doris Oundo, December 9, 1979. Uyoma Kokiri, M. Agayi, February 16, 1980. The NLC members believe that the distance between heaven and earth should take one's soul about 70 days to cover.

It is full active participation that leads to firm commitment. It is by involving in these activities that the belief system becomes meaningful and relevant to the individual and to the whole community of the faithful. As they meet in the social gatherings the community relations are strengthened and the individual also gets developed. This kind of community is comparable with the Luo system of extended family or clans.

5. CONCLUSION

From the study of doctrine, worship, sacraments, polity and organisation certain conclusions have been reached. The first conclusion is that the movement was a protest movement. As a protest movement it was directed against certain traditions or forces; the Christian, Moslem, Luo traditions and the colonial government. As a protest against certain christian traditions, the founder opposed the doctrine of the Trinity, the Catholic practices of the Holy Mass, Eucharist, intercession of the saints, the Catholic belief in the existence of purgatory and the infallibility of the Pope. These are already mentioned in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. The founder also protested against christianity because those who presented it disregarded the needs of a society in transition. It should be taken into account, of course, that usually religious movements are started to answer cultural problems and since those who presented Christianity disregarded this, the people had to start their own movements. It was also a protest against Islam in that although the founder joined Islam and, likely, borrowed certain beliefs and practices he did not stay there because it was not a home for him. The founder of the NLC also attacked some aspects of the Luo traditional society, especially magic, witchcraft and spirit possession. The movement was also a protest against the colonial government which disregarded the Luo religion that was viewed by the Luo as an underlying foundation, the spearhead of development and progress and a source of new values. For the Luo

religion permeated every aspect of society, so that the colonial separation of church and state came as a shock.

The second conclusion is that the movement was also an attempt at compromise. Starting from the actual religious condition of the followers it took from the traditional outlook the values that it considered indispensable and incorporated these values into the christian and Moslem patterns. Attempt has been made in this chapter to show instances of compromise or dialogue, mainly in the idea of God. The movement, therefore, helped to bridge the gap between the Luo traditional society and the new world.^{438A}

The final conclusion is that, in as much as the movement was an attempt to adjust to the changing circumstances, the movement has continued to adjust by changing and developing the belief system in an attempt to give answers to problems that beset and plague a considerable portion of the society at present. One wants to say that, if in time the necessary adjustments are not made, it may be doomed to irrelevancy or become a relic of the past.^{438B}

438A

Because the NLC has rejected some of the basic tenets of the christian faith, like the trinity, divinity of Jesus and the universality of the christian faith, the extent to which it can be considered a christian denomination is questionable. This question is not fully answered in the Thesis but the NLC is recognised as a unique sort of church, because it uses the Christian Bible.

438B

Three questions remain unanswered in Chapter five.

1) One is whether the NLC has plans for theological training of its leaders - The NLC has no such plans. 2) The second is why the educational level of both the leaders and ordinary people is generally low. Generally the educational level of members of Independent Churches is very low, perhaps, because when the churches started during colonial period, the established churches refused to let them join their schools, and the educational standard of the few independent church schools was very low. 3) The third is why the church fails to retain its members - Factors which enable churches to retain members like, education, dispensaries and training of leadership have not been handled well. Membership can only be maintained if the basic needs are met.

CHAPTER SIXEVALUATION AND APPRAISAL1. Evaluation of the Nomiya Luo Church's Impact on the Society.(a) Introduction

The Nomiya Luo Church is primarily a religious phenomenon, yet its impact extended and extends to the secular aspects of life. The secular field here is meant to refer to the political, economic and social spheres of life. The religious sphere, though it affects all these secular scenes, will be subjected to a separate critique.

(b) Political Involvement

Almost from the beginning of its active history, the NLC has not been accused of involvement in politics. Politics here is to be understood in terms of the struggle for freedom from foreign domination and the party politics of Independent Kenya. Oginga Odinga, has indicated that the NLC was the consequence of disillusion and discontent into a religious outlet,⁴³⁹ so that it diminishes "the force of direct political action."⁴⁴⁰ Other authors like J.M. Lonsdale, B.A. Ogot have portrayed Yohana Owalo as a rebel who wanted to accept the European Civilization in his own terms.⁴⁴¹ However, as shown in earlier chapters, particularly in Chapter Three, Yohana Owalo did not cause political unrest. Perhaps, as earlier said, he considered the way the British Government was dealing with such movements and realised that if he openly showed political tendencies, his would have suffered the same fate as the Chilembwe in Malawi and the Mumbo cult in South

439 Oginga Odinga, Op. cit., p. 68.

440 P.C. Llyod, African Social change (Penguin, 1967) p. 263.

441 J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., pp. 353 and 363; B.A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 263.

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Nyanza. Yohana Owalo's relations with the Government authorities was friendly and in fact as said in Chapter Three, he also even served as headman in his area. The NLC members did not worry the administration during the inter war period. In fact, in 1929, when the District Commissioner met with the NLC leaders, he described them as "intelligent, respectful, clean, and decent looking crowd."⁴⁴² In other words, therefore, the government was not experiencing any problems from them. Subsequent reports said that the NLC continued to exist harmlessly. In any case, whenever the NLC had any internal problems, the leaders invited the Provincial Commissioner to solve their disputes, and most often the District Commissioner. The disputes and instances when the government official were invited to solve them are already given in some detail in Chapter Four.

During the Emergency Period, the members were suspected of associating with the Mau Mau. Perhaps, this was because the then Bishop of the NLC Mr. G. C. Owalo was a close friend of some of the political leaders like, Oginga Odinga, and Achieng' Oneko, who were also suspected of having connections with the Mau Mau. This suspicion was, however, shortlived. The intelligence department, after much research realised that these people were not connected with the Mau Mau. The official attitude of the NLC towards politics and the government authorities is outlined as follows: "As already outlined in the prayer book of the Church, the church and all its followers shall be loyal to the head of state and the government."⁴⁴³

Although the NLC has failed to attract any appreciable numbers of followers from other ethnic groups, it has, however, at times helped in.....

⁴⁴² Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1929, (DC/CNI/6/1, K.N.A.)

⁴⁴³ Revised Constitution, 1973, p. 31. This clause is a new addition in the Constitution.

developing certain government encouraged ventures among the Luo like the building of harambee schools, the planting of cash crops like cotton, sugarcane and ground nuts. That the movement is confined largely to the Luo, remains one of its greatest weaknesses.^{443A}

In conclusion, it may be maintained that the NLC is too much absorbed in its religious activities to show a legitimate christian concern for public issues or to be deeply involved in politics.^{443B} This may be an advantage, since the Kenya government has not allowed the churches to criticise its policies and actions.

(c) Economic participation

A developing country like Kenya wants to secure the cooperation of all its citizens in its efforts to achieve economic independence. As the industrial sector is still very limited and cannot provide employment for all people, the government urges people not to flock to towns but to stay on the land and by their hard work increase agricultural output. The Membership of the NLC is predominantly rural, not because they have heeded to the Government's call, but because most of them are not educated enough to get salaried employment outside the rural area.

Economic development can be accelerated if people are healthy and educated. The Government of Kenya tries to drive home this truth to the people by stressing that there are three enemies of progress; disease, ignorance, and poverty. It is interesting to see what attitude the NLC members adopted to the government programmes to combat these enemies of progress.

^{443A} The ethnocentric nature of the NLC is a great paradox in that, it is both a weakness and a strength. It is a weakness in that members of other tribes may not feel free to join the movement and a strength in that worship becomes more intimate when it is expressed in terms that are easily understood and embraced by the followers - It is hard for a religion to be universal and retain the religious intimacy.

^{443B} This is, perhaps, because the NLC has no theological colleges or Bible schools where its leaders might be exposed to national and international issues - both theological and socio-political. It has no hospitals, clinics or health centres, and yet these are some of the benefits of society. Even their schools do not seem to be influenced by their teaching. The orientation would, perhaps, be different if these facilities were there; they would make the members well informed about national and international issues.

The Luo people were subjected to many diseases which, they claimed originated from the spiritual world. The founder of the NLC recognised that the possibilities of such diseases could not warrant going to hospitals but rather required exorcism and prayer for healing. Exorcism is already dealt with in Chapter Five. The founder of the NLC recognised that devils are not responsible for all afflictions so that to date members are free to go to hospitals and have always availed themselves the use of medical facilities. However, the NLC was not and is not in a position to build their own hospitals like other churches, like the Catholics and the Anglicans.

The NLC's involvement in combating ignorance is very significant in this study and cannot be ignored. At the beginning of the century, education occupied a relatively secondary place and so was left to the Missions, within whose scheme it enjoyed a place of first importance. Yet there is no doubt that the state realised its responsibility to provide public education. Hence, in those days when it found itself in no position to implement an alternative education programme to the territory, it undertook not only to subsidise the education works of the Missions, but also laid down conditions which each Mission school had to fulfil in order to qualify for a subsidy. Later, the government insisted that it had also a duty to set up an education inspectorate to ensure that the prescribed conditions were fully met. The government, then asserted its right to close down schools which fell below the prescribed standards.⁴⁴⁴

When Yohana Owalo started the NLC, he had both education and teaching experience which he had gained during his quest for truth from various Missions. Like his contemporaries, he started a sub-elementary school at Orengo and an elementary school at Oboch. The first school was established at Orengo in 1912 and the next school at Oboch in 1914. The students usually came from amongst the adherents in all the locations of Nyanza. After learning how to read and write, Yohana Owalo sent them back to their various locations not only to preach, but also to teach

others how to read and write.⁴⁴⁵

After his death, formal education became characteristic of the movement. In Nyanza, the European Missions were not willing to educate any member of an independent church. If anybody wanted education, he had to leave the independent church and join the Missionary Church. The NLC was not ready to lose members, so between 1924 and 1931, it worked hard to revive schools founded by Owalo and to start new ones. According to the District Commissioner's directive, any Mission that was not offering any education was to be hanned. The NLC had to actively involve itself in education if it was to survive.⁴⁴⁶

In 1930, Yona Oyungu and Meshack Onyango asked Mr. Webb, the then Inspector of schools, to provide them with school equipments. They were referred to Archdeacon R.E. Owen in Maseno. They asked to affiliate their schools with the Church Missionary Society (hence CMS) to enjoy the mission's training facilities. At a meeting in Gem Marenyo with the CMS, the CMS refused to give their facilities to a movement whose founder had declared them polytheistic.⁴⁴⁷

445 Okanda, interview; Oyungu, interview; Nyakito, interview; M. Onyango, interview; B.A. Ogot, Zamani, p. 236; J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., pp. 353 - 363.

446 Oyungu, interview; M. Onyango, interview.

447 Ibid.

In the same year, they wrote a letter to the District Commissioner of Central Nyanza asking him for permission to start schools at Oboch, Sagam, Rapogi, Alungo and Holo. They were given permission and the schools were filled, not only with the NLC adherents, but also with others who were not converts. They employed local teachers, especially those whose teaching certificates were confiscated after they married second wives. The church and the community joined hands in paying them. The students paid what they were able to give in terms of fees.⁴⁴⁸

In an official report that year, it was said:-

Persistent endeavours are being made by the leaders of the religious sect known as the "Nomiya Mission" for government recognition. It has been thought advisable by the education department to register all their schools and teachers but for many reasons, it would seem inadvisable that they should receive grants from the local Native Council." 449

With the establishment of the NLC schools, the need for undenominational schools became very apparent. The type of education offered by the missionaries did not give allowance for the non-christians or adherents of Missions not widely represented like the NLC. The small churches like the NLC could not get financial assistance from the government or the local Native Council (henceforth LNC) and yet unless they sent their children to other Missions, which they did not want to do, they were cut off from the benefits of education. The plea that government aided schools were bound to take non-christians and others and refrain from giving them religious instruction went unheeded.⁴⁵⁰

448 Ibid.

449 Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1924 - 1931, (DC/CN 1/6/1, K.N.A.), p. 24.

450 Ibid., p. 33.

In 1931, the LNC asked for a grant-in-aid, since the desire for education was gaining momentum. The head of the Education Department advised against such a grant on the grounds that, it would create a precedent whereby any native, who took it into his head to start a religious or educational campaign on his own, would be in a position to demand a grant-in-aid. This was a state of affairs which in a short time, they felt, would lead to chaos in so far as religion was concerned. The Education Board decided that the matter should be taken further, for if there were government schools such a state of affairs would never have risen.⁴⁵¹

They were persistent, however, in asking for grants from the LNC but the Inspector of Schools did not consider their schools to be of sufficiently high standard to warrant such a grant-in-aid at the time. In 1934, the official report records: "They have a very poor standard of education in their schools and have not yet produced any one sufficiently highly educated to enter the Jeanes School."⁴⁵²

Between 1932 and 1934, other schools were established, Ndware in Asembo Kanyikela, and Ralingo in Kikia, and Kijana in Seme. The schools were on the increase when, in 1938 they were informed that no schools could be started without the consent of the LNC or its prior consent.⁴⁵³

451 Ibid.

452 Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1932 - 1934, (DC/CN1/6/2. K.N.A.), p. 27.

453 Provincial Intelligence Report Nyanza, Nov. and Dec. 1937 (PC/NZA 4/5/2, K.N.A.), p. 3.

In 1931, the NLC school at Sagam was considered a recipient of a grant and provision was made for annual allocation of funds. But after inspection, however, the Inspector of Schools reported to the Education Board that the standard of work was too low to warrant a grant. Ten years later, Sagam, became the first NLC school to get a grant-in-aid.⁴⁵⁴

The approach revealed the dilemma at the heart of Independency. The advantage of free participation in the modernisation or civilising process could be obtained only on European terms. And in the words of J.M. Lonsdale:-

African Control, however much it might tame the West's impact and "clothe it in native dress" was bought at the expense of forfeiting the educational benefits which were then a necessary attribute of the political leader. 455

The squabbles within the church during the 1940s affected schools drastically. The Bishop was not willing to produce church funds to pay for the education of children. Oboch school in Asembo, Alungo and Rapogi in Seme, and Holo in Nyakach died down completely, only Sagam continued to operate due to the initiative of local adherents. In 1948, after the church split into two, education was once again seriously embarked on by one of the groups. Oboch, Alungo, Rapogi, Kijana and Holo were revived. In 1949, Sagam got a grant, and by 1953, Rapogi, Kijana, Alungo and Holo had also been given grant-in-aid. In 1956, Oboch also got grants.⁴⁵⁶

454 Central Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1939, (DC/CN 1/6/5, K.N.A.), p. 35.

455 J.M. Lonsdale, op. cit., p. 357.

456 Yona Oyungu, interviews.

On January 13, 1953, they applied to the Director of Education for permission to manage their schools, of which four were registered; Alungo, Holo, Rapogi and Sagam. They were refused because the Mission was not recognised to manage the schools. They were told that the schools were to be managed by a recognised body or else they were to be closed down by April that year. They appealed to Mr. R.K. Stovold, the head of the Anglican Church in Nyanza, that the African Anglican Church Manager of Central Nyanza Schools could undertake to manage the schools for them since their children were going to suffer if this was not done. Mr. Stovold refused on the grounds that their supervisor had more than enough work to do, and secondly, that they did not accept polygamy, as it was "contrary to our Lord's teaching."⁴⁵⁷

Due to the failure of NLC to manage the schools satisfactorily, the District Education Board (henceforth DEB) took over the management towards the end of 1954. At the same time, the DEB invited Mr. G.C. Owalo, to attend the DEB meetings as the representative of the NLC. The DEB gave the responsibility of managing the schools to the District Education Officer, Mr. Harrigan.⁴⁵⁸

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Provincial Education Officer, to the District Education Officer, letter, March 1, 1954, EDUC/ORDDGEN/257, K.N.A. District Commissioner, Central Nyanza to the District Education Officer, March 8, 1954, ED312/1/4/87; NLC Bishop Petro Ouma to Ven. Arch. Stovold, March 20, 1954, Stovold's reply, March 29, 1954.

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Central Nyanza District Annual Report, 1954, (DC/CNK/2/6, K.N.A.), p. 16.

Beginning from 1956, the church had problems with the education officer in connection with the starting of schools. A school was established at Nyamira without the consent of the DEB and the leaders were, therefore, liable for prosecution. Mr. Harrigan asked them to undo everything immediately. It is unlikely that anything was undone. During the same year, they started a school at Uradi in Alego, less than one mile away from the Anglican Church School, at Ng'iya. The Missionaries at Ng'iya reported this to the Education Officer and the NLC leaders were warned sternly against such an undertaking.⁴⁵⁹ In 1957, Othoche school in Uyoma and Kanyibok in Yimbo were started. During the same year, three additional schools came under the management of the DEB. There were still a number of the NLC schools operating with unaided status and special provision was made for their supervision.⁴⁶⁰

In 1959, for the first time, G.C. Owalo, assisted with the supervision of the NLC schools under the general guidance of Mr. M. Ombaka, who was the Assistant Education Officer. This was after G.C. Owalo had been in the DEB for about three years. All the same, the DEB recommended that some NLC schools should be closed or transferred to a recognised management. Othoche and Kanyibok were among some of the schools to be transferred or closed down.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ District Education Officer, to Mr. G.C. Owalo, letters, April 12, 1956 and May 25, 1956.

⁴⁶⁰ Central Nyanza District Annual Report, 1958, (DC/CN1/2/10, K.N.A.), pp. 2 and 14; G.C. Owalo, discussions; Okumu, interview.

⁴⁶¹ Central Nyanza District Annual Report, 1958, (DC/CN1/2/11., K.N.A.), pp. 16 and 18.

After independence in 1963, the Kenya Government took over the running of schools so that all Missions that were responsible for starting of schools became sponsors. The NLC became a sponsor of the following schools in Siaya District; Sagam, Oboth, Ujwang'a, Othoche, Nyamira and Kanyibok. In Kisumu District, it is a sponsor to the following schools; Rapogi, Alungo, Holo, Opande, Nyaundi, Gumu, and Nyang'inja.⁴⁶²

What is significant is the fact that Yohana Owalo, and later his followers, realised the importance of education within the changing circumstances. Attempts of the NLC at combating ignorance is very evident during the period before independence. Even after independence, with more chances open to them, most adherents have continued to send their children to institutions of learning. There are many well educated NLC members, some of them who went through the primary schools established by the NLC.

To combat poverty, followers have been encouraged to work hard on their farms, in their businesses and jobs. Yohana Owalo himself became an employee of the government because he sought his means of livelihood. When he left this government position, he embarked on serious farming on the River Odundu. He encouraged his followers to be able to provide for their families. In the Prayer book, they are encouraged to have enough and to be even able to provide for the fatherless and the strangers who arrive in their homes.⁴⁶³ Most of the adherents, especially those in the

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Some NLC schools collapsed soon after they were founded. At the moment they were trying to start secondary schools on Harambee basis. Already functioning are: Sagam, Rapogi, Holo and Oboch. The NLC leadership does not understand the responsibilities embedded in the Education Act - 1968 which made the churches sponsors of schools which were theirs.

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This section is often quoted when a member is rebuked for lack of hospitality.

country side, are involved in agriculture and business.

The NLC members have also formed small unregistered associations, whereby they unite to do some jobs to earn money. For example, in Uyoma Koriri, the church at Othoche has an association whereby all members unite during the sowing, or weeding or harvesting period, to work for people in their farms, to earn money. The money, earned in this way, is then invested in some business and every participant has a share. When there is a pressing need, the individual is allowed to take the share plus interest.⁴⁶⁴

In conclusion, the NLC has made significant contribution to the economic development on account of its acceptance of education and attempt at alleviating poverty amongst its members, especially, in the country side. Members in the rural areas are involved in agriculture for both cash and subsistence crops, and in business. Quite a number are employed in towns. Bearing this in mind, it would not be in order to say that all adherents have been drawn from the "liminal individuals in society:- the poor, the sick..."⁴⁶⁵

(d) Social Integration

The Luo traditional systems, with the family, clan and other organisations, provided or guaranteed cohesion and stability; it provided for members a sense of belonging and a place to feel at home. The impact of the colonial administration and the Missions changed all that by profoundly altering the patterns.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview held in Uyoma, with about 16 members of Othoche church.

⁴⁶⁵ E. Fashole Luke, Richard Grey, Adrian Hastings and Godwin Tasie, Christianity in Independent Africa, (London: Rex Collins, 1978), p. 53.

Social Structures and religious foundations of the society were undermined and at the same time these old structures proved inadequate to cope with the changing times.

All over Luoland, the victims of social disintegration, were to be found. The processes at work were hard to fully understand or to cope with. Into this vacuum, the NLC entered. It offered a new ideology, a new way to cope with contemporary issues and a more elaborate religion that did not call for an abrupt break with the whole past. Yohana Owalo, himself, declared that he was a prophet for the Luos and therefore a direct link with heaven. The NLC provided a home for its members. By joining the movement, one became a member of a small local community (church) that, by the social and religious activities, integrated the individual into a newly found family and therefore, home.

The NLC responded to the need for participation. In the mission churches, before anybody could participate in any activity, there was a thorough screening done. Membership of the NLC was not just a passive status of being registered in some kind of body, it entailed full participation in the communal activities of the group, whether they were of religious or of social nature. The NLC, to some extent, also guaranteed a sense of equality. Though as early as the period when the NLC started, it had a hierarchical arrangement of functions it displayed a strong egalitarian tendency. Communal activities were discussed, arranged and performed by consensus agreement. This idea of doing communal activities by consensus agreement has persisted in the church so that whenever this has not been adhered to a split has occurred.

The NLC also aimed at relevance. The rituals, and the activities were meaningful to the existing conditions and needs of the members. They were attuned to the members' fears of witchcraft, misfortune or sickness; by being tolerant in its attitude towards

polygamy and the levirate, it took into account the local conditions and did not prescribe what it could not expect or enforce.

The NLC also answered the desire for renewal. A sense of renewal was inculcated by the movement by means of certain prohibitions or taboos. The members were not supposed to dance, smoke or drink alcohol. There were also food prohibitions. These are discussed in detail in Chapter Five. By these, the members were given a moral code which they considered superior to those of other christian missions. The taboos created a common bond which had and has to date a socially intergrative effect.

The NLC secured integration which started at the local level, extended or was a base for a wider geographical integration. Members from South Nyanza and Nyakach became united under one religious movement with members from Asembo or Gem. There was a lot of contact between these locally separated communities for the purpose of prayer meetings and religious festivals: At present in theory, the movement is even committed to a programme of ecumenical encounter with other independent churches.

In conclusion, it would be just to acknowledge the fact that, the NLC provided a progressive and coherent explanation of changes in the Luo society brought about by the colonial rule and helped a number of individuals to attain social integration in a relevant and satisfying way. At present in an attempt to cope with the changes, the movement has tried to reinterpret and reorganise some of its beliefs and practices. This is also discussed in Chapter Five. In spite of the disturbing events in the church it has succeeded in giving a sense of security and renewal to the type of people to whom the mission started churches could not and would not even at present offer hospitality. This integrative function, however, is still limited to the level of one ethnic group. Perhaps, the reinterpretation and reorganisation

of some beliefs and practices are also meant to push the movement beyond ethnic barriers.

(e) Psychological adjustment

Social integration helps to solve problems and to meet the needs that are common to many members in a changing society. But there are also personal problems which differ according to sex, age, education and personal conflicts. In psychology, these problems may be expressed in terms of psychosis or neurosis. In a peasant society, such disorder was attributed to some misfortune, likely, brought about by supernatural agents. While the NLC rejected the skills and powers of the ancestors and the magicians, it gave great prominence to God and the Angels. In this section, there are three important groups of people to be considered, men, women and young people.

When the NLC started, many men were experiencing disillusionment. The respect and obedience that was theirs was on the wane as young people went out to work in the white farms. They enjoyed a position of power as heads of the family or elders of the clan. Besides, in the society at large, leading positions and the prestige connected with them were now beyond their reach as they lacked the education or other accomplishments for such offices. Moreover, if they were members of the mission churches, and polygamous as well, their religious status was judged as inferior. For such a person, the NLC offered considerable attractions. He could take his place as a full member of the church where his polygamous status was not considered a stigma. Opportunity of leadership was also open to him. At any rate, even if he never rose to any height in the hierarchy, he felt at home among people who had similar experiences. The movement continues to fulfil certain of these needs thus making some male members to stick to it or to join it.

Young people derived various benefits and psychological compensations from joining the movement. They were given the chance of getting some education like some of their contemporaries in the mission churches. By joining this movement, most of the young men escaped conscription during the first and second world wars. Whether the movement has continued to provide the same benefits and compensations is difficult to ascertain. Like any church, the NLC has also experienced the problem of young people drifting away from the church. The leaders blame this drift on secular education that leads young people to get away from the grips of the older people. At the moment they have introduced church choirs in the various churches and this seems to be attracting quite a number of young people. Young people, particularly, in towns are beginning to participate actively.

Women as already said, by far, form the majority of the NLC membership. Apart from the tensions and anxieties of the family, the women were also the victims of the policy of the mission churches in regard to polygamy. Nervous breakdowns or mental disturbances were not rare among women with such stresses. In the small local community there was relief. They found a relaxing escape from their arduous daily tasks and an opportunity of entering into a sympathetic relationship with women under similar strains. When a woman was prayed for or when she prayed alone she underwent a psychological treatment that gave her emotional relief. In spite of the relief that women obtained, women were not allowed to hold any position of spiritual leadership. This is already discussed in Chapter Five. However, women, as members of the NLC, continued to attain prestige, status and respect.

What then, briefly is the psychological effect of the NLC? The NLC helped people to cope with certain of their problems and gave to some a temporary and to others permanent adjustment. By ministering to its members in a personal and meaningful way at the crisis points of life, it obtained results where the mission churches would have failed.

2. APPRAISAL OF THE NLC's RELIGIOUS DYNAMISM

It is evident from Chapter Five that the NLC was created out of an amalgam of some catholic, Anglican, Old Testament, Luo and Islam beliefs and practices. The movement was an attempt to bring up a way of life and not a doctrinal presentation. This section is concerned with the religious relevancy and renewal of the NLC. Before this is looked at there are certain preliminary observations.

First there is the issue of "Schism and renewal".⁴⁶⁶ The term "Schism and Renewal" is used to mean what D. Barret put forward in the following words:

Independency and movements within the churches now began to be seen not primarily as a negative reaction to mission, but in the more positive sense, understood by participants themselves; as movements of renewal attempting to create a genuinely indigenous christianity on African soil. In view of this the continuing expansion of schism and renewal across the continent takes on very considerable significance.⁴⁶⁷

The NLC, as the first breakaway church in Kenya, came as a surprise to the missions mainly based in Nyanza. It was abhorred by the missions, because of the strange beliefs and practices, and also because it stood as a hindrance to the ecumenical progress in Nyanza. In spite of this attitude, it may be asked whether, there will not always remain a wholesome necessity, for schism to occur for the good of christianity itself. Although the NLC adopted some propositions

⁴⁶⁶ D. Barret, Schism and renewal, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

that looked extreme to the missions, its very existence ought to have been a corrective of an imbalance in the missionary churches. Since the missions did not review it as such there was no reappraisal of missionary methods. However, the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, John Ainsworth, recognised its worth and warned the missionaries.

I cannot all too earnestly exhort all who have dealings with the natives to investigate their customs and beliefs before attempting to proselyte them For it is only by understanding and appreciating them that one can hope to win their affection⁴⁶⁸

Secondly, the movement did not juxtapose the three traditions in order to clearly outline what was necessary to be taken from them. Rather, as the founder came to grips with situations he incorporated certain factors from the three world views into a unified whole, not overtly concerned with contradictions and consistencies. As a kind of protest against certain tendencies within christianity, Islam and Luo practices, the founder effected a compromise that produced a degree of cohesion, renewal and integration. The changing times warranted the rise of the movement. The founder realised the necessity of change and adjustment with the changing times. At present, for the movement to serve any good purpose, it has to reorganise its beliefs and practices and to reinterpret them.

Lastly, two decades ago, an evaluation of independent churches would have yielded judgements and conclusions quite different from the present. There is at present some appreciation of

⁴⁶⁸ Ainsworth's political records, Op. cit.

religious systems that differ widely from major christian churches. Attitudes have changed because all churches are aiming at africanization, at being a localised expression of the universal church. The NLC, as an African Church, was narrowed when the founder declared it a church for the Luo people only. At the moment, the problem which plagues the church is how it can make its message acceptable beyond the Luo borders.^{468A} The name of the church has been considered a hindrance and some people have moved out of the NLC to form a different church giving it a more universal name (Already discussed in Chapter Four). In spite of its being limited to one ethnic group the movement has a lot of relevance; moreover by calling itself church, the movement implies that it is, authentically, christian in its renewal. Consequently, it will be necessary here to comment briefly on the relevance and christian renewal of the NLC.

(a) Relevance

The Luo were religious people and it is likely that their religion was dynamic and was already undergoing change by the time they were colonised. At the beginning of the century, they were faced with three religious options: their traditional religion, Islam and christianity. The traditional religion was itself threatened by the changing circumstances. Islam had but very few converts in Nyanza most of whom were the Arabs and some Luhyas. Christianity attracted quite a number of people but because it abhorred certain Luo practices most people, either remained nominal or quit the church.

It is against this background that we ought to look at the relevance of the NLC to the people and to existing needs. The movement, though christian in name and content, developed strong Luo and Moslem religious practice. It accepted the Luo reality of the spiritual world and provided a cure that was both christian and African in

^{468A}This is important. Some of the leaders have noticed and are trying to solve the problems. However, it is difficult to give an answer to this problem because it is a touch area in the church and has even led to a split.

nature. It emphasised the importance of small religious communities which provided outlets for emotions. It was tolerant towards polygamy and the levirate.

The movement borrowed elements from the Catholic and Anglican heritages. Almost the whole of the NLC catechism is equivalent to the Catholic catechism. Almost the whole of the NLC liturgy is equivalent to the Anglican liturgy.

Most of the practices are like moslem practices; for instance, the food taboos, circumcision and the rituals connected with worship are almost equivalent. The NLC, in its three-fold aspects, Christian, Moslem, and Luo traditions, was, indeed, relevant to the kind of people who became members. Due to its relevancy, the movement attracted many people in a short time and managed to win the acceptance of those who did not become members. In spite of this initial dynamism the rate of growth has slowed down and the movement has not appealed to other ethnic groups. The rate of growth has slowed down because the foreign elements in the major churches have decreased, factors which led to the start of the churches are no longer there, there are many splits and young people are drifting away from church.

The NLC's Christianity consists in a large admixture of syncretistic interpretations and associations, the result of its attempt to come to terms with the changing times. As already shown in Chapters Four and Five, the NLC has been trying to come to terms with the modern world and this has required a lot of change in various aspects of it. That it has already undergone a lot of change must be admitted.

(b) Renewal

Renewal here is intended to convey the idea of religious renewal based on christianity. The NLC tried to answer the need for religious renewal that was active among a section of the Luo. The renewal was effected in three ways. First the renewal required a break with the past. In the breaking with the past, one had to be baptised to be freed from the original sin, and a system of laws

and prohibitions was instituted to help the new convert to live in newness of life. The world of evil was also renounced and the traditionally irrelevant religious practices which would soon lose validity were discarded. The NLC offered initiation into a new life which was imparted by baptism and later circumcision. The members received new life and joined a new religious community. The members adapted themselves to this new outlook.

The movement demanded a new commitment. The members manifested an astonishing zeal in participating in the communal activities: attending religious meetings and promoting efforts to extend the movement's membership. There was a remarkable amount of dedication, initiative and a dynamic spirit of evangelism indicating that they were willing to make their own contributions. In regard to the Christian basis of this renewal, it should be recalled that according to the constitution, the members are committed to uphold essential requirements of christianity. It is a christianity that is relevant to its followers.

3. A CRITICAL REVIEW

The NLC, as a breakaway church, can be studied under two aspects. It may be reviewed as an existing reality or it could be considered as a phenomenon. As an existing reality, it is only of a limited historical and of restricted local importance. As a phenomenon, however, it has a wider, and more universal importance, since it has within it significant trends that could possibly contain relevant implications for the church in Africa and beyond.

(a) The NLC as an existing reality

However much one may try to ignore the NLC; the fact of its existance cannot be discounted. The NLC exists and seems likely to remain a force to be reckoned with under whatever form it will present itself as a result of schism or new formations. Viewed in itself, the movement is not a strong force inspite of its initial,

almost spectacular, successes and of the many attractions which it holds even now for its adherents. The reasons for its present weakness are many and varied.

First, it lacks the enlightened and dynamic leadership that might significantly promote its further expansion. The founder foresaw that there was going to be an immediate and large-scale response. He started training leadership and this succeeded in building a strong and dynamic movement. Since the death of the founder, there has not been any organised preparation of leaders. In view of the fact that a minister's task is not just to minister to his church members, but also to those with no church connections or connection with other churches, the minister should be well trained. The result of this lack of firm guidance and control is, the emergence of tensions among leaders which have also resulted in the splintering of groups. Circumcision is mandatory qualification for one to be a leader. It would be recommended that these leaders get good training and those recruited for the positions should be carefully assessed.

Secondly, the NLC is essentially a movement for one ethnic group in Kenya and, in its present condition, one does not expect it to develop national dimensions. It has not succeeded in attracting an appreciable following among the non-Luo ethnic people although some Luo speaking neighbouring Bantu individuals and families have joined the movement. Though the movement is to be found all over East Africa, it is only among the Luo settled in these areas that it has taken root. At the moment, however, members of the church are considering means and ways of reaching non-Luo peoples but nothing has gone beyond the level of discussions. Perhaps, one could also argue that the NLC has just taken the trend taken by all churches in Kenya, be they mission churches or independent churches. Most missionary-started churches like the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Friends churches, have almost been limited to certain ethnic groups.

However, since the beginning of the NLC, it has often compared itself to Catholic and Anglican churches that seem to have taken root almost everywhere in Kenya and the rest of Africa. At the moment universalism is the aim of every church.

Thirdly, the NLC stands isolated. Its very secession from the mainline Western Christian churches means a complete break of relationship. And although, according to its constitution, it is committed to a policy of close cooperation with other churches, it seems now to have become progressively more concerned to safeguard its own independence.

Forthly, the NLC is the object of contempt, and sometimes ridicule, within Luo land, hence the members are called variously, Jo-Nomiya, Jok-Owalo, Jo-Nyangi.⁴⁶⁹

It may be reasonably expected that the movement will not expand significantly in the future. As a matter of fact, the initial success was due to combination of circumstances. After the movement, in its first explosive drives, had gathered many people, its magnetic attraction was almost spent, for the zest for evangelism was waning and internal squabbles came to the fore. At the moment, only individuals may be recruited, while others defect./

Yet, inspite of the weaknesses, the movement still has an extraordinary cohesion among its rank and file. Unwilling to return to the Luo religion and yet also not willing to join the missionary started churches, the members have found in the NLC a type of christianity that is relevant to them. The NLC is relevant because, it includes values which were traditionally treasured like

⁴⁶⁹ Already explained in Chapter One, footnote No. 12.

polygamy and the levirate. The mission churches would never have ministered to those people in the same way the NLC did, because their very organisation and norms still, even now, do not allow them to adopt the African culture in order to meet the needs and aspirations of the people.

(b) The NLC as a Phenomenon.

As a phenomenon the NLC is not an isolated event: all over the world, the independent church movements have sprung up that when taken together constitute a unique occurrence. These movements display such striking similarities. It would not suffice to attribute the development of these movements merely to social change or acculturation which continues to alter the traditional systems and to neglect the religious dimensions. Actually, to be truly planted in Africa, christianity would need to go beyond institutional or intellectual acceptance in the emotions of the people.

As a phenomenon, the NLC can be seen as a movement with a bearing on the past, present and future. It reacted against certain aspects of the past, the Luo traditions. It aimed at an encounter with the present and devised a movement that however deficient, met with the existing needs and aspirations. The christian and moslem aspects expressed its desire to break with the traditional and join the modern trends.

From this approach of the study of the NLC, two conclusions emerge that are significant to the church. In the first place, the situation of the people, their needs and aspirations should determine the kind of approach and methods that are adopted. It is now universally admitted that it is undesirable to impose a uniform system. The complex problem which faces the church universal is how to relate to the traditional culture. Here

difficulties are usually encountered. The objection is usually that many traditional features and customs are on the way out and should be allowed to die a natural death. This may be true, but the church has an obligation to be meaningful and relevant to the people as they are at present rather than as they might possibly be at some future date. Whatever adaptation is appropriate today should be accepted and, if a developing society outgrows the need for this particular adaptation, a corresponding change can be made by the church. This should apply to the NLC itself at present; it also has to continue to undergo changes to be relevant. If the church is to retain its dynamism, it has to relinquish out-dated forms and incorporate new trends, safeguarding, obviously, the essentials and the unity of the church itself. New approaches will have to be in keeping with a developing and changing society.

And another conclusion is that it is the local level that should determine the pastoral approach and method. In this, one can endorse the view of Welbourne, that christianity which claims to be local as well as universal is failing if it does not realise that the deepest needs of men are to be met at the local level.⁴⁷⁰ The NLC's local nature may perhaps teach the mission started churches to come to grips with the most vexing problem, that of relating christianity with the local circumstances and ministering it to all layers of society in a genuine spirit of adoption.

Finally, as a phenomenon, the movement implies an attempt at renewal. It would be misleading to review the movement as merely retrogressive or conservative. The process of its formation

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Welbourne, East African Christian.

created an integration which acted as a secure platform to make the transition into modern society possible. Probably, a movement such as the NLC should stir, as a contribution, the mission started churches to re-examine their methods in the light of African needs and aspirations. It is likely that independent religious movements will continue to rise in response to conditions that are unbearable because they will be attempts at giving hope in the midst of disillusionment.

4. EPILOGUE

The NLC is the earliest breakaway church in Kenya and therefore can be subject of a definitive assessment. Its main effects on the christian scene in Nyanza can be listed.

In the first place, it was the first separation from the mainline christianity as was presented by the missionaries in Kenya. Its causes, as are already indicated in Chapter Three of this dissertation and in subsequent chapters, are not unique but were a pointer that if the missionary methods were not changed, in future even larger breakaways from the missions would occur.

Secondly, the movement itself has developed schismatic tendencies which are indication of further divisions and splintering. In Chapter Four, the splinter groups are discussed. Inner tensions and personality conflicts which have not been solved are not likely to find any permanent solution. Some of the causes of splintering are also given in Chapter Five, particularly connected with leadership.

Thirdly, this movement has in all its history, maintained very close relationship with the government and has not reached any point where its deregistration was considered. However, the movement has not been able to enter into meaningful relationship with other African Independent churches or other ecumenical christian

bodies. It has not received much recognition and prestige and, in the course of its history, it has become more and more isolated, also probably on account of its limitation to a single ethnic group.

Yet it has given its followers a satisfying form of christianity. Thus it has so far given its members a certain measure of security that has enabled them to adjust to their environment. To this extent, NLC fulfils a definite function and its demise would have harmful effects for a section of Luo population. Starting from this kind of home base, the members have been able to integrate themselves gradually into larger concepts and realities of the nation and the world and have become cooperative and responsible agents in the development of the country. There are several members who are holding responsible positions in the society.

Finally, by its concerns to provide for the existential needs of its members who were disoriented by the confusing trends of a society in transition, it has developed certain emphases that deserve to be studied. As the churches try to make christianity relevant and deeply rooted in Africa, the NLC highlights both pitfalls to be avoided and approaches to be examined and possibly adopted. By studying features that made the movement attractive and by incorporating them, the missions would find certain guidelines towards Africanisation of christianity. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to study the contributions of the movement to the mission started churches, one example could be given. Bible passages which are exegetical problems for many Europeans and Americans are perfectly understandable to these people. The emphasis is on experience, community, morality, singing and dancing rather than abstract ideas.

The NLC, then, as a reality and phenomenon, has a significance that exceeds by far its local and ethnic implications for the Luo in Siaya District. It has an importance and relevance, not only for Kenya, but for the whole continent and perhaps beyond. Thus it should be viewed in the larger setting of church independency in Africa.

APPENDIX A

MISCELLANEOUS

A P P E N D I X A

(i) EXTRACTS FROM THE 1956, NOMIYA LUO CHURCH, CONSTITUTION

NAME: (THE NOMIYA LUO CHURCH)

- (1) The Church shall be called "The Nomiya Luo Church"
- (2) The "Nomiya" which means literally in Luo "I was given" when used in the context of these rules shall constitute the name and the messages as they exactly manifested themselves to Nabi Johana Owalo from God in 1907.

The word "church" used in these context shall carry one or both of these meanings:-

"Adherents", "Worshipping", "Institution", OR "the whole Society". "Spiritual Leader" stands for name, position and person of Johana Owalo.

The "Synod" when used in these presents shall mean the Supreme Council where the presiding Authority shall be the Supreme Head of the Church.

"Prophet" or "Nabi" when used alone in these presents conveys the same meaning and substitute the name and person of the Spiritual Leader.

- (3) The church and its property shall be vested in six Trustees appointed by the members of and at a sitting of the synod. The first ones to be the Bishop, Archdeacon, Two Pastors, General Secretary and the Controller of Finance.

The duties of the Trustees are to sue or to be sued on behalf of the Church under instructions from the

Synod or any Committee authorised by the Bishop or both; and with the sanction of the Synod to raise loans for the benefit of the church or to invest its surplus funds on approved securities. Or purchase immovable property.

- (b) The Synod is empowered to replace any Trustee at any time.
- (c) The Church may affiliate itself with any society, Association or another church whose teachings, creed and faith are identical or appeals to it.

AIM AND OBJECTS

To preach and teach the people, newly converts and followers to know believe and follow that in March 1, 1907 God manifested himself to Prophet Johana Owalo, selected him as Apostle and gave him the following messages to preach and teach to people on earth:-

- (a) that God is ONE and HE is omnipresent. He is the Creator of all things and the Father of all living and non-living things.
- (b) that the philosophy of Trinity and the worship of Idols and images are all false and falacious in the eye of God.
- (c) that Jesus Christ was the son of God sent to earth to show people the kind of life God expects us to live from childhood until the end. He never in any occasion established Jesus as another God, but a MESSENGER and the BELOVED SON.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Every true Nomiya Churchman or woman must possess the following qualifications:-

- (a) He must, in respect of God's commandments, disbelieve "the

Philosophy of Trinity, Worship of Idols and Images and must have faith in one God, the Father; and that Jesus Christ is his True Messenger and the Beloved Son."

He or she should accept as Spiritual Leader, Teacher and have faith in all teachings and sayings of "Prophet Johana Owalo"

- (b) Every member shall have to fill up the prescribed form of membership which shall be made in duplicate.
- (c) A male member must be circumcised.
- (d) A member must pay regularly all church dues and any other subscriptions required from him from time to time.
- (e) A member must observe strictly all rules of the church as well as shall be altered, amended or added to from time to time.
- (f) Every member is duty bound to be present at all Sunday congregations and on all special religious gatherings.
- (g) And in order to participate in one of the church meetings or to be considered for leadership in any junior capacity a member must have served the church faithfully and continuously for at least three full years.
- (h) By our faith, Bishops, Priests, Pastors and Deacons are not commanded by God's Law, either to wear the estate of single life or to abstain from polygamy. Therefore it is lawful for them as for all other churchmen, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to Godliness.

- (i) For our women folk, God forbid their having more than one husband.
- (j) A member must refrain from making and taking all kinds of intoxicating liquor.
- (k) He must not smoke and relieve himself of all evils of smoking.
- (l) He must pray bowing and kneeling down with his head facing towards North East (Facing Kibla).
- (m) He must marry properly in the church and should not marry a loafing woman. If he is to marry a divorced woman, the marriage must first be arranged with the parents of the woman and the marriage ceremony should be properly performed in the church by elders.
- (n) He must not marry his or her relatives. The people whom the church recognises as relatives are enumerated in schedule which is attached to these rules and forms part of these rules.
- (o) By the God's commandments a good churchman should not eat animals without hooves, unscaled fish and reptiles.
- (p) A true member must observe the rule of burial with the head of the deceased facing North East (Towards Kibla).
- (q) And in addition, to the foregoing rules he or she must observe the Ten Commandments of God, given to Moses and is written in the Holy Bible.
- (r) A person uncircumcised can be a member of the church provided he keeps all other rules. But shall not take part in any

leadership of the church.

(ii) NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN SIAYA DISTRICT

There are two Diocese in Siaya District; Oboch and Nyakwere Diocese.

OBOCH DIOCESE

Oboch Pastorate

Gangu

Oboch

Ndori

Ralingo

Nundu

Ougo Pastorate

Owimbi

Orengo

Ougo

Nyanduiria

Nyachida

Asino.

Konge Pastorate

Konge

Kusa

Kilo

Gundnit

Oriri

Gangu B.

Ong'iyō

Ogwedhi.

Kanyibok Pastorate

Kanyibok

Misori

Nyang'oma

Nyangoma

Nyachide

Otieng'

Owimbi Ruma

Lieta'

Lwala

Ujwanga Pastorate

Ujwang'a

Masala

Ndwara

Ojelo

Mabinju

Ogwedhi

Kayundi

Apondo

Magare

Othoche Pastorate

Othoche

Odiero

Barchando

Barchando

Maranda

Ugadhi

Arer

Nyakasumbi

Bar Ogwedhi

Binga Pastorate

Binga

Ulagai

Alwala

NYAKWERE DIOCESESagam Pastorate

Sagam

Juna

Kalanyo

Minjeche

Gombe

Nyanya

Nyakwere

Oguedhi

Masonga

Yago

Sinaga

Sinderma

Lwala Pastorate

Lwala

Rambara

Osewre

Nairu

Pala

Nyahera Pastorate

Nyahera

Rakuom Pastorate

Rakuom

Nyandiwa

Sipiklo

Oboke Pastorate

Oboke

Jina

Got Regea

Orom Pastorate

Orom

Ngeta

Wangoji

Nguge

Rawa

Alara

Rawa

Ulongi

Aredha

Mabinju

Mabinju

Amboka

Kaonje

TOWNS

Nairobi
 Mombasa
 Thika
 Kitale
 Kariobangi
 Kakamega
 Eldoret

KISUMU

Kibuye)
 Manyatta) Kisumu
 Sunset)

Kuoyo Diocese has 10 pastorates and seventy seven churches.
 Ng'iya Diocese has three Pastorates and ten churches.
 Milambo Diocese has three Pastorates and twelve churches.

(iii)

Number of members since 1955

<u>Years</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
1955	20,983
1956	26,995
1957	29,170
1958	29,870
1959	30,426
1960	31,748
1961	There were problems so no report was given.
1962	The Odol group had 20,915 members
1963	Odol - 27,964 members)) unlikely Oriere - 50,214 members)
1964	51,806 (united)
1965	52, 368
1966	53,669
1967	50,000
1968	52,200
1969	52,200
1970	53,974

1971	..	..	..	..	..	61,231
1972	..	..	..	..	..	80,417
1973	..	..	..	..	..	80,263
1974	..	..	..	..	..	81,125
1975	..	..	..	..	..	87,130
1976	..	..	..	..	..	90,125
1977	..	..	..	..	..	Problems)
1978	..	..	..	..	..	Problems) General Secretary had problems.
1979	..	..	..	..	..	Author was present when the counting was done. 4,000 people were present.

In 1977 and 1978 the NLC was experiencing problems which are already related in chapter four. In 1979 the author attended a meeting in which the counting of all the NLC members who were present was done. This is also already described in chapter four.

U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

Office of the Inspector General
Washington, D.C.

Enclosed for the Inspector General are two copies of a report of the
Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, dated
January 11, 1967.

The report is entitled "Report of the Department of Justice,
Office of the Inspector General, dated January 11, 1967,
concerning the activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation
in the handling of the case of the late Senator
John F. Kennedy, Jr." The report is being furnished to you
for your information.

APPENDIX B

LETTERS

The following letters were received from the Inspector General
of the Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General,
Washington, D.C., on January 11, 1967, and are being
furnished to you for your information.

The first letter is dated January 11, 1967, and is
entitled "Report of the Department of Justice,
Office of the Inspector General, dated January 11, 1967,
concerning the activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation
in the handling of the case of the late Senator
John F. Kennedy, Jr." The second letter is dated
January 11, 1967, and is entitled "Report of the
Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General,
dated January 11, 1967, concerning the activities of the
Federal Bureau of Investigation in the handling of the case
of the late Senator John F. Kennedy, Jr."

Very truly yours,
[Signature]

EDUC/ORD/GEN/257

COPY.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT,
1st March, 1954.

The District Education Officer,
K I S U M U.

Copy to District Commissioner, Central Nyanza, Kisumu.

I enclose a copy of a letter from the Director of Education refusing to approve the Nomiya Luo Mission as managers of Schools.

2. At the last District Education Board Meeting it was agreed that pending a decision by the Director of Management, the schools of the Nomiya Luo Mission should be managed by the District Education Officer. You will now have to get in touch with the Mission and put before them the following alternatives:-

- A. They can close all their schools down as soon as you wish, which, in point of fact means as soon as you can make arrangements for the children in them to be spread round other schools.
- B. They can hand over their schools to some other authorised management and I would suggest that you urge them to hand them over to the District Education Board to manage, in which case you should make arrangements for the Nomiya Luo Mission to be given a good many representatives on the School Committee.

You will realise that in view of the Director's decision this matter is extremely urgent, since, as a matter of strict fact, the Nomiya Luo Mission could be had up under Education Ordinance for having managed schools in this region illegally since June, 1953.

(Sgd.) ? ?
PROVINCIAL EDUCATION OFFICER,
KISUMU.

AAG/PKH.

ED.12/1/4/7/87.

8th March, 1954.

The District Education Officer,
Central Nyanza,
KISUMU.

NOMIYA LUO MISSION
MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS.

Ref. Your EDUC/ORI/GEN/257 of 1.3.54.

I wish to press most strongly that you call in the present leaders of the Mission to discuss this matter.

2. I agree with the Provincial Education Officer that the Mission would be encouraged to hand over the schools to the District Education Board to manage. Perhaps you will ask Archdeacon Stovold or Mr. Dakeyne to put this over to the present leaders in the first place.

3. I shall be glad if you will keep me informed of all developments as they arise.

T. A. WATTS
DISTRICT COMMISSIONER
CENTRAL NYANZA.

TAW/SSD.

copy to:- Archdeacon Stovold,
P.O. Box 1,
MASENO.

- copy of P.E.O.'s letter enclosed
herewith.

" :- The Provincial Education Officer,
Nyanza Province,
KISUMU.

B.P. PETRO OUMA
UJWANG'A SCHOOL
NOMIYA LUO MISSION
P.O. ASEMBO BAY

20TH MARCH, 1954.

The Ven. Archdeacon Stovold,
P.O. Box 1
MASENO.

Dear Sir,

RE: MANAGEMENT OF NOMIYA LUO SCHOOLS

On January 13th this year, we applied to the Director of Education for permission to manage our schools, of which four have been registered.

We have just received a reply from him to the effect that our Mission is not recognised to manage the schools and that these schools should be managed by a recognised body, or else they should be closed by April 11th.

It is my great desire to bring this before you as the head of the Anglican Church in Nyanza, asking you kindly if the A.A.C. Manager of Central Nyanza Schools could undertake to manage these schools for us also. There are many children who would suffer should these schools be closed. In the past we have had great help from the A.A.C. especially with regard to the education of our children, and I sincerely hope that you will stretch a helping hand for the sake of our children.

When, in future, the Government feels that our Mission is fit to take over the management of these schools, we shall then take them over.

I beg to remain
Sir

Yours faithfully

Petro Ouma

Copy to: The Rural Dean C.N. P.O. Maseno
The Supervisor, A.A.C. Schools, C.N. Maseno.
Mr. G.C. Owalo, (Ag. Manager, N.L.M. Schools).

FROM
THE VEN. ARCHDEACON K.E. STOVOLD, M.A.
TELEPHONE: MASENO 11(OFFICE HOURS ONLY)
TELEGRAMS: SUNRISE, MASENO.

C.M.S.
P.O. BOX 1
MASENO
Kenya.

March 29th, 1954

Bishop Ouma,
Nomia Luo Church,
P.O. Asembo Bay.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter asking whether the A.A.C. Supervisor could be responsible for managing your schools.

The answer is the same as when you asked the Rev. I.W.R. Bacon to do this some years ago, i.e. that we regret we cannot accept this responsibility.

The reasons are:-

1. Our Supervisor has more than enough work to do looking after his present number of schools.
2. We do not accept polygamy in the Christian Church, as it is contrary to our Lord's teaching.

I am sure that the best thing you can do is to ask the D.E.B. to manage them for you.

Yours sincerely,

copy to: Mr. G. Owalo
Mr. R.B. Dakeyne
The Education Officer, C.N.

Ref.S/APP/GEN/58/56.

District Education Office,
Central Nyanza
Kisumu.

12th April, 1956.

Mr. G.C. Owalo,
Oboch D.E.B. Primary School,
P.O. Box 691,
Kisumu.

Nyamira Primary School.
Ref. your letter of 11th April, 1956.

If you have established a school at Nyamira without the consent of the District Education Board, you are liable for prosecution in the very near future.

You have no right to establish a school, and you should immediately undo everything that has been considered for this school. You will meet these people and inform them that a school may not be started. You will withdraw the T4 Teacher and stop all teaching of any subjects on the school syllabus with the exception of religion.

I am informing the District Officer, Bondo to enquire into any future activity at this spot, and I hold you entirely responsible for the instructions given in this letter.

I see no point whatever in your continuing to represent the Nomiya Luo Mission Community if you are incapable of understanding the method of establishing a school in this District. You have been informed of this procedure on more than one occasion by myself and have heard it discussed at the District Education Board, and Managers Meetings.

This School must be closed immediately on receipt of this letter and the letter acknowledged by you.

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER,
KISUMU.

JH/JWO.

Copy to: The District Officer, Bondo - Kindly investigate this matter.
" " The Chief Sakwa Location, P.O. Bondo.

MR. N.J. ODIWJOR,
PRIVATE BAG, UKWALA.

S/DP/ON/71A/224

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE,
KISUMU - 21st Oct. 1957.

Ref. Your letter of 11th October, 1957.

I refer you to my letter S/DP/CN/71A/ of 20th February 1957 to the District Officer Ukwala Division, Chief Amoth, Mr.G.C. Owalo and copy to you.

I see no good reason for Uradi school continuing as such this year and as there has been no reply to my letter quoted above it appears that there is no case for its existing as a school at all.

Kindly consult the District Officer, Ukwala with a view to informing the local people that Uradi School must be closed as quickly as possible, and all concerned informed of the consequences of operating illegal schools in the protectorate.

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE,
K I S U M U.

JR/SWD.

Copies to: The District Officer, Ukwala.
Chief Amoth, Alego Location, P.O. SIAYA.
Mr. G.C. Owalo, Oboch Primary School, BOX 689, KISUMU.

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE
DISTRICT OFFICES
CENTRAL NYANZA
P.O. PRIVATE BAG
KISUMU.

22nd February, 1960.

Mr. G.C. Owalo,
Nyangoko Intermediate School,
P.O. NYILIMA.

EX NOMIYA LUO SCHOOLS AT OTHOCHE AND KANYIBOK

Shortly after your visit on the 20th instant, I was able to discuss your problem with Mr. Mayor who represents the Anglican Church on the District Education Board.

2. He states that he has no objection to savings in Grant in Aid in respect of his schools being applied to selected Nomiya Luo establishments which would come under the Management of District Education Board.

3. I must now ask you to be patient and let this matter of grant-aiding Othoche and Kanyibok await the next Meeting of the Central Nyanza District Education Board, when I propose to recommend the registration of these two establishments as grant-aided schools in 1961 under D.E.B. Management.

4. I must emphasize two things most clearly,

- a) That the two schools mentioned remain closed and their children learn at adjacent aided schools until such times as the D.E.B. accepts a recommendation for registration.
- b) That you understand that this concession applies only to the two schools mentioned and not to any other ex Nomiya Luo Schools. These two have been selected only on account of their geographical isolation and large enrolments. All other ex Nomiya Luo Schools will remain closed.

(G.R. HILL)
DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER,
K I S U M U.

GRH/DCH

Copies to:- The District Commissioner, Central Nyanza, KISUMU.
The Principal, Ng'iya T.T.C., Private Bag, KISUMU.
Assistant Education Officer, P.O. BONDO.

NOMIYA LUO CHURCH,
P.O. NDORI.

28/8/61.

The Registrar-General,
Register of Societies,
P.O. Box 30041,
NAIROBI.

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that at a meeting of Nomia Luo Church held on the 19th August, 1961 chose Mr. Benjamin Owundo to be the Bishop of the Nomia Luo Church.

Please note that any communication regarding the Church should be addressed to Bishop Benjamin Owundo, c/o P. O. Sondu, via Kisumu.

Yours faithfully,

GENERAL SECRETARY
NOMIA LUO CHURCH.

copies to: The Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza, KISUMU.
The District Commissioner, C. Nyanza, KISUMU.
The District Education Officer, C. Nyanza, KISUMU.
The D.S.O. Kenya Police, C. Nyanza, Kisumu.
Bishop Benjamin Owundo, c/o P.O. SONDU.
Secretary Ishmael Onguka.

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE OF THE
SYNOD OF NOMIYA LWO CHURCH HELD AT ASEGO
CHURCH IN KANYADA PASTORATE, HOMA BAY ON
SUNDAY, 11TH JUNE, 1978 AT 2 P.M.

Present:

Rt. Rev. Meshak Onyango.	Mrs. Selina Nyangweso.
Rt. Rev. Joel Achila.	Rev. James Ondigo.
Rt. Rev. Malaki Owalo.	Rev. Mathayo Auko.
Rt. Rev. Charles Odhiambo.	Rev. Shadlack Sewe.
Rt. Rev. Shem Obura.	Mr. Sefania Kenga.
Rev. Yona Onyuna.	Mr. Festo Onyiego.
Rev. Nashon Ojuok.	Mr. Jason Osio.
Rev. Richard Ongochi.	Rev. Walter Awino.
Rev. Festo Gwada.	Jonathan Obadha.
Rev. Stephen Achieng'.	Nathaniel Odera.
Rev. Baranaba Adhing'a.	Mrs. Filista Akoth Odera.
Rev. Gerson Midwa.	Mr. Simeon Ajur.
Rev. Samuel Midayi.	Mr. Jakobo Okelo.
Rev. Philip Ochieng'.	Mr. Elkana Oguok.
Mr. Solanon Oiro.	Mrs. Stela Ondiek.
Mr. Walter Ong'ondo.	Mrs. Sara Onyango.
Mr. Julius Oloo.	Mrs. Teresa Akumu.
Mr. Joshua Okelo.	Mrs. Miriam Ongecha.
Mr. Simeo Atieno.	Mr. Enoke Okumu.
Mr. Fanuel Okonjo.	Mrs. Rose Akumu.
Samuel Opiyo.	Mrs. Wilikista OIweru.
Mrs. Lewnida Gwada.	Mr. Elija Achieng'.
Mrs. Sela Again.	Mrs. Wilfrida Oluny.
Mr. Joshua Adel.	Mr. Josia Obonyo.
Mr. Zedekia Onam.	Mrs. Sabina Achola.
Mr. Rosbela Ng'idi.	Mr. Nikanor Onumo
Mr. Samuel Ototo.	Mr. Apolo Olanya.
Mrs. Rosa Ongalo.	Mr. Eliakim Ojuang'.
Mr. Shadrack Ongere.	Mrs. Grace Ouko
	Mrs. Rispa Mbayi.

Apology: Rev. Elija Okanda. Mr. Samuel Odera, Mr. Musa Oguna.
Mr. Claudio Okoth. Rev. Reuben Abiya, Rev. Ahsalcm Okech,
Rev. S. Aol.

Agenda:

1. Striking a compromise within the Nomiya Church.
2. Any other business.

The members present resolved that, as the meeting was consisted of members of the two parties which had been waring within the Nomiya Luo Church for quite a period then, it was necessary to seek a fresh mandate of the assembled members by voting in block of two. It was proposed by Rev. Yona Onyuna and seconded by Mr. Julius Oloo and Mrs. Sara Onyango and Mr. Elija Ochieng' that the groups led

by Benjamin Oundo as Archbishop and that one led by Rev. Joel Achila be put to vote and whichever wins would lead the meeting on behalf of Nomiya Luo Church. When this was debated, the members unanimously agreed that this step would help to bring about the unity required and the success so badly need within the Church. It was further suggested by Mrs. Grace Ouko and seconded by Mr. Sefania Kenga and Simeo Atieno, that in taking the votes a neutral elder of the Church, Reverend Meshak Onyango, be the Chairman of the voting period. This was overwhelmingly supported and Rev. Meshak Onyango took the chair in front while Mrs. Rispa Mbayi was selected to count the votes which were decided by simple voting of show of hands.

Rev. Meshak Onyango first called for the number of people who wished the group led by B. Oundo, The number recorded was 21. The second group led by J. Achila was called and a number of 38 people was recorded. The Chairman of the voting time, Rev. Meshak Onyango then announced to the meeting that the group led by Rev. Joel Achila as Archbishop had come up to win a majority of 19 people and was then declared the official leading group of the Nomiya Luo Church with effect from 11th June, 1978. Everybody clapped in great support as the Chairman sat down. Rev. Shem Obura then proposed amid cheers that the unity then achieved should be known and referred to in future as the "ASEGO DECLARATION". His views were endorsed by the meeting. Rev. Meshak then asked two Bishops to stand before the meeting. They were Rev. Malaki Owalo who was blessed as the Assistant Archbishop and Rev. Charles Odhiambo was blessed before the audience as the Bishop of Kisumu West Diocese where the SEAT of the Church is held.

The Meeting then proceeded by confirming the rest of the Church Office Bearers as elected as follows:-

Archbishop - Rt. Rev. Joel Achila.
 Assist. Archbishop - Rev. Malaki Owalo.
 Senior Bishop - Rev. Absalom Okech.
 Bishop of Kisumu Central: Rt. Rev. Elijah Okanda.
 Bishop of Kisumu South: Rt. Rev. Shem Obura.
 Bishop of Kisumu West: Rt. Rev. Charles Odhiambo.
 Administrative Secretary: Mr. Solomon Oiro Ogombo.
 Chief Accountant - Mr. Claudio Okoth Omolo.
 Treasurer-General - Mr. Moses Oguna.
 Registrar - Mr. Samuel Odera.
 Educationist - Mr. Walter Ong'ondo.
 Assist. Admin. Secretary: Mr. Joshua Okelo.
 Assist. Treasurer-General: Mr. Julius Oloo.
 Archdeacon/South Diocese: Rev. Yonah Onyuna.
 Archdeacon/Central Diocese: Rev. Sefaniah Aol.
 Archdeacon/West Diocese: Rev. Reuben Abiya.
 Rural Dean/South Diocese: Rev. James Ondigo.
 Rural Dean/Central Diocese: Rev. Baranaba Adhing'a.
 Rural Dean/West Diocese: Rev. James Okumu.

Senior Pastors: Rev. Mikaiiah Nyambok - Kisumu Central.

Rev. Jekonia Ndege - Kisumu West.

Rev. Richard Ongochi - Kisumu South.

Diocese Secretaries: Mr. Ezekiel Bunde - Kisumu Central.

Mr. Festo Gwada - Kisumu South.

Mr. Simeon Akumu - Kisumu West.

After the above confirmation in appointments were made, the Presiding Officer Rev. Meshak Onyango blessed those who have been confirmed by saying few words of prayer and wished them well in their task of leading the Church in future. He stressed that more bickerings were not in the interest of the church, but all should work hard in steering the Word of God which was the main task and responsibility.

Before the meeting came to a close, one member, Mr. Joshua Adel moved that it was vital for all to think hard in suggesting a new name for the Church instead of the present name which tended to give an impression that the Church was purely meant for only one particular tribe, Luos. Many people supported the views expressed. After a long debate in the issue, the meeting resolved that a name 'Nomiya Church in Africa' or the like would be ideal and impressed upon the incumbant officers of the Church to seek the Registrar's opinion in the matter and bring it before the Synod at a subsequent date.

There being no any other business, the Conference was closed with a word of prayer from the Bishop of Kisumu West, Rt. REV. Charles Odhiambo, at 4. p.m.

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Confirmed:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ASECO/SOUTH NYANZA.

June, 1978.

SOURCES(i) ORAL EVIDENCE (list of some informants)1. HARUN NYAKITO

Born:- 1900

Occupation: Farmer, lives in the neighbourhood of Oboch, his father was one of the first old men to attend Yohana Owalo's meetings. Was closely involved with NLC education between 1945 - 1955, is not an adherent. Interviewed, at his home at Oboch, on January 12, 1980.

2. MESHACK ONYANGO

Born: 1890

Was one of the first NLC adherents, involved in the NLC schools from 1920's, had problems with the church leadership in 1930's and 1940's. The first church was built in his area - Asembo Kanyikela - interviewed in his home, Ndwara, December 9, 1979, has since died in 1980.

3. LOUISE OTINDA

Born: 1890

Wife of Ibrahim Odiyo, one of Owalo's converts. Went together with Y. Owalo and I. Odiyo to get their marriage registered, though the marriage was polygamous.

4. YAKOBO OKECHI

Born: 1875

Joined the NLC during Owalo's life time. Baptised by Owalo, was Bishop of the NLC in 1921. His life has spanned the history of the movement. Interviewed at his home, Konge, in September 9, 1979 and December 6, 1979.

5. EZEKIEL ONYANGO

Born: 1920

Interviewed at Konge - is a layreader of his church.

6. SAPHIRA OKANJA

Born: 1906

Lived in Owalo's home as young girl. Was wife of Bishop Petro Ouma, 1920 - 1954. Interviewed twice, once at Oboch on December 15, 1979 and at her home in Asembo Kabondo on February 28, 1980.

7. NATHANIEL AGINGU ONYANGO

Born: 1900

One of the first students at Orengo the first NLC supplementary school. Baptised by Owalo - interviewed at his home in Kabondo.

8. ANGWEN OSURE

Born:- 1900

His father gave Owalo land at Oboch. Owalo stayed in their home during the first few years of his stay at Oboch. Not an adherent. Interviewed at his home in Oboch, February 11, 1980.

9. G.C. OWALO

Born: 1923

Present Archbishop. Involved in NLC education during the 1950s and 1960s. Son of Y. Owalo and wife Elizabeth Alila, result of a levirate marriage. Was educated in Maseno and Uganda in the 1940s and early 1950s.

10. JAMES OJUOK

Born: 1896

Joined the NLC in 1914. Was bishop of a splinter group for one year in 1920s. Friend of Musa Wera Nowa Backsliden NLC member. Interviewed at Ougo Asembo, February 19, 1980.

11. JOSEPHAT OPIGE

Born: 1932

Was student at Oboch in the later forties and early fifties. Interviewed at his home, Oboch, December 20, 1980.

12. SILA AKINYI

Born: 1925

One of the church leaders in Nairobi. Interviewed in Nairobi, March 21, 1980 - His father is also one of the earliest members.

13. ABSALOM GONDI

Born: 1900

Member of NLC since 1927. Involved in NLC education in the 1930s. Joined Nomiya Luo Roho church as Bishop but returned to the NLC in 1976. Became layreader and sharrif. Interviewed at his home in Oboch, January 14, 1980.

14. JAMES NYADA

Born: 1932

Discussion at his home near Oboch. Has lived with muslims at the coast for a long time. During discussion an attempt was made to compare some NLC beliefs and practices with some Moslem beliefs and practices.

15. KALEB ASEMBO

Born: 1923

A member of the Konyango Subclan in Asembo Kakia, which defected from NLC to join the Nomiya Luo Sabbath. They later rejoined the NLC and he was made Pastor.

16. ZADOCK OORO

Born: 1890

Member since 1927. Has eight wives. All his children are adherents. It is in his home where reconciliation was reached between Odol and Oriere in 1964. Interviewed, Ougo, January 13, 1980.

17. MARIKO OUKO

Born: 1904

Church elder at Ndwarra - Ujwanga

18. ELIJAH OKANDA

Born: 1900

Has been a member since 1914. Was one of the first students at Oboch. Went with Yohana Owalo to most of his journeys e.g. when Owalo visited Bamba Uganda he went along. Is an Archdeacon and one of the pillars of the church. Interviewed twice, Seme Korango, December 16, 1979, March 14, 1981.

19. BARANABA ADHING'A

Born: 1900

Converted in 1916. First convert in Seme Korwije. Was baptised by Owalo. Is now chief sharrif, interviewed at Oboch, January 11, 1980.

20. ELEKIA OGAL
 Born: 1903
 Layreader, Kisumu Manyatta church, Born in Seme - his elder brother was taken to work for Alexander Morrison in Mombasa by Y. Owalo.
21. CLEOPA OYIEKO Born 1914
 Layreader, Silo Korango church - one of the most active NLC churches. A very effective church leader, interviewed at Silo Korango on March 3, 1980.
22. YONA OYUNGU Born 1880
 One of the first converts in Seme. Has done a lot of evangelism since 1914. Is prominent in the history of the NLC. Was Hishop of a splinter group in 1940s. Left the church in 1954 to join a splinter group. Has started his own religious group, Nomiya Ligangla Mabith.
23. SARAH DINGA Born 1909
 Wife of Isaya Dinga one of the first converts in Seme. Daughter of Suleman Odundo of Kanyikela - who was also one of the first converts in Kanyikela, interviewed at Korango.
24. RACHEL OKUNGU Born 1923
 Daughter of Suleman Odundo. A convert - Seme Korango. She belongs to the group that claims they are saved by the blood of Jesus.
25. ELI OBILO Born 1932
 Layreader, Kijana area of Seme (Kambudi) his father was one of the first adherents, interviewed at Uyona on 24th February, 1980 and at Silo Korango on 2nd March 1980.

26. JAMES OKUMU Born 1914
Rural Dean, the Ujwanga which includes Uyoma.
Became an adherent in 1940 and since then has
played a leading role in Uyoma, interviewed at
his home in Uyoma Kokiri, February 16, 1980, with
a whole group of 6 other adherents who were:-
Mrs. Lorna Nyabono, Born 1939
Mrs. Cecilia Okech, Born 1918
Mr. Z. Aganyi, Born 1920
Mr. H. Omolo Born 1930
Mr. S. Opondo, Born 1940
27. ISAYA NDISI Born 1890
Was taught by Owalo in Maseno, is a non adherent.
Interviewed at Uyoma Kikori, February 17, 1980.
28. MZEE ASOKA Born 1890
Was together with Owalo at Maseno - not an
adherent. Interviewed at his home near Maseno
on December 1, 1979.
29. MZEE I. NDENGA Born 1875
Staunch Anglican Member, when Owalo was preaching.
Later when Owalo died, Ndenga's second wife
joined the N.I.C. His younger brother now dead
was with Owalo at Maseno. Interviewed at his
home, Alego Masumbi. December 2, 1979.
30. MZEE R. ONEYA Born 1875
Was with Owalo at Maseno. Now dead, interviewed
at Siaya, December 2, 1979.
31. RHODA OJAL Born 1918
Church leader at Gobei in Sakwa. Second wife -
is "saved" by the blood of Jesus. Interviewed at
Oboch, December 14, 1979.

32. REUBEN ABIYA Born 1918
 Father was one of the first adherents in Gem Ahono. Not a Luo. Is the Archdeacon, Nyakwere Diocese. Interviewed twice, 1st alone on February 17, 1980 and secondly with a group on February 24, 1980 - the group consisted of:-
- (i) His two wives.
 Mrs. Grace Abwao, Born 1918, was very actively involved in the development of the school at Ahono in 1940s.
- (ii) Z. Okechi, Born 1918 a new convert, Mnyore.
33. KILION MILUGO Born 1950
 Member of one of the recent churches in Gem - Kaudha - Masanga. Leader of the youth group there.
34. BENJAMIN OUNDO Born 1900
 One of the first people to be baptised by Owalo' in Nyakach. Became convert after Nichodmu Tambo, preached Archbishop of the church since 1960. Died in April, 1980. Interviewed January 11, 1980 at Oboch.

Others who were interviewed:-

35. JABES TAMBO, Nairobi.
36. H. Ang'ina Ooro, Iten
37. Ochieng' Agoya Obado, Eldoret.

38. Charles Anyona, Nairobi.
39. H. Matanga, Mombasa.
40. R. Koga, Kisumu Manyatta.
41. L. Owalo, Member of Nomiya Church of Gospelers.
42. Gideon Abong'o Migot, Seme Wangarot,
Son of Daudi Migot.
43. S. Oyugi Ogut, member of Nomiya Luo Sabbatto Church.
44. Naphtali Ong'awa - Bishop of Kwayo Diocese
45. Mariko Odeny, Layreader, Ujwang'a.
46. Malaki Owalo, Archdeacon, Oboch Diocese
47. Mathia Owade, one of the early adherents.
48. Moses Oyugi Nyakina, member, West Seme,
Alungo Kocholla.
49. Clement Seje, not an adherent, but brother to John Paul Oti,
mentioned in the text.

Two of the interviews that have been quoted now and then as evidence in this study.

A. INFORMANT

Elijah Okanda, was interviewed twice,
20th December, 1979 and 3rd March, 1980.

1. *How old are you?*

80 years.

2. *How many wives do you have?*

My first wife died, so I had to marry another wife.

3. *Where did you go to school?*

I started school in Oboch in 1914 when Owalo arrived here. He taught us how to read and write and also taught us what we have continued to hold on to.

4 (a) *When did you become a member of this group?*

In 1914.

(b) *Why did you become a member?*

I joined the school, because the government also wanted people to join school. Under Owalo we were not only learning reading and writing but also religion. I was then baptised in 1917. Before baptism we were taught the catechism thoroughly.

5. *What are some of the teachings that appealed to you?*

At that time nothing in particular apart from the fact that we were at school excited me, but when I grew older I began to appreciate the practice of polygamy. I also felt comfortable with the teaching concerning the glory that should go to God alone and not to Jesus.

6. *Who founded the Church and when?*

Yohana Owalo, in 1912.

7. *Did he belong to any church before this?*

Yes in 1905 he was at Kibuye with the R.C. and he was baptized as Yohanes. In 1907, during the famine of Odila, Morrison took him to Mombasa. In 1908 he was with Bwana Burns and later he joined the Scotch Church in Kikuyu. At Nairobi he taught Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. He also joined Islam and he was baptised as Omari.

8. *Why did he break away from the above groups?*

a) He broke from Catholics because they were worshipping idols (Mary, Jesus and the Saints). They also worshipped the pope.

b) He broke from the Anglican because they worshipped three Gods, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God the Father, inspite of the fact that God is only one.

c) He left Islam because they Moslems indulged in witchcraft and believed in protection from the charms they wore.

d) The most important reason was that God called him on March, 1, 1907 to start a Mission for the Luo people, It is clearly written in the Prayer book we copied this from Upanga Mkali.

9. *Did he meet opposition from the members of his clan? NO*

At his home at Orengo he was welcomed and he had the first converts. He was given land to build a church. At Oboch he was also given land by the clansmen. He only met opposition from those who were already adherents of either the OMS or the Roman Catholics. In fact, these people wanted to kill him but Bwana Willis and Ainsworth refused.

10. *What did he teach and preach?*

(i) He taught us about one God who resided in heaven.

(ii) In 1917 he began to teach us that it was necessary for adherents to be circumcised, the first people to be circumcised were Samuel Ogombo, Ibrahim Odiyo, Petro Ouma.

(iii) He prohibited from eating certain fishes, certain animals, dancing and drinking alcohol. The prohibitions were not effected immediately because some old men refused.

(iv) He gave the freedom to marry many wives - Daudi Migot wanted to send away his second wife but he stopped him from doing this. Many people who were sent away from the Anglican Church or the Catholic joined Owalo.

(v) He taught us many songs, to remove our shoes when in worship, to wear white robes.

11. *Do you think that his message was influenced by the following traditions:-*

Anglican

Luo

Catholic and

Moslem

When the movement started the songs sung and the creeds were those of the Anglicans. The removal of shoes and the wearing of Kanzus were practices that to us looked very unique but at present they seem to be very equivalent with the Moslem practices. We also allowed people to be polygamous. The Luo funeral rites remained almost the same. He made it a rule amongst his adherents a brother was required to inherit his dead brothers wife and children.

12. *What kind of people joined him?*

Those who were excommunicated from the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church. Some people who were possessed also joined and they were exorcised. Other people who had never joined any other church also joined.

13. *Was the movement welcomed by people from other locations? YES*

In Manyatta it was received in about 1916. In 1918 after the war we went together to Bombo with Owalo to baptise new converts - Some locations in Sakwa accepted in 1916. Yimbo also received the message in 1918. In Nyakach in 1918.

14. *Did the death of Owalo affect the development of the church?*

Yes, there were leadership quarrels between Wera and Petro Ouma. It is those problems over leadership that have affected the growth of our church. For 16½ years beginning from 1920, there were problems. When this was solved another problem also started between Petro Ouma and Yona Oyungu and Meshack Onyango. In 1954 Petro died and G.C. Owalo took over. After seven years trouble started again.

15. *Is the NLC a Christian Church*

A Moslem Branch

A catholic Denomination

An Anglican Church

A Luo Church?

It is a christian church for the Luo.

16. *Why was it called N.L.C. and not Nomiya African Universal Church?*

The name Nomiya Luo Mission was given to Owalo by God. His message was meant for the Luo people. If at present other people, other than Luos, would like it, they would have to accept it that way, just like our people accepted to join the Anglican or Roman Catholic Churches.

17. *Have you heard about Jesus Christ?*

Yes.

18. *What is the relations between Jesus and Owalo?*

They are fellow prophets of God. Jesus however, is greater than Owalo because he is the son of God, and in the prayer book it is said that he is holding the end of the cord of life in heaven.

19. *In what way do you differ from other Churches?*

(a) We practice and accept polygamy.

(b) Our male members are circumcised

(c) We remove shoes during services.

(d) We do not take the Holy Communion.

(e) We wear white robes - Other churches like Roho and Israel Nineveh have copied this practice from us.

(f) The word which Owalo brought to us came directly from Heaven.

(g) There are some foods we do not eat.

20. *Has the movement lost its original impetus?* YES

These days we no longer participate in serious evangelism. Most of the times we are involved in quarrelling. Before Owalo died we went preaching in all places - in fact we made sure we visited our relatives in other places and preached to them. Sometimes we went together with him - at other times we went alone. The separation or the splits are causing a lot of harm to our development - We have not found a remedy yet. This, however, does not mean that our church is weak and about to die - We people who saw Owalo cannot let the church die. We will preach about this religion until we die.

B. INFORMANT:- Yakobo Okech was interviewed two times
September 9, 1979 and December 9, 1979.

1. *How many wives do you have?*

Only one; my first wife died so I had to marry another.

2. *Where did you go to school and when did you join the NLC?*

For some years I was a CMS Catechist then when Yohana Owalo arrived in 1912 to start the Nomiya Luo Mission, I joined him and became his student. It is under him that I learnt how to read and write.

3. *Why did you join the NLC?*

First I was impressed by the fact that Owalo spoke English and Kiswahili and I wanted to know these languages. Secondly, the fact that his message was from heaven attracted me. Thirdly, during those days one had to belong to a particular denomination to get education, and one was respected even by the colonial government. I joined Owalo to be educated by an African like myself.

4. *Did Owalo belong to any other church before he founded his own church?*

He was at the following:-

(a) he joined the Catholic Mission at Ojola

(b) Then he went with Bwana Morrison to Mombasa where he joined the CMS. It is in Mombasa where he began to see visions.

(c) He joined Islam.

(d) Morrison sent him to CMS station in Maseno.

Owalo decided to leave these churches because God told him in a vision

in March 1, 1907 that these people were teaching wrongly. The angel told him that purgatory was non-existent, that worship of Mary and the veneration accorded the saints was wrong, and the worship of any other being like Jesus was wrong. The fact that Owalo was called by God and instructed on what type of movement to start is what led him to leave these churches.

5. *Did he meet with any oppositions from the people of his clan?*

He did not meet with any serious opposition. Owalo arrived when Odindo, a member of the CMS was to be the chief. Those who refused christianity were thoroughly beaten so when Owalo arrived the Kochieng' clans men joined him. They helped him to build the church and to buy a bicycle and a drum. He built a school at Oboch and many children joined.

6. *What did he preach and teach?*

- (i) He taught that there is only one God and Jesus is his son.
- (ii) He taught that polygamy was acceptable before God.
- (iii) He taught that circumcision was a must for his male followers.
- (iv) He taught that there was nothing wrong with the traditional herbs and medicines but he condemned the works of witchdoctors. As a result of his teaching, various people joined him.

Those who were demon possessed joined and they were exorcised. The infertile women joined and they were prayed for and they gave birth. Those who were excommunicated from the CMS because of having taken second wives found it very attractive.

7. *What was the reaction of the Anglican and Roman Catholics and that of the Colonial Government?*

J.J. Willis called a council in Maseno in 1912 intending to stop Owalo from starting the movement but in vain. In 1914 Mathayo Opiyo and Zakayo Nyanyuok brought a case against him before Willis and Mr. Ainsworth but Owalo won the case. Mathayo became insane. Joshua Opondo and other adherent quarrelled Owalo and just died.

The P.C. Bwana Ainsworth, gave Owalo a period of two years probation. In 1914 while visiting chief Odindo's camp he asked Owalo to name his church - Owalo asked for a day of prayer, then the following day he went and said it was the Nomiya Luo Mission, (hence NLM).

8. *Was the movement welcomed by people of other locations?* YES

(i) Arius Manyala of Kanyada in South Nyanza left the S.D.A. Church and joined the NLM in 1916. In 1916 Nickodemu Tambo of Nyakach also joined the NLM and went to preach in Nyakach. Samuel Otieno of Manyatta Kisumu also accepted in 1916. In Mbogo Vale, where the son of Owalo's sister lived, he got some converts in 1915 - Gem Ahono, Sakwa, Yinbo also had converts as early as 1918. We went together with Owalo to Mbogo Vale.

9. *Did the death of the founder affect the development of the church?*
YES

Soon after Owalo's death there were problems related to leadership in 1921. I took the leadership of the church but I had to leave because Musa Wera threatened to kill me. For about seventeen years there were problems then in 1937 the problems were resolved but this did not last. In about 1945, problems

started between Yona Oyungu and Petro Ouma. In spite of problems evangelism continued. We preached in very many places. Some people visited the white settlement areas where several Luo served as labourers. In 1925 we started Mony - The night revival meetings. It is only in the last sixteen years that these young people have not taken seriously the work of spreading Owalo's message.

10. *Was any member involved actively in the Nationalist movements in Nyanza in the period between 1920 and 1956?*

We have always felt the necessity of being faithful to any government so nobody that I know of really joined any of these movements.

11. *Why was the name of the church called NLM and Not Nomiya Universal or Church of Africa?*

The name was given to us by God, so unless God changes we shall not change. If anybody from another tribe wants to join it he must join the Luo tribe or learn their language.

12. *What is the relations between Jesus and Owalo?*

Jesus is a fellow prophet of God. We will always preach against worshipping Jesus.

13. *In what ways do you differ from other churches?*

- (i) We preach that Jesus is God's son and not God.
- (ii) We practice circumcision.
- (iii) We believe that a dead man's wife must be inherited.
- (iv) We remove shoes during worship. This has been copied by most churches in Nyanza. We believe, however, that ours is quite unique because it was given us directly from God.

(ii) ARCHIVAL SOURCES(a) Unpublished non official documents.

- (i) P.C.E.A. preserves a valuable collection of letters in microfilm at the University of Nairobi. All correspondences between A. Scott of Scottish Mission school Kikuyu were read. From the correspondences the conclusion was reached that the two were very close friends, and communicated often. There was also very helpful information about Owalo. Although the information was not extensive the correspondence is indispensable in the reconstruction of the life of Owalo. Some of the letters are quoted in the text.
- (ii) Mill Hill Fathers, station at Kisumu Kibuye; inspite of the uncooperative attitude of the Priest in charge, he agreed to give me an excerpt that has also helped a lot in the reconstruction of the life of Y. Owalo. MHF.
- (iii) Maseno South Diocese, C.P.K. During search for any information on Owalo, some information was found in the catechismal record book and this is shown in the appendix.

(b) Unpublished Official documents

Kenya National Archives

- (i) Nyanza Province Annual reports 1907 - 1959.
- (ii) Ainsworths Political Records 1908 - 1915.
- (iii) Central Kavirondo Political Records.
- (iv) Provincial intelligence report, Nyanza 1930s.
- (v) Central Nyanza District annual reports (sometimes Central Kavirondo District, Kavirondo District) from 1919 - 1959.
- (vi) Central Kavirondo intelligence reports 1930s.

- (vii) Judicial Reports, particularly, connected with the life and work of Alexander Morrison. (Some of the information is attached).
 - (viii) Registrar General of Society files on NLC already mentioned in Appendix A.
- (c) Govt. Publications Kenya Blue Books 1910 - 1936.

Report on the Catholic Mission Work at Ojola 1904 - 1925.

R.C. Kibuye.

The first mission among the Nilotes was at Ojola, nine miles from Kisumu. It was opened on April 21, 1904 by Father Grimshaw. The first catechists were all young men who were personal servants of the railway officials.

Meanwhile work among the Nilotic Kavirondo was progressing. Ojola Mission promised a glorious future. The first native to be baptised there was an enormous help to the priest. He was zealous, extremely pious and helped the missionaries in the necessary translations and instructing the people. But how deceived one may be! It was customary to begin and end the instructions with "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" and "The Glory". Sometime after, the priest began to notice that the catechumens did not answer the "Hail Mary". He questioned the catechists and to his horror and surprise learned that the first and only christian among the Nilotic Kavirondo was a rank protestant, who threw aside our Lady and the intercession of the Saints. He persisted in the protestant notions and so was sent away... The catechumens, being contaminated with his perverse spirit could not be trusted. The priest made them understand that a catholic was bound to believe the whole doctrine and sending them away, gave them three months in which to consider their position and to return if they wanted catholicism. The catechist in question went over to CMS for a short time. Later he threw in his lot with the Quackers (who had a place between Kisumu and Kakamega) and shortly after became a Mohammedan. In this state he began to have so called visions and as a result he started his own religion (a concoction of the three he read). He started catechumenates and seemed in the beginning a real menace to Catholicism. He died soon after but his religion still lingering on under the name "Nomia" which is the first word in Nilotic text, "All power is given to me."

Information from the Catechismal register, CPK. Maseno South, 1910.

1. Owalo s/o Abor: From Ayoro's Asembo, wife: Elizabeth Alila
 First impressed by Kwatu in Kisumu, when working the missions boy at R.C. station, Ojola's (After four months in day school Kisumu) 4 months: baptised June/06 Johana. Then 1 year in Mombasa. Back to Ojola (1907) left owing to breakup of the BVL (1908): Went to Morrison again; 3 months with Burns 1909; 1 year in the Scotch Mission Kikuyu joined Maseno in October 1910. Circumcised by R.C. Luo boy.
 Apprent? sp/u. Typewriting.
 Not satisfactory as a teacher. Refuses to join with us at Adhola's
 Confirmation postponed.

2. Ogera s/o Dola from Ondiek's Sakwa
 May 1908 - Catechism August 29/09 Baptised Easter/11
 Isaka. Very steady but not brilliant. July 1st class vi Goes out as village teacher. Entered service of Bishop Willis March 8/12 - Uganda.

3. Odera s/o Swinyo Karateng' Kisumu.
 joined 1910, Catechism ... Bapt. Sulemani
 H.O. Savile's cook.
 Threw hot water over small boy scalding him badly,
 March/12 postponed confirmation:- bad answers
 and above.

Information on Alexander Morrison from the Kenya National Archives
Judicial files:

I Alexander Morrison make oath and say as follows:-

(1) Previous to the 26th of January 1903 I was residing at 3 Brich Count. Middle Temple London E.C. and had resided at other places in the United Kingdom.

(2) On the 26th January 1903 I was duly called to the bar of the Middle Temple, London.

(3) From that date until April 1904 I read in Chambers with Mr. Ashworth James at 20 Old Square Lincoln's Int. London W.C.

(4) In April 1904 I received an appointment as a magistrate in the Colonial Service in this Protectorate and since then until the 31st December 1909 I have been under the Superintendance of this High Court.

(5) My call to the bar has never been removed or cancelled and I am still entitled to all the rights and privilege of a barrister at law before the Court of England.

A. Morrison

Sworn at Mombasa .

17th January, 1910.

MIDDLE TEMPLE

These are to certify that Alexander Morrison, son of the late Rev. W. Morrison of Boharm Banff., was specially admitted to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple on the twenty ninth day of March one thousand nine hundred _____

Called to the Degree of the Utter Bar on the twenty sixth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and three - and published in the Common Dining Hall of the said society on the same day. And that he hath paid all Duties which were owing by him to the Society and the officers thereunto belonging. In Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the said society this eighth day of November in the ninth year of the Reign of Our Sovereign Lord Edward the Seventh by the grace of God of the United Kingdom, of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India and in the year of Our Lord One thousand and nine hundred and nine.

(Sd) M. Wards

Under Treasurer

20th January 1910.

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA

THE SOCIETIES RULES, 1952
(Rule 6)

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION No. 443

I, RODOLD HENRY MUNRO

Registrar of Societies, hereby certify that I have this day registered the

KONYA LUO CHURCH Society

under section 5 (2) of the Societies Ordinance, 1952.

Dated at Nairobi this 31st day of January, 1956.

R. H. MUNRO

As Registrar of Societies.

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APPENDIX D
PHOTOGRAPHS

Photos taken during the celebration of the January 11, 1980,
memorial festival



The people have lined up for the competition in neatness.



The NLC group from Nairobi (Women).



After the competition - people line up to wait for the announcement of the winners and the prize awards.

Ordination.



On the left is the Archbishop Benjamin Oundo, on his way to ordain leaders.



Those who were ordained.

Baptismal Ceremony.



Those to be baptised - standing in the water.



The child is baptised



A boy is baptised.



Those already prayed for - immerse themselves in the water.



Oboch Church.



Konge Church.

Purification ceremony.



Mother of the child is in the middle.
The woman next to her is her helper.



After the service there is rejoicing and dancing, the mother
dances - the "Nderu"

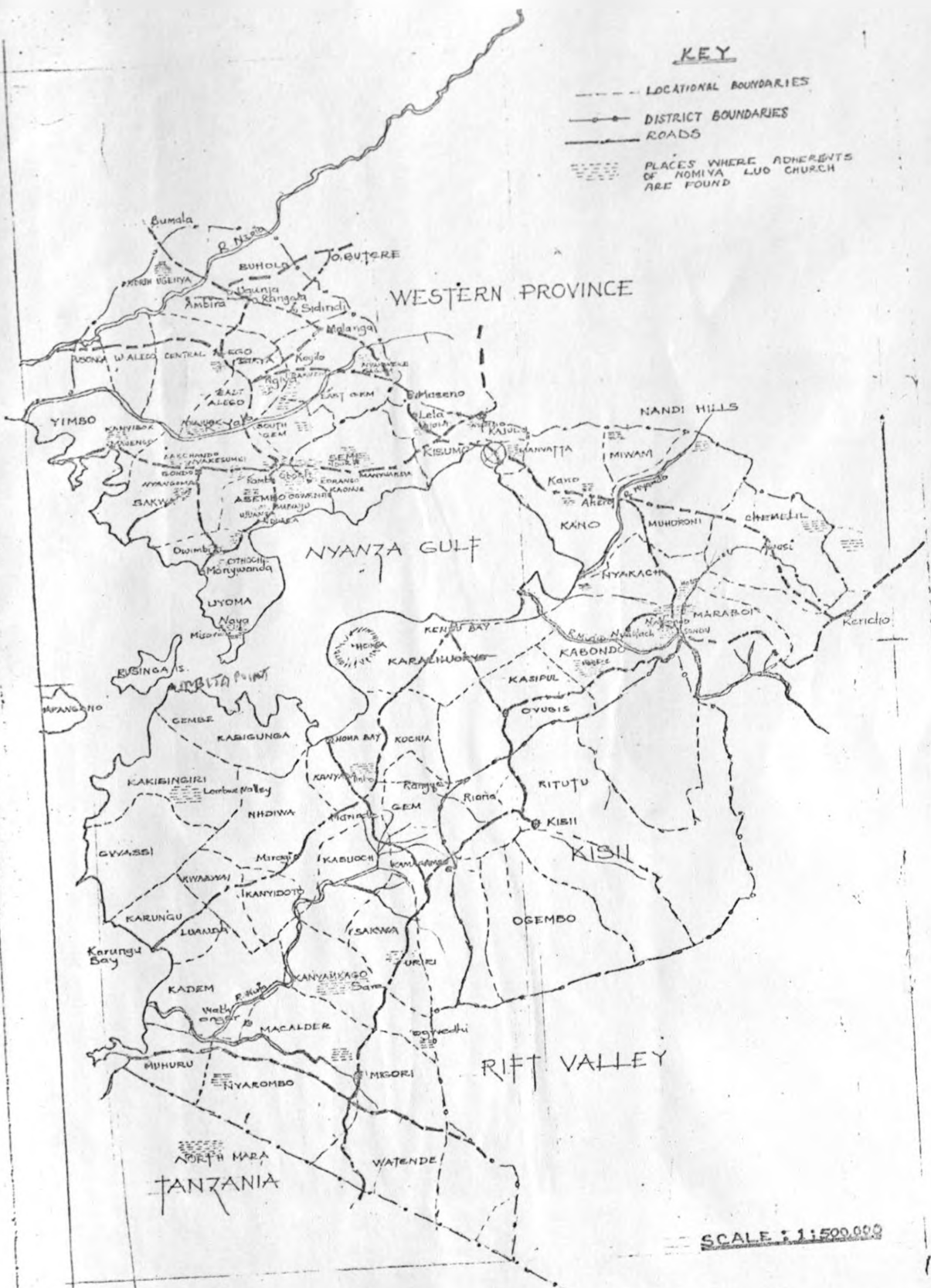
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Owalo's grave.

KEY

- LOCATIONAL BOUNDARIES
- - - DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
- ROADS
- ▨ PLACES WHERE ADHERENTS OF NOMIYA LUD CHURCH ARE FOUND



SCALE : 1:500,000