



**Thesis**

**By**

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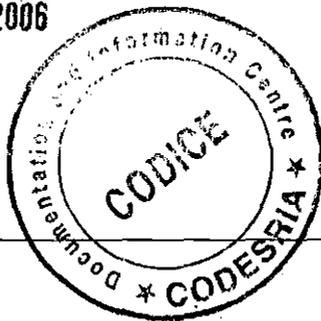
**The syncretising dialectic in the  
historical development of religion: the  
case of selected Western Kenyan cultural  
zone communities**

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**THE SYNCRETISING DIALECTIC IN THE  
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION:  
THE CASE OF SELECTED WESTERN KENYAN  
CULTURAL ZONE COMMUNITIES, c. 1700-  
1950**

**BY**

**EDWIN ATIANYI GIMODE**

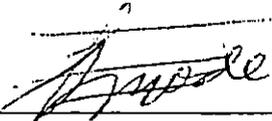
A Thesis submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Kenyatta University.

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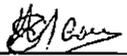
**DECLARATION**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

Signature  Date September 29, 2003.

Candidate (Edwin A. Gimode)

This thesis has been presented with our approval as the university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Jescah Khadi, my dear wife, I dedicate this thesis.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many people and institutions have contributed in different ways towards the successful completion of this work. It is not possible to mention all by name in such limited space. Some, however, merit such mention.

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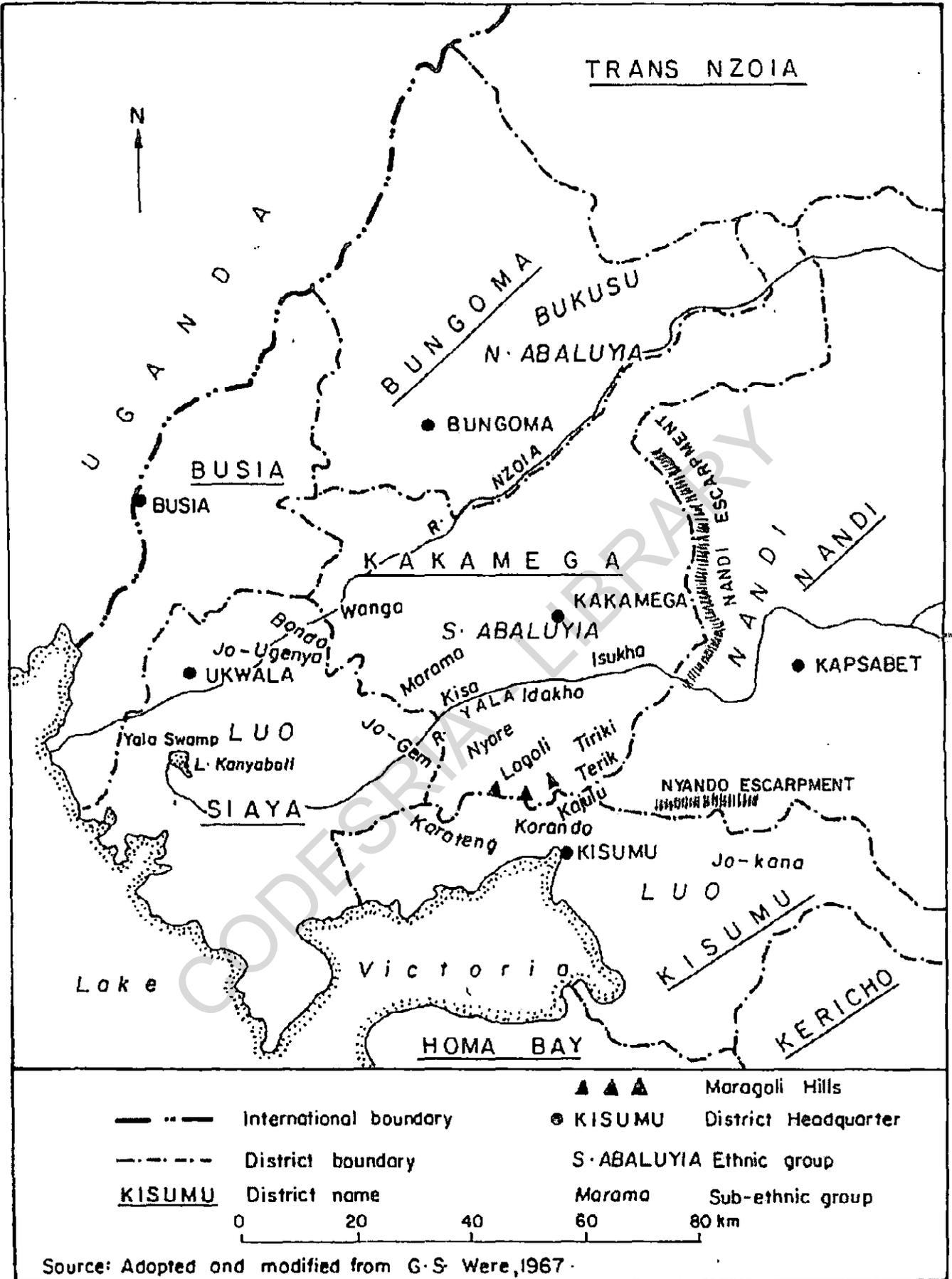


FIG. 1: CLANS/SUB-ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE LUYIA-LUO-KALENJIN BORDER ZONE

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACHS	-	African Church of the Holy Spirit
AIM	-	African Inland Mission
AINC	-	African Israel Nineveh Church
CMS	-	Church Missionary Society
COG	-	Church of God
FAM	-	Friends African Mission
FPM	-	Finnish Pentecostal Mission
HSCEA	-	Holy Spirit Church of East Africa
NLC	-	Nomiya Luo Church
PAC	-	Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada
PMCA	-	Peace and Mercy Church of Africa
SA	-	Salvation Army
SACIM	-	South African Compounds and Interior Mission
SDAM	-	Seventh Day Adventist Mission

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION: THEORISING HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGION

#### 1.1 Dimensions of Religion and Conceptualisation of the Divine in Different Cultures

It is acknowledged by students of religion that the search for a single definition of the phenomenon has been inconclusive. There are as many definitions, it has been said, as there are writers. Perhaps, rather than discussing the definitions, it may be more worthwhile to discuss the different dimensions of religion. This is because different writers have tended to emphasize different dimensions. Some have stressed the communal, while others the individual; some the structures while others the functions; some the private while others the public; some the mundane and others the transcendent; some the truth and others the illusion (Bowker, 1997:xx). A brief survey of these dimensions is apposite. Every religion has a mythical dimension with tales and lores which "... are told and retold to give weight to the beliefs, attitudes, aspirations and truths" (Odera-Oruka, 1989:xv).

It is no longer acceptable that myth is "an age-old story passed down, unchanging, through generations" (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:136). Myths are important critical forms that shape and reflect the trajectory of history and therefore have a certain historical resiliency. This has been well put by

Jonathan Smith when he writes, "...regardless of whether we are studying myths from literate or non-literate cultures, we are dealing with historical process of interpretation" (J.Z. Smith, 1990:107).

For the historian, when myths are properly interrogated they are likely to throw light on the cosmology and thought systems of 'traditional' societies. Myths explain the universe and provide for ritual belief. They mainly describe sacred ritual, codification of religious beliefs and dogma, accounts of origin and migration, (p'Bitek, 1975:63).

Ritual may be defined as a formal action directed at the sacred (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993:xv). It is a significant practice that is confined to the sacred and to formal symbolic processes. Its function is to serve the continuity of social systems, order, and authority (Aseka, 2002:44). Rituals are activities that express beliefs and aspirations of the believers. Ritual provides for spiritual perception of problems and the means of solutions. Society shapes ritual, while ritual continues to affect society (Langley, 1979:135). In classical anthropology ritual is a hostage of custom. Proper conceptualization of this phenomenon should be historical, interrogating ritual for changes in time and space. Ritual takes concrete form in worship activities. Worship is an activity, attitude or thought which is consciously directed toward the service of God, ancestral spirits, divinities or whatever object that elicits awe. It is in prayer, sacrifice and offerings that people turn to deity. Rituals are

rites which serve as means of establishing contact with the spiritual world (Ayisi: 1972:63).

Worship or ritual practices is an extremely important moment in religion. It is the moment of unification of the individual subject with God (Radhakrishnan, 1953:281). Through worship, the subject or worshipper seeks to bridge spiritual division and reconstitute original unity. The concept of communion, therefore, involves intimacy with a spiritual being in a form of ritual called prayer. Through prayer the worshipper (subject) intuitively enters into the spiritual realm, communicating with the object of worship, the higher subject (Aseka, 2002:60). Prayer is purposive communication with the sacred in the form of thanksgiving, praise, worship or non-verbalized symbolization of an experience of spiritual intimacy from the altar of the human spirit in the form of material or self-sacrifice which is called 'offering' in religious terms (*Ibid.*).

The social dimension of religion posits that spirituality is also a social process in the sense that it has to do with relations between human beings in communities and between communities. In this way religion contributes an important element in the fabric of community life. Benjamin Kidd, toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, recognized this point. He argued that contrary to the skeptics of his day, religion was a universal and persistent phenomenon,

playing a critical role in society. For him the vitality and very existence of society was bound up with religion (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:26).

Probably the most emphatic commentary on the social dimensions of religion was that by Emil Durkheim. Durkheim properly understood that religions are organized systems which hold people together (Bowker, 1997:xvi). He argued that religion had to be explained in terms of its social function. Consequently he differed with his contemporary anthropologists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who had sought to discuss religion as an illusion. For Durkheim it was obviously untenable to imagine an illusion surviving for centuries, which religion had done (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:22). But Durkheim, instead, pushed the case of the social dimension of religion to its extreme. This he did by stating that religion has an objective basis, namely society itself, where men work into gods symbols of their own collectiveness. For him, every society must have a religion because it is the product of action of social life itself. He did not subscribe to a transcendental personal God.

In Durkheimian terms, therefore, spirituality is a social process. In some societies religion pervades all social processes, endowing every social aspect with the aura of the sacred. In the process it reinforces and confirms social organization. Yet Durkheim was not the first person to provide such a thoroughgoing social interpretation of religion. A Greek philosopher, Aenophanes (570-475BC), was the first person to draw up an anthropological

perspective of religion. Long before Karl Marx and Emil Durkheim appropriated his ideas for their own, Aenophanes had argued that society is created by man himself, the gods created in the human image, and that religion is a social product (Oke, 1984:3). Whatever the shortcomings of the Durkheimian perspective of religion, it facilitates the translation of religion from a purely intractable mystical realm, giving it a foothold in reality (Bowker, 1997:xvi). Secondly, in a very real sense, at least part of the Durkheimian perspective seems to have captured a typically African conceptualisation of religion as the total way of life of a people. Mbiti illustrates this well when he states that Africans are notoriously religious, with spirituality permeating all departments or entities of life so fully that it is not possible to treat it in isolation (Mbiti, 1969:1). Accordingly, the phenomenon of religion is not *sui generis*, distinct from other dimensions of culture. It comes into being "... in an ongoing dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life" (Orsi, quoted in Moore, 2000:319).

Religion has also an experiential dimension, which underlies the unique experience which every adherent goes through in the process of exercising yet another dimension, faith. Human beings are predisposed to religious experience at various times in life. At moments of exultation and joy, or at moments of tragedy and sorrow, human beings express their feelings by turning to deity in an expression that is above or different from ordinary

experience (Ayisi, 1972:62). Ginsburg puts this dimension in proper context.

He posits that at the core of religious consciousness there are:

...elements of genuine experience giving the insight into the real. The experience however, is never merely intellectual, but is permanently rooted in emotional needs. Man needs to be reconciled to his place in nature. He needs guidance in action, consolation in grief, fortitude in bearing irreparable loss (Ginsburg quoted in Ayisi, 1972).

Like the social dimension of religion, the experiential dimension is especially characteristic of African religion. One of the reasons as to why Western anthropologists, missionaries, travellers and administrators failed to appreciate African religiosity was their lack of appreciation of the profundity of this dimension in African culture (Onyanwu, 1975:154). It was experienced and not theorized intellectually. Religion was personal and immediate, engaging and moving individuals. African religion is discerned in the ritual and experiential dimensions. The African person is soaked in his culture which was the same as his religion. In fact, Mbiti's characterization of the African as notoriously religious is not far-fetched. For Mbiti, "Where the African is there is his religion" (1969:1). Later Bishop Sarpong summed up the truism of experienced African religion using the analogy of the skin: "To the African, religion is like the skin that you carry along with you wherever you are, not like the cloth you wear and discard the next moment" (Sarpong, quoted in Nasimiyu, 1986:120).

Geoffrey Parrinder understood this experiential dimension in African religion well and gave it as an explanation for the failure of mission Christianity to attract Africans. He wrote:

Our faith will not hold African minds until we have brought more beauty, reverence and joy into the worship of God; something that is close to the African's own colourful and emotional religion. We must present real religion, in a way that Africans can understand and interpret in their forms of thought and worship (1966:240).

Religion in Africa was essentially this-worldly, unitary, instrumental and explanatory in this world (Fernandez, 1978:220). People believed in and honoured deity through participation in events believed to be inspired by these deities. The various images, ghosts, demons and magical objects were, and are still, vehicles of problem-solving in Africa. But the experiential dimension is not uniquely African. It was a major dimension in the apostolic church. According to Latourette, the impulse which made the neophytes to embrace Christianity was "...not intellectual, but emotional" (Latourette, 1970:121).

One dimension that seems to apply equally in almost all religions is that of faith and belief. It is from this dimension that the ritual dimension gets impetus to verbalize and act out. This dimension of religion also provides the most widespread conceptualisation of religiosity. Posnansky states that religious belief implies belief in the supernatural expressed in the form of both animate and abstract forces (Posnansky 1972:29). In the same vein P'Bitek

asserts that man imagines gods and spirits "... and the relationship between them and man constitutes religion" (p'Biteck, 1975:55). Similarly, Edward Tylor came to the conclusion: "It seems best to fall at once on this essential source, and simply to claim, as minimum definition of religion, the belief in spiritual beings" (Bowker, 1997:xv).

Perhaps the best exemplar of the dimension of belief in the supernatural is Melford Spiro who differentiates religion from other cultural institutions only by virtue of its reference to superhuman beings. In his own words:

To summarise, I would argue that belief in superhuman beings and their power to assist or harm man approaches universal distribution, and this belief – I would insist – is the core variable which ought to be designated by a definition of religion (Spiro, 1968:94 quoted in Hauge 1974).

In line with the argument for the primacy of belief in the supernatural are writers who have sought to delineate the phenomenon of religion as having emerged *sui generis*. They have especially reacted against the attempt to accept religion primarily in sociological terms. Evans-Pritchard falls in this category. He has emphatically argued that jettisoning prophecies, miracles, dogma, theology, ritual and the supernatural is jettisoning the very content of what religion is (1962:41). Harold W. Turner is equally skeptical of sociological explanation of religion which he considers reductionist, taking the form of appearing to explain religion away. Hence there is need to focus on the religious dimension rather than the social one. He argues that spiritual:

...cannot be equated with culture, society, morality, psychic processes, or political systems and the distinctive features of religion escape us if we reduce it to any or all these categories, no matter how intimately it is woven with these aspects of the totality of reality (Turner, 1981, 13).

Turner's argument for the primacy of the transcendental dimension, therefore, properly focuses on revelations of the numinous or divine, response in worship (music and prayer), obedience, trust, quest for blessings or illumination of the human situation (Hinga, 1990:23).

This means that religion as human-spiritual relation has to be understood as relating to the ultimate conditions of existence. Religion is more a matter of meanings than a matter of facts. This was well put by Mwanzi when he stated that religion "... has to explain a situation and the explanation is not to be given, but to be thought out" (1972:13). Religion has to be understood as a phenomenon that keeps men and women through their days. If we fail to grasp this we cannot begin to understand why religion continues to matter (Moore, 2000:320). Hoehler-Fatton provides a conceptualisation of religion that seems to adequately embrace the various dimensions examined. For her, religious phenomena encompass:

...a culturally conditioned response to a perceived transcendental reality that is offered by a community, codified within myth or scripture, and located in ritual and through which people attempt to act in ways that bring daily existence into closer alignment within that sense of spiritual reality (1996:7).

Human beings have always felt that life is in close contact with sacred power in the form of divine beings. The idea or notion of “God” is fundamental to the concept of religion (Radhakrishnan, 1953:281). In fact, world religions differ according to the meaning of God that each embraces and preaches (Odera-Oruka, 1975:30). Indeed, “the uniqueness of each religion lies in its conception of Deity and its apprehension of the divine will. Here is the heart of every religion, its essential theology and the motive of its ethical emphasis” (Idowu, 1970:94). Different peoples have conceived the notion of God differently, some emphasizing experiential while others the intellectual aspects. This is attributable to different cultural backgrounds. Barney illustrates this point well. According to him, God – at least the Christian God – is constant, absolute and underived. But the forms in which people respond to God are tied to their culture and therefore relative (Barney, 1973:57, cited in Nasimiyu, 1986:110). But conceptualisation of deity is never a finished process. It is an on-going devaluation and revaluation of gods and goddesses because culture itself is not static but dynamic. Hence, the modalities of apprehending the sacred are dynamic “...one form diminishing in importance or becoming absorbed into another form, while new exposures give strength to other forms of the sacred” (Ludwig, 1987:59). This simply underscores the historically dynamic but syncretic development of a people’s idea of God.

The Western philosophical tradition developed a concept of God that was rationalist. This concept has remained firmly part and parcel of religion in the West. In fact it came to treat theology, the study of religion, as one of its branches alongside metaphysics, epistemology, logic and ethics on the grounds that philosophy is the most adequate form of knowing the Absolute Idea, namely God. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this typically Western tradition argues that God is not an objective reality which in actual fact exists independent of a people's knowledge or conception. For them, God is a mere thought (Odera-Oruka, 1975:34). The Enlightenment inherited this typically Platonic notion of God. In Plato we see the articulation of rational consciousness and the celebration of reason that led to the "...mistaken identity of true being with ideas" (Aseka, 2002:62). Aseka dismisses this conception of the divine and emphasises rather the biblical and experiential perspective. According to this God is a Spirit who relates to humankind at the level of the human spirit. Being a Spirit, God is neither male nor female. He is the creator who is uncreated, and therefore the being from whom all being issues (*Ibid.*) Even then, the Bible speaks of God in anthropomorphic terms. God is presented in the male gender and in patriarchal terms.

It was the typically Western mold of thought which ultimately produced the religio-skeptics of the Enlightenment whose intellectual pastime was parodying the divine Christian conceptualisation of deity. The printmarks of

the Enlightenment have remained an inherent part of Western Christianity which emphasises imageless syntactic thought, and which is more a consequence of literacy (Fernandez, 1978:22). In fact Western Christianity evolved as a rational approach to God. The product was knowledge of the divine – of God, of the soul and of immortality as purely rational constructs (Onyanwu, 1975:151). It is in this vein that most religions of the world have tended to be erroneously depicted as being without theologies in contrast with a rationally theologically informed Western Christianity. According to Ninian Smart, theology is a formal system of doctrines that introduce “...intellectual power into what is found in less explicit form in the deposit of revelation or traditional mythology of a religion” (Smart, 1969:18). This is an extremely narrow view of theology. According to Hinga, a theology of pre-literate religious systems is viable provided that the term is not confined to the narrow perspective of well-argued and systematic conception of God and mankind (Hinga, 1990:151). Properly conceptualised, the term theology should be used broadly to imply a people’s understanding of God and humankind, as expressed in word and in symbol in word “... ritual, myth, and day to day experience and parties” (*Ibid.*). Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

The African concept of God had scant recognition in the West because of the rational conceptualisation of deity. The missionaries, explorers and administrators dismissed the African mind as unphilosophical and so unable to form a concept of God. For G.W.F. Hegel, the great German philosopher,

Africans had "...no knowledge of God and of the immortality of the soul" because they were not philosophically inclined (Onyanwu, 1975:153). Reasoning on more or less the same lines, one Emil Ludwig considered it a futile exercise to attempt to convert Africans to Christianity. "How can the untutored African conceive deity? Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of knowing" (Smith, 1966:1).

These assertions are highly contestable. In the first instance, the condemnation of Africans as unphilosophical is misplaced. To make the Western philosophic tradition the yardstick of advance in philosophic abstraction is to dismiss the rest of humanity to sterility of thought. The contribution of classical Greeks towards a certain systematization of empirical knowledge or philosophical speculation is a fact of history. But it is proceeding on false premises to credit ancient Greeks with a monopoly of reason, and to attribute "...to other cultures mystical knowledge, cognitive distortions stemming from religion, irrationality, or even emotivity" (Preiswerk and Perrot, 1978:69). It is in this respect that Leopold Senghor's famous dictum of "Emotion is Negro in the same way as Reason is Hellenic" is most unfortunate and without basis (*Ibid.*).

History testifies that Egyptians and Greeks of the ancient world were closely involved in intense interactions for centuries. Greek mythologies and ontological explanation had antecedents in the ancient African civilisation of

the Nile Valley and freely drew from it. The intellectual hegemony of ancient Egypt concretised into the “Egyptian Mysteries Systems” which had a strong religious element. It was at once philosophical, scientific and mystical (Ben-Jochannan, 1970, and Bernal, 1987). The grandmasters of the Egyptian secret higher education were priests who taught Greek students like Pythagoras, Thales, Aristotle among others.

Perhaps the difficulty of understanding the African conceptualisation of deity is precisely its deeply philosophical embeddedness. This philosophy may not be easily discernible or distinguished after the manner of Western rationalism. However, it was there, and informed the thinking of African peoples in different situations of life (Mbiti, 1969:2). Ben-Jochannan puts this truism well when he states that any group of people with “...a concept that created a God which they have not seen, spoken to, or met, must have began from a philosophical premise” (Ben-Jochannan, 1970:18). When Africans spoke of their God as ‘moulder’, distributor’, ‘giver’, ‘judge’, they were employing images that were familiar to them and projecting them into the spiritual realm. The idea of a high God who is the ultimate authority and the sovereign of the universe and of human life is widespread in Africa. This God is usually conceptualised as the almighty, immortal, all knowing, creator (Mbiti, 1970). This is philosophical and it is found in other religious traditions too, for instance the Semitic religious concepts.

The fact that African philosophy was not “rationalist positivist” does not empty African concepts of philosophical power. James W. Fernandez has articulated this well by explaining that African thought patterns were steeped in local images which reflected explanation of life. This is a highly philosophical enterprise. It is ontological and highly appropriate. It is grounded in the acts, images and embedded concepts (Fernandez, 1978:230). He rightly argues that the problem in African thought systems is “embeddedness” of ideas, hence hard to grasp in a normal intellectual sense. This is because thought embedded in images, symbols and actions is complex thought. Consequently, the Western intellectualist argument can be judged as being:

...not intellectual enough because it ignores the dynamic relation of images and ideas. It ignores how ideas are squeezed out of the images and how they can be again embedded in them – and it ignores the difficult problem of the coding of thought in images and symbolic form (*Ibid.*: 222).

Thought is not only present in conceptualised abstract forms. Rather human representations of experience especially in non-literate societies are enacted (enactive thought) and bound up in images (icon thought) (*Ibid.*). Mwanzi endorses the Western intellectualist concept of God: “the intellectual entity or concept in theology and known by different names in different languages” (Mwanzi: 1976:50). But the bottom line in conceptualising the divine is that this process of observation differs from culture to culture all over the world. Different religious systems speak of the divine reality of gods and other

spiritual beings in different ways. Salmon Rushdie has argued that for some people God is not a symbol, but an expression of reality. This has to go beyond mere intellectualism and allow "... the miraculous and the mundane" to exist at the same level (Rushdie quoted in Jassawalla, 1996:52). Ludwig comes up with more or less the same conclusion when he argues that ideas and experiences of gods and goddesses are "...not so much intellectual reflections as existential concerns" revolving around the fundamental human question of how to live authentically in the world (Ludwig, 1987:38).

This was the case especially in Africa where religion provided an ontological framework for the interpretation and explanation of existence. African ontology equipped the society with confidence to confront the various challenges of everyday life. The spiritual defined the physical (Aseka, 2002:71). Mbiti's hierarchical categories of the African ontology began with God at the top as the originator and sustainer of humankind, the spirits explaining the destiny of humankind, and man/woman occupying the centre stage. Bolaji Idowu provides a complex and articulate ontology of the Yoruba of Nigeria. He argues for a modified monotheism "...because of the presence of other divine beings within the structure of religion" (Idowu, 1973:168). He provides a highly advanced structure of divinities (*orisa*) under the Supreme God, *Olodumare* or *Olorun*. The status of *Olodumare* in relation to *orisa* is one of absolute transcendence. *Olodumare* delegates certain portions of his authority to certain functionaries. The *orisa* can be viewed as manifestations

of *Olodumare* and his ministers. Idowu argues that the multiplicity of spirits and divinities can be perceived as manifestations or refractions of a 'single God'. In this way *Olodumare* remains the core, giving meaning and coherence to the whole system. This was more or less the same ontological view in Egypt where *Re* was the Almighty God symbolized in the sun, and where all other gods were refractions of *Re*.

## 1.2 Historiographical controversies on Religion

Religion has had both its defenders and its detractors, those who acknowledge its importance as a social phenomenon and those who dismiss it as a mirage and a mistake. Most of the debates and different perspectives on religion took place in the eighteenth, and especially in the nineteenth-and twentieth-century Europe. These debates were, however, negative statements on religion in general and religion in Africa in particular. They were closely concerned with the origin of Western social anthropology in the middle of the eighteenth century. This anthropology was a by-product of the Enlightenment movement which espoused rationalist philosophy (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:14). This anthropology was part of the Enlightenment project of modernity which sought to develop "objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art..." (Habermas, cited in Mourad, 1997:115). The Enlightenment attempted to replace the defunct moral authority of religion with the moral authority of reason "...especially the theories of rational

'calculation of Bentham and Mill, and the ethics of rational deontology developed by Kant" (Baker, 1998:220).

A major preoccupation of these anthropologists was a passionate endeavour to discover the origins of everything – species, law and religion. Hence they addressed a broader topic of 'primitive religions' and freely drew on African religion to illustrate their postulates. The aim remained not to understand them, but to destroy not only primitive religion but also religion in general. In the words of McVeigh: "If they could explain primitive religion as intellectual aberration, as a mirage induced by emotional stress or by its social function", they would dismiss the whole phenomenon as a mistake (McVeigh, 1974:75). Most of these scholars were atheists who had rebelled against their Christian family background. Tylor was a Quaker, Frazer a Presbyterian, Marrett an Anglican, Malinowski a Catholic, while Durkheim, Levy-Bruhl and Sigmund Freud were Jews (*Ibid.*). Nietzsche was son of a Lutheran pastor (Schacht, 1987).

Spencer argued that religion was untrue and useless, unable to provide a basis for morals, and that if there was God, he was unknowable and *otiose* (Evans-Prichard, 1962:33). Tylor and Frazer dismissed religion as a hallucination brought about by the reflection of immature minds on such phenomenon as death, dreams and trances (*Ibid.*). It was this mold of anthropologists who continued to dominate the study on religion in the early twentieth century.

According to Evans-Pritchard, "Almost all leading anthropologists of my own generation would, I believe, hold that religious faith is total illusion – a curious phenomenon to become extinct and to be explained in such terms as 'compensation' and 'projection' or by some sociologicistic interpretation on the lines of maintenance of social solidarity" (*Ibid.*:36).

These scholars came up with several theories to explain religion in "primitive societies", Africa included. They treated African religion as if it were a bizarre item entirely different from religious phenomena found in the Western world (Ayisi, 1972:57). They came up with conceptual schemes such as structural – functionalism, evolutionism, diffusionism and modernisation as the explanatory tools of African religion. These isolated indigenous societies in "...rather static sterile equilibrium" (Kay, 1973:1). They did not acknowledge the importance of historical change, treating African systems as if they were frozen in some kind of "ethnographic presence" (Burt, 1980:3). Upto as late as the 1920s, they still propounded theories of "primitive societies", which involved an analysis of data coloured in racism. This led to a lot of confusion about the relationship of race, language, physical features and culture (Ogot, 1976:4). These anthropologists coined the pejorative phrase "traditional societies" for African people who were largely non-literate and designated their history as "ethnohistory". This was

following their tendency to celebrate the “authentic” and to be fixated on unchangeable “traditions” which visualized change as marginal, superficial and external (Kempf, 1994:110).

Social evolutionism, propounded by Sir James Frazer, explained institutions in terms of progress through immutable stages from earlier and simpler forms. It postulated the inevitability, or at least desirability, of all people passing through a series of sequential stages in order to attain goals defined and already achieved according to Western criteria (Preiswerk and Perrot, 1978:75). This theory was an instrument of interpreting the world for the West. The theory was rooted in European ethnocentrism which desired to classify the rest of the world in relation to Europeans. Above all it developed from the need to justify European domination over the rest of the world. Yet this theory failed to reconcile the incompatible: accepting cultural diversity, but approaching other cultures only to the benefit of Europe (*Ibid.*:77). For our purposes as students of religion, the theory portrayed Africa as being destitute of civilization and true religion. It was basically a racial theory of human achievement, civilization, history and progress (Bediako, 1992:230). It described African religion as “fetishism” and “animism”, descriptions that ultimately heavily coloured the missionary movement of the time. Missionaries came with preconceived ethnocentric ideas – to destroy African culture and religion and in its place to plant a totally new culture and religion.

The implementation of this programme can be viewed as amounting to a misadventure in the name of missionisation.

Another school of social theory to come out of Western anthropology was structural - functionalism. It was formulated by Emile Durkheim in the nineteenth century. Its main thrust was that human societies are natural systems in which "all parts are interdependent, each serving in a complex of necessary relations to maintain the whole" (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:190). The paradigm emerged a little later than that of social evolutionism. But it borrowed from the latter, coexisted with it and made more or less the same claims on Western society in relation to the rest of the world. The main postulate of structural-functionalism is that social reality continually observes a state of equilibrium. Consequently, the present can be understood in terms of its own contemporary structures (Ogot, 1976:3). This paradigm conceptualized religion, especially African religion, as playing the role of "a social glue", keeping society together. This at once implied that African religions are unchanging eternal "givens", existing out of time and space. On the contrary, one of the chapters in this work clearly demonstrates the vibrant history of belief and ritual among the people of Western Kenya.

Another paradigm is that of the innocent-sounding 'modernisation theory', with which some scholars tend to be fascinated. The idea of modernisation is basically a latter-day rendition of the idea of evolutionism. It places the

Western society in the position of responsibility of ensuring that “traditional” societies have come through the stages already traversed in the West (Preiswerk and Perrot, 1978:44). Modernisation is at the heart of the concept of the ‘civilizing mission’, which justified Western European imperial conquest of most of the planet in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Africa included. Part of the wider colonial experience as ‘modernisation’ was the assumption that “...Christianity would supplant local systems of belief and ritual” (Mosse, 1994:85). Subject communities were expected to be absorbed into Western culture and religion. We, on other hand, in our chapter on mission Christianity, demonstrate that African religions were never supplanted. They fought back and engaged Christianity in a process of selection and synthesis which we have called in this work syncretism.

One school of thought in the West which took a firmly negative view of religion in the nineteenth century was Marxism or historical materialism. For Karl Marx and his close associate Frederick Engels, religion is a weapon that makes the superordinate subdue the subordinate. In their own words:

The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, dejection, in a word all qualities of canaille, and the proletariat, not wishing to be treated as canaille, needs its courage, its self-feeling, its pride and its sense of independence more than its bread (Marx and Engels, 1964:84).

Thus orthodox Marxism dismissed religion and religious phenomena as futile ideological superstructure solely maintained by and for class struggle. For

them God did not create the world but rather man created the lurid fantasies of God. To be sure, the Marxists were not the first scholars to speak of mankind creating gods. Greek philosopher Aenophanes (570-475 BCE) had argued that gods are created in the human image and that religion is a social product (Oke, 1984:3). Marxism denies the importance of the realm of the spiritual in the human life, referring to it instead in the following terms: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opiate of the people" (Quoted in Bowker, 1997:xv). In this way Orthodox Marxism renounced the gods and the scriptures as forces or instruments of human beings over fellow human beings. For Marxists "...religions anesthetize their converts so that they become oblivious, indifferent or incompetent to changing their social condition in any tangible and material way". It becomes opium and false consciousness (Hinga, 1990:14,15).

Marx's thought drew heavily from Hegel (an idealist) and Ludwig Feuerbach (a materialist). From the former he appropriated the idea of the dialectic while jettisoning the spiritual dimension. From the latter he took and developed the material determinism of social conditions in dialectical terms. He must also have appropriated the loath for the spiritual from him. Feuerbach is on record as having dismissed religious consciousness, and aimed at working to turn candidates of the next world into students of this world, believers into

thinkers, men who in their own confession are half men and half angels into full men. He was determined to turn theologians into anthropologists.

Aseka (2002) gives a substantive critique of Marx and the Marxist perspective on religion. According to Aseka, Marx's dismissal of all consciousness that is not class-based as false consciousness is basically faulty. Aseka argues that Marx's trivialisation and disparaging of the spiritual dimensions of social life was due to "... his failure to perceive the identity and social function of the human spirit" (*Ibid.*:18) given that the Enlightenment discourses he based his critique on did not transcend the Cartesian dualism. He states that the Marxist logic explains the nature of humankind in material terms and therefore "dissolves nature in the ensemble of economic human relations" which are social relations of production, in the process dismissing "religion as a redemptive ideology" (Joshi, 1991, cited in Aseka). Aseka dismisses the Marxist political economy for being too narrow in handling the complexity of social reality and the human personality. The approach was gender-and-religion blind. Contrary to this, Aseka points out that human beings "are not just material objects, reducible only to organic form as pieces of matter". They are rather "...spiritual beings with enormous spiritual potential and propensity" which can be exploited in various ways (Aseka, 2002:500. Moreover, other shortcomings of the Marxist perspective have been pinpointed by other scholars. Dirk Berg-Schlosser has pointed out that a purely 'political economy' analysis will tend to neglect other potential areas

of conflict, namely religion, ethnicity and communalism (1979:5). We add gender to these. In the same vein Giddens has lucidly observed that the approach, by focusing purely on economics and political control, leaves out huge chunks of human history in terms of epochs and social forms, and fails to provide treatment of values and belief systems. For Giddens, the critical inspiration of Marx embodied in the application of the dialectic loses power on "...reduction of cultural ideas to epiphenomena of physical events" (1977:66).

Recent studies by neo-Marxist scholars, however, indicate an accommodating stance in contrast with the orthodox Marxist finality against religion. These acknowledge that participants in religious activities are seriously coming to grips with their historical conditions. They do not simply project the 'false consciousness' hypothesis (Hinga, 1990:18). Hinga cites the work of Jean Comaroff (1985) among the Tshindi Zionists in South Africa which is cast within the framework of creative and dialectical interplay.

Another perspective on conceptualization of religion is the Weberian school. Max Weber's commentary on religion can be summarized as centering on three dimensions - origins of religious thought, the characterisation of authority, especially charismatic, and the nexus between faith and economics. Concerning the first of these aspects, Weber differed with Marx and with Durkheim who conceived religion basically as a social contrivance. For him

religion did not issue from the social needs, nor was it a product of the propaganda strategy of the ruling class. Its origin is *sui generis*, in response to the metaphysical needs of humankind. This is especially the case with the economically and socially marginal classes. They do not turn to religion because it is opiate, but rather because of existential or practical daily life needs. This calls for need to believe in salvation (Contursi, 1993:332). Secondly, it springs out of "... an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos". This is an intellectual or metaphysical basis of religion whereby the individual needs to comprehend the purpose and meaning of suffering (Weber, 1964, cited in Contursi, 1993:332). The second aspect of concern for Weber is that of "authority types", where he classifies authority into traditional, charismatic and bureaucratic (Johnson and Anderson, 1995:11). He brings out the revolutionary nature of charismatic leadership which breaks with tradition while introducing radical orientation to attitudes and values. This authority derives from a crisis involving conflict and suffering (*Ibid.*). This is of concern to our work where we have focused on confrontation of religious belief and ritual among the people of Western Kenya, with consequences of conflict in many of the confrontations. Weber's insights on the nature and characteristics of charisma in the initial stages of religious movements are germane to our study which includes the lively spiritist movements in Western Kenya.

The third aspect of the Weberian thought on religion is that of the connection between faith and economics. We are specifically here addressing the implication of Weber's insight of the Protestant Ethic. This was a dramatic and radical interpretation of the relationship between a religious ethic and an economic ethos. The thrust of this thesis rests on the role of religious inspiration in the success of Western capitalism. Weber astutely observed that the Protestant work ethic which supplied the basic norms for European capitalist culture was "materialized version of the old medieval quest for salvation (White and Hellerich, 1995:10). The new ethic tended to dispense with the notion of the old transcendental heaven above and to emphasise material abundance through hard work as a sign of prosperity. In the twentieth century the work ethic was conjoined with what White and Hellerich have called the 'pleasure ethic' – the virtually religious pursuit of commodities by people. It has sanctified what we could call consumer capitalism.

For the purpose of our study, however, a closer scrutiny of Weber's ethic clearly reveals that it informed and justified Christianity which spelt *ethnocide* and *religiocide* for non-Western societies. Weber's rationalization of authority and his assumptions on bureaucratic efficiency emphasised to the Europeans the notion of hard-earned fruits of one's labour (Aseka, 2002:13). It was a religious façade which merely sought to inculcate into the colonial

administrator 'workholism without a moral pedigree' (*Ibid.*:52). Yet morality is a crucial dimension of religion. The imperialist ideology of materialism, self-interest and acquisitiveness was safely insulated by the Protestant ethic. Colonialism and its inhuman trappings were indicative of actual decline in religious morality in the West inspite of the pretensions of civilising and Christianising the rest of the world. This notion is well illustrated by missionaries who came to Western Kenya at the start of the twentieth century. Kay writes of Willis Hotchkiss of the Friends African Mission (FAM), Kaimosi, as having come with Victorian fervent. For him the only hope for Africa lay in "...civilizing the African, implanting in him a belief in Christian attitudes fortifying his vacillating character by training him in habits of industry" (Kay, 1973:63). At the back of this was the Protestant ethic which espoused clean living and hard work and were expected to build in the African "... the moral fibre he needed to escape his world of sin and degradation" (*Ibid*). It is no wonder that Africans took the Christian faith based on the Scriptures and disabused it of European cultural trappings in order to make it meaningful to them.

Another perspective on religion is the Freudian or psychoanalytic approach. Sigmund Freud approached social reality from the standpoint of people's individual behaviour which, he argued, had to be understood as a relationship between the conscious and the unconscious – the *ego* and the *id*. His technique of psychoanalysis has benefited humanity by drawing attention and

being sensitive to individual psychological needs. Most criticism against Freud, however, centres on his reductionism of the complex processes of life (individual and social) to an intra-individual level. Like many scholars of society of his day, Freud dismissed religion as a mistake. But he made particular scathing observations on religion and especially on Christianity as practiced in the West. His parody was only matched or outdone by that of Nietzsche, as we shall see shortly. For him, religion was analogous to "...obsessional neurosis, the product of wishful fulfillment and the 'Father' complex" (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:37). The title of his book on religion published in 1928 is instructive as to his thought. He called it *The Future of An illusion*. Religion was the product of wish fulfillment and a particularly damaging species of illusion, precisely because it militated against the scientific effort to distinguish between what reality in fact was and what people wanted it to be. Freud argued that religious beliefs corresponded closely with fantasies of infantile life, particularly unconscious ones concerning the sex life of one's parents and the conflicts this generates (Bowker, 1997:xv). For him religion replaces the fallible father of reality and projects into the heavens an omnipotent and infallible father. Hence religion, he argued, perpetrates infantile behaviour patterns especially, premised on the conceptions of guilt and forgiveness. For this reason he condemned religion for perpetuating narcissism or self-love by "...conferring upon people the illusion that they were special or privileged by virtue of their relation to an all-

powerful and all loving god” (Holmans, 1987:437). Belief in an all-powerful divine being, Freud argued, forestalled rather than facilitated new knowledge about the world. His new science, psychoanalysis, was, for him, the perfect weapon against religion (*Ibid.*:435).

What can be observed here is that for the Freudian thought to seek to reduce religion to illusion is to miss to comprehend the complex human personality, which is not merely mental and physical but also pneumatic. It is to miss the context in which cultural formations and civilisations in human history took place. All the great ancient civilizations were based on religions and not on secular ideologies. In fact virtually the whole human history to the Age of Enlightenment was heavily tinged with religion. It cannot be simply signed away as history based on an illusion. Perhaps Durkheim’s dismissal of the religio-skeptics is the most fitting dismissal for the Freudian thought. He dismissed his English colleagues from across the Channel as being unrealistic because an illusion dissipates sooner or later and does not certainly survive for centuries (Evans-Pritchard, 1962:32).

Next, we analyse the thought of Nietzsche, a German philosopher who was son of Lutheran pastor. He initially intended to study theology but by a twist of fate turned to philosophy to become a social and cultural critique and the most unrelenting literary foe of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Nietzsche was totally opposed to religion because of its

transcendental outlook and because it directed mankind to focus on God which he considered a mistake that must be corrected. He hated the idea of a God before whom humankind is stricken with awe. "...often with the power and presence of majesty, and so with chill and fear" (White and Hellerich 1995:19). Hence he came up with the idea of "Death of God", according to which he parodied the godhead as an idea not deserving philosophical attention (Schacht, 1987:439). He rejected not only the "God-hypothesis" but also any metaphysical postulation of a "true world of being" transcending the world of life and experience. And since God was dead, humankind should realise they are themselves God, pretending not to be (White and Hellerich, 1995:19).

Nietzsche declared 'war' upon the major religions and their theologies because, he argued, they perpetuated superstition and errors (*Ibid*:440). The reasons he gave were that these religions were anti-human, having fed on and fostered weaknesses, sicknesses, life-weariness and resentment. In the process they had poisoned the well-spring of human health, strength and vitality by derailing all naturalising values. Religion had debased man, making everything good, great, true to be "superhuman and borrowed only through the act of grace" (*Will Power*, p.186 cited in White and Hellerich, 1995:15). Religion, especially Christianity had made man weak, submissive, resigned, humble, tortured and unable to develop feeling (Muga, 1975:5). Consequently Nietzsche declared an "immoral rebellion" against Western

morality which consisted of both Judeo-Christian morality and the ethics of the Enlightenment (Baker, 1998). He set himself the task of translating man back into nature and developing a naturalistic value theory and a “revaluation of values” (Schacht, 1987:439). This constituted a version of social Darwinism which valorized race and power and which became the ideology that informed of colonialism and imperialism earlier and the NAZI regime in Germany later in the 1930s. In this he valorised the powerful and the strong while despising the weak, feeble and powerless. According to this, the victors in war and their descendants are usually biologically superior to the vanquished. This is because they have the courage, the resourcefulness and strength of will (Nietzsche, cited in Muga, 1975:4). He despised the physically disadvantaged as a drag on society. In his own words: “... the sick man is a parasite on society and in certain cases, it is indecent to go on living... the right to life has been lost and he ought to be regarded with the greatest contempt by society (Nietzsche, 1977:88 quoted in Baker, 1998).

His immoral rebellion made Nietzsche appreciate only one form of religion – the ancient Greek religion with specific appreciation of the demon god Dionysius whom he encountered in his study of ‘the tragic’ in Greek mythology (Aseka, 2002:64). This was the god of the ancient Greek tragic festival – the god of wine, drunkenness, ecstasy and frenzy. Nietzsche revelled in the frenzied instrumentalisation of sex because in the absence of God and conscience there was no feeling of guilt. What one needed was

freedom and an inflated ego in the pursuit of will to power. Nietzsche, by a strange twist in the tale, became a sort of victim of his own formulations. His freedom from morals, from conscience and guilt, ultimately came back to haunt him when he contracted syphilis and ended up as a mental case and invalid. Poetic justice, it would seem, caught up with Nietzsche who had engaged in an incestuous dependence on his sister Elizabeth, and who had become 'a parasite on society'.

### 1.3 Historiographical Context of the Problem

The study of African culture in general and that of religion in Africa in particular has gone through several phases since the continent came under Western colonial domination. The first writers on African culture and religion in Africa South of the Sahara were the explorers, traders, colonial administrators, anthropologists and missionaries who wrote on what they observed of the Africans. These were in the first place emissaries of European imperialism whose culture they believed was the best, hence the civilising mission. These were steeped in European cultural prejudice, whose task it was to carry out a systematic destruction of African culture and religion – *ethnocide* and *religiocide* in order to create a *tabula rasa* in the African *persona* on which to write the text of the 'true' religion, uncontaminated. Their records of African culture and religion are wanting. Probably worse were the nineteenth century armchair anthropologists who never set foot in

Africa to study her people, but who wrote from conjecture on the subject called "primitive culture". Most of these were agnostics who had lost faith in religion and who wanted to demonstrate that it was a mental aberration. Others among them wished to try new theories like structural-functionalism to prove that primitive culture changes hardly at all. In the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century, however, there was a new consciousness among the Western scholars which made them sensitive to the rich heritage of world cultures and religions. Studies in sociology and anthropology emphasised the uniqueness of all cultures. They made genuine effort to understand African cosmologies in their own right. Probably the best representative of this group is E.E. Evans-Pritchard who studied the Azande and the Nuer of Southern Sudan.

Unfortunately, while social-anthropology opened up, the literature from the Christian frontier remained conservative, hostile to African beliefs and ritual, and couched in denominational orthodoxy. In fact the missionary attitude to both African religion and to other denominational creeds remained confrontational, antagonistic, dismissive and condemning. In the Roman Catholic Church the conservative and exclusionist theology instituted by the Council of Trent in 1545 remained the yardstick, discouraging any form of interpenetration of dogma and ritual. This was in part the cause of the Reformation and this was the case until the calling of the Second Vatican

Council in 1959, opening the first official channel for dialogue between the African worldview and the Roman Catholic faith.

The situation was not particularly different in the case of the Protestant missionaries and church leaders. The official text prescribed conformity to the dogma and practice of the denomination. Dissent was dealt with by suspension from positions of responsibility or excommunication altogether. Opening up to plural views and so permitting what could be called a taste of African Christian theology began in the 1960s. The major focus was a re-examination of the African pre-Christian religious heritage by African Christian leaders and not European missionaries. This elite undertaking has attempted to revisit the faultlines of continuity and discontinuity in African belief and practice and the Christian faith. By the 1970s this approach to religion was becoming normal, indicating a great departure from the early missionary approach to understanding the African religious concepts.

The latest studies on African Christianity have come to put into sharp focus issues that relate to the translation of religious meanings across cultural boundaries. They focus on "...the historical values, beliefs and practices in terms of which the Africans interpreted and appropriated Christianity" (Spear and Kimambo, 1999:9). This new tendency was pioneered by Bolaji Idowu in the 1960s, A. Shorter and A. Hastings in the 1970s and came to find profound expression in especially Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh as the twentieth

century drew to a close. Sanneh's reinterpretation of Christianity is profoundly paradigmatic, opening a totally new vista of perceiving Christianity in Africa, and making some statements that could be considered anathema to many Christian theologians. Spear and Kimambo summarise Sanneh's perspective well. They state that Sanneh makes a sweeping reassessment of the development of Christianity historically by arguing that:

translatability and radical cultural pluralism – the ability of Christianity to transcend cultural boundaries – constitutes the essence of historical Christianity, from the very beginning of the church; thus placing the development of African Christianity firmly within the history of Christianity as a whole (*Ibid.*).

The secular historians of religion in East Africa have not been left behind. *The Historical Study of African Religion* (1972) edited by T.O. Ranger and I. Kimambo was a collection of essays which focused on the reconceptualization and writing about the history of religion in Africa. They gave prominence to the African *persona* as creative, innovative and astute in religious engineering in the pre-Christian past. They also emphasized the African element in the contact between African cosmologies and Christian and Islamic faiths. In the case of Kenya, Ogot has led the way and has been strident in calling for a reconceptualisation of the historical study of religion so that the dynamics of interaction and blending can clearly be demonstrated in complex syntheses.

The essays edited by T. Spear and I. Kimambo (1999), *Expressions of East African Christianity*, seem to have in part taken Ogot's challenge in

reinterpreting or reassessing what exactly Christianity has meant to the East Africans. According to Preston (1987:57) the 1970s were a watershed in the study of religion globally, with focus on the main themes of human religious experience like sacrifice, birth, rites of passage and others. The social scientists, religious specialists and historians have worked together closely, making possible broad comparative analyses which have resulted in a new approach in the 1980s and 1990s which focuses on hybridity and cross-cultural interpenetration. It dismisses the orthodoxy and purity claims by adherents of most creeds as a fallacy in reality and argues instead that there are no pure cultures or religions. Religious systems are not static 'givens', but phenomena which are in constant flux, negotiating and adapting to new beliefs and practices by a syncretic dynamic. This dynamic regulates the processes of synthesis by which a people faced with a new set of beliefs will select and merge the desirable with their own while leaving the undesirable in the new and discarding the obsolete in their old beliefs. In short, the syncretic dynamic is about continuity and change in a people's beliefs occasioned by the historic and inevitable process of culture contact.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Our study is cast in the mold of scholarship which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as demonstrated above. It is essentially a reinterpretation in the conceptualisation of religion. It goes out of its way to try out the assumptions

of this new approach. It takes two historically and geographically contrasting settings – Western Europe and Western Kenya – and attempts to develop broad parallels in their response to the Christian message. It is thus a historical study that departs from narrations that have characterized pre-Christian cosmologies in simplistic terms of the ethnographic present. Instead it demonstrates the dynamic encounter of indigenous belief systems in the pre-Christian setting and later with Christianity and the syntheses that issued from these encounters.

The study makes a bold attempt in emphatically reintroducing and redeeming the term ‘syncretism’ as the most suitable basis of explicating of processes of encounter and interaction that have characterised the history of the mixing of cultures and religions. It contributes to the discourse that is raging currently in the global academy of religion and concludes that evasions of the term because of a negative history do not and should not negate its veracity. It argues that the very attempt by theologians and anthropologists to come up with an assortment of new terms in the last half a century, namely adaptation, accommodation, adoption, trans-culturation, inculturation, incarnation, indigenisation, Africanization, contextualization – is in itself testimony of the need to seriously re-examine the term syncretism versus these other terms in describing exactly the same processes or syntheses. By use of selected aspects in the historical development of Christianity in Europe on the one hand and by tracing the elements of African thought patterns and religious ideas in both

pre-Christian and Christian Western Kenya on the other, the study demonstrates the universality of the syncretising dynamic in the development of religions.

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

More specifically, the study is constructed on the basis of a number of objectives.

- a. It seeks to contribute to the re-emergence of the discourse of syncretism.
- b. It strives to identify aspects in the history of Western Christianity and demonstrates the inherent syncretising dynamic which gives it particularistic and not universalistic features.
- c. It identifies a cultural border-zone of several communities in Western Kenya and attempts to demonstrate the syncretising dynamic in their cosmological encounters in the era before Christianity.
- d. It endeavours to compare and contrast the varying and changing syncretic responses to mission Christianity by the border-zone communities in the first half of the twentieth century in an effort to negotiate authentic identity in a fast-changing world.

## **1.6 Premises of the Study**

- a. The primary research premise of the study is that development of belief and ritual among communities in interaction with one another is a function of the syncretising dynamic.
- b. The prime importance of the resurged discourse on the pros and cons of 'syncretism' among the theologians, anthropologists and historians of religion is an indicator that the academy has not run out of ideas.
- c. Western European Christianity emerged in a culture-specific context which coloured the original apostolic faith in a uniquely European frame of thought, belief and practice.
- d. The advent of Christianity in Western Kenya at the start of the twentieth century was preceded by centuries of a Western Kenya religious complex that was syncretic in nature.
- e. The religious beliefs of Western Kenya communities were not vanquished by Western Christianity but rather creatively grafted the new faith into an already vibrant religious universe.

## **1.7 Review of Related Literature**

The study is a broad comparative venture of Western Christianity and the Western Kenyan religious experience. It takes the position that when religious beliefs and practices from one tradition encounter and confront those from

another tradition, there starts a process of give-and-take that results in a renegotiation of the religious identity of a people. This study is historical, explicating this premise in the case of Western Kenya. In doing this it has borrowed ideas from studies already done but which do not focus on the same approach.

The subject of syncretism constitutes a territory in religious study that would rather be avoided because of the prejudices that surround it. However, the debate on syncretism has been reopened by studies in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw edited essays (1994) that could be regarded as critical in bringing back the debate of syncretism to the fore. The essays constitute the most profound statement yet on the need to give the subject proper scholarly attention shorn of bias. These essays have contributed a lot in the formulation of this study which focuses on the reinterpretation of Western Christianity as well as religion in Western Kenya.

Most literature available on religion in Kenya as a whole has tended to be anthropological and sociological in nature and not historical. Where the latter have been done, the works have been mainly straightforward single ethnic or single denomination narrations. It was in response to this trend that the editors of a set of essays on the historical study of religion in Africa stated: "... some of the outcome of African religious studies has been alarming" (Ranger and Kimambo, 1972:2). However, the essays they edited provided a useful

conceptual framework of approaching study of religion historically. The essays warn against the danger of falling into the trap of treating indigenous religions in Africa in terms of the ethnographic present. They emphasise the view that these religions should be treated more as processes rather than "givens". They also rightly treat Islam and Christianity as specific phases in a "... specifically African religious historiography" (Ibid:22). Our study has been conceived on these lines of inquiry.

Mbiti (1969) discusses African religion in broad terms that give useful basic information. We do not, however, agree with Mbiti's assertion that African religions have no concept of the future. This denies African concepts a sense of history. Sanneh (1989) is a landmark work in line with our study. It transverse the history of Christianity and emphasises the role of translation of the Scriptures in indigenising Christianity. Sanneh does not dismiss the concept of syncretism. He acknowledges it as a fact that has attended the history of Christianity for two thousand years. He, however, rightly emphasises the fact of the centrality of Christ in the process of Christianity interacting with local cosmologies.

Bediako (1992) delves into the question of culture and Christian thought. He takes two different eras and communities for purposes of broad comparison of how cultures have impacted on Christianity. He takes the second century of Christianity and modern Africa, bringing out similarities in response to the

Christian faith. Bediako describes some very syncretic instances in his work, but stops short of calling them syncretism.

Spear and Kimambo (eds. 1999) is a set of essays on the different expressions of the Christian faith by different communities in East Africa. The essays are a bold move to give mission Christianity in Africa a fresh interpretation that gives space to African thought. The essays attempt to go into what exactly the Africans wanted of Christianity. They are very useful to our study in the reinterpretation of Christianity in Western Kenya. Mojola (1999) provides an outline history of translation of African Scriptures from the time of Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebmann, the first CMS missionaries in East Africa. Our study has benefited from his work, especially in demonstrating how the process of translation was an opportunity for African concepts to find their way into Christian lexicon.

At a more focused regional level most works on religion in Western Kenya are either based on an ethnic group or on a specific mission in an ethnic area. Our study is a major departure, synthesising religious history from an inter-ethnic perspective as well as from an inter-denominational perspective of mission work in the region. In doing this, however, we have borrowed from the studies outlined above and others, but given the data a new interpretation.

A number of studies have been done among the Bantu Abaluyia. Gunter Wagner (1970) was the first serious anthropological study among the group in

the 1930s. It focuses on the main cultural features of the Luyia. It provides a rich background against which a historical study can analyse the fortunes of Christianity among the Luyia. Burt (1980) is a useful work that has treated the art history of the Luyia from the pre-colonial period. We have borrowed some of the findings from this work.

Osogo (1966) tackles the origins and evolution of the various Luyia sub-ethnic groups. It is a useful work. Together with Were (1967a) these studies provide a reconstruction of the clan interaction among the Bantu groups that came to be described as the Abaluyia in the 1940s. For our purposes, this interaction underlines the hybridity of the Luyia community and the implications for diverse sources of the pre-Christian religious concepts.

Amolo (1972) focuses on the interaction of the Luyia, Luo and Kalenjin-Terik in the Masana Valley in the nineteenth century. Our study has reinterpreted the data in this work while focusing on the interaction and possibilities of exchange of religious concepts in the pre-Christian period.

Sangree (1966) studies the age-sets among the Tiriki, the colonial administration and the coming of Christianity into the area. It gives useful data on the reticence of the Tiriki in receiving the Christian message. The work, however, remains centred on one ethnic group and is basically anthropological. We have used some of the data generated by the study. Mwenesi (1972) is a biography of Yohana Amugune, one of the first converts

to Christianity among the Logoli. The work gives useful data on the ethos and mores of the first converts among the Luyia.

Painter (1966) describes the activities of the Friends African Mission in southeastern Buluyia. It is cast in triumphalist terms and disparages the religiosity of the Africans among whom the missionaries worked. Our study specifically dismisses such an approach to studying religious history of a people.

Kay (1973) concerns himself with the planting and growth of Western education in south-eastern Buluyia upto the time of independence. It examines the factors that account for the different rates of acceptance of Christianity among the different sub-ethnic groups. This study brings to the fore a questioning of the triumphalist terms within which Christianity in the region has been cast. In a similar vein, Lohrentz (1977) examines the role of missions in the implanting of Western education among the central-southern Luyia groups of the Wanga, the Kisa, the Marama and the Nyore, and among the Luo of Central Nyanza. The work gives very useful data on interpreting the extent of conversion among these communities.

Omulokoli (1981) is an account of the establishment of the Anglican Church among the Abaluyia. It highlights the indigenisation of leadership from the Western missionaries to the Africans. Our study has recast indigenisation primarily in conceptual terms of belief and practice. Kasiera (1981) traces the

origins and development of Pentecostal Christianity in Western Kenya. This work gives useful data on the origins of the *Iyahuka* or separatist movement in the region. We have used this in the reinterpretation of the Holy Spirit or *Roho* movement in Western Kenya.

Nasimiyu (1986) highlights the role of the Second Vatican Council in bridging the gap between the Roman Catholic Church and indigenous religions in the different parts of the world. This work has greatly enriched our project of establishing the syncretising dynamic in world religions.

Gimode (1993) focuses on the Logoli sub-ethnic group and attempts to reconstruct the syncretic history of their religious experience. The present study is a logical continuation of that work, but at a broader and deeper level.

Most of the studies undertaken on Kalenjin culture and religion cover the pre-Christian era. Hollis (1909) focuses on the Nandi language and folklore. For the purposes of our study, however, Hollis describes the main religious concepts of the Nandi as he observed them at the close of the nineteenth century and at the dawn of the twentieth. The work is extremely useful to our project of reconstruction of movement of ideas in pre-Christian Western Kenya. Peristiany (1939) focuses on the social institutions of the Kipsigis. We have used some of the data in this work in reinterpreting the pre-Christian history of Western Kenya. In the same vein, Orchardson (1961) throws light on Kipsigis religious concepts in the pre-Christian era.

Matson (1972) provides data on the Nandi migration and occupation of their present area and the emergence of a centralised polity in the nineteenth century. It also details the Nandi resistance against the establishment of British colonial rule over them. Our study has used some of the data. Mwanzi (1977) tackles the Kipsigis history, dispensing with the pre-occupation with migration and instead illustrating that the Kipsigis are a hybrid society that developed in the Rift Valley. Following this, the work also illustrates that the religious concepts of the Kipsigis are syncretic. Our study pursues this line of inquiry but comes to different conclusions. Langley, (1979) examines the rites of passage among the Nandi and how they relate to their indigenous religion. It is useful, especially in detailing persistence of indigenous culture in the twentieth century. Fish and Fish (1995) deal with pre-Christian Kalenjin heritage upon which Christianity was grafted. It was written by long serving missionaries among the Kalenjin with the aim of looking for "redemptive analogies" and reading of biblical concepts in Kalenjin religion. Yet in the same vein the authors vigorously abhor any attempt to carry forward into Christianity any aspects of Kalenjin indigenous cosmology. Fish and Fish (1989) is the history of the activities of the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya in the Rift Valley. We have used some of the data from this work.

Perhaps the one person that has done most on the religious historiography of Western Kenya in general and that of the Luo in particular is Ogot. He set the

pace in writing properly conceptualised religious history in Kenya. His numerous works highlight the dynamic nature of interaction of religious ideas. In his articles (1967a and 1972) he attempts to trace the history of the religious concepts of the River-Lake Nilotes. He tackles the concept of *Jok* and then traces the possible origins of the term *Nyasaye* for God, among the Luo, though our own study disagrees with this conclusions. His major work (1976b) traces the origins and migration of the River-Lake Nilotes from Southern Sudan, into Uganda and Western Kenya. This has provided a useful basis for reconstruction of interaction of ideas in pre-Christian Western Kenya. In his article of 1982, Ogot calls for a serious re-examination of the approach to writing religious history in Kenya. Our study has been undertaken partly in response to the challenge posed by Ogot. P'Bitek (1968, 1971 and 1975) are studies that raise crucial issues concerning African religions and their interaction with Christian. They range from issues in pre-Christian religious concepts and their resilience during the twentieth century. His ideas on the etymology of the concepts of *Were* and *Nyasaye* are also the focus of our study.

Ogot (1975) attempts a historical reconstruction of the Luo concept of God. He acknowledges encounters and interactions between the Luo and the Bantu Luyia, leading to exchange of ideas and practices. Our study has used some of his ideas. In another work, Ogot (1981) narrates the history of Roman Catholic Mill Hill Mission in Western Kenya. Our approach on mission

Christianity is interdenominational, dealing with the overall impact of missionisation in the region.

Opwapo (1981) traces the origins and growth of the Nomiya Luo Church. Our study has used some of her data, but has recast the whole movement and examines it as being part of the history and regional synthesis of independency. Hinga (1990) examines the history and the theology of *Legio Maria*, the only Roman Catholic independent Church in Kenya. It comes after the period under which our study falls. Nevertheless, we have used some of her insights in enriching our study of the history of the independent church movement in Western Kenya among the Abaluyia and the Luo.

Hoehler-Fatton (1996) gives a historical evolution of the Musanda-based *Joroho* indigenous independent church movement. She gives prominence to the African worldview in interaction with Christianity, demonstrating a recasting of Christianity in African terms. Our study has borrowed heavily in terms of both the conceptual framework and data in effecting a regional synthesis.

### **1.8 Justification and Significance of the Study**

In 1982, Ogot decried the absence of a proper history of religion in Africa.

He stated:

It is evident that African historians have so far failed to produce a history of religious ideas and their development in time, their interaction with other religious ideas and cultures. A history of religious ideas is much more complex than one of a simple development of ideas, of ritual approaches based on a single set of ideas. And we in Africa are yet to start writing this history (1982:44).

This is an unusual way to begin a justification of a study. But it is germane in our case because our study is in the main a response to Ogot's challenge of twenty years ago. In the first place the study is justified by its departure from the pervasive approach of studying single ethnic groups or sub-ethnic groups in Africa. This gives the false impression of self-sufficiency and self-containment in social process. The study, in contrast, highlights the history of cross-ethnic border influences in cosmological evolution of both pre-Christian and Christian religious systems in Western Kenya.

Secondly, the study of religion in Kenya has tended to be left to scholars in departments of anthropology and religious studies at universities and theological colleges. These, in line with the canons of their disciplines, have tended to focus on studying structures and/or processes in ethnographic terms with the lingering trademark stereotype of African a historicity. Our study is a historical inquiry, seeking answers to questions related to historical interaction while stressing causality and consequence.

Thirdly, most studies on Christianity in Africa have been conceived in terms of the history of the spread of mission work in a specified area among a specific ethnic group. Alternatively it has been cast in terms of the history of specific denominations. Our study is a fundamental departure from this bias. It deals with the activities of over half a dozen Christian missions in the same geographical location and tries to bring out the similarities and differences between them as they interacted with Africans. Even then the study does not focus on the missionaries as such, but on the response of the Africans, on the place of the African *persona*, in relation to missionisation. This is, in part to answer another challenge by Welbourn and Ogot in 1966 when they stated that they hoped that "... a thorough area study of Western Kenya may soon be possible. It offers a galaxy of both mission and indigenous independent churches which are not available in any other part of East Africa" (1966:7). Our study attempts to address this challenge, four decades down the line.

Fourthly, the study is justified on the grounds of highlighting and contributing to discourse. It gives a historian's version of the debate on syncretism with the view to balancing theologically and anthropologically oriented contributions to the concept. It then actually goes beyond discourse on syncretism to instantiate actual historical processes in which the syncretic dynamic has informed religion. This is a bold move, given the fact that the controversial concept of syncretism generates hesitation, even fear, among scholars because of the orthodoxy against it. We are of the view that to make

a meaningful contribution to scholarship, we must have courage and confidence to disturb this equilibrium that has existed for a long time. This is what the syncretic dynamic does in our study which is further amplified by an innovative theoretical framework which combines aspects of the Hegelian dialectical triad and the Aseka's triadic approach to the human personality.

Fifthly, the study has taken two contrasting geographical areas and periods – Western Europe and Western Kenya – for purposes of drawing broad parallels in the instantiation of the syncretising dynamic as a universal logic that informs the historical development of all religions. We have not pretended to cover the whole sweep of Euro-Christian history, but have rather focused on the first five formative centuries as the prime time of Westernisation of Christianity and how this spread to cover the continent thereafter. Whatever accretions that added to it later only answered to the dynamic already initiated during these early centuries of the contacts between Apostolic Christianity and the beliefs of Western Europe. This in turn lays a firm background of appreciating the gist of mission Christianity and the response of the Africans in Western Kenya during the first five decades of missionisation. It also prepares us to appreciate the rise of ecclesiastical independency in the region between 1920 and 1950.

Studying two blocs of totally different communities in two different eras of history may seem unusual but is not exceptional. A classic example is

Bediako's seminal work of 1992, *Theology and Identity*.<sup>42</sup> He takes the first five centuries of Christian theology in the Near East and the twentieth century enterprise of the search for an African Christian theology. Such a comparative approach helps us put the Christian faith in proper historical perspective. Apart from this, our study is a contribution to the religious historiography of Kenya in particular and of religion in general. It is both a theoretical and empirical study. It is part of the reinterpretation characterising the encounter between African cosmologies and Western Christianity. The study adds to the debate on syncretism and shows how the dialectic can be reasonably applied in historical study of religion. It gives privilege to the African *persona* in religious creativity and innovation and totally revises the thesis put forth by most studies which describe the activities of missionaries in Kenya and which portray the victory of Western Christianity over African religion.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework: The Hegelian Dialectical Triad and Aseka's Triad Theory of Consciousness**

A theory is a set of assumptions harmonising the relationship between a set of variables, in the process providing a conceptual framework for a study. Thus a theoretical framework provides a basis for acquisition of knowledge by offering insights, direction and depth of inquiry. Theory helps us understand and explain a process (Jones, 1983:76). It assists a scholar not to remain at

the mercy of data, and helps settle standing issues in scholarly debates. This does not mean that proper scholarship should focus on theory at the expense of data which are crucial to a study. In fact a researcher should always be susceptible to be kicked by the force of facts "... the impact of which would oblige him to revise the basic propositions of his approach" (Preiswerk and Perrot, 1978:49). Properly conceived research, therefore, consists of praxis, of zipping fact and theory together in a dialectical relationship (*Ibid.*). There is, however, hardly any one theory that addresses all aspects of human behaviour, personality, social processes and institutions (Aseka, 2002:86). In most cases scholars integrate insights from a variety of intellectual traditions to come up with a theoretical framework for a particular study.

Our study on the syncretic dynamic in religion is a study of spiritual phenomena which, as Spear and Kimambo correctly observe, constitute a very difficult and mysterious world to explore (1999:20). This study draws insights, therefore, from two main formulations that have addressed the spiritual world. These are the Hegelian formulation of the dialectical triad and Aseka's formulation of the triad theory of consciousness. The first deals with systems of ideas and how they confront each other, ultimately resolving antagonisms. The second is more specific, focusing on the individual human being as a subject logged into and communicating with the spiritual sphere. The combination of the two insights provides us with a composite framework that accommodates the range of variables that we are investigating.

Hegel lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and did his reflection on the world and nature of ideas and concepts (Walsh, 1960:139). His greatest contribution was his articulation of the nature and operation of the concept called the dialectic. He did not himself originate the idea. It was first expressed by Greek philosophers of classical times, Socrates and Heraclitus (Solomon, 1970:193). Hegel espoused the idea that the nature of thought was dialectical, whereby it formed a self-generating and dialectically related series. In other words thoughts have a peculiar propensity to give rise to one another. In this way they fall into triads of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Accordingly, every finite thought bears within itself its own opposite so that if we assert the first we are required to assert the second, its opposite (Radhakrishnan, 1953:69). Yet we cannot rest in sheer opposition but are led to a third position "... which overcomes and reconciles the opposed concepts as elements in a higher concept" (*Ibid.*). The two concepts are only partial truths, forming part of the third concept which gives better description of reality. The thesis and the anti-thesis do not cancel each other, but are preserved as in an amended form in the synthesis in a higher unity that only realizes itself through the two opposites. Even then the first synthesis is not fully concrete, but rather retains contradictions of the opposites. It therefore becomes a thesis which is opposed by its proper antithesis which could only to be again reconciled in a new synthesis "... which transcends them but retains the truth which was in them" (*Ibid.*:270). According to Hegel the triadic

dialectic process continues until a fully concrete synthesis is reached in which contradiction is finally dissolved and which, therefore, does not lead to any further opposition. This final synthesis is the fully adequate definition of the Absolute Idea. This is the Spirit, or God (Durant, 1953:204). He called this series “the phenomenology of the spirit” or “the long road travelled by human consciousness”. This was pure thought thinking about itself, and this was God, at least Aristotle’s prime mover.

Hegel, however, went further and argued that his rational constructs, in some way, contained the seed of their development in the concrete. Thus, for him, the key to understanding of empirical facts, whether of the natural or of the mental world, had to be borrowed from the categories of logic (Walsh, 1960:141). In this way Hegel took the dialectic from its home, the realm of logic, and fitted it into concrete history. In this way he revolutionized the study of history by inaugurating interpretation in place of plain narrative. For him, every stage of social development has sufficient reason for coming into existence. But it has within it internal contradictions which generate dynamism for growth, but which also leads to its disintegration to give way to a new stage. Karl Marx, Hegel’s disciple in youth, retained the Hegelian features in his materialistic dialectic or historical materialism, but turned Hegel upside down by expunging every feature of the spiritual dimension and focusing solely on material dimensions of humanity.

What concerns us here most is the fact that Hegel developed a spiritual or pneumatic perspective to reality. His dialectic was dialectic of the spirit. It is this dialectic which we have borrowed to explain the response of beliefs and ritual practices when they come into contact with foreign ones. This does not lead to the extermination of any whole system, but rather engages in a historic encounter of give-and-take which results in a higher synthesis which we have emphatically identified as syncretism. Indeed, the dialectic makes the historical study of religion a rewarding enterprise, because, as Durant says, all history "...lights up under the flash of the dialectic" (1953:231).

But one weakness in Hegel's dialectic of the spirit was the failure to highlight "...the subjective in man" (Aseka, 2002:66). He maintained a spiritual dimension, but in so far as it related to God only. But this was basically a philosopher's God. It was a God who was an idea, the perfect thought thinking about itself. This was a God that could be worshipped only by philosophers. One scholar who has attempted to argue on Hegelian lines in tracing the possible development of religion in human history is Elijah Benamozegh. He has argued for the likely existence of an ancient monotheistic religion, thus positing the unity of God, of humankind and of the universe (Gopin, 1998:183). However, it is obvious that humankind is not united, and belief in God is hardly uniting the world. Benamozegh executes a neo-Hegelian twist, arguing for a "...stage-by-stage process of human religious consciousness that begins with unity, albeit a vague conception of it.

moves to complexity and multiplicity, and returns finally to a higher unity or synthesis" (*Ibid.*). Like in the case of Hegel himself, Benamozegh's treatment of religion is only useful in treating the confrontation of whole sets of beliefs and practices while ignoring the subjective element of humankind. In fact, synthesis bereft of agency becomes sterile. It is in this question of agency that has led some to argue against syncretism as ambiguous and unrewarding. Proper conception of religion must clearly spell out the subjective element, because religion is practised by human beings – beings who are bearers or carriers of concepts. Religions do not just come together and combine. They have to be mediated through the human personality and this dimension we borrow from Eric Aseka and his conceptualisation of the triunilateral existence of the human being.

Aseka, like Jean Comaroff, belongs to the neo-Marxist school of thinking. In studying religion, neo-Marxists have made a departure from the orthodoxy that dismissed spiritual consciousness and concluded that the religious or spiritual dimension to life is real and important in social reality. The Comaroffs, for instance, argue that the human body is "...a receptacle of the spirit". It is "unstable and penetrable by powerful transformative spiritual forces" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993:72). This is how the phenomenon of spirit-possession is to be explained. Aseka perfects this conceptualisation of the human being as a bearer of spirit. Accordingly, the human being has a

trine nature consisting of the body, soul and spirit, and any proper analysis of human behaviour has to take into account all these dimensions respectively.

Aseka critiques Western formulations of social theory for having never transcended the formulation of Rene Descartes, the dual nature of the human being. According to the Cartesian duality a person is metaphysically divided into material body and immortal mind (Doyal and Gough, 1991). Descartes summarised the existence of consciousness in his famous aphorism “*cogito ergo sum*”, meaning “I think, therefore I am”. In this way, Aseka points out, the human being is locked in his own ego. The ego (the ‘I’) is an immortal substance, a thinking substance, while the body is an extended substance.

Actually the dualistic mold of human conception has a long pedigree in Western thought. Plato of classical Greece vigorously held the view that the mind and body, ‘god’ and ‘nature’, must be kept separate because the object of philosophical quest is precisely the separation of the soul and body (White and Hellerich, 1995:14). The *soma*, body, was separate from the *psyche*, soul. This separation is the apex of the Socratic-Platonic philosophical quest, namely “...to die, to exist as an entity alone by itself” (*Ibid.*). The missing dimension in most social theoretical formulations is the spiritual or religious element, inspite of the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. According to Radhakrishnan, there is a subjective religious consciousness which posits a

distinction between self and God. It is on the basis of this distinction that religion exists at all (Radhakrishnan, 1953: 81).

In his formulation, Aseka goes out of his way to establish such a consciousness, pointing out that the shortcomings of the body-mind duality are obvious and have contributed in no small measure to the failure to conceive social reality in its complex totality. We shall here summarise and paraphrase this formulation. Aseka points out that contrary to Marx, human beings are "... spiritual beings with enormous spiritual potential and propensity" (Aseka, 2002:50). The human being has the triune constituent domains of the spirit, soul and body. These operate in a combination of "... determinate and over-determinate casual influences on one another..." (*Ibid.*). The human body, the *soma*, plays a mediatory function with the five sensual domains. Through these senses and the orifices, the body is made world-conscious or has apprehension of the world. The human soul or *psyche* is the reasoning or intellectual part of the human being. It is self-conscious or it apprehends the self. But there is the spiritual or pneumatological aspect of human existence which yields spiritual consciousness. The spirit in men and women is conscious of the inorganic realms of the universe.

Thus there are three levels of consciousness which are conjoined in the human personality. The physical body is a receptacle or a house that hosts the mental and the spiritual faculties. The conscience of the human mind or *soulish*

conscience is in close proximity with the *spiritual* conscience. Spiritual conscience involves deep knowledge of oneself and of operations in the spiritual theatre. In this way the human individual constitutes a materiality of spiritual theatre. In this theatre the grand actors are either God or Satan, exerting pressure to influence human mind and the human spirit. A central notion in religion is God. God is spirit, just like the counterpart of God, the Devil or Satan is a spirit. These two have hierarchies of spiritual beings operating in the spiritual realm, but whose activities are manifested in the physical through the agency of human beings. It is the human agent, the spirit in man, which responds to those operations which are inspired by either God or by Satan. Those spirits deeply involved with God become "...mediums of His power while those involved in deep relationship with the Devil become mediums of his power" (Aseka, 2002:62). Both activate the communicative domains of the human spirits.

One important aspect that Aseka emphasises here is the element of free will. The human spirit cannot be imposed upon by the divine beings. In conjunction with the mind, the spirit has to make decisions on who to listen to and to communicate with. This is why the whole question of religion is very much a personal question first and only a group question second for those in agreement on the same doctrines. It is also in this context that we understand the dimension or aspect of worship which involves the lower subject (the individual) submitting to a Higher Subject (God or Satan). The faith, prayers

and other rituals with which human beings honour God are part of the repertoire that characterises a lower subject communicating and submitting to a higher subject. Faith is actually revelation knowledge in action (*Ibid.*:61). It is the operative dynamic in the human spirit. By it human beings penetrate deep or intuit into the spiritual realm and influence events in the physical. The release of power in form of *charisms* is one such manifestation. In this process the ritual of prayer clearly demonstrates the communicative dimension in religion. What may pass for incoherent groans or *glossolalia* is actually "... an expression of power relations between the subject and the higher subject" (*Ibid.*:60).

Our study on the syncretising tendency in European Christianity, Western Kenyan cosmologies, and later Christianity, has been well captured by a combination of Hegel's and Aseka's formulations on religion. The two together provide adequate latitude within which to pursue developments in belief and ritual in different historical and geographical contexts. They together provide space for critical aspects like agency in religion, popular manifestations and even apparently unconscious developments in religion.

### **1.10 The Historical Method**

This study is a historical study that has used ethnographic data in Western Kenya, without, "... succumbing to the methodological trappings of

ethnographic and anthropological imagination” (Aseka, 2002:6). The study has generated data on pre-colonial, colonial and even post-colonial Western Kenya by orally administering a comprehensive questionnaire among selected informants. It enlisted the help of a battery of undergraduate students in the Department of History of Kenyatta University who came from among the Luyia, Luo and Kalenjin ethnic groups over a period of three years from 1998 to 2000. Given the basics they have had in courses on “Sources of African History” and “Research Methods”, these research assistants identified suitable elders for interview.

Different informants happened to have more information on different aspects or areas of the research. Some were knowledgeable on indigenous beliefs and practices while others on the colonial era generally and mission Christianity in particular. Others yet were ‘specialists’ on the indigenous independent church movement in their areas. There were specific informants who were identified as being very resourceful and to whom I was called in to interview myself with the help of the research assistant who helped in translation and transcription. The data collected was cross-referenced with archival data and library research. However, the most important aspect of this research was not so much empirical as radical reinterpretation of existing data, giving the study a specifically historical approach. The past is not of primacy on its own since it is not synonymous with history (Steadman-Jones, 1983:75). History is an

intellectual operation that takes place in the present and in the head of the historian. History is first and foremost an exercise in interpretation. Historical discourse flows from an informed perspective in interpreting and analysing the data for production of a usable body of knowledge.

There is such a thing as the historical method which is employed to treat data to produce knowledge that is clearly historical. This method was first promulgated by Hegel who portrayed the unfolding of history as a dialectical process which produced change in a dialectical manner (Novack, 1974:24). This revolutionized the approach to the study of history, marking a shift from the practice of mere careful data-gathering and recording to the threshold of an engrossing intellectual exercise of interpretation of the data. This conceptualisation of history is not easy. It involves being able to analyse the different social variables in processes of interaction yet reasonably assigning each factor the extent or degree of contribution to change (Fatton Jnr., 1992:11,12). It is nevertheless a most rewarding approach to the study of history.

According to this method historical knowledge is not immobile or static or given. It is worked out through continual elaboration (Preiswerk and Perrot 1978:43). Hence the writing of history has to reflect this fluidity. The historian interrogates sources, posing questions shaped by the changing social and cultural needs. Emphasis is placed on coordination of ideas of cause and

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 THE DISCOURSE OF SYNCRETISM

As a process, syncretism is a technical term that refers to the combination for blending or synthesis of two or more different elements of culture in general and religion in particular. It enables the description of religious interaction over time, leading to a borrowing of aspects of rites, symbols and concepts. This is demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of this work. For the moment, however, we are concerned with the application of the term 'syncretism' in debates on religious phenomena. Discourse involves creating meanings through application of language. In the social sciences we constitute discourse when we are engaged in debates on the various concepts we apply and the terms that describe them. The discourse of 'syncretism', in this case, gives perspective to the history and different meanings that have been assigned to the concept.

#### 2.1 Greek Origins: Positive Connotation

The term syncretism comes from the Greek word *synkretismos* and was first used in literary form by Plutarch in the first century AD in his work the *Moralia*. It was used in a positive light, based on the Ionian term *synkrestos*, meaning 'mixed together' (Colpe, 1987:218). In popular etymology it was applied in reference to the behaviour of the Cretans who, in spite of habitual

discord among themselves, drew ranks when an external enemy attacked them. In this way Plutarch linked the word syncretism to the word Cretans, literally meaning "...the coming together of Cretans, a combination of Cretans" (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:2). It was in this positive sense of morally justified demonstration of brotherly love that the term was transmitted to the modern period, though after a hiatus in the usage of the word since Plutarch. It came to be used during the Renaissance when the rediscovery of classical authors - Plato, Aristotle and others - began to influence the strictly ecclesiastical readings of the Christian faith. During this period a significant feature of the emerging humanism was an emphasis on unity and compatibility of truth in all-philosophical and theological systems – a process that was described as syncretism. For Erasmus (1469-1536), a student of philology during the Renaissance, the practice of mixing theology and classical philosophy was positive, strengthening and enriching Christianity (Screech, cited in Shaw and Stewart, 1994:4).

However, the first scholar to use the term in modern times in purely theological terms was Georg Calixtus (1586-1656). Calixtus was a Protestant theologian educated at Helmstedt (Cross, 1958:218). He endeavoured to build a theological system which he hoped would lead to reconciliation between Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics. He proposed that the reunion should be based on Scriptures, the Apostle's Creed, and the faith of the first centuries. He used the term 'syncretism' at a Church Conference in Thorn in 1645 (Van

der Veer, 1994:196). Apart from doctrine, he advocated for reconciliation and access to each other's rituals of communication and baptism (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:4). But the position taken by Calixtus sparked off controversial debates in Lutheran churches throughout the early seventeenth century. They came to be known as "the syncretistic controversy" and acquired negative overtones.

## **2.2 The Anti-Syncretic Rhetoric: Claims of Theological Orthodoxy and the Inherent Ambiguity**

The reaction against Calixtus was a turning point in the use of the term. It entered modern discourse cast in negative terms, entrenching claims to purity and orthodoxy by different religious persuasions while perceiving difference in other people's religious traditions in terms of contamination and heresy (Stewart, 1994:134). Calixtus was denounced by the Calvinists and Lutherans as "crypto-Romanist, and "Cryo-Calvinist" and accused him of "sacrificing the distinctive views of the reformation" in favour of irenicism. Suffice it to indicate here the irony in these charges against Calixtus in the seventeenth century and the preoccupation of churches – Catholic and Protestant – with dialogue and ecumenism in the twentieth century. In retrospect, the second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches can be interpreted, in part, in terms of the spirit of Calixtus.

In the nineteenth century, however, scholars of comparative religion had maintained the negative overtones of the term. They used syncretism to describe the religious life of the Roman and Hellenic world, with connotations of disorder confusion and manipulation by the Roman Emperors. The negative overtones in the usage of 'syncretism' have remained a monopoly of scholars with an ecclesiastical or theological bent. Their writings have contributed in no small measure to the tarnishing and ultimate declaration of the term as useless in analysis, deserving to be expunged altogether from religious discourse. The term has had to carry implications of "impurity, backsliding, undisciplined sloth and indulgence, the incapacity to keep up, giving in to old ways; it implies a weakness rather than a strength", a lack of agency and power (Kiernan, 1994:70). For a very long time, the Roman Catholic Church was particularly rigid on its perception of orthodoxy as against what is considered heresy and deviation from the 'pure' faith. This rigidity has to be understood in the light of the spirit of Church Councils before the Second Vatican Council in the second half of the twentieth century. Especially crucial in defining Christian orthodoxy was the Council of Trent in mid sixteenth century. Its focus was restoration of purity and orthodoxy in the Church teachings (Nasimiyyu, 1986:vi). With this in mind the Council instituted a rigid and uniform church liturgy for subsequent years.

In line with this, tendencies that were amenable to appropriation of religious ideas that came from outside sanctioned doctrine and practice throughout the

world were frowned upon. Consequently, the Catholic clergy and theologians have been most averse to the use of the term syncretism. They have vigorously disputed the usage of the term, reserving it for a “narrow and altogether negative subject of such syntheses where they perceive that the Truth of the Christian message is distorted or lost” (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:11). This aversion remains evident to date when Catholic theologians participate in debates on religious exchange. In an era when concessions have been made to the fact of the inevitability of borrowing between different religious traditions to enrich the faith, the debate has been couched in an assortment of culture-related terms. One Catholic theologian who has heavily contributed to the debate is Schineller. This is especially brought out in his article of 1992. Schineller has virtually no room for entertaining the term syncretism in discourse. He argues that because of the history of the usage of the term, and even contemporary usage, it has many meanings and contrasting pejorative connotations. Coupled with deep-seated ambiguity, he argues, these reasons should make the term to be dropped from discourse altogether. Schineller expresses his displeasure at the fact that anthropologists find the term useful at all! He dismisses any attempts to redefine the term. “...my view is that the word cannot be redeemed and it might be better not to enter into controversy surrounding the word” (1992:52). In fact, he goes on, there should be an end to the debate because one’s energy is lost in the “...*lis de verbis*, into quarrels about the meaning of words” (*Ibid.*:56). He does not see

how progress will be made in religious and cultural interpenetrations if the focus remains on the word 'syncretism'. His final submission is that it cannot be saved:

And even though I incline towards those scholars who see syncretism as a positive, necessary and helpful word to describe development of a tradition into new culture, I do not feel that it can be saved (*Ibid.*).

Our view of Schineller is that he is making an impossible demand on scholarship. As scholars, we work with and thrive on words and their meanings. Nefarious as the term might sound and appear to people with different persuasions, we cannot expunge it from discourse. Since it was there during the first century, as it was during the Renaissance era and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who are we to declare that we have finally heard the last of it? In fact what Schineller and the rest who hold similar views should do is to genuinely demonstrate sufficient grounds indicating the inadequacy of the term. So far the grounds they give do not hold enough substance to warrant erasure of the word from intellectual discourse. The simple question to answer is: Do different religious traditions make contact and influence one another? That is essentially syncretism. I agree with Shaw and Stewart when they argue that there are apparently no substantive objections to the semantics of the term (1994:3).

But towards the end of the nineteenth century, Herman Usener used the term 'syncretism' in a particularly derisive manner. He called it a "mishmash of religions", arguing that the term did not even qualify to be regarded as mixture or blending (Colpe, 1987:219). Apparently these two qualities were a notch higher than syncretism. For him syncretism was an "unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers", although it was "a necessary transitional stage in the history of religions". One wonders: transition to what? To pure religion? To a synthesis? He does not say. Usener represents that partisan theological category of scholars who seem to have a thoroughly mixed up perception of syncretism and who are averse to the term not because of any genuine grounds but out of sheer dislike of the reality of the disintegration and integration of religious beliefs and practices.

To an extent Colpe seems to agree with Usener. He states that when a "... religio-historical development" reaches a syncretic stage, its syncretic character is not usually "communicated to the subsequent stages". He concludes that to this extent syncretism is always a transitional phase (*Ibid.*: 221). In other words Colpe argues that historical development of religions is syncretic. But he does not tell us what happens after transition. And if the syncretic character is not communicated to the subsequent stage, then what form does that subsequent stage of religion take? In contrast with this amorphous position, our argument advances the view that syncretism is actually a stage of synthesis in the historical development of religion.

However, it is important to note that like in the case of Hegel's dialectic, religion is not a static phenomenon, but a process in flux, undergoing constant negotiation and renegotiation by its practitioners. What is arrived at today as synthesis will be tomorrow's thesis – a basis upon which appropriation and refinement of new ideas will be undertaken. In short, religion is an extremely dynamic realm, constantly renegotiating its position in response to time and space.

Other scholars of religion have argued differently about the use of syncretism. They do not contest the fact of syncretism. Indeed, their argument is that syncretism is so obvious in religions that there is not much to say about it. They use the inclusiveness of syncretism in all religions to declare it as serving no purpose, and therefore useless. They state that simply identifying a ritual or tradition as 'syncretic' tells us little and takes us nowhere, since all religions have composite origins and continually reconstruct through ongoing processes of synthesis and erasure (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:7). Virtually every religion or culture is syncretic, having changed over time, "...adapting and incorporating exogamous elements and ideas along the way" (Stewart, 1994:127). Indeed, because of this very fact, some have argued that it is impossible for a historian to unravel what came first.

Even Robert Baird, a historian of religion, looks at syncretism in terms that are so obvious as to gloss over its usefulness in study. He states: "...to say

that 'Christianity' or the 'mystery religions' of 'Hinduism' are syncretic is not to say anything that distinguishes them from anything else and is merely equivalent in admitting that each has a history and can be studied historically" (Baird, 1991:146). In our view Baird is at once wrong and right. He is wrong when he implies that syncretism does not distinguish a religion from others, because as he then rightly observes, each religion has a history which can only be properly understood by factoring in the syncretic dynamic. This is the point of our thesis. The debate on syncretism has for long been left in the theological and anthropological domains, yet it is in history that the claims and counter-claims to encounter and interaction can be effectively tested. So far there are not many works that have studied histories of religion from this vista, a vista that Baird says is obvious, namely syncretically conceived history. Many students who have tried their hand at religious history – at least in Africa – provide accounts that are cast in the 'victor-vanquished' mold. The syncretic dialectic simply tells us that this is wrong conception. But Baird overlooks one thing in relation to Western-European history: the claims that Western institutions were civilized and that they were the cream of mankind. To the Westerners their Christianity was the authentic, the pure version of Christianity which was to be exported and transmitted in the original European form to the savage and the pagan. If the syncretising dynamic in religion is obvious to Baird, it has not been obvious to many Western historians of religion especially in regard to Christianity. The role of

the historian is to attempt to unravel a conundrum – to describe the path that various aspects of a theme under study have taken over lengthy periods. This is why Sanneh, a scholar of religion with a historical bent, sets out to unravel “...how the religious phenomenon is formed by internal forces as well as external circumstances” (1989:7). And, very importantly, unlike the category of religious scholars outlined above, he rightly treats religion as a movement and in constant flux.

### **2.3 The Stigmatisation and Euphemisation in the West: Syncretism as the Other’s Religious Traditions**

Because of the seventeenth century negative usage of the term syncretism, Western social scientists were influenced by and perpetuated the stigmatic overtones from the past. Confronted with phenomena or processes that were obviously syncretic, they ended up substituting the term with euphemisms. In this way they also perpetuated claims of orthodoxy of Western versions of Christianity while reserving ‘syncretism’ for religious experiences of other people. By so doing, debate on syncretism and the anti-syncretic rhetoric became a function of power relations. This became manifested, especially in the ensuing period of missionary expansion into Africa and other parts of the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century and going deep into the twentieth century. In the case of Africa we have recounted elsewhere in this work that one of the main objectives of Christian missionaries was to

eliminate completely indigenous forms of religion. It was feared that should such be left, a syncretic process would begin which would only contaminate the orthodox Western version of Christianity. Partly to blame for this were developments in or rather the conservative nature of European, and especially British anthropology. The anthropologists tacitly accepted or endorsed the view that syncretism was a theological concern. This “absconding” made them then develop ambivalence and cynicism towards terms like creolisation and hybridity. The spirit of the civilizing the mission made them see in other people and cultures inferiority which aroused the desire to guard their pure or orthodox institutions.

It is true that at the start of the twentieth century some Western theologians gathered enough courage to point out that Christianity itself was syncretic. But they were met “...with broad disapproval on the part of Western Christians” (Baird, 1991:143). They had to use euphemisms to describe syncretic experience in their religion. Stewart gives a good example in the case of the revival of ancient Greek practices in later Christianity. He speaks of the popularisation of the ritual of *Anastenaria* in the nineteenth and twentieth century Greece. It involved walking on hot coals of fire, but observed as a Christian ritual. But the Greek historians and folklorists who encouraged the ritual avoided the use of the term ‘syncretism’ and instead used the term ‘survivalism’ as the euphemism for it (Stewart, 1994:138).

Van de Veer gives another examples in the early proselytisation of Europe. The coming of Christianity to Europe involved encounter with different beliefs and practices. It embraced some of these. But this encounter is not described in syncretic terms. It is rather perceived as "...a triumphant history of religious expansion and conversion which ultimately establishes the absolute Catholic truth by appropriating Catholic symbols in the construction of the Church" (Van de Veer, 1994). Another example is that of Benamozegh who demonstrates the synthesis of Judaism from diverse sources. He states that because of the diversity from which Moses drew the Torah, Judaism could be "accused" of syncretism. But, he argues, from a metaphysical level, Moses chose the good from multiple sources, in the process "... synthesizing a higher unity. Judaism could only be syncretic if it did not resolve itself in a higher unity" (quoted in Gopin, 1998:188). It is clear that Benamozegh is frantic in defending a thoroughly syncretic process against the charge of syncretism because of the pejorative nature of the term in the West. In this study we have argued that the syncretising dynamic is essentially synthetic, actively taking aspects in systems into a new composite form. It is dialectical, inheriting the relevant in both and discarding the obsolete.

It is the same stigmatised use of the word which makes Colpe, while discussing obvious syncretic process in Hellenistic Greek culture, to argue that the term syncretism cannot be applied. Rather, he argues, Hellenism was "... a reconciliation of cultures or an integration of cultures with a higher

unity”, and for him the right term is synthetic and not syncretic (1987:221). At the same time he ‘exonerates’ Catholicism, Judaism and Eastern forms of Christianity from being syncretic. The question then remains: which religions are syncretic? Or is the term reserved for specific, say African religions and their forms of Christianity? Haven’t Judaism and Catholicism displayed appropriation of extraneous religious traditions in their development?

The last example to illustrate the intimidating and stigmatised use of the term in the West is that of Boyarin. Boyarin’s works gives very powerful insights into the interpenetration of religions and clearly demonstrate that cultural and religious boundaries are at best fuzzy (1998b). He actually states that the syncretic dialectic governs all religions. Yet in another article published in the same year, he strenuously argues that he is not proposing something that one might be tempted to call “...syncretism’ as if some ingredients of religion can be assigned to one ‘source of influence’ and others to another, even unidirectional syncretism” (Boyarin, 1998a, 525). What this boils to is a deep-seated stigmatisation of the term in the Western social science circles. It would rather be in reference to somebody else’s religion, while one’s own has to be portrayed in terms of purity and authenticity. This is an expression of power relations that attempts to justify dominance of some cultures over others.

of Christianity be assigned the status of 'true religion' while declaring others false and heretic (Van de Veer, 1994:196). Syncretism then became a description of any deviations from these 'ideal' Western forms. But the question of truth or falsity of religious beliefs is a controversial issue which cannot be decided with any degree of fairness or even accuracy without allowing "...the participants their right of reply" (Hinga, 1990:54).

The rhetoric of purity and authenticity which, in a way, amounts to a kind of essentialism, ignores obvious facts of culture-contact and culture-change and only ends up in creating a myth, namely the orthodox religion. According to Boyarin, the 'myth' of pure Christianity rests on the fallacy of an original Christianity "...uncontamination by external influence". (1998b:52). He also points to another myth in regard to Judaism and created by Jewish writers – namely the ascribing to Judaism of purity while describing Christianity as an 'alien' form of Judaism. In this case Judaism is 'orthodox', 'pure', 'true' while Christianity is 'syncretic; 'heretic', false'. Jewish writers on Judaism have articulated it as "...precisely the distance from 'syncretistic' Christianity whose defining feature is that it is somehow a composite of Judaism and Hellenism" (*Ibid.*:53).

In the case of Africa, mission Christianity became the orthodox while forms of adaptation and accommodation of belief and practice between African religious traditions and Christianity became heretic and syncretic phenomena.

Syncretism was pejoratively used to "...designate the mixture of Christianity and indigenous religion" (Meyer, 1994:45). In this vein Oosthuizen categorised all indigenous independent churches in Africa as "post-Christian" (1968:119). But he went further to expand the circle to also include the nativistic movements and "many Pentecostal churches which he summarily categorized as *a priori* heretical (*Ibid.*).

Ullendorff described the Abyssinina/Ethiopian religious heritage as being impregnated with strong Hebraic and other Archaic Semitic elements and "pagan residue" whose result has been "a centuries old remarkable syncretism". He goes on to state that the Abyssinian church and nation have been at peace "... *with their syncretistic* Judeo-Christian civilization and folklore" (Ullendorff, 1978:97, emphasis mine). Writing earlier on Ethiopia still, Jones and Munroe described Absinian Christianity as being "...at base the Coptic Christianity of Egypt and *contaminated* by a number of pagan survivals, and by certain Jewish elements introduced concurrently with or before Christianity" (1966:42, emphasis mine). Shaw and Stewart correctly point out that missionaries and theologians have described local versions of Islam and Christianity in Africa as 'prime examples of syncretism' (1994:11). Hence Shorter's description of the many religious movements in Africa as 'crudely syncretic' (1989:43). Yet if these writers were challenged to describe Western Christianity in the same terms, they would rather call it 'higher synthesis'. They would also rather remain silent on the history of a

European Christianity which is replete with syncretising instances (see Chapter 3).

One thing that the negative overtones in which discussion on syncretism is treated has led to in Africa is to make the Africans defensive. Members of the many indigenous independent churches in Africa have emphasised the authenticity and orthodoxy of their specific versions. They have successfully adopted Christianity to the local contexts, yet take offence at being considered syncretic (Stewart, 1999:46). Kiernan (1994) has argued that the Zionist movement in South Africa may constitute an exception to the principle that all religions are syncretic. Zionists perceive themselves as being the 'true Israeli' – a fact due in no little measure to the condescending ascriptions of syncretism by Europeans to indigenous independent churches.

#### **2.4 Emerging Broader Positive View of Syncretism in Social Analysis**

As already indicated, developments in European anthropology in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth tacitly endorsed the negative overtones ascribed to the concept and term 'syncretism' in the theological circles. However, a parallel but contrasting development was taking place in American anthropology. The perspective of this branch of anthropology conceived syncretism in positive terms in the study of social realities. It is via American anthropology that syncretism has re-entered the

theatre of social analysis with great promise. The key authorities in this trans-Atlantic anthropology are Franz Boas, Melville Herskovites, Gilberto Freyre and Fenando Ortiz. The quartet symbolises the dynamic approach in anthropology, most certainly because of the heterogeneous experience and history of the multi-cultural nature of the North and Latin America cultures. Drawing from the Boasian perspective, Americans have viewed cultures as syncretic formulations (Guss, 1994:145). Boas may not have used the term 'syncretism', but his theory of "... historical particularism was clearly based on a syncretic model" (*Ibid.*:156). His theory strongly advanced the view that it was impossible to study any one culture in isolation because it is only by understanding history of contact and exchange that it can be understood, its psychology and genius notwithstanding. Herskovits and Freyre were trained by Boas at Columbia University. Consequently, their analysis of society was syncretic. Herskovits perceived syncretism as a useful tool of analysis in specifying extents of integration of diverse cultures (Stewart, 1999:47). He once wrote that "... the very use of the term 'syncretic' helped to sharpen my analysis, and led one to a more precise formulation of the problem and theory...." (Herskovits, 1941 quoted in Shaw and Stewart, 1994:5). Freyre, a Brazilian, considered his society as being fundamentally a historical synthesis of different races and cultures (Stewart, 1999:47). He thus dismissed the idea of pure cultures as being historically untenable. Probably the best exemplifier of the syncretising dynamic in culture formations, with implications for the

study of history, is Fernando Ortiz. Ortiz, was a Cuban folklorist and historian. He postulated that Cuban culture developed as various exogamous cultures – but primarily Spanish and African – met and mingled through the syncretic dynamic of transculturalism. He emphasized that change ensued when cultures made contact – change that involved simultaneous loss and acquisition. Cultures mix and change not by acculturation which is passive but in a process of “...continuing, creative flux, never a finished synthesis” (*Ibid.*:48). This is a typically Hegelian insight applied to the realm of culture. Culture is a social matrix that is characterized by a constant process of evolving.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century there developed a heightened awareness of this approach to studying cultures as a process of interpenetration. This has increasingly brought into question and critique earlier conceptions of culture as being “...stable, bounded and homogeneous” (*Ibid.*:40). Consequently the term syncretism is becoming frequent in social science theory along other terms like creolisation and hybridisation in portraying the dynamics of global social developments. Edward Said has argued that the readmission of the term ‘syncretism’ into scholarly vocabulary as descriptive shorthand for cultural realities is of great importance. It is especially useful in avoiding the tendency of “... essentialism which... has become the tool of that struggle in which everyone insists on the ‘purity or priority of one’s voice’ (Said, 1993:xxiii). Said properly argues that “...all

cultures are involved in one another, none is simple and none pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic” (Said, 1993:xxv). Thus the concept of syncretism has slowly but surely shed the negative overtones that characterised it for so long. Students of religion in general and Christianity in particular have gradually embraced it, albeit, with the condition of criteria to establish ‘critical’ and to avoid ‘uncritical’ syncretism. They have acknowledged what Smith Robertson discerned at the close of the nineteenth century. Because of the great force of his insight, we have to quote him a bit extensively.

No positive religion that has moved man has been able to start with a *tabula rasa*, and express itself as if religion was beginning for the first time, in form, if not in substance. The new system must be in contact all along the line with the older ideas and practices which it finds in possession. A new scheme of faith can find a hearing only by appealing to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist; and it cannot reach this without taking account of the traditional forms in which all religious feeling is embodied and without speaking the language which men accustomed to those old forms can understand (Smith Robertson, 1894:2).

More recently Boyarin has written to caution against inscribing a “...phenomenological boundary between Jews and Christians, a sort of pure Christianity, pure Judaism, and indeed pure Greco-Romanness” (Boyarin, 1998a:515). He goes on to advance a strong case of syncretism being at the centre of religious development. He urges students of religion to be broad-based in analysis and “... to transcend the narrow lines of histories of

particular religious groups. So-called syncretism is not a marginal phenomenon in the formation even of monolithic religions but the very heartland of their life and development” (Boyarin, 1998b:78). For Eugene Hillmann the term syncretism is more often than not “... both desirable and necessary for the progressive universalisation and tangible catholicisation of Christianity” (1989:60). Similarly Leonard Boff (1986) has acknowledged that syncretism is something positive and a normal process of Catholicism. His chapter seven is entitled: “In favour of Syncretism: The Catholicity of Catholicism”. Boff, however cautions that there is both true and false syncretism. What is needed, he argues, is the criteria for authentic syncretism to lead to the growth of true Catholicity of the church. This is the same position taken by Sanneh. He acknowledges the fact of syncretism as uncontested. For him the history of Christianity demonstrated that is a syncretic faith, given its transcultural nature. Christianity showed “... an enormous appetite for absorbing materials from other religious traditions...” (Sanneh, 1989:43). This made it easy to penetrate many cultures. To Sanneh there was the danger of ‘uncritical syncretism’ which was nevertheless countered by ensuring that Jesus Christ occupied the central place as taught by the Apostles. This ensured that Christianity did not lose focus on the saviour. Probably the most specific statement on Christianity as a syncretic faith is that by Adolf Von Harnack. He writes that Christianity,

... revealed to the world a special kind of syncretism namely the the syncretism of a universal religion...unconsciously, it had learned and borrowed from many quarters;... These religions fertilized the ground for it, and the new grain and seed, which fell upon that soil, set down its roots and grew to be a mighty tree. Here is religion which embraces everything. And yet it can always be expressed with absolute simplicity: one name, the name of Jesus Christ, still sums up everything (Harnack, 1908, Vol.1:312, quoted in Sanneh, 1989:43-44).

In similar terms Walter Hollenweger has argued that the church cannot avoid being syncretic. In fact it has to produce "... different syncretisms in different cultures". What, however, is needed is a "theologically responsible syncretism" over against a theologically irresponsible one (Hollenweger, 1995:1028).

## **2.5 Syncretism: Agency or Blind Forces?**

While rehabilitating syncretism in scholarly circles, however, the concept has still to be made more focused and nuanced in order to disabuse it of long-standing accretions of passivity and sense of lack of agency associated with it, which tie it more to the "static" concept of acculturation. Aseka has pinpointed these as some of the aspects that make the concept of syncretism objectionable. He states that syncretism is an anthropological notion which ignores the historical dimension in the evolution of social form. For him it focuses on interaction and the social processes of synthesis, giving the impression of passivity and lack of agency, "...forgetting that before synthesis

there must be encounter” (Aseka, 2002:51). He dismisses the concerns of religious syncretism which “...emphasize the subject of community interaction in the creation of religious hybridities” (*Ibid*). He further dismisses hybridisation and creolisation – concepts directly related to syncretism – as being passive processes that do not go beyond interaction”.

He states:

A syncretism that is oblivious of the complex process of encounter in which complex social, intellectual and spiritual processes are involved in negotiating and renegotiating new religions can only produce a bizarre narrative of an anthropologically conceived cultural or religious phantasmagoria (*Ibid*).

The fact of the matter is that syncretism, like the sister concepts of hybridity and creolisation, cannot be wished away. These are real and highly dynamic, and so historical processes. Probably what we need to make clear from the outset is that syncretism can be conceived in two diametrically contrasting ways – as a state and as a process. It makes all the difference which of the two one has in mind. We have eschewed the concept of syncretism as a static condition where there is no agency. We have embraced syncretism as a concept denoting forces in flux, always dynamic and negotiating. Hybridisation and creolisation are dynamic processes whose undercurrents inform the history of many societies and cultures worldwide. The last description we can attribute to social and cultural forms of societies like Brazil

and Cuba is one with the label “bizarre”. These are syncretic culture, on the testimony of the leading social scientists in those very cultures. In any case, in his own doctoral thesis, Aseka pays tribute to the concept of syncretism. In pointing out some of the shortcomings of classical Marxism, he points out that his “...study attempts an alternative approach that is essentially syncretic and fundamentally materialist in approach” (Aseka, 1989:xiii).

We fully espouse Aseka’s contribution of the critical concept of encounter. This in itself acknowledges the fact that there are no pure entities, because what proceeds from the process of encounter is the process of interaction, an interaction which is not a passive or sterile process, but one that necessitates interrogation and appropriation of what is suitable, while discarding what is not suitable. Religious canons may demand the adherents to be pure, and indeed adherents of a faith aspire to purity. But then when we apply the hindsight of history, it becomes clear what exactly takes place when two cultures and cosmologies confront each other. This precedes a process of give-and-take which has been described by many terms, but which we emphatically call syncretism.

However, Aseka’s concerns remain germane and draw attention to the fact that to be properly applied, “syncretism” has to be carefully redefined. To help us in this, it is important to stress the need for the reworking of the notion. It is this reworked, redefined syncretism which gives the promise of

meaningful study of anthropology and history of cultures and religions. Perhaps it is Werbner who captures this very well. The discourse of syncretism has two aspects to it, and it matters what one emphasises most. It “...has its own Scylla and Charybdis” – on the one hand celebrating dynamic and lively acknowledgement of interpenetration of ideas, while on the other loaded with pejorative judgements about idealized pure culture and religions versus contaminated ones (Werbner, 1994:214). Perceived in former terms, syncretism is full of agency and always involved in negotiation of identities. It becomes the “... continually contested social action” across cultures and traditions, appropriating and reproducing cultures (*Ibid.*:212). This way syncretism is conceived as a form of resistance, a questioning of hegemonic practices, selecting, deconstructing and transforming them to resonate in people’s own universe of meanings.

Thus syncretism has to be understood as focusing on image and counter-image, debate and counter-debate. It is about interpretation and reinterpretation of religion. It is about religious “...contestation and contentiousness” in the process of encounter (Webner, 1992-214). Syncretism is, properly speaking, a form of resistance to cultural domination and an avenue of establishing identity. The discourse on syncretism is a discourse about power relations. Aseka aptly demonstrates the diffuse field of social power which he categorises into political, economic, spiritual and body forms (Aseka, 2002:20). The concept of power automatically implies the “...

complementary concepts of opposition, struggle, conflict, resistance and antagonism” (Hall, et.al., 1978:195). Power and resistance are reciprocally related. They bring about and pervade each other (Kempf, 1994:110). Thus syncretism connotes a dialectical process. It is an active response to a hegemonic order.

This calls for a little more analysis on the question of agency and intentionality, of consciousness or lack of it, in the discourse of syncretism. As already pointed out one of the charges against syncretism is the apparent lack of agency and the implication that the subject does not feature anywhere as the social forces of culture interact passively. This is missing the point. Cultures are practised, and are only possible, because of human beings. It is human beings who perpetuate their culture. We cannot speak of religious traditions without speaking of their practitioners. For instance modes or patterns of leadership change from time to time to respond to the needs and challenges that a society confronts. The genius of statecraft invokes consensus building and morally grounded principles deemed necessary for the survival of the group by most members. Grassroots actors are not passive recipients. They are essentially a conscious community of moral actors that discriminates between what is good for one and for the group, and what is bad. This is the way to understand the customary moral and legal codes and sanctions which play the role of policing the community. This cannot be considered to be blind forces.

Syncretism may occur “consciously” as in the case of early Church Fathers who purposefully fused pagan festivals with Christian festivals, while allowing aspects of the former to become a permanent part of the latter. Another example in this category is that of Gbadebo Dosumu, a Nigeria innovator who founded the Yoruba Church. He acknowledged syncretism and lauded it on the grounds that most world religions are syncretic and Africans should freely engage in such religious engineering. He gave the example of the “...Teutonic festival of Easter and the English days of the week named after pagan gods” (Peel, quoted in Shaw and Stewart, 1994:17)

In our view, the right approach is not so much to focus on consciousness (or lack of it) of syncretic processes, but rather on the degree of consciousness which may best be perceived as ranging on a spectrum from ‘elite’ to ‘popular’. The question of syncretism as a process powered by blind forces does not capture social realities. This is the acculturation perspective which we have shown to be inadequate. While the degree or extent of consciousness may vary in the way human beings apprehend reality, they remain the only creation with understanding of themselves as agents or subjects. Human beings are concept-bearers who involve themselves in “...reflexive appropriation of knowledge” that is denied non-human animals (Giddens, 1977:216).

In both elite and popular syncretism there is agency. Elite syncretism involves the production of systematised highly intellectualised theologies in the mold of Western theologians. Concerns of the Second Vatican Council and the purposeful quest for an African Christian theology by learned, mission-trained Africans are good examples of this. This is religious engineering from the top. According to Mazrui it is purposeful religious reform that seeks to give greater native meaning to imported religions by closing the cultural or psychological gap. He also includes here the enterprises of individual prophets who stand out to carry out such programmes, for instance as Ahmadiyya Miria Ghulam Ahmed (Mazrui, 1986:150).

On the other hand, popular syncretism can be perceived as religious engineering from the bottom, at the grassroots level. The bottom-up creativity or innovation is the most pervasive. But it has to be emphasized that it is not a function of blind or unconscious forces. This has always preceded elite indigenisation. Meyer's research on the Ewe of Ghana captures this well. Whereas the elite, former mission based African theologians began the project of Africanisation in the 1970s, the grassroot Christians appropriated Christian concepts in a practical way during the early years of missionisation. But they were not passive recipients. They recast Christianity in a way that addressed the day-to-day existential problems of health, fertility and food (Meyer, 1944:59). The appropriation of Jesus and the Holy Spirit gave them new

arsenal in fighting perennial evil forces of witchcraft which were now personified in the Devil. They went farther than the missionaries had intended. The latter had not and did not wish to emphasize evil forces and the Devil. This is a good example of popular religion displaying creativity and innovation to the point of subversion of dominant missionary ideas. Here was a case of what Bangkoff would describe as creating cosmologies that are neither wholly foreign nor wholly customary (1999:45). It is in these terms of agency that Contursi attempts to understand the case of Dalit Buddhism in India. She argues that Dalit Buddhism is “popular religion” not because it is less rational or less ethical than doctrinal religions, but because it is “...constituted in the activities and popular struggles, defines its adherents in opposition to the dominant culture and provides a new identity for the Dalits” (Contursi, 1993:322).

Agency, and with it creativity and innovation, is an attribute of every average human being. Matters to do with religion are matters that have always compelled individuals to think and play certain organic roles in social change. It is individuals who make religious congregations. The fact that they submit to a pastor or a cardinal or an imam does not mean they are simply going through motions. Faith itself issues from a certain degree of rationality. One decides on whether to believe or not.

Thus people at the grassroots develop religious synthesis by creating “...meaning for their own use out of contexts of cultural and political domination” (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:22). Syncretism, then, is a form of resistance. The conundrum of agency and intentionality make syncretism “...very slippery, but it is precisely its capacity to contain paradoxes, contradictions and polyphony which makes syncretism such a powerful symbolic process...” (*Ibid.*:21).

## **2.6 The Syncretic Dynamic in the Discourse of African Christian Theology**

As an organized religion, Christianity has been in existence for some two thousand years. Most of this time it remained confined to specific areas like the Mediterranean World, parts of Eastern Europe, most of Western Europe and parts of Africa. However, within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the faith experienced phenomenal expansion that went along with Western European colonialism. It was during this period that most parts of Africa south of the Sahara became part of the Christian world through a vigorous programme of proselytisation.

The Christian missionary enterprise in Africa was basically a Westernizing enterprise, heavily associated with European culture. Christians were

expected to convert from their religion and culture and to become Christians on the missionary model. In the first decades of the twentieth century African Christians at the grassroots did not change into European Christians away from Europe. They rather explored Christianity in its complexity, interpreted it in their own cultural and historical context and appropriated it as their own (Spear, 1999:3). In other words what went on at the mission stations was at variance with what went on in the day-to-day lives of the communities. When the missionaries tried to nip this emerging synthesis in the bud, the African believers in some parts of the continent broke away from the mission to form their own indigenous independent churches where they could truly experience an authentic African Christianity. This practical approach to indigenisation or Africanisation by the masses was not matched with an African elite theology until the 1960s and 1970s (Bediako, 1992:xviii). Consequently, the debate on theology 'for and about Africa' by the mission educated elite has lagged far behind practical syntheses by the majority of the African Christians. The major cause for this anomaly has been the extremely conservative and exclusivist theology which held sway in mission Christianity in Africa among both Roman Catholics and Protestants (Ukpong, 1992:42). The missionaries came armed with an attitude of confrontation and condemnation of African culture and religions, leaving very little room for 'dialogue'. This attitude began to change in tandem with the stirrings of the nationalist liberation around the mid-point of the twentieth century. The struggle against

colonialism in the political arena had the effect of spurring African clergy to re-examine the history of their relationship with the mission with a view to putting Christianity in a cultural context, a context that involved a synthesis of the African religious heritage and the Christian message. This was in the early 1960s (Hastings, 1979:231). In a way it constituted a rebellion against hitherto unexamined assumptions of the Christianity received from the West which had developed a portrait of the African as a passive receiver. The African clergy attempted to regain self-esteem and to formulate a theology that would tell mission history from the point of view of the missionised (Mosse, 1994:85). It was an attempt to replace the image of the “passive proselyte” with that of “converts as active creators and manipulators of symbolic and ritual systems” (*Ibid*). Perhaps the singlemost event, apart from the independent church movement, in the redirection of African Christianity to reflect African heritage was the calling of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. The council made theological claims that “...God was present among all indigenous cultures throughout the world” (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:110). The impact for both the Roman Catholics and Protestants totally changed the *modus operandi* of mission in Africa as in the rest of the world. It inaugurated a new level of religious engineering. Not surprisingly, the central focus of Christian African theology has been on “...the nature of the traditional religion of Africa and its relationship with continuity rather than discontinuity with Christian belief” (Hastings, 1979:231).

### **2.6.1 The Revolution of the Second Vatican Council and African Christian Theology**

In 1959 Pope John XXIII announced the summoning of the Second Vatican Council. The Council met between 1962 and 1965 during which the Counciliar Fathers commissioned what Nasimiyu has described as "...a Magna Carta of Liturgical adaptations" and whose spirit was to be a "...profound penetration of liturgical theology and spirituality" in the lives of the missionised worldwide (Nasimiyu, 1986:78). The project was a programme of indigenisation of Christianity and of inaugurating "...interfaith dialogue" (Mosse, 1994:85). What this amounted to was a confession that the Roman Catholic Church, and for that matter Protestant Christianity, so rigid since the Council of Trent in mid-sixteenth century, had not succeeded in evangelisation. The council had frozen church liturgy and imposed rigid and uniform conditions on missioned societies in order to maintain purity or orthodoxy. Part of this orthodoxy was that the traditions of the Church and the Bible were of equal value. Latin was the language of worship and the eleven apocryphal books were part of the Bible (Burnham, 1975:46).

Five centuries after Trent, Vatican II sought to listen to the cultures and other religions and to have dialogue with them. It made Christianity take into account historical and cultural differences. It was a major departure from

orthodoxy, revising practice on many points in order to render it compatible with local religious realities (Stewart, 1999:51). It has been hailed by African theologians as actually facilitating the realization of African cultural influence on Church teachings. For Uzukwu, Vatican II was "...a happy confession (many years too late) that communion in the faith may be enjoyed even if the churches differed on possession of the Holy Spirit, or divergences on liturgy, and the development of church structures" (1992:165).

A prominent feature in the ensuing discourse of African Christian theology has been the bewildering array of terms used to describe the processes that we consider to be basically syncretic, but which are rather couched in culture-related lexicon because of the uneasiness which 'syncretism' causes among theological scholars. The processes have variously been described as adaptation, adoption, accommodation, indigenisation, Africanisation, inculturation, incarnation and contextualisation. Basically all describe combinations of elements of religious traditions, shedding some aspects of these while incorporating new aspects to form new beliefs and practices. This is topflight syncretisation. An examination of a few of the terms makes this much more clear. The first stage of missionisation involved the mode of transplantation where Western Christianity was directly inserted into mission-field societies without change. Western European symbols, gestures, art, music and the Latin language were perceived as universal. Other cultures were pagan and inferior. Gradually, however, because of the positive

influence of a changing Western social anthropology in the early decades of the twentieth century, there emerged an acknowledgement of the rich heritage of the world cultures. This impacted on missionaries who moved to embrace the concept of accommodation or adaptation in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s when the Vatican Council sanctified it. Pope Pius declared of 'pagans' that those:

... of their ritual forms which are usable should be retained, once their community has been incorporated into the "corpus Sociale Christi". We ought to remember how, in the case of the conversion of our forefathers pre-Christian ritual forms found a place and a new function within the scope of true worship by means of wise adaptation (Van Bekhum, quoted in Nasimiyu, 1986:14).

In line with this spirit, the Vatican Council actually promulgated a new rite which was composite of the Roman rite and the local genius. In the case of Africa the search for an African Christian theology within the Catholic circles reached a new level with the papal visit to Kampala, Uganda in 1968. Pope Paul VI's address to the African bishops stressed the need for a uniquely African Christianity, thus endorsing theological pluralism (Adom-Oware, 1992:179). The Roman Catholic Church was clearly "...redrawing the boundaries around syncretism" by recognizing that a certain amount of adaptation would not affect the content of the Christian message (Stewart, 1999). So much from indigenous cosmologies was accommodated. Stewart sums up this well when he states that "... many practices that might have been

disparaged as syncretism in the decades previous would henceforth be allowed as valid, culturally specific expressions of the one faith” (1999:53). According to Van Bekhum, it was perceived that if the cultural needs of the different communities were “...not soon satisfied, they will degenerate into far worse paganism” (Quoted in Nasimiyu, 1986:97). In short, the Church embarked on a liberal programme, making itself “all things to all people” to paraphrase St. Paul, in order to win them for Christ. In this vein Luykx has argued that adaptation should involve pulling indigenous worship higher.

Conversion to Christianity “...must never entail a loss of their worship, as in the case present, but should, instead, bring their worship to a higher level where it will attain its full perfection” (Luykx, 1960:81, in Nasimiyu, 1986:97). This was indeed bringing mission Christianity to a new level that was very different from the blueprint of the pioneer missionaries! In this process of adaptation, however, the Roman Catholic Church remained averse to the term “syncretism”. If anything the promulgation of pluralism was done in terms that indicated that it was “eliminating” syncretism. Adaptation was to ensure that “...any appearance of syncretism or false particularism can be excluded and Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and disposition of each culture” (Abbot, 1961: 161, in Stewart, 1999:53).

By the start of the 1970s, Catholic bishops from Africa felt that there was still need for greater integration of Christianity with African culture which was not

adequately covered by the term adaptation. This inadequacy led to the coining and trying out new terms – indigenisation, inculturation, incarnation and contextualization. At the Roman Synod of 1974, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar rejected adaptation theology and called for ‘incarnation’ theology. They argued that “theology must be open to the aspiration of the people of Africa, if it is to help Christianity become incarnate in the life of the people of the African continent” (Quoted in Shorter, 1977:150). They reasoned that ‘incarnation’ effectively captures the “...creativity and dynamic responsibility of the local church while remaining faithful to the authentic universal tradition” of the church (Adom-Oware, 1992:180). The concept of incarnation is closely related to that of inculturation which has been widely celebrated in African Christian circles in the last quarter of the twentieth century by both Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy and scholars. ‘Inculturation of the church’ was an idea borrowed by the missiologists from anthropology, specifically from Melville Herskovits’s concept of ‘enculturation’ (Umoren, 1992:64). The concept burst onto the missiological landscape with tremendous force, and is, according to Umoren, “...still gathering momentum and outshines in its promise such rival ideas as adaptation, incarnation, even contextualisation and indigenisation” (*Ibid.*). He argues that the term has the promise of resolving “all missiological issues” and has the potential of bringing to realisation the “...new science of

missiology, the framework in terms of which a comprehensive system of missiological analysis can be constructed” (*Ibid.*).

The basic ideas in inculturation theology is the suggestion that all cultures own true and beautiful religious elements and that evangelisation of the cultures gives a “...Christian interpretation to the customs, morality and character of the religion” (Nasimiyu, 1986:110,236). The theology involves the disembedding of the supra-cultural elements of the gospel from one culture and “...contextualising them within the cultural forms and institutions” of another culture (Buswell, 1973:51, cited in Nasimiyu, 1986:109). Pope John Paul II has endorsed the project of constructing an African Christian theology based on the concept of inculturation. He states:

The proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples of the earth *cannot take place without the encounter which entails the transformation of the authentic values of these culture by their integration with Christianity.* In order to help the church become more and more deeply rooted in African soil, it would be well in accordance with the Second Vatican Council, to bring to light these elements of the traditions which could better enable her to ‘praise the glory of the creator, manifest the grace of the saviour, or contribute to the right ordering of Christian life’ (John Paul II, 1990:10, quoted in Ojo, 1992:18. Emphasis mine).

But then again what does inculturation exactly involve? It involves trading in religious concepts since culture without religion, especially in Africa, remains an empty shell. Adom-Oware understands this well when he states that the only avenue to a truly African brand of Christianity is “true dialogue” between

the Gospel message and “African culture and religion”, an integration of elements of African ontology into Christianity (Adom-Oware, 1992:180). This view is similar to that of Umoren who argues that when the proclamation of the word is “...rooted in the culture’s thought patterns, symbols and verbs”, they become meaningful and attract greater understanding (1992:66). This implies that the church has to insert itself into the “language, beliefs and practices” of the indigenous culture. It boils down to factoring into Christianity the local religious background (Bassey, 1992:135).

All these are examples that clearly indicate processes that are basically syncretic. In fact, even a harsh critic of syncretism like Schineller ultimately concedes to equating inculturation and syncretism. He ultimately avers that some particular cases of syncretism are necessary in the quest for authenticity: “In this senses the word syncretism refers to the necessary, ongoing process of the development of Christian life, practice, and doctrine” (Schineller, 1992:53). The only condition he ultimately insists on is that of an established set of criteria of judging ‘adequate’ syncretism or/and inculturation. This discourse of indigenisation in the Catholic Church in Africa has had its counterparts in other parts of the world. Mosse has described the Indian experience of inculturation or interfaith dialogue as emphasising tolerance towards Hinduism and bringing into close relation Hindu and Christian symbols through “...forms of art, music, architecture and liturgy...” (Mosse, 1994:100).

### **2.6.2 The African Theology in the Context of Protestant Christianity**

What has been said of the quest for an authentic African theology in the Roman Catholic Church Christian context can in large measure be said of the Protestant context. Protestant clergy adopted a similar outlook. African theologians have attempted to create local theologies focused on culturally rooted questions. Consequently the concept that they have reorganized their views around is the innocent-sounding inculturation. In the 1960s and 1970s priests and pastors sought to disentangle Christianity from Western trapping and to interpret it in the context of African cultures, beliefs and historical experiences (Spear, 1999:2). The case of Ghana's Ewe Protestant clergy in the 1970s is a good example. The elite embarked on an Africanisation project of Christianity to redeem their self-esteem after a long history of Westernization which portrayed African culture as inferior (Meyer, 1994:59). They developed a theological synthesis of Christian and indigenous elements. Thus they come up with what they described as the "I am alive" theology which portrayed the Ewe religious past in positive light.

But the argument of culture and the Christian gospel has been most vigorously put by a number of scholars. Sanneh and Bediako have argued that the Christianity that came to Africa was a specific Western Christianity which overlooked the example of the expansion of the church during the apostolic

century. Bediako cites the case of St. Paul who set the church on the way to universality by stemming the growth of Judaistic cultural arrogance (1992:241). The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) put all cultures on an equal footing. Greeks would practice Christianity in their Hellenic context, while Jews practised their Judaistic Christianity while observing the mosaic ritual and dietary laws. According to Sanneh, the quest for Christianity with a specifically African manifestation is justified by the tensions during the Judaic-Hellenic phase in the first century. The African renunciation of a Christianity heavily laced in suppositions of Western Christian culture has to be understood in this light (Sanneh, 1989:4). For Sanneh God does not absolutise any one culture and that "God has breathed His breath on all cultures, at once cleansing them of all stigma of inferiority and untouchability" (*Ibid.*:47). In this way, Sanneh argues the Christian message has always been an inculturated message. To realize inculturation, the perfect instrument over the years has been translation of the message into vernacular tongues, giving the message indigenous meanings. In this Sanneh and Mazrui are at one. Mazrui posits that the phenomenal spread of Christianity owes it to translation, which made it the "religion of the foreigner", (1986:143), meaning that it had an absorptive nature that found accommodation in many cultures.

The potency of translation, in Sanneh's terms, lies in the fact that it has served as a tool for the adherents in creating their own faith. Meyer, once more,

illustrates the intricate process of complex concept-formation in the course of translation. The converts appropriate the ideas against a backdrop of their own indigenous concepts. Consequently translation involves interpretation and transformation, creating new syntheses (Meyer, 1994:62). This is syncretism.

Probably the most persistent voice of inculturation in African Protestant circles has been that of Bolaji Idowu. He has been precisely reviewed by Bediako (1992). He argues that the master-key to any reasonable and relevant construction of theology in Africa must take into account the African religious cultural heritage. This is very important when we talk about what inculturation entails or does not entail. It involves trading in religious concepts across cultures. He agrees with Mbiti that African indigenous religion is the master-key to understanding of the Africans who in all things are religious. An authentic African Christianity has to involve purposeful and "...self-conscious appropriation of Jesus Christ as a living and present reality expressed in African terms" (Quoted in Bediako, 1992:276). Only this will be able to lead to the construction of a genuine identity and self-understanding among the African Christian adequate enough to shed off the cultural trappings long served to Africans by missionaries as Christianity.

On the question of culture Idowu takes a stand more or less like that found in Sanneh's writings. He dismisses the idea of European possessiveness of the

Christian faith as theologically groundless. No "...people or creed can claim to possess a clear knowledge of God in an absolute sense". As a result, the much bandied assertion by Western writers that "...Africans have no clear concept of God" is erroneous (*Ibid.*:282,283). What matters in a supra-cultural faith like Christianity, according to Idowu, is the centrality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Africa "...must respect, preserve and dedicate to the glory of God" valuable cultural institutions while at the same time she "...must preserve full allegiance to the Eternal, Cosmic, Unchanging Christ, who is her only Lord" (Idowu, 1965:13).

In conclusion, in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant quest for authentic African theology, the motif of intercultural embeddedness runs throughout. Yet evidence indicates that together with culture in general, there is an urgent need to re-examine the role of indigenous cosmologies in the appropriation and domestication of the Christian faith. This negotiation and renegotiation of Christian identity should properly be described as syncretism. What this amounts to, for the Africans and for all other societies on planet earth, is an acknowledgement that: Africans knew and worshipped God by employing time-tested rituals before the coming of Christianity; that the advent of missionary work was not announcing religion for the first time; and that it was better that Christianity found in place this "spiritual infrastructure" than if it had found a *tabula rasa*. Consequently, the attempts at *genocide* and *religiocide* with the advent of Christianity in an effort to create the *tabula rasa*

was a totally uncalled for approach and a cause for the contemporary search for meaning and identity in the name of an authentic theology in the African context many decades after missionisation.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 THE SYNCRETISING DYNAMIC IN THE EVOLUTION OF WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

#### 3.1 The Universalising Yet Syncretising Tendency

The modern missionary movement that began in the seventeenth century led to the widest expansion in the history of Christianity. This process picked momentum in the nineteenth century and reached its zenith in the twentieth century. This was a specifically Western brand of Christianity developed in a specific culture and which Western scholars have portrayed as the pure or orthodox or ideal Christianity and good for the rest of the world. The 'civilizing mission' was informed by this universalising belief of Western institutions. This belief was well portrayed by Hilaire Belloc, the Englishman of letters who wrote: "Europe will return to the Christian faith, or she will perish. The faith is Europe. And Europe is the faith" (Belloc:1920). Belloc was articulating an assumption that had made Christendom synonymous with Europe, but which is highly contestable by the rest of the world. European scholars took it for a truism that the culture and institutions of Europe took their specific form because of Christianity (Bediako, 1992:229).

This chapter focuses on laying bare the conundrum of the syncretic dynamic in the formation of Western Christianity. This is critically important, given

the portrait of other cultures and religions by Western scholars in pejorative terms like impurity, contamination, heresy and syncretism. The fact is that no culture is pure and European cultures, together with the European Christianity that has spread worldwide over the last two centuries, are a highly syncretic product of the biblical faith and Western Paganism. The Christianity that left Asia Minor to spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first five centuries was different from the Christianity that spread to the farthest reaches of Western Europe in subsequent centuries. It was a product infused with different practices and beliefs which were in possession of the different societies that it came to. Latourette summarizes this syncretising tendency in the following words:

No single picture would be valid for all the five centuries. The stream which flowed from primitive Christianity early divided into many different channels. As it increased in volumes the course through which it ran became more numerous and its waters took on varied colours from the soils it raversed (Latourette, 1970:45).

What Latourette is underlining here is the fact that Christianity took many forms early in its history, forms that were culturally determined. As Christianity expanded, it was “not a single system of beliefs and practices” that expanded (*Ibid.*). This calls for a need to reassess Western claims to Christian orthodoxy on the basis of which other Christian experiences have been branded contaminated and syncretic. According to Lees and Overing,

the Anglo-Saxon culture, for instance, is a "...particular syncretic culture", yet the Christianity that has issued from it has been presented as a "...belief system that is a seamless continuity with the past and disregards specific socio-cultural formation" (1998:317). They critique this "orthodox" Christianity for emphasising sameness while expelling difference. Hence there is necessity to historicise in order to avoid eliding the importance of the "...self as a product of both belief and history" (*Ibid.*).

History reveals that Western Christianity has sucked in other traditions to form a specifically European syncretism. Because of the long history, this may have been dulled by time to appear "...equally traditional and inseparable" (Stewart, 1994:134). Many of the local beliefs and customs became naturalized as part of accepted Christian traditions of particular places, regions or countries. This is, for instance "...the preponderance of holy wells in Ireland or mountaintop shrines in Greece. Where once they had been discerned as remains of paganism, sites and the beliefs surrounding them now became part and parcel of validated Christian tradition" (*Ibid.*). A few general examples will clarify this.

At the end of the sixth century Pope Gregory advised Augustine, the first Bishop of Canterbury and missionary in Southern England, that Christian ritual should be adopted to local circumstances, and that "...pagan temples, instead of being destroyed, should be transformed into churches (Adom-

Oware, 1992:173). Augustine landed on the mouth of the Thames in 597AD, and went on to use the vessels from pagan temples in Christian services as a way of bridging the gap between ancient religion and the new faith. During the European Middle Ages Christianity developed into a popular religion that combined the Christian message with traditional beliefs in miracles related to the practice of magic. There were many relics and images related to saints who effected miracles for their devotees. It was believed that should one carry an image of St. Sebastian, it was protection against plague (Latourette, 1970:145). In Iceland, as elsewhere in Europe, it was evident that converts around 1000 AD received some aspects of Christianity and fitted them into their own beliefs and practices. The custom of human sacrifice persisted among Christians here for quite some time, and was practised as an element of the faith. According to Healte, the leader of the church in Iceland, whereas the heathen offered the worst of their men for sacrifice, "...we will offer our best" (Burnham, 1975:25).

Christianity in Ireland was early fused with local practices. Rather than reject all Irish traditions, St. Patrick, the great missionary of Ireland, tried to save and build on such practices. He took many of their symbols and models and baptized them with Christian values. Thus syncretisation helped Catholicism take firm hold in Ireland (Schineller, 1992:54). The medals and rosaries in Catholicism are a specific Irish contribution (Hinga, 1990). Similarly in the nineteenth century Bulgarian Thrace, nationalist folklorists led the way in

recasting Greek Christianity in a syncretic mold, but without using the term syncretism. In revival of a ritual called *Anastenaria* which featured in the worship of Dionysus in ancient Greece, the participants "...danced ecstatically over hot-coals while holding sacred Christian icons" (Stewart, 1994: 138-139). Such was the general trend in the development of the European Christianity that ultimately spread to the rest of the globe during the last two centuries. It came to be presented as the orthodox Christianity. For instance, by the turn of the twentieth century, Western Europe symbols, gestures, art, music and Latin language were universal for all Catholic congregations worldwide. This is well summarized by Pearl Drego:

That every European act of genuflection was seen as the best way to respect the Blessed Sacrament, that the Gothic spire was an essential indication of the Parish Council, that the Gregorian chant was the finest expression of liturgical song, and that Anglo-Saxon face of Christ or an Italian Madonna are the most evocative symbols of Christian piety (Drego, 1981,516).

Acknowledging this thoroughly syncretic tendency in Western Christianity has led to emerging conflicts amongst Western scholars. Walter Hollenweger, for instance, has questioned the 'holier-than-thou' approach by Westerners whereby they condemn any local cultural Christian particularism while prescribing the Western version as pure and ideal. In reacting to a rebuttal of a Korean theologian at World Council of Churches Conference, Hollenweger demonstrates the syncretic dynamism in Western Christianity in the following terms:

I am astonished that Western churches, which are knee-deep in syncretism and which probably owe more to their Celtic and Germanic ancestors and to Greek and Roman culture than to the Bible (think of our burial rites, some of our buildings, our liturgies, our liturgical vestments, our church music) could be shocked by a Korean woman who tries to take her own pre-Christian heritage seriously as we take our pre-Christian tradition (Hollenweger, 1995:1028).

It is in line with this sincere observation that a few specific aspects in the history of Christianity in the West warrant detailed attention in unraveling the syncretic dynamic in them.

### **3.2 Christianity and Hellenistic Culture in the Mediterranean World**

Christianity was born in an environment that was exceedingly syncretic. There was a multiplicity of competing cults and philosophies which borrowed from one another. Consequently Judaism, and later Christianity, vigorously attempted to preserve intact their historical heritage. Neither of them completely succeeded in this effort. The main challenges to Christianity in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity (the first five hundred years of Christianity), was however, not from the many cults in the empire, but from a strong Hellenic tradition of philosophy. Philosophy had come to dominate the spiritual and intellectual life of the people, and spoke increasingly in “religious tones” (Bediako, 1992:30). In fact philosophy in the late Antiquity has been characterised as constituting the “... last bastion of paganism”

(Walbridge, 1998:392). Platonism and Neoplatonism had definite impact on Christianity. They have been treated as much religion as philosophy (Latourette, 1970:16). Platonists displayed a monotheistic streak, or at least appeared to be well on the way to monotheism (Walbridge, 1998:400). Justin Martyr believed that the “Logos Doctrine” of John’s gospel was descended from Plato. For him the doctrine of the Logos had to do with the fullness of knowledge which is a gift through the Incarnate Word, Christ, and hence reason, which is itself a participation in the ‘divine Word’ in His pre-Incarnation activity (Bediako, 1992:43). Martyr declared that Socrates partially knew Christ (*Ibid.*:41).

Neoplatonism was the latest in a long tradition of philosophic schools. Most of its ideas were Platonic. They attempted to combine pagan thought and philosophy. Neoplatonism was deeply couched in syncretism, though it has been criticized by many as “... mere cerebral spirituality incapable of penetrating the mystery of incarnation” (Shaw, 1999: 575). It had a lot of influence on leading Christian personalities of the Late Antiquity. This was especially so with Clement and Pantaeus Origen who saw no problem in vindicating Christian identity within the context of the Greek philosophy. They taught at the Alexandrian Catechetical School, giving it a philosophical bent. Similarly, St. Augustine of Hippo was deeply involved in Neoplatonism before he was converted to Christianity. He never shed off Neoplatonic ideas but rather went on to develop a theology that was largely a combination of

both this philosophy and traditional Christian views. Similarly, the manichean tendencies in his youth never completely left him. In his exegesis on the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity, Bediako avers that during these early centuries, Christians sought to establish “an authentic Christian identity within their culture, meaningful both for them and for the world as it was then known” (Bediako, 1992:33). In this way he acknowledges the syncretising tendency, without saying so.

### **3.3 Constantine’s State Syncretising Project and the Origins of Western Christianity Proper**

The foundation of the Church in Rome around 42 AD by Apostle Peter and the arrival of Apostle Paul afterwards effectively marked the start of the struggle for Europe. The second half of the book of the Acts of Apostles is basically about Paul’s missionary journeys in Europe. One of the high points of these journeys was Paul’s confrontation of the pagan audience in Athens. His mission climaxed with his arrival in Rome, the most powerful Christian centre in Europe during the first century. The community was prominent enough to make Emperor Nero instigate its persecution, during which Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom. Indeed, persecution came to characterise the life of the Church in Europe especially at the hands of Roman Emperors who were adherents of traditional Roman cults. In 177 AD Marcus Aurelius

instigated the “Great Persecution” of the Christians in Gaul in the congregations of Vienne and Lyons (Burnham, 1975:13). Christians suffered terrible tortures in an attempt to crush the faith. The aged Bishop of Lyons, Pothinas, perished in this struggle.

Yet Christianity became a popular religion with the rise of Constantine as Emperor of the Byzantine Empire (306-337 AD). In 312 he defeated his rival, Maxentius, at Milvian Bridge. He was until then a worshipper of the “unconquered sun” or the Sol Invictus. His victory proved to be a turning point for Christianity in Europe. He attributed it to the Christian God because he saw a vision of the cross in the sky on the morning of the battle (*Ibid.*: 16). Constantine ultimately converted, then went on to order conversion on a large scale, while designing and implementing radical changes that totally altered Christianity, making it acceptable to many subjects of his empire. His reforms amounted to a state-sponsored project of syncretisation that made little demand on change in the believers.

This marked a major point of departure from the inculturation of the church sanctioned by the Jerusalem Council in the first century. This council had allowed Greek Christians to worship God without changing their culture. But there was one exception which is never stressed by those who cite it as a ground for inculturation, namely, they were not allowed to fuse Christianity with their religious beliefs. Kiernan (1994) has argued that the only mode of

indigenisation that has nevertheless kept the Christian faith unsyncretised is the Zionist Independent Church of South Africa. We hold the view that the only successfully inculturated church without fusing pre-Christian beliefs and Christianity was the Gentile Church of the first two centuries which first took its definitive form at Antioch and spread to the rest of the Roman empire, often accompanied by persecution. After this, especially beginning with the reign of Constantine, the Church experienced inculturation that involved syncretism of religious ideas and practices.

Ali Mazrui has argued that it was Constantine who laid the foundation of Christianity in Europe (1986:143). The fact of the matter is that Christianity took root in Europe during the apostolic age, though operating under difficult conditions. What Constantine did was to stop persecution of the Christians and to create an environment which did not demand of converts a rigorous Christianity. For instance, immediately after his victory in 312, crosses and crucifixes were for the first time displayed as emblems of redemption and setting a precedent for the appropriation of a range of many items from local cultures and religions into Christianity. In 313 Constantine promulgated the Edict of Milan which tolerated Christianity, putting it on equal footing with other religions in the Empire. In 320 wax candles, a common feature of pre-Christian religion in the Roman empire, were used for the first time in Christian worship. It has persisted in a number of Christian traditions to date. In 321 Constantine declared work forbidden on Sunday in the empire. Sunday

was associated with the pre-Christian worship of the *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquerable Sun. In 324 Constantine ordered all his subjects to embrace Christianity. This opened the floodgates of nominal profession of Christianity. People worshipped in public as Christians, but observed their beliefs and practices in private. Henceforth the stage was set for thorough syncretisation of Christianity in Europe. Constantine went on to turn pagan holidays into Christian ones, in the process using religion as an instrument of political control. He Christianised pagan symbols, customs, and terminology, in the process paganising Christianity. Aspects of naked Roman idolatry were covered with the garb of Christianity. Many aspects in historical churches vestments, images and processions—originate in pre-Christian religious systems which were fused into Christianity.

#### **3.4 The Non-Christian Birthmarks of the Easter Festival**

The Easter festival has been accepted as the chief of Christian holidays. It involves observance of Lent, Holy Week and Good Friday. It also involves buying hot-cross buns, coloured eggs, and especially going to the Church on Easter Sunday (Armstrong, 1973:5). It has been taken for granted for the last sixteen centuries that Easter is equivalent to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet a little scrutiny of these observances, however, exposes their deep pre-Christian Teutonic roots which have no connection with the Passover Jesus Christ inaugurated on the eve of His sacrificial death. Alexander Hislop states

that Easter "...bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing less than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the Queen of heaven..." (Hislop, quoted in *Missions*, 1973). 'Easter' is the slightly changed English spelling of the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian major goddess worshipped in the Semitic world under different names. In Phoenicia she was Astarte. In Babylon or Mesopotamia she was Inanna or Ishtar, worshipped on the Euphrates and Tigris as the "...queen of heaven and earth and goddess of love" (Preston, 1987:53). She was the consort of the sun god known as Baal in Phoenicia, Adonis in Syria, and Tammuz or Dumuzi in Babylon/Mesopotamia (*Holy Bible*, Ezekial 8:14-16)

Upto and throughout the second century of the Christian era., the Christian communities of Asia Minor like Ephesus, Galatia and others founded and nurtured by the Apostle Paul observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Until then it was not called by the name Easter, but rather the Bible name the Passover or Pascha in Greek, or Pasha or Pesah in Aramaic (Bowker, 1997:30). The only point of departure from the Mosaic tradition was the transformation given to the Passover by Jesus Christ Himself when He changed the emblems used. They were changed from the blood of the lamb and the eating of its roasted body to bread and wine (St. Luke 22:7-20).

This is further amplified elsewhere:

There was no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers....The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as communication of events which these festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it, of Christ as the true Pascal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead continued to be observed (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 3, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition: 828).

Thus Jesus gave the Passover higher significance. In everything else it remained the same. The crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus were observed on the same day as part of the Passover (Bowker, 1997:30). And this was not on Sunday or any fixed week - as it was to become the custom in Western Christianity - but on a calendar day of the year, hence varying from year to year. The Christian groups depended symbolically and practically on the Jews to establish the date for the Passover on a year-to-year basis. It was not easy to declare who was a Jew and who was a Christian (Boyarin, 1998a:584). Hislop sheds more light on this when he notes:

The festival, of which we read in history, under the name Easter, in the third and fourth centuries, was quite different from that one observed in the Romish (and Protestant) Church, and at that time was not known by any such name as Easter. It was the Pascha or the Passover, and.... was very early observed by many professing Christians....that festival agreed originally with the time of the Jewish Passover when Christ was crucified... that festival was not idolatrous, and it was preceded by no Lent" (Hislop, p.104, in Armstrong 1973.)

The Passover - crucifixion and resurrection - was therefore kept annually on the fourteenth day of the seventh month of the sacred calendar. The Apostles and the primitive church, especially the Church in the province of Asia Minor, did not keep a festival called Easter for the simple reason that it did not exist. How, then, did the Passover change to Easter with all that this entailed? This began earlier than Constantine, in the early second century. The Church in the West in Rome began to make changes, bringing it into conflict with the church in Asia Minor. According to Church historian Eusebius, the bishops of Asia Minor, led by Polycrates, "...decided to hold onto the old custom handed down to them" (in Armstrong, 1973:25).

It was Bishop Sixtus/Xystus who led the Roman bishops in changing the Passover from the fourteenth Nisan to Sunday. Sixtus lived in the early second century, soon after the death of Apostle John. With time all the congregations of the Church in the West observed Sunday (Belkwith, 1989:214). In 314 AD Constantine called the Synod of Arles. This was to specifically fix the date of the Passover (Burnham, 1975:16) and which forever after came to be called Easter and was celebrated on Sunday. When the Church in Asia Minor continued to prove stubborn, Constantine summoned the Nicene Council in 325 to address the question of the date among other issues once and for all. The council confirmed Sunday following the full moon after the vernal equinox to be observed universally (Bowker, 1997:30). It was further declared with finality that on the observance of the

Passover "...none hereafter should follow the blindness of the Jews" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.3, 829). The baseline, however, was that the observance of Sunday was in honour of the sun god, the Sol Invictus, which had been observed for thousands of years before Christ.

Among other things, the Council also instituted the forty days of fasting each Lent. The primitive church had not observed Lent on the grounds that Jesus Christ did not observe Lent. This was observed expressly in honour of Adonis in Syria, Tammuz in Babylon and Osiris in Egypt. It had no Christian bearing, being directly borrowed from these deities (Hislop, 104, in Armstrong, 1973). Similarly, the contemporary practice of burning of palms on Ash Wednesday and the painting of the cross on the forehead using the ash originates in religious ceremonies that preceded Christianity in Europe.

One other common feature which has been associated with the observance of Easter in the West even to date is the use of dyed eggs. Eggs featured in the ancient Babylonian mystery rites. They were the religious ceremonies in the Orient for a long time before Christianity. According to James Bonwick, dyed eggs were "...sacred Easter offerings in Egypt, as they are today in China and Europe" (in Armstrong, 1973:211-212). They were also used in the ancient pagan worship of the Druids in Britain who were also sun worshippers, one of whose main centres was the stonehenge—a towering megalith of ancient times.

And the influence of the Druids has apparently not died. The following report on their gathering on Saturday June 21, 2003 is revealing:

A record number of revellers converged on Britain's ancient Stonehenge yesterday to celebrate the summer solstice, get in touch with their pagan roots and party. Robed druids, spiritualists and the simply curious sang and danced around the towering megaliths. Druids, a pagan religious order dating to Celtic Britain, are drawn to Stonehenge, because they believe it was a centre of spiritualism. (*Sunday Nation*, June 22, 2003:23).

### 3.5 Christmas: The Feast of the Nativity and the Sol Invictus

After Easter, the feast of the nativity or the birth of Jesus Christ, is the most important on the Christian calendar. It is celebrated on December 25, and popularly known by the English Version Christmas or Christ's mass. Most of the features about the nativity are grounded in pre-Christian religious observance in early Europe. The feast that was commonly celebrated before the institution of Christmas was that of the Epiphany – the remembrance of the baptism of Jesus Christ on January 6 (Cross, 1958:277). It is not clear when Christmas was instituted. The day and the festival were not celebrated, commemorated or observed by the apostolic church. Some sources indicate that it was first celebrated in Rome in 336 AD (Bowker 1997:210). Others state that it was instituted by Pope Liberius in 354 AD (Bram, 1987:139). However, overwhelming evidence indicates that it was instituted by the church fathers to coincide with the popular Roman pagan holidays towards the

end of December and the start of January. This was during the Winter Solstice when several gods were worshipped to mark the season. Among these were *Saturnas* the harvest god and Mithras the god of light. They were celebrated in a feast called the Saturnalia, from 17 to 23 December. It was believed that on the last night the mother goddess gave birth to the baby sun god – the *Sol Invictus* or Invincible Sun.

Christmas was instituted by the church at the time of this winter feast in opposition to it and with the objective of overwhelming and suppressing the latter by the good news of Jesus (Schineller, 1992:54). With time, the Christian feast apparently emerged victorious. On closer scrutiny, however, the victory was more in name than in content. At best it became a syncretised feast, fusing pre-Christian ideas with Christianity. It was in this syncretised form that Christmas gained popularity and spread out from Rome to the rest of Western Europe.

The Eastern churches, especially the Armenian Church, the Russian, the Greek, the Egyptian and the Ethiopian church in Africa did not celebrate the nativity in December. They rather combined it with the Epiphany and have continued to celebrate it on January 6 (Bowker, 1997:210). The Jerusalem Church held onto the original date of the Epiphany until 549 AD when they gave into the then new date of December 25. The resistance was in part due to the fact that pre-Roman Christian ideas did not find resonance in the

Middle East where the religious heritage was different. Over the centuries other European accretions were added to Christmas as it spread. It was first observed in England by the end of the sixth century and spread on to Scandinavia by the end of the eighth. According to the folklore of most Western European countries, the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany December 25-January 6 were characterized by intense activity in the pre-Christian religion of the time. It was a season when "...evil spirits were considered to be especially active" (Baldovin, 1987:461). There was active fighting against the coming of spring and the gradual victory of sunlight over darkness after the winter solstice. They described Christmas Eve as "the devil's funeral". These beliefs have persisted and remain part of the Christian celebrations of Christmas. Hence, to celebrate the victory of life over winter's defeat and to combat evil spirits, houses in Scandinavian countries are decorated "... in this darkest period of the year with lights and evergreens of all kinds" (*Ibid.*).

In the Norse country, Christmas season came to be described on the basis of the pagan activities surrounding the Yule log. A huge log was burnt once a year in a family to honour Thor, god of thunder. The log was kindled on Christmas Eve and kept burning until Epiphany. Remains of the log were kept to rekindle the coming year's fire. On conversion to Christianity the Norse people made Yule burning a part of the Christian celebration of the nativity. The term Yule was adopted and used synonymously with Christmas. In the

Middle Ages, the Christmas festival became very popular in virtually all European countries. It led to inspiration of composition of music and liturgical drama on Christmas. It acquired newer and more numerous accretions that were mainly folklorist in nature. In the thirteenth century, St. Francis of Assisi introduced into the feast the aspect of the Crib.

One aspect of Christianity which has become most pervasive over time is the Christmas Tree. The origins of the tree are not clear and are shrouded in mystery, though today it is a global phenomenon. Evidence suggests that the Christmas Tree is part of the syncretic element in the Christmas festival with German origins (Yalcin-Heckmann, 1994:186), coming up for the first time in the sixteenth century. The Germans were apparently the first people to decorate the Christmas tree with stars, angels, toys, nuts and foodstuffs wrapped in bright paper. Martin Luther, the great leader of the Reformation of the Church thoroughly approved of the tree. He was the first person to use lights on the Christmas tree to represent the glory and beauty of the stars above Bethlehem on the night when Jesus was born. The tree was brought to England for the first time in 1841 when Prince Albert, the German husband of Queen Victoria, brought one to the royal castle at Windsor. In the following year the first tree was taken to Williamsburg, Virginia, USA where it eventually became popular among the Americans. The story of Christmas, nevertheless, has not been success all the way. It can rightly be argued that the modern-day counterparts of the Armenian Church in opposing Christmas

were the Puritans. In 1649 Christmas was banned in England when Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan forces took over power in the country. It was only restored after the first quarter of the nineteenth century when Queen Victoria ordered Carols to be sang again in the royal palace.

However due to Puritan influence in the USA, Christmas had also been banned in Boston between 1639 and 1681. It became popular in the nineteenth century because need was felt for a family holiday, leading to its reinvention in its present form. It was declared a national holiday in 1870 and became basically a day of feast, fun, frolic and family reunion. But this only led to a new kind of opposition. On the eve of Christmas of 1871, the Reverend Charles Haddon Spurgeon of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit denounced Christmas as an ecclesiastical arrangement based on superstition arguing that superstition was responsible for the fixing of Jesus' birth and that it was not possible to discover when it actually occurred.

In conclusion, the feast of the nativity, as constituted today is a thoroughly syncretised festival. It has no basis in Christian scriptures, but rather borrowed heavily from the European pre-Christian religious feasts associated with beliefs of warfare in the spiritual realm around the time of the end of winter and start of spring. Over the years it acquired features that were more folklorist and social in nature.

### 3.6 The Syncretic Dynamic in the Construction and Elevation of the Virgin Mary to Deityhood

One of the most popular and intriguing aspects of the Roman Catholic and that of various forms of Orthodox Church Christianity is the place of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. The history of the construction of the Virgin to the divine status of *Theotokos* (Mother of God) is a long and complex history of a syncretism that precedes the Christian religion by many centuries and which has gone on for the last two thousand years of Christianity. Indeed, some of the most radical pronouncements in the construction of the Marian theology took place as late as the 1950s. To understand the evolution of the Marian theology over the years, one has to go back to the goddess history of the Mediterranean world in general and of the Egyptian goddess Isis in particular. In very fundamental respects, the Virgin Mary was not an innovation of the church but a convenient continuation of the worship of Isis of the Nile Valley.

In his *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes the goddess Isis as being a constituent part of the “triad of Abydos”, namely Osiris, Isis and Horus, or simply the Osirisiorus (Lyle, 2000:144). Of the three, however, Isis became the most prominent and enduring and went on to become a great influence on Christianity. She was the last Egyptian goddess to be worshipped in the Christian era. She was more a complex of goddesses rather than one goddess

and was proverbially referred to as the bearer of a thousand names. The worship of Isis diffused from the Nile Valley to all parts of the ancient world (Redd, 1985:108). Her wide ranging attributes made her a most popular deity. In part this was because of the prominence assigned to womanhood in her worship. Finch summarises this attributes well when he states:

She is the greatest of the Egyptian pantheon, the veritable great mother embodying all the positive feminine attributes as gestator, bringerforth, nurturer, protector and preserver. She is the Virgin Mother of Horus, the sister-wife of Osiris, and the ideal of the true and faithful consort. She is the goddess of the corn and the grain, a lunar goddess identified with Sirius. In her lunar aspect she is identified as the “great cow” and in her stellar aspect she is the ‘Queen of heaven’ (Finch, 1982:180).

Because of her revivifying of her husband Osiris’s body after death by utterances of magical formulae, Isis was also called, “...the lady of enchantments” (Budge, 1980:96). She was the ‘Divine Mother’ in whose character thousands of statues in Egypt portrayed her as a black woman seated and suckling her child Horus who she held on her knee. By the second century AD the cult had diffused throughout the Roman Empire, spread by the legions. In Italy and Sicily, for instance, Isis was worshipped as Venus (Redd, 1985:111). Isis became the greatest challenge to Christianity in the Empire during the early centuries. Judaism and nascent Christianity were thoroughly patriarchal religions, couched in the masculinity of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, did not feature at all in the spiritual hierarchy. The attributes of Isis remained highly attractive, making the church fathers to consider inculcating

them into Christianity in order to give the faith a mass-appeal. This was a deliberate, highly conscious process of syncretisation of Christianity. Hence the church introduced a fourth dimension to the trinity, creating a quarternity by uplifting the Virgin Mary to a status of deityhood in all but name by using the attributes of Isis.

At the Council of Ephesus in 430 AD, the doctrine of the Virgin was officially fused into the Christian corpus (Redd, 1985:116). In 431 Mary was designated "Mother of God" (Burnham, 1975:19). By so feminising Christianity, God came to be approached through Mary. This was a major departure from the then orthodox belief that Christ was the redeemer and sole mediator between God and humankind. Mary was at once the Madonna, the Queen of Heaven, Mother of God, the Great Mother, Our Lady. Eventually, the Isis cult maintained its pull on the European populace through the veneration of the European "black madonnas" and the Eastern Orthodox Church images of the Virgin Mary (Redd, 119). Various Black goddesses were adopted to represent the Virgin Mary. Starting in 726AD, Pope Leo embarked on a programme of destroying these icons because, he argued, they were rooted in "the worship of pagan gods and goddess" (*Ibid.*: 124). Yet there was a resistance to the iconoclasm, especially from the leaders of the Orthodox Church in Byzantium. The conflict went on until 843AD, when the church relented and the icons were brought out of hiding. The priests blessed the images "of the Virgin Mary and the child" (*Ibid.*:126).

Over the centuries, the evolution of Mariarism came to be closely associated with many pilgrimage shrines of earlier pagan gooddeesses in different places in the world as Christianity spread (Preston, 1987:40). This became especially common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In virtually all of the cases, a "... pattern of syncretism involving goddess worship" is evident in the worship of the Virgin Mary (*Ibid.*). A classic example is the Roman Catholic pilgrimage icon of the dark skinned Virgin of Guadalupe "whose shrine is built on the site of a temple once dedicated to the Aztec goddess Tonantsi" (*Ibid.*). The perfection of the Virgin Mary to a status akin to deityhood, however, did take place only in the twentieth century. This was especially the case during the papacy of Pius XII, between 1939 and 1958. The pope led the Roman Catholic Church in laying unprecedented emphasis on devotion to the Marian cult. The process of a heightened devotion to Mary actually began in the nineteenth century when in 1854 Pope Pius IX declared the doctrine of the Immaculate conception of the Virgin birth. Then in 1942 Pope Pius XII dedicated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1950 the pope announced the dogma of the bodily assumptions of Mary into Heaven – as the Queen of Heaven. He argued that Mary's body was raised from the grave shortly after she died. Her body and soul were united and she was taken up and enthroned as the Queen of Heaven (Burnham, 1975:79). He further stated that anyone doubting or denying this doctrine was "...utterly fallen away from the divine and Catholic faith" (*Ibid.*). From heaven, the

Virgin occasionally descended to earth in different places like Guadalupe and Lourdes to bestow favours on earthly mortals. Pius XII also declared 1954 “the Marian Year” (Hinga, 1990:245). The whole year was dedicated to the celebration of the Virgin Mary. 1958 was observed as the celebration of the centennial of “Our Lady of Lourdes”.

One of the results of the emphasis on the near deification of Mary – if not complete deification – of Mary in the mid-twentieth was the formation the “Legion of Mary”, a group of devotees solely consecrated to the worship of Mary as the “Queen and Mother” (Hinga, 1990:79). Annually the Legionnaires take an oath of allegiance to Mary, represented by the statue of the Immaculate Conception. She is revered as a giver of blessings and favours to her children – the Mediatrix of all graces. Their handbook emphasises this: “God constituted her (Mary) as a special means of grace.... She is the spouse of the Holy Ghost (and) we receive nothing we do not owe to a positive intervention on her part” (Hinga, 1990:79). Probably the best summary on the evolution of Marianism is that of M. Warner. According to her, the figure of the Virgin Mary has manifested different developments as a result of the process of syncretisation. She states:

The figure of the Virgin belongs to a vast community of people, and represents a gradual accretion of ideas, the deposits of popular belief interacting with intellectual inquiry, until like the results of the coral insects industry, a doctrine breaks to the surface as an atoll...” (Warner, 1976, XXIV, in Hinga p. 247).

It was this typically syncretic Christianity, with a heavy bias for European culture, that found its way to many parts of the world that came under European imperialism and colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was presented as the authentic or orthodox Christianity. In the case of Western Kenya, several missionary societies from Europe and America arrived in the first decade of the twentieth century to start proselytisation among the Abaluyia, Luo and Nandi-Terik. The outcome of this effort was not displacement of the indigenous faith, but a combination of both. This is illustrated in the subsequent chapters of this work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 THE SYNCRETISING DYNAMIC IN THE WESTERN KENYAN RELIGIOUS COMPLEX 1700-1900

#### 4.1 Western Kenya: Geopolitical and Demographic Background

Geopolitics is the synergy between geography and politics. Conventional conceptions of geopolitics stem from international relations and security studies that focus exclusively on competition for power among states in delineated geographical regions (Aseka, 2003:2). A critical look at the pre-colonial history of Africa reveals a rich history of inter-ethnic encounter and interaction that goes beyond just struggle for power. It reveals a dynamic process of barter in both economic items and cultural artifacts. Western Kenya is one such ideal area to apply this broad view of geopolitics. It is an expansive territory stretching from the Rift Valley Escarpment around Lake Naivasha in the east, to Lake Victoria and Mount Elgon in the west; from the Kerio Valley in the north to the Gusii Highlands in the south. In today's political administration set up, the region comprises Western and Nyanza provinces and most of the Rift Valley Provinces.

Slightly over a century ago, Western Kenya became a part of the Uganda Protectorate in July 1894 (Were 1967a:55) but was only important in relation to the British interests in Uganda. It constituted the Eastern Province of

Uganda, with headquarters at present Mumias town. In 1902 the East African Protectorate was declared over most of the territory now comprising Kenya. The Eastern Province of Uganda was transferred to the new protectorate as the Lakes Province and later it became Nyanza Province (*Ibid*:169).

For centuries before the colonial era, Western Kenya had played host to diverse ethnic populations. The relation between these communities were determined by a common physical environment and dynamic socio-cultural interaction. Giddens rightly states that human social life may be understood in terms of relations between individuals and groups operating in time and space, linking both action and context, and different contexts to one another (1987:99). Our study in part endeavours to demonstrate this truism with regard to interaction between communities in the region under study.

We conceive Western Kenya as a mega crucible of social and cultural interaction which over the centuries has facilitated the evolution of what we shall describe as a Western Kenyan cultural complex deriving from interaction of various ethnic populations in the region. Those communities are products of long and complicated historical processes. They have undergone changes and adaptations through contacts with people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Were, 1985:6). Accordingly, Were cautions us that studying one ethnic group in isolation of others are not prudent. Speaking of the AbaAbaluyia, Were stresses that they can only be meaningfully studied

together with the Kalenjin and the Luo, given similar patterns of their historical movements, interactions and settlements in the region. The heterogeneity in the ethnic composition is the "... unifying factor in the region's history" (Were. 1967a, 41).

Today Western Kenya is home to the Nilotic communities namely the Kalenjin, the Luo, the Maasai and the Teso; and the Bantu speaking communities of the, the AbaAbaluyia, the Abagusii, the Abakuria and the Abasuba. This study focuses on three of these ethnic groups - the AbaAbaluyia, the Kalenjin and the Luo - whose continued presence and interaction in the region could be traced back to the fifteenth century, if not earlier. Even then, the study does not take whole ethnic groups, but focuses on specific sub-ethnic groups or clans of the three communities. Among the AbaAbaluyia the sub-groups for discussion are the Logooli, the Isukha, the Indakho, the Tiriki, the Wanga, the Kisa, the Nyore and the Marama. These occupy the central, eastern and southern parts of Abaluyialand and correspond to the present districts of Vihiga, Butere-Mumias and part of Kakamega. Similarly, among the Kalenjin the study focuses on the Nandi and the Terik sub-ethnic groups occupying the Nandi District and which we shall together call the Nandi-Terik. Furthermore, among the Luo the study centres its discussion on several clans which are the Jokano, the Kajulu, the Kapuonja, the Korando and the Karateng in Kisumu District; and the Jo-Gem, the Alego, the Jo -Ugenya, the Jo-Seme, and the Kager of Siaya Districts. The rationale in selecting these

Bantu and Nilotic sub groups is that the communities occupy contiguous physical territory which has brought them together as neighbours for centuries in rather intense interactions. This territory, therefore, constitutes a cultural border zone across whose porous boundaries there have been free flow of human beings, trade and cultural artifacts, both material and ideological in nature.

Western Kenya is an ideal area for investigating the syncretising dynamic in religious systems in pre-Christian and pre-colonial Africa. Writing generally on how cultural and trade items in Africa had spread in the past, Waller underlines the continuous "... flow of the individuals, practices and ideas across boundaries through networks which conveyed more ordinary commodities" (Waller, 1995: 54-55). Religious concepts and practices were among the foremost merchandise spreading through these networks in a dialectically syncretic manner of selection and appropriation, leading to new concepts with exceptionally diverse roots. This historical process has had a long pedigree in Western Kenya, but reached its full maturity in the course of the nineteenth century with the emergence of an arguably unique regional religious complex. In this way three concepts in this complex render themselves for in-depth historical analysis-the concept of the Supreme Being or God, the cult of the ancestral spirits and the cults of various categories of nature spirits in the region. The encounter and interaction of communities in the region over the centuries is also the history of the transfer of whole or

parts of these concepts and the worship practices associated with them. The latest agents in the nineteenth century in the transfer and appropriation of these concepts were the Bantu AbaAbaluyia and the Nilotic Luo and the Kalenjin. They were heirs to the ideas of earlier communities whose mention cannot be avoided in the religious engineering in the region.

#### **4.2 The Problematic of Migration and Evolution in Western Kenya**

The problematic of migration into and within Western Kenya is significant in the reconstruction not only of the general history of the region, but more so of the cultural history of the people. Communities broke up and were integrated into other linguistic elements in the process of migration, encounter, interaction and settlement (Aseka, 2002: 24). By the close of the nineteenth century, on the eve of colonial rule and the advent of Christianity in Kenya, there had emerged social systems characterized by common languages and complex syncretic cultures. This chapter focuses on the impact of migration and interaction on the religious concepts and practices in the region. It is an interrogation of the process of ethnic encounter, and interaction and integration. In Ochieng's words, we are asking the question: "How did the lands and peoples encountered during the migration affect the cosmological outlook of the migrants?" (Ochieng', 1977:20). Consequently a broad survey of migration traditions is a prerequisite to commenting on cultural and religious development in the region.

#### **4.2.1 Pristine Ethnic interaction in Western Kenya upto 1500 AD**

The present day populations of Western Kenya are a product of migrations into the region during the first millennium AD. This migration intensified after the fourteenth century, reaching the apex of interaction in the nineteenth century with complete emergence of the Bantu AbaAbaluyia and the Nilote Luo and the Kalenjin speakers. Before these more or less modern processes, however, Western Kenya was not a demographic vacuum. There were Cushitic speakers who became the earliest migrants in the area during the first millennium BC. They found in possession autochthonous hunter-gather populations who have been described using a variety of appellations and who were widespread across eastern, central and southern Africa. In Western Kenya for that matter evidence of their presence has been found at Mungoma Hill in Maragoli and at Kakapeli on the slopes of Mount Elgon, and are described as being part of the Khoisan hunter-gatherers (1978: 102). They have also been described as the Okiek or Dorobo or Sirikwa in present Rift Valley Province (Mwanzi, 1977:33). They are also synonymous with the Nguu or Nguye in Western Kenyan traditions, the Sanye and Boni in the Tana River Basin and Coastal Kenya, the Mbisha in Taita-Taveta area, the Gumba and Athi in the Mount Kenya area, and the Hadzapi and Sandawe in Tanzania (McIntosh, 1968).

We find it contentious that renown Kenyan historians – Ogot, Were and Mwanzi - describe these populations in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya as the “Southern Nilotes” and actually attribute to them original Kalenjin speech (Were, 1972:41; Ogot, and: 10; Mwanzi 1977;33) These authorities fall into the trap of Sutton who first listed the Dorobo or Okiek as Nilotes. These groups have no traditions of migration into the region. The term Nilote is a linguistic - geographical classification for groups which trace their origins to the southern fringe of the Ethiopians Highlands and near the Lake Turkana area. Originally it simply meant “of the Nile,” though many hived off to spread and settle elsewhere. Hence, Luo-speakers have been called the River-Lake Nilotes, the Maa speakers as Plains and the Kalenjin speakers as Highlands Nilotes precisely because their migration is traced to the general areas of the River Nile region in the Sudan and in southwestern Ethiopia. This cannot be said of the Okiek or Dorobo. Furthermore, if the Dorobo-related groups are a continental phenomenon, as they indeed are, it is totally untenable to attribute to them the status of being Kalenjin. What otherwise happens to the rest of the Dorobo types in the rest of Kenya, Tanzania, the Congo Forest and Southern Africa? This point is important when it comes to attribution of religious concepts.

It was to these populations that the earliest immigrants into Eastern Africa came. These migrants were the Cushitic speakers from the direction of

Northern Africa. The earliest Cushitic speakers to come have been described as the Southern Cushites who most probably began entry as early as the second millennium BC. By 1000 BC Cushitic presence was in parts of the present eastern, Rift Valley and South Western Kenya (Ehret, 1968:162). Today surviving remnants of this stock in Tanzania include the Iraqw, the Burungi, the Gorowa, the Alagwa, the Aramanik and the Ngomvia (Ehret, 1968:162). Later a second population of Cushites, the Eastern Cushites came into Eastern Africa but remained influential in the present Ethiopia-Somalia-Kenya border zones. Among these were the Galla or Oromo and related groups - the Orma, the Boran, the Ghabra, the Rendille and the Somali (Aseka, 2002:25). By 500 AD the Cushites had greatly influenced pristine societies in Eastern Africa. They were to have even greater impact on latter day migrants, especially on the Highlands Nilotes or the Kalenjin.

The second category of migrant population into Western Kenya composed of the pristine Bantu speakers who began to enter the region in the early centuries of the first millennium AD and who came to dominate the area upto around 1500 AD. These ancient Bantu speakers first appeared between 200 and 500 AD as evidenced from the dimple-based pottery associated with Bantu-speakers (Ochieng', 1976:48). These early Bantu speakers are not to be confused with the Bantu Abaluyia speakers who are a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These Bantu speakers were probably water and fishing nomads from the islands of Lake Victoria and who must have come from present Uganda and Northern Tanzania in the eastward thrust of the Bantu movement from the Congo forest. They occupied the area around Lake Victoria, forming "... a great lakeshore cultural area extending from what is now southern Busoga in Uganda to the Winam Gulf in the Kisumu area of Kenya..." (Ogutu, 1975:35). They formed lakeshore settlements which were quasi-sovereign and which included the Abamasuda, the Abamani, the Abakhobole, the Abashisira, the Umadh, the Amachika, and the Ulango among others (Were 1967a; 58 1967b; 1984; Ngoha, 1999:O.I.). Their political economy consisted of fishing, simple cultivation and pottery (Ochieng'; 1976:47). Huntingford attests to the existence of these communities by arguing that if the Bantu kingdom of Buganda began around 1000 AD, it follows that there must have been Bantu speaking populations at the same time in the region immediately to the east, that is present Western Kenya (1944a:3). These early Bantu speakers appear to have dominated Western Kenya, but were influenced by the autochthonous populations and the Cushitic migrants who had preceded them into the region. They contributed the dominant language and then were joined and influenced by the other diverse elements so that we cannot talk of pure Bantu speakers. For purposes of this study, this early interaction has significant implications for the development of religious beliefs and practices which drew from diverse sources, and which were essentially syncretic. Here

it was thus a Western Kenya already pregnant with ethnic and cultural hybridity that the latter and better known ancestors of the Bantu speaking Abaluyia and the Nilotic and Kalenjin came, putting in process yet another phase of interaction between 1500 and 1900 AD. It is to these communities that we turn for the reconstruction of their history of interaction and the process of borrowing of religious beliefs and practices in time and space.

#### **4.2.2 Ethnic Interaction and Evolution of Hybrid Communities in Western Kenya, 1500-1900 AD**

Commenting on ethnic formation in Western Kenya, historian William Ochieng' took to task his mentors Ogot and Were. The latter two tended to talk of ethnic groups in the region as if they were definitive and pure (Ochieng, 1976: 44 - 46). Ochieng rightly emphasized the process of hybridization in the course of encounter, interaction and evolution of ethnic communities in the region. Following this approach, this section demonstrates this biological hybridization. This will in turn show that this was replicated in the cultural arena, resulting in the formation of what can rightly be described as a broad Western religious complex.

##### **4.2.2.1 The Nandi-Terik Factor**

The Nandi are part of the Kalenjin or Highlands Nilotes who also include the Keiyo, the Marakwet, the Pokot, the Kipsigis, the Tugen, the Sabaot and the

Terik. By the 1890s the Nandi had settled on the plateau bearing their name and which now constitutes the Nandi administrative district. The Nandi Plateau extends from the Mau mountain range in the east and southeast to the Nyanza or the Abaluyia plains in the west, and from the Sosian River in the north to the Kano Plains in the south. The plateau is part of the Western Highlands (Matson, 1972:5; Langley, 1979: 3;). The immediate neighbours of the Nandi to the south are the Luo Jokano and the Kajulu clans, for whom the Nandi constitute the northern and northwestern frontier. To the southwest they border their closest Kalenjin cousins, the Terik, together with the Tiriki and the Maragoli sub-ethnic groups of the Abaluyia. To the west are the Isukha, the Idakho and the Kabaras Abaluyia groups. Because of their close geographical proximity and the similar cultural and religious history, we shall refer to the Nandi and Terik as Nandi-Terik.

The Kalenjin speakers or highlands Nilotes comprise several different sub-ethnic groups, each speaking dialects within the same language family and each displaying similar cultural traits (Anderson, 1995: 165). The appellation is a relatively recent coinage by the elite who sought to emphasize the common heritage of the groups (Langley; 1979:3). The ancestors of the Kalenjin initially lived in the territory to the north of their present habitats, most probably around the modern Ethiopian border with Kenya (Matson, 1972:3). Their formation, dispersal and migrations as different sub-ethnic groups is a matter of conjecture. Their initial dispersal must have brought

them to the area east of Mount Elgon, extending into the Pokot and the Cheranganyi Hills. From this dispersal era it would appear that these Pokot-Kalenjin families moved out in two general directions within Western Kenya. According to Were this began around 1490 to 1700 (1967a:7). But the start must have been earlier, because by the time the Nilotic Luo arrived in modern Nyanza around 1490, both Kalenjin and latter Bantu immigrants had occupied or traversed those areas.

The movement in the easterly direction took the Pokot-Kalenjin from around Mount Elgon, through Kerio Valley, Kamasia or Tugen Hills and around Lake Baringo. The process was concomitant with the formation of the initial populations of the sub-ethnic groups - the Pokot, the Marakwet, the Keiyo and the Tugen. Some of these bands moved south into the Molo - Londiani - Mau Range area, from where they dispersed further south into present Kericho-Buret-Bomet area, mixing with the autochthonous Okiek and the Bantu speaking Gusii, and so forming the Kipsigis sub-ethnic group (Mwanzi: 1977). This was a long process that took several centuries, and which continued into the nineteenth century. This process is significant for this study because it helps in the unraveling of the conundrum of the origins and development of various religious concepts in the whole region.

The second direction of dispersal from the Mt. Elgon area was a southerly direction, and which carried the ancestors of the present Nandi and Terik sub-

ethnic groups. These are the two groups closest to the Luo and especially to the Abaluyia with whom there has been the longest interaction. The proto-Nandi and proto-Terik moved through present Abaluyialand as far south-west as the Yimbo-Kadimo area. It is proper to say that the latter Bantu immigrants were preceded into present Western and the northern part of Nyanza province by these Nilotic pastoralists. The process must have began earlier than Were's date of 1598 (1967a:58). The abundance of the Kalenjin place-names testifies to this movement. In southern Abaluyia territory (Abaluyia) there are names like Lososi (corruption of Kalenjin Lessos), Seremi, Jimamoyi, Chepnaywa, among others. In northern Abaluyia territory such place and group names include Kakameka (Kakamega), Kakalewa, Kitosh, Kitale, Kabras, Tachoni. The proto-Kalenjin movements in the area appear in the migration traditions of the Nandi and the Terik themselves as well as those of the Abaluyia and the Luo. For instance in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Luo recall driving both the Kalenjin (*Jalango*) and the Bantu from the low-lying Winam littoral onto the Maragoli Hills and other higher areas to the north and east (Matson, 1972:4). It would appear that the first band of the proto-Kalenjin did not climb onto the Nandi escarpment until the seventeenth century.

According to Nandi traditions, their eponymous ancestor, Kakipoch, led a group to ascend the escarpment from the lower areas to the west into the south-eastern section of the Nandi Plateau. It was around 1500 when the

families formed the nucleus of the Nandi sub-ethnic group (Were 1967a: 48; Matson, 1972:17). They were known by their Kalenjin cousin as the Chemngal or “many words”, due to their lengthy deliberations (Matson, 1972:17). According to Huntingford the name was Chemwal, meaning “cattle-raider” (Huntingford, 1944b:1). Within a few centuries, the Nandi had by early nineteenth century developed into a dominant military power commanding the whole of Western Kenya. They had firmly settled in their present areas from where they raided their Bantu neighbours to the west and south-west and the Jokano and Kajulu Luo to the south and south-west (Kipketer Chumo, 1975:86).

The name Nandi for the Chemngal was first used and popularized by the Swahili caravan traders. “Mnandi” is Kiswahili for the cormorant - a voracious seabird. It came to be used for the Kalenjin in general and for the Chemngal in particular because of their fierce military lifestyle. It was first used in written form by Johann Ludwig Krapf in 1854 (Langley, 1979:3). It is tempting but erroneous to assume that the primary relationship between the Kalenjin and their neighbours – especially the Abaluyia and Luo – was raiding them for cattle. A lot more than hostility went on. In the course of their movement in Western Kenya, some Kalenjin families remained in what is now BuAbaluyia, (Abaluyialand) and were Banturised.

Similarly, in the course of the nineteenth century Abaluyia clans settled among the Nandi, intermarried with them and were Kalenjinized. Families from other clans on the border of the Abaluyia and the Nandi maintained relations of trade, intermarriage and cultural exchange. The Kibois, the Kamelilo and the Tibingot clans have had the longest tradition of close interaction with the Abaluyia (Teingong, 1998: 0.1). This is because they had settled in the Aldai-Nyangori area and in Serem. These are border areas that facilitated such interaction.

The Moi Abaluyia clan led by Shitakwa settled in the Kombe-Kaptel area, intermarrying with the Kapchemuri and Kapchepkendi clans (Mosin, 1999, 0.1). Similarly the Kuchwa Abaluyia clan came from among the Abaluyia and got absorbed among the Nandi. The most intense interaction between the Kalenjin and their Bantu Abaluyia neighbours is epitomised in the relationship between the Terik and the Tiriki in the Aldai - Serem area. The Terik are a hybrid between the Kalenjin and Abaluyia, but Kalenjin element far overrides the Abaluyia element (Mosin, 1999: 0.1). For Sutton the Nyang'ori or Terik emerged within the Nyang'ori Location by assimilation of diverse groups arriving in the area at different times (Sutton, 1970:19). This was especially the case in the nineteenth century.

The case of the occupancy of the Masana Valley in Nyang'ori illustrates this process of hybridization and concretization of the Terik. In the first half of

the nineteenth century the valley was free of the Abaluyia and Luo respectively. It was wholly dominated by the Kalenjin Terik and the Luo (Amolo, 1972:9). Towards mid-nineteenth century the Luo and the Abaluyia (Logooli and Tiriki) began to close in. In the course of the second half of the century the Kalenjin generally retreated eastwards. The latent hostility did not preclude miscegenation and cultural exchange. As Sangree notes, the Terik first permitted the struggling detachments of the Abaluyia clans (Tiriki) to settle in the area, then insisted that the new-comers be initiated into Terik age-groups (Sangree, 1966). On the whole, it was the Kalenjin who influenced most of the Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups to adopt and practise circumcision, especially among the males (Were, 1972, 6). The female rite of clitoridectomy, however, never took root among the Abaluyia. In 1923 the Kakamega (the Isukha and the Idakho) adopted this Nandi custom, but it died out shortly after (Huntingford, 1944b: 4). The most meaningful influence of the Bantu Abaluyia on the Kalenjin was in relation to the adoption of agricultural practices, learning virtually everything from the Abaluyia. The Nandi agricultural lexicon and methods, even in the twentieth century, are mainly traceable to their Bantu neighbours (Huntingford, 1944b:6).

#### **4.2.2.2 The Coming of the Latter Bantu and Formation of the Abaluyia**

As already indicated the Bantu population of Western Kenya date from as early as 200 AD. However, new groups of the Bantu speakers entered the region mainly from present Eastern Uganda, preceding the Luo into the area and joining earlier Bantu families, but being preceded by the proto – Kalenjins. These were the ancestors of the Bantu speaking communities in Western Kenya as we know them today, namely the Logooli, the Nyore the Batsotso, the Kisa, the Marama, the Wang'a, the Tiriki, the Gusii, the Nyala and the Samia. They must have begun coming to the region around 1300 AD or earlier, should the view that the Luo came in the area around 1490 remain credible. These initial clans have traditions that mention settlements and movements in the Yimbo-Kadimo area of the lakeshore including names like Urima, Ulowa, Sere, Got Ramogi. Their itinerary includes areas like Sakwa, Asembo, Seme, Alego and Kisumu. It is clear that most of these sub-ethnic groups experienced their formative stage during the period between thirteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ochieng', 1976:49). Kisumu was a kind of pre-colonial metropolis in Western Kenya, where in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century various communities criss-crossed. It was from here that the Gusii parted with their Logooli cousins and from where the Logooli, the Tiriki and the Terik moved into present areas. This period of sub-ethnic formation was also a period of movement within the region due to pressure from the incoming populations. This process went on until the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Ochieng', 1976:48). Luo raids over the

centuries gradually pushed the Bantu and the Kalenjin communities to leave the lakeshore and to move into new areas. According to Were, for instance, southern and central Buluyia was occupied by the Logooli, the Nyore, the Tiriki, the Kisa, the Marama and the Wanga between 1598 and 1733 (Were, 1967a:73).

The Abaluyia are one group whose formation underlines the dynamic of interaction in Western Kenya. According to Were, the Abaluyia owe their emergence as an ethnic group to the interaction with several ethnic and language groups in Western Kenya – the Bantu, the Kalenjin, the Maasai, the Cushitic stock and the Iteso. The formation period was between the fourteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, when the Abaluyia became a cultural unit (Were, 1974:40). Were further indicates elsewhere that Luyialand was “predominantly Bantu, culturally and linguistically” (1982:2).

*Abaluyia* as a term gained currency only in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century (Huntingford, 1944a:8). It was a reaction against the term Kavirondo which had been superimposed upon the Abaluyia by the Swahili traders and later by the Europeans (Johnston: 1902, 722). The term is meant to express unity and solidarity of the various sub-ethnic groups as members of a nation. It derives from the term *Ohuyia* (clan). Hence Abaluyia means fellow clansmen (Huntingford, 1944a:8). Ochieng’ dismisses the idea of the Luyia as a cultural entity and argues that at best “Bantu” is a linguistic

affiliations and not a cultural one ((1976:45). The fact of the matter is that there is no questioning of the heterogeneity of the origin of the sub-groups that constitute the Abaluhya. Indeed, most ethnic groups in the region cannot lay claims to purity of ethnicity. Sutton rightly stated that the continuity of an ethnic group as a social and political entity depends not on its purity or single origin, but on its ability to accommodate diverse elements from far and wide (Sutton, 1970: 9).

In this case the Bantu-speakers who came to constitute the Abaluyia had experienced social change and cultural assimilation for centuries (Lohrentz, 1977:18). It is not useful to regard the Abaluyia as a single historical or cultural entity. Such a culture as may be described as Abaluyia is highly syncretic – a product of processes of migration, adaptation, assimilation and unification. The Abaluyia are a cultural entity that is characterized by absorption of different cultures. In this respect, the Abaluyia typify the thread that runs through the ethnic groups of Western Kenya, differentiated not by absence but by the degree of presence, namely heterogeneity. This is the dialect inherent in the process of ethnic formation in western Kenya. The diversity of the Abaluyia and their neighbours has not hampered a long tradition of interaction and influence between them (Burt, 1980:19). This tradition was concretized in the nineteenth century, a century that bequeathed the Abaluyia with a definitive hybrid cultural identity that separated them from their neighbours.

Of special mention in the composition of the AbaAbaluyia are the Kalenjin. According to Were, after the Bantu-speakers, the Kalenjin are the largest single group from whom the Abaluyia assimilated some elements. It accounts for at least thirty per cent of the Abaluyia population (Were, 1972). This conclusion is not exaggerated. Clans of Kalenjin origins in Abaluyialand include the Abatachoni, the Abashieni, the Abalamulembwa and the Abanashieni. These were Bantuised and lost their Kalenjin identity (Were, 1967a: 61). Barker underscores this point for the northern BuAbaluyia, when he says that up to as late as the mid-nineteenth century, the area was peopled by Nandi related clans (1950:3).

Of the Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups, the Isukha do not seem to have a migration tradition. Yet Nobuhiro seems to have stumbled on some clue that would point to a strong Kalenjin element in the Isukha. He came across a tradition that linked the eponymous ancestor of the group, Chilonya, to a Nandi migrant (Nobuhiro, 1981:20).

The Maasai also contributed toward the emergence of the AbaAbaluyia. Legend has it that a Maasai known as Kasam or Kasimani came into Western Kenya in the past. He initiated the Shimuli or Abambuli clan in Abaluyialand. This clan can be found among several sub-ethnic groups, the Idakho, Nyore and Kisa. The clan literally traversed southern Abaluyialand

and went as far south-west as Gem, before being blocked by the incoming Luo (Were, 1967b:60).

#### 4.2.2.3 The Coming of the Nilotic Luo

The Nilotic Kalenjin and the Bantu speakers preceded the Luo Western Kenya. The proto-Luo began to move from South Sudan around 1000AD, together with their cousins, the proto-Acholi, the proto-Lango, the proto-Alur and the proto-Padhola. They first moved in Yimbo at the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, coming into contact, for the first time with both the ancient Bantu and latter day Bantu speakers. Their influx into the region according to Ogot, continued throughout the tenth century AD (Ogot, 1967a: 152). This arrival and subsequent settlement initiated both a long chain of displacement and a process of absorption of local communities in the area. This lasted till the end of the nineteenth century (Were, 1967 a: 139). They also met earlier indigenous populations (p'Bitek, 1968:10). Those who resisted were driven from their areas of settlement. The latter day Bantu that immediately preceded the Luo into Nyanza were mostly displaced. These included the Logooli, the Nyore, the Tiriki, the Kisa, the Marama, the Abange, the Abakwiri, the Gusii, the Banyala, the Samia and others (Ochieng', 1974:43).

Some of those conquered, however, stayed under Luo overlordship and initiated a long process of cultural negotiation and exchange between the two

groups. The Jok Owiny, the second major contingent of the Luo migrants Nyanza after the Joka-Jok, established the Yimbo *ruothdom* or centralized polity which at core was a product of Luo and Bantu elements. The Joka-Jok, on their part moved in the Sakwa and Alego areas and in the process pushing the Bantu communities ever northwards and eastwards. The Samia and the Banyala moved to occupy their present locations at this time.

The itinerary of the Logooli, the Gusii, and the Nyore and others took them through present day Luo locations of Sakwa, Asembo and Seme (Ochieng', 1974:43). The Logooli, the Tiriki and the Nyore entered their present homeland, pushed from the plain areas below by the Kapuonja, the Karateng, the Korando, and the Kajulu clans now occupy Kisumu district. They have remained the immediate neighbours of these Bantu groups, with implications of intense cultural interaction over the years (Wasuna, 1999:0.1). Together with the Tiriki and the Logooli, these Nilotic Luo clans have had the longest and most intense interaction with the predominantly Kalenjin Terik of Nyang'ori area.

The Jokano clan was among the pioneer frontiersmen who kept pushing the Gusii and related Bantu groups, and who went past the present Kisumu area into the Kano plains. They occupied the plain in the first half of the nineteenth century, where they came face to face with the Kalenjin Nandi and the Kipsigis, beginning relations that were characterized by border fights and

cattle raids (Ondere, 1969: 17). These raids went on throughout the rest of the century and well into the twentieth century when the colonial administration was established to the relief of the Luo. It is our argument that apart from this hostile relationship, the two ethnic groups engaged in cultural interaction that had impact on their cosmology. A case in point is the *Jalang'o* spirit possession phenomenon that developed among the Luo during this period.

However, the area which became the theatre of the most intense interaction between the Nilotic Luo and the Bantu speakers who later became Abaluyia, is the area that today constitutes northern Siaya District locations like Gem, Ugenya and the southern locations of Abaluyialand namely Kisa, Marama, Southern Wanga and Buholo. For several centuries the Luo had settled among the Bantu speaking communities of Western Kenya. Later, the Luo became aggressive and displaced the hosts from the formerly Bantu dominated areas of Gem, Ugenya and Alego. Those families that were displaced moved further northeastwards into present Kisa, Marama, southern Wanga and Buholo areas. They later became identified as the Abaluyia. Those who had remained behind and were Luonised included the Sirodha, the Ufwaware, the Unamare, the Umani the Kassagam and the Sidimba (Were, 1967a:134).

Throughout the nineteenth century the confrontation between the Luo and the Bantu intensified. The Jo-Ugenya Luo moved into Bantu Abaluyia territory in

earnest in mid- nineteenth century. They conquered modern Baholo and a portion of South Wanga, evicting the Bantu Baholo and taking the whole region between the Nzoia and Viratsi rivers (Ogot, 1967a: 227). The Ugenya clan of Kager settled permanently in Uholo and frequently foraged Wanga territory (Were, 1967a:126).

In the second half of the nineteenth Century the Wanga were able to contain the Luo onslaught because of the availability of rifles and ammunition from the Swahili traders from the coast, and by hiring Kwavi Maasai mercenaries (Hoehler – Fatton, 1996:16). The establishment of colonial rule at the close of the century added a new thrust to the saga. In 1896 and 1897 Hobley backed Mumia, king of the Wanga, to drive the Kager Luo out of Buholo and South Wanga. This spelt doom for the Kager who were reduced to refugee status among both Abaluyia and Luo clans. The Kager lands remained a simmering question in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This conflicts apart, however, the Luo and Abaluyia clans underwent a process of cultural interaction that definitely influenced the emergence of both the Bantu - Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo cosmological outlook. It is our thesis that this pre-Christian interactions among the peoples of Western Kenya led to an essentially syncretic cosmological outlook which derived from diverse sources and which became what we are describing as the Western Kenya religious complex.

### 4.3 Studying Religious History in Pre-Christian Western Kenya

Western Kenya presents an ideal research field for investigating the syncretising dynamic in the history of religious ideas and practices among the diverse communities before the advent of Western Christianity. The foregoing account of the complex process of migrations, interaction and settlement of different populations points to this. Indeed, in tracing pre-Christian religious developments in the area we are actually tracing the interaction of the autochthonous, Cushitic, Nilotic and Bantu peoples of the region. In this respect, it is reasonable to argue that the Western Kenyan communities have for centuries had to contend with a variety of demanding theologies which they had to examine, select from them aspects that they fused with their previous beliefs, and discard the rest.

This typically syncretic process has informed the history of all religions. According to Ludwig, there is always an on-going process devaluation and revaluation of the gods and goddesses, even in cultures that seem to change least. In this process one form diminishes in importance or becomes absorbed with another form, while new experiences give strength to other forms of the sacred (1987:59). Speaking in the same vein, Horton has argued that the nineteenth century was prime time for change and transformation of religious concepts in Africa. The process of change was:

... producing in Africans, out of their own thought resources, a shift from such microcosmic explanatory concepts as those of local spirits and the ancestral dead to such macro-cosmic explanatory concept as that of the Supreme Being (In Fernandez, 1978:220).

Horton's statement is only partially correct, especially when viewed against the religious developments in Western Kenya before the twentieth century. This chapter demonstrates, for instance, that the mainstay of the Bantu Abaluyia religious belief and practice was ancestral veneration, to which they later added the concept of the Supreme Being, *Nyasaye*. But the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik began with a thoroughgoing monotheism in their history, and only appropriated belief in ancestral spirits from the Bantu Abaluyia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In another scenario, the Nilotic Luo had the concept of a high God prior to entering Western Kenya at the close of the fifteenth century. In the ensuing centuries before Christianity, they simultaneously refined their idea of God, appropriated ancestor-veneration from the Bantu neighbours of which they became adepts, and went on to acquire various nature spirit cults in the region and to perfect their worship.

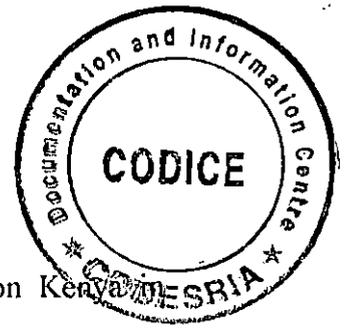
The history of pre-Christian Western religion complex, thus, centers on tracing the origins, exchange, and transformation of ideas and practices centred on three major phenomena: worship of the Supreme Being, veneration of ancestral spirits, and the cults of various categories of nature spirits. This syncretic process had a long pedigree in Western Kenya, but realized its

maturity in the nineteenth century, just before the advent of Christianity. This implies that apart from the Bantu Abaluyia, Kalenjin Nandi-Terik, and the Luo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mention has to be made of earlier societies and their ideas which the subsequent societies inherited and transformed.

#### **4.4 The Experience and Contribution of the Nandi-Terik in the Western Kenya Religious Complex**

##### **4.4.1 The Cushitic Influence in the Nandi Sun Worship**

Among the earliest immigrants into Eastern Africa, especially into present Kenya and Tanzania, were a people of Cushitic stock. These entered the region through the Horn of Africa beginning as early as 1000 BC (Ehret, 1968,1979). They found in possession the autochthonous population (see 4.1 of this chapter). The encounter and interaction between these groups, and later between them and the proto-Kalenjin speaking immigrants contributed in no small measure to the religious heritage of Western Kenya. The Cushites preceded the proto-Kalenjin and Proto-Maa speakers into Western Kenya, but had had their first contacts with them in the present general area of Northern Kenya - Southern Ethiopia and Somalia (Ehret, 1968:164). Among the surviving Cushitic stock in East Africa today include the Iraqus in Central Tanzania and the Galla, Boran and Somali among others in Northern Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia.



Apparently the Cushitic group which impacted most heavily on Kenya in general and Western Kenya in particular were the Galla. They influenced the proto-Kalenjin who adopted some of their religious ideas, especially the cult of the Supreme Being symbolised by the sun. The Galla name for the Supreme Being is *Waka* or *Wak* who was a sky deity associated with the sun and also called by the word for the sun, *Adu* (Hollis, 1909:xxii). The worship of *Wak* was characterized by turning to the east. In one of the prayers deity is addressed as "... the sun with thirty rays" (*Ibid*). Ullendorff, however, argues that *Wak* was the Galla supreme deity "whose eye is the sun" (1973: 107).

Although the Galla venerated ancestral spirits and nature spirits or *genii*, their most enduring legacy in Western Kenyan religion was in the aspect of the Supreme Being symbolised by the sun. It is the contention of this study that the pervasiveness of the sun cult in pre-Christian Eastern Africa should be traced to the ancient Cushitic migrants who traversed the Eastern African Rift Valley and part of the lake-region of eastern Africa, and extending as far south as central and southern Tanzania. Of the latter day migrants into Western Kenya it was the proto-Kalenjin and their descendants who became the most refined worshippers of the Supreme Being personified in the sun. It was the Kalenjin who, following close contacts with the Cushitic-Galla, became the main purveyors of the cult of the Supreme Being in the region, spreading it to the Abaluyia and the Luo.

The Cushitic connection in religious matters cannot be wished away as has been done by scholars and especially concerning aspects of culture like economic organization. Mwanzi has dismissed Ehret's thesis of Cushitic creativity and innovation in material and cultural terms. These arguments have merit in many instances. But this should not be interpreted to mean that the Cushites never contributed anything. In religious matters, the contribution of the Cushitic Galla, especially in relation to the worship of the Supreme Being associated with the sun, cannot be ignored. According to Mwanzi, the veneration of the sun among the Kipsigis Kalenjin sub-group is to be traced to the Okiek, a variant of the autochthonous population of Eastern and Central Africa. He argues that the Okiek emerged from the Mau and Molo forests around mid eighteenth century, whereupon they began intense interaction with the Bantu Gusii clans, resulting in the formation of the Kipsigis community which was thoroughly hybrid by the start of the nineteenth century (Mwanzi, 1976:47).

Mwanzi then goes on to argue that Asis, Kipsigis deity personified in the sun, was introduced by the Kipasiso clan of the Okiek whose totem was the sun (*Ibid*:51). In this way, Mwanzi argues, the Okiek invented the Supreme Being who became the deity of the Kipsigis and argues that the Okiek were Nilotic. This view is contested elsewhere in this chapter. What we can add here is that the worship of God encapsulated in the sun cult, is an extremely

pervasively widespread phenomenon in terms of territory and epoch. In Africa the phenomenon dominated the Nile Valley, the Horn of Africa and the Rift Valley territories of Kenya and Tanzania and some lake shore societies. In fact, in the case of the Nile Valley, the cult was in existence well before 2000 B.C.

It is therefore not convincing on the part of Mwanzi to explain this phenomenon among the Kipsigis in complete isolation of other people and on the basis of a vague thesis that could only be described as “The Okiek from the Forest with the Sun”. The time span of less than two hundred years makes it even more unconvincing. Mwanzi’s thesis cannot remain unchallenged. In the first place the Okiek origin of sun worship in Kipsigis country in the nineteenth century does not explain the pervasiveness of the cult in Western Kenya during the same period among the Maasai, the Bantu Abaluyia, the Nilotic Luo and especially the rest of the Kalenjin speakers. Secondly, the Okiek are the Rift Valley variant of the original stock of occupants of the whole stretch of territory from Eastern to Central and Southern Africa. How is it that their counterparts, even within Kenya, who shared with them the same mode of production did not share spiritual perception? There clearly appears to be need to put the sun-cult in Western Kenya in a wider global historical perspective if we have to avoid the danger of celebrating achievements without proper historical evidence.

#### 4.4.2 The History of Sun Worship in Global perspective

The idea of the sun as the eye of God is found in the religious histories of different religions. In ancient Egypt the sun was sometimes called the 'eye of *Re*'; in northern Europe it was the 'eye of *Odin*', and in Oceanica it was the 'eye of *Atea*' (Bram, 1987:133). Among the Indians the sun was the 'eye of *Varuna*' (Ludwig, 1987:61). Among the Luo chieng', the sun, was the eye of God, *Nyasaye*. In Plato's great myth, *Timaeus*, the Demiurge or Creator spirit lit the light called the 'sun' and other heavenly luminaries, before setting them in motion and instituting time. In the Scandinavian countries carvings depict scenes replete with discs, bodies, and human beings raising their arms to a disk (*Ibid*: 134). In ancient Rome the original nature god was *Sol Indiges*, for whom public sacrifice was held on the Quirinal or ninth of August (*Ibid*:138). Later, Emperor Aurelius reinforced concepts of sun-worship with ideas from Egypt. In 224 AD Aurelius instituted the worship of the *Sol Invictus* (the Invincible Sun) as the state cult (*Ibid*:139). In Japan, *Amaterasu* rose to become the sun goddess, standing for light and purity (*Ibid*:140).

It was, however, in Egypt that the most complex worship of the sun developed. As early as the second millennium BC the Egyptians broke away from a moon calendar and organized syncretic religion around the sun. The sun became dominant, combining with and sometimes supplanting other deities. There were several combinations or manifestations of different deities

and the sun god. One of this was *Re-Atum* or *Amen-Ra*. Here the god *Re* combined with an older creator God, *Atum*, with a powerful priesthood and temple at the Heliopolis. This was around 2600 BC (Budge, 1980: 103). It was around this time that the great pyramids were constructed, pointing heavenwards towards the sun. To understand the devotion to the sun as a symbol of God in other cultures, one would have to borrow a leaf from the Egyptian manifestation of the cult. Essentially Egyptians worshipped one God, creator of the universe, and who manifested his power especially in the sun and its operations (*Ibid*: 4). There were very many gods in Egypt, who were perceived only as "... forms, manifestations, and phases of *Ra* or *Re*, the sun god who was himself the type and symbol of God" (*Ibid*: 17). *Re* was only the visible emblem and type of God Almighty Himself, who was "...self-existent, immortal, invisible, eternal, omnipresent, almighty and inscrutable" (*Ibid*:8). He was both the "father of fathers and mother of mothers" who begot but was never begotten, creator but never created (*Ibid*:20).

The greatest hour of sun worship came in the second millennium BC when radical reforms were introduced. During the reign of Amenhotep III (1417 - 1362 BC) the actual disc of the sun, called Aton, began to appear as numinous symbol in worship (Bram, 1987: 137). He was succeeded by Amenhotep IV around 1360 BC. The latter sought to abolish all other forms of worship in favour of only Aton, the sun disc. He initiated one of the greatest revolutions in history by attempting to convert the whole nation to the monotheistic

worship of Aton as sole God. He offered gifts to the sun whose outstretched beams symbolised the gift of life (Bernal, 1987: 138). One portrait depicts Akhenaton pictured with his wife Nefertiti and his five daughters, all under the brilliance of the sun, with its long rays ending in human hands. In a word Amenhotep IV should rightly be credited with the invention of monotheism. When this project was completed, he changed his name to Akhenaton, meaning 'Aton is satisfied' (Bram, 1987:135). And although his innovations were overturned after his death, Akhenaton has gone down in history as one of the most remarkable human beings that ever lived (Dubois, 1972: 129).

#### **4.4.3 The Kalenjin Worship of Asis The Sun Deity**

The proto Nandi-Terik had began their movements from the primary dispersed area of Mount Elgon as early as 1450. Their excursions in present Western Province and parts of northern Luo Nyanza most likely went on up to 1600 AD. It would appear that the first proto-Kalenjin families began to ascend to the Nandi plateau in the early 1600s. By this time they were worshippers of the sun. This is clear from the rest of the Kalenjin sub groups like the Tugen, the Keiyo and the Marakwet who knew no other object of worship except a rude monotheism focused on the sun. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries their religion underwent sophistication among especially the Kipsigis and Nandi-Terik. They became adepts at practising a common worship of a supreme sky deity called *Asis*. This was the Supreme Being or God. The same term was applied, with a definite article, to the sun, hence

*Asista* (Huntingford, 1944b:11). Thus *Asis* was conceived as a spirit of the bright sky and personified in the sun. The Kalenjin perceived the sun as the "... form under which human beings perceive deity. This is a very advanced notion indeed" (Peristiany, 1935: 215). *Asista* was the emblem of *Asis*, just as was the case in ancient Egypt. *Asis* was also known by other appellations, which underlined the majesty and benevolence of the deity. *Asis* was wholly beneficent, without antithesis of evil, the provider and helper of humankind (Ochardson, 1961:20). There were some variations in the designations of *Asis* by different groups. The Marakwet, for instance described *Asis* by such terms as *Chebet*, *Chebo* (*Chemattow* daughter of *Chemattow* (Fish and Fish, 1995:3).

It was, however, among the Nandi-Terik, and especially the Kipsigis, that the worship of *Asis* was most refined. The second commonest name of *Asis* was *Cheptalel* or *Cheptelil*, meaning blameless one or holy one, and also symbolized by the sun (Cheruiyot, 2000:0.1). *Cheptelil* was the closest synonym of *Asis*. It was most used among the Kipsigis. According to Mwanzi, the term was used for the first time in the nineteenth century when the concept of God underwent transformation following a specific historical event. Oral tradition has it that following a long drought in the Kipigis country a virgin girl was sacrificed by one of the Kipsigis clans to procure rain. The prefix *Chep* means *girl*. The godhead, consequently, came to be identified with the female gender (Mwanzi, 1976:52). According to Fish and Fish (1995:7), the girl offered was an only child, and it is not clear if she was

actually sacrificed or symbolically sacrificed. It is possible that the sacrifice was symbolic because in the subsequent annual worship *Kapkoros*, a live white goat was brought to the sanctuary where it was part of the ceremony then taken back home.

Be that as it may, the Kipsigis and other Kalenjin groups came to associate creation with the feminine gender, and destruction with the masculine. The gender prefix gave deity a personal nature as opposed to just a power. Other names that were developed emphasized this conceptualization of deity in feminine gender. As God of battle *Asis* was designated as *Chepopkoiyo*, and as God of harvest *Asis* was *Chepokimabai* (Fish and Fish, 1995:11). *Asis* was also known as *Chebonomoni* or the ancient one. *Chepketyen Sogol* or 'the nine-legged one' in reference to the sun's rays. This last one expressed the infinity of God. But of special note here is the similarity in conceptualization of the sun god by the rays it emits among other people and the Nandi-Terik. Among the Galla deity was described as "the sun with thirty rays" (Hollis, 1907:xxii). In ancient Egypt, the sun's rays are portrayed as shining and ending in the hands of Pharaoh Akhenaton, his wife and five daughters.

Among the Nandi and their Kipsigis Neighbours the worship of *Asis* was done during day time and in the open. There was private worship at family level and public worship conducted at locational or *bororiet* level and consisting of a number of clans. Public worship was conducted at specific shrines or

sanctuaries characterized by unique natural features like a canyon, a hill, or an imposing *simatwet* or baobab tree. Among the Nandi such sanctuaries in the nineteenth century included those at Kombe, Kilibwoni, Kabiye, and the site of present Seventh Day Adventist University at Baraton (Siren, 1998:0.1).

Among the Kipsigis the first place of public worship was at the Chebiwot Hill. From here others were established and the population spread out. Main centres were at Belgut, Waldai, Buret and Sot (Fish and Fish 1995:105). Public worship was constituted as urgent need arose. But it was also marked as an annual fare, especially after harvest time, and was called the *Kapkoros* named after the structure of the altar constructed for the occasion i.e. *kapkorosut*. This was the holiest place, constructed from sacred trees, bushes and climber collectively called *korosyek*. The whole structure and occasion was associated with offering or sacrifice or gift, *koros*. Hence ideally it means "an altar or place of sacrifices of *Asis*" (Towett, quoted in Fish and Fish, 1995:25).

Among both the Nandi and the Kipsigis the leader or *mantis* of the annual public worship was called the *poyot ap tumdo*, or equivalent to high priest or elder of ceremony. It was his role to stand between *Asis* and the community on all-important occasions, praying for abundant health, cattle and children. He blessed the congregation by spitting or spraying on them beer or milk sipped from the sacred calabash called the *komda* (Peristiany, 1939:217). The

*poyot ap tumdo* was especially prominent at the *rootet* or harvest thanksgiving festival. There was no blood sacrifice, but rather a white goat, which symbolized purity and newness, and which was taken around the *kapkorosut* as people followed it (Mosin, 1999:0.1)

Peristiany and Orchardson differ on the time such public worship was carried out at least among the Kipsigis. Orchardson states that this was a nineteenth century phenomenon and was not held in the twentieth century (1961:21). Peristiany argues that the ceremony was observed well into the first decades of the twentieth century (1939:221). We are inclined to go along with the latter view, given the fact that the Kalenjin were exceedingly conservative people in the face of Christian missionisation. This is given credence by the fact that there was an emergency *kapkoros* (public worship) called among the Kipsigis in 1948 following a total eclipse of the sun. A cleansing was called at Olbubyo in southern Kipsigis country (Fish and Fish 1995:28).

#### **4.4.4 Kipsigis Family Worship of *Asis*. No Ancestor Worship**

The above general characteristics of worship of *Asis* among the Nandi-Terik and Kipsigis aside, there were certain differences in practices between them, which can only be explained in terms of historical contacts with other people. A case in point is the family worship. Among the Kipsigis this was dedicated solely to *Asis*, while among the Nandi there was a syncretism of *Asis* and

ancestors. The Kipsigis gradually developed smaller versions of the public worship altars, *kapkorosut*, which they erected in every homestead, and which they called *mabwaita*. It was made of the same sacred plants as the *kapkorosut*. Here the Kipsigis family worship or functions were conducted (Huntingford, 1969:52). The distinct feature was that family worship was dedicated to *Asis* and to *Asis* alone. They were thorough monotheists. "It should be stressed that the *mapuaita* has nothing to do with the *oiik*, the spirits of the dead" (*Ibid.*: 40). At the *mabwaita*, a typical prayer among the Kipsigis to *Asis* followed the general formula of:

God give us cattle (*Asis konech tugo*),  
 God give us strength (*Asis koneth winda...*, etc.

It ended with the words "I have prayed" (*Kagesai*) (Peristiany, 1939:215). Thus all prayer was directed to *Asis*. Libotians of beer and milk were poured to *Asis*, and the entrails of the sacrificial animal examined for *Asis's* will (*Ibid.*: 216). The stomach of the animal was opened and the entrails examined for omens, and the content applied to the head, stomach, arms and feet of the members of the family - all in the name of *Asis* and *Asis* only.

The stomach was believed to be the centre of life of a person. But since it could not be opened to find out the wishes of *Asis*, an animal was substituted (Fish and Fish, 1995:5). A good omen implied approval of *Asis*. This was done by the expert reading of the entrails. A good stomach was described as

being ripe-hence a good omen or *kerur moo* (Fish and Fish, 1995:227). Such a stomach was full of food, green in colour, with veins of the small intestines full of blood. This was followed by the act of *keulie*, an act of humble worship whereby the petitioner knelt on the intestines predicting the good omen (*Ibid*:227). The opening of an animal's stomach to read omens was not exclusively African. It was practised in many parts of the world and at least the ancient Greeks and Romans were adepts at this (Mwanzi, 1976:56).

In all this, the Kipsigis never mentioned the ancestral spirits, *Oiik*. No evil spirit or ancestral spirit was invoked at the *mabwaita*. No libation was poured for the spirits of the dead, the *oiik* in the process of normal worship. They could be propitiated when they became troublesome. For instance, the *oiik* of a husband was believed to be responsible for a woman who experienced hard labour. Such spirits were pleaded with to be patient because one time they would find a womb to enter and so reborn.

Peristiany argues that the *oiik* were perceived as causing sickness, implying that they were perpetually malevolent, and had to be tricked away by scattering elusive grains from the sickbed to the door (1939:224). In contrast, Orchardson argues that they were on the whole benign, and that if they were angry they would be calling attention as a result of a broken taboo, but not inherently malevolent (1961:23). What is clear, however, is that the Kipsigis never worshipped them.

#### 4.4.5 The Nandi-Terik Syncretic Worship of *Asis* and Ancestors:

##### The Bantu Connection

In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the sole object of Nandi-Terik worship was *Asis*. They were raw monotheists. Following intense interaction with the Bantu Abaluyia beginning in the seventeenth century and intensifying in the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries, the Nandi added to their cosmology the cult of ancestors, transforming their religion to a complex syncretic practice. According to Kipkorir, this cosmology was “.....a great deal more complicated than of any other Kalenjin group” (1976:177). The syncretic nature of Nandi religions in the nineteenth century is attested to further by Hollis. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, he observed that Nandi religion consisted of several stages of religious belief. He described the dedication of a baby at four months, with the face washed in the undigested food from the stomach of the sacrificial animal. He concluded:

The stomach is invoked in a prayer together with *Asis* and the spirits of the ancestors: "*Asis*, give us health: *Asis*, protect us: spirits of the departed, protect this child: stomach, protect this child" (Hollis, 1090:xxi).

What clearly emerges here is that this complex spirituality does not end with *Asis* as was the case among the Kipsigis. It involved the spirits of the ancestors, *oik*, and even gave unique significance to the stomach of the ritual animal. The daily morning family service involved *Asis* and the *oik* at the

same time. After addressing *Asis*, the family elder continued: "Our spirits do not be angry for you died naturally, and do not say 'a man killed us'; protect us who are above" (*Ibid*). Libation accompanied invocation of the *oiik*. Beer was poured to the ground with the words: "Our spirits, we have prayed to you. Look at this milk; give us health" (*Ibid*: xxii).

So clearly pronounced was the ancestor cult among the Nandi-Terik that Huntingford thought that it was more prominent than the worship of *Asis*. He states that "...the active part of Nandi religion is centred on the cult of the dead rather than on a remote and not always friendly sky spirit"(1944b: 12). This conclusion is however, highly contestable. Daily worship among the Nandi was mainly directed toward the sun. Veneration of *oiik* was in addition to this worship. There was thus a fairly developed ancestral cult along that of *Asis*. This ancestral cult, however, was an appropriation and not an original Nandi idea. Huntingford has argued that unlike their Kipsigis cousins the Nandi-Terik did not develop a family shrine called *mabwaita*. For him *mabwaita* was not a Nandi custom, "... and where something similar is done, (in Southwest Nandi), the custom specifically concerns the *oiik* and has been borrowed from the Bantu Kavirondo" (1969:52. The fact of the matter was that the Terik and the Nandi, especially those who were closest to the Bantu speaking AbaAbaluyia, developed a homestead shrine called the *kapkorosut mining*, literally meaning "the little shrine" (Songok, 2000:0.1) This came to

predominantly associated with the veneration of ancestors, a practice we can safely assume that the Nandi appropriated from the Abaluyia.

The Nandi made offerings to ancestors as an act of worship. Unlike their Kipsigis counterparts, the seniormost male in a Nandi family placed millet or sorghum *ugali* (hard gruel) on the altar for the ancestors who were always believed to hover around the homestead. In other words, the dead among the Nandi required food just as the living did - a practice and belief that was mainstay among the neighbouring AbaAbaluyia. (Huntingford, 1944b: 3). This is corroborated by Hollis. After slaughter of an animal, some pieces of meat were thrown in different directions purportedly for the ancestors - a typically Abaluyia practice of sharing roasted sacred meal with the ancestors (Hollis, 1909:xxi).

The Nandi and the Terik in general, but especially those in close proximity to the Abaluyia border, invoked the names of the departed for protection, and for cure of diseases, for abundance and prosperity in terms of children and animals (Langat, 1999:0.1). Some sources indicated that during the annual public worship at the *Kapkoros*, great clan ancestors were invoked along *Asis* (Kurgat, 1999:0.1) Ancestor veneration was also reflected in the naming of children which, for the Nandi, was not just belief in the transmigration of the soul or spirit. Failure to name and invoke an ancestor would offend and turn the latter against the family. But such spirits which turned vengeful were no

longer called *oiik*, but rather *masampwanik* or evil spirits. This latter has a Abaluyia root where the ancestor cult proper was called the *msambwa* cult.

Further Abaluyia parentage of the Kalenjin ancestor beliefs is attested to by the myths surrounding a hill in Nandi territory called Chebeloiiik Hill. This hill is near the Kakamega forest on the Abaluyia-Nandi border. The name simply means "burnt by the evil spirits" (Kurgat, 1999:0.1). There were unconfirmed stories of fire, which could occasionally be seen burning on the hill especially during the dry season. Further claims were that people who went to the hill were caned by unseen people. Such fantastic stories do not seem to feature in any other Kalenjin community except Terik-Nandi living closer to the Abaluyia border.

#### **4.5 The Bantu Abaluyia Contribution to the Western Religious Complex**

##### **4.5.1 Ancestor Veneration: A Global Framework**

A number of African writers have tended to associate ancestor worship with inferior religion. In the process they have sought to prove that there was no such a thing as ancestor-veneration, and where it seemed to appear it was actually the worship of the Supreme Being mistaken for ancestors (see Were, 1973, Kasiera 1985). Consequently, to them, at no time did Africans ever venerate ancestors because they only worshipped God. Other writers,

especially Western, scholarly, give the erroneous impression that ancestor worship is a unique African phenomenon. The fact of the matter is that ancestor-worship is found in many communities in the world. It is universal in distribution. Radcliff-Brown and Fortes have stated that ancestor worship is rooted in kinship and descent relations and institutions (cited in Ayisi, 1972:63). Elsewhere, Radcliffe-Brown writes:

A most important part of the religion of ancient Greece and Rome was the worship of ancestors... A religious cult of the same general kind has existed in China from ancient times to the present day. Cults of the same kind exist today and can be studied in many parts of Africa and Asia (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952:163, quoted in Ayisi, 1972:63).

Simply put, the ancestral cult involves worship of dead members of families, lineage and clans. It is based on the belief that their spirits are immortal, or at least have power to help or harm the living. Worship involves performing of rites to persuade the spirits to use their power for the benefit of the living, or to appease them when they are offended.

Among the Chinese, where the cult has long pedigree and is pervasive, families to-date notify their ancestors of important occasions and make offerings of food and flowers and burn incense at household shrines or in ancestral temples. All along the Chinese have always had two structurally distinct phases of ancestor worship whereby the traditional households focus on immediate ancestors, while lineage or clan segments focus on clan heroes (Freedman and Topley, 1961:6). In Chinese society, part of ancestor-worship

includes elaborate funeral rites, frequent memorial ceremonies, and regular care of the graves. Most rural areas of Africa manifest features similar to the Chinese ancestral cult. Ritual practices pertaining to ancestors have remained in some communities an "... important aspect of daily life and of agricultural activities"(McCall, 1995:256). Among the Ohafia Igbo of Nigeria, for instance, libations are still poured and invocation made to the patriarchs of families and their dead descendants. Before any living man may drink, a portion is poured into a small hole in the floor of the house which is said to "... lead to the mouth of the founder himself" (*Ibid*:260). In Western Kenya, the AbaAbaluyia Bantu-speakers were great adepts at ancestor veneration.

#### **4.5.2 Bantu Lake-region of Kenya and Uganda and the Phenomenon of ancestor-worship**

Wherever it appears, the ancestor cult is mostly associated with settled societies where the dead are buried in close proximity to the living (Posnansky, 1972:40). It was in the Bantu-settled areas of Western Kenya and of Uganda, rather than among the pastoralist Nilotes with nomadic tendencies, that ancestor veneration developed to complex levels from very early centuries. This was evident to Hollis, writing at the start of the twentieth century when he observed that "... the religious observances of those Bantu tribes of East Africa who have not been influenced by the Maasai, the Nandi and the Galla are concerned *almost entirely* with ancestor worship" (Hollis,

1909:xxvii. Emphasis mine). To appreciate the place of the ancestor cult among the Bantu speakers of Western Kenya, one has to briefly survey the phenomenon in Bantu Uganda. In present Rwanda, the cult of ancestors was strong and held sway up to as late as the 1920s. The District Commissioner of Kigezi noted that the "... cult of the ancestral spirit-*Mandwa*-meant a lot to the people in terms of deliverance from evil" (Quoted in Hansen, 1995:152). In Uganda the cult was strongly associated with the Bachwezi, the rulers of Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In fact, the word Chwezi in the ancient kingdom also meant ancestral spirit (Johnston, 1902:613). Johnston further reports that at the close of the nineteenth century, every Ugandan village had a fetish hut close to the living quarters. In this hut offerings of food and libation beer were placed to propitiate the ancestral spirits. Although it was the rats, which consumed them, it was firmly believed that the spirits received the offerings (*Ibid*). Because of the aspect of state formation in Uganda, the range of ancestral veneration was fairly wide, starting at family level, lineage, clan and onto chiefdom level. Consequently the Ugandan pantheon also included "... chiefly deified ancestors" (Hollis, 1909:xxvii). Definitely among the Bahima worship went beyond family and village to the worship of "... dead chiefs and prominent personalities" (Johnston, 1902:613).

It is against this background that the ancestral cult in Western Kenya ought to be perceived and studied. Ogot rightly observes that the movement of the

Bantu-speakers from Eastern Uganda to the lakeshore area of Western Kenya was a long process covering the period between 500 and 1500 AD. During the period was introduced into Western Kenya a new "... religious outlook stressing veneration of ancestors and territorial spirits" with fixed abodes or shrines (Ogot, nd:13). In more or less the same vein, Atieno Odhiambo has argued that by about 1000 AD quite a number of Bantu-speaking groups had settled in the area of Western Kenya. The religious ideas of these people were nurtured by the environment in which they settled, and centred on problems related to diseases, survival and family and clan solidarity (Odhiambo, 1975:121). In other words the people were pre-occupied with existential challenges, leading them to develop beliefs centred on ancestral spirits that were close and known to the individual and the family (*Ibid*). From this background it is important to note that the incoming Bantu speakers were already versed in ancestral veneration, but now practised it in a new environment, making it responsive to their needs. And it was in this area - the area of ancestral veneration rather than in the area of Supreme Being-that the proto-Abaluyia Bantu speakers and their descendants left an enduring mark on the Western Kenyan religious complex.

#### **4.5.3 The Bantu Abaluyia Practice of Ancestral Worship in the Nineteenth Century**

The Bantu Abaluyia religion had from the earliest times been focused on worship of ancestors. Both the ancient Bantu settlers on the Winam littoral as well as the latter Bantu migrants from Uganda were great adepts at ancestor worship. As they settled in Western Kenya, they continued with this. However, the nineteenth century was a period of great transformation among the Bantu-speakers of Western Kenya. The various Bantu families and lineages had gradually concretised into specific clans which developed a cosmology that centred on "... belief in the Supreme Being, ancestral spirits and human agents with supernatural powers" (Burt, 1980:21). This simply means that the Bantu Abaluyia had added to their worship of ancestors the worship of the Supreme Being or God. It was a syncretic religion. The mainstay of this religion, however, remained centred on the ancestral cult, the details of which we turn to now.

Kasiera has advanced the thesis that the AbaAbaluyia never worshipped ancestral spirits in the pre-Christian days, that such spirits were not tolerated and were certainly not sacrificed to (Kasiera, 1985:107). He goes on to argue that only an ancestor who had not been given a decent burial and was demanding the performance of the correct rituals could be tolerated. Furthermore, ancestral spirits were tolerated only at the naming ceremony of a child. Save for these exceptions, he concludes that ancestral spirits were "neither invoked nor prayed to" and that the living "never depended on the

ancestors to help them sustain the social order" (*Ibid*). For Kasiera it is untenable to think that the spirits of the ancestors were worshipped.

This thesis is in complete contradistinction to Kasiera's. We would rather argue emphatically that the hub of the religion of the clansmen, AbaAbaluyia, was for centuries centred on the worship of ancestors. These spirits were called *imisambwa* and were vital in all aspects of life. They were not the only supernatural agents, but "assuredly are held as the most potent of all such supernatural agencies" (Shackleton, 1931:2). The underlying principle in ancestor worship was that at their own pleasure ancestral spirits could, and did, intervene in day-to-day affairs of the living. They operated in a protective capacity. But they could withhold favour, allowing evil to befall their descendants, when they were neglected or angered by breaking of taboos. During the second decade of the twentieth century, Dundas (an administrator-cum-ethnographer in Western Kenya) observed that the religion of the Abaluyia was "based on ancestorship", and was characterized by offering sacrifices to ancestors. For him the Kavirondo or Abaluyia religion was a form of deism combined with ancestor worship, and, "...to their ancestors they make sacrifices and offer up prayers on all domestic occasions" (Dundas, 1913:3). The smallest unit of ritual was the family level, where family ancestors were venerated with great frequency. The ancestral cult was centred on a stick called *Ulusambwa*, a branch or *pole* from the *lusiola* or *ulwuvu* or *omutoto* trees. The stick was four feet long, stuck in the ground inside a small

hut (Huntingford, 1944a:32). The hut itself was six feet high, cone-shaped and made of sticks from sacred plants. Inside the hut the *ulusambwa* pole (meaning 'pole of *imisambwa* or ancestral spirits) was fixed upright in the centre, with four stones (in some cases three) arranged around it at a distance of two feet. This was the Abaluyia equivalent of the Kipsigis *mabwaita*.

The shrine was the altar, usually constructed in front of the principal wife's hut. In some homes the stones were sufficient as constituting the shrine or altar. Until the nineteenth century the ancestral hut or stones were dedicated to the male ancestors of the family. Beginning in the eighteenth century and becoming more concrete in the nineteenth, the stones were dedicated to both the ancestors and to the Supreme Being or God (Were, 1973:10). By this time the Abaluyia had appropriated the cult of the Supreme Being from the Kalenjin, legitimising a syncretism of concepts through ritual practice.

The stones were called *amagina ge misango*, simply translated as the ritual stones. Here all-important ceremonies in the family were undertaken, calling upon the ancestors and effectively invoking them in the functions, since they were *bona fide* members of the family. In a typical ritual, a live chicken would be sacrificed by the senior most male member of the family who held it by the legs and hit its head on the stones while invoking the ancestors for help. It bled and died, was roasted and the meat was thrown in all directions as a share for the ancestors. Similarly, in a very serious situation like a deadly

disease or cleansing of a taboo, a goat was strangled and the stomach opened to get the contents and to read the omens from the entrails. These were taken into the shrine where the stomach contents, *ovese*, were poured onto the stones and the *ulusambwa* or ancestral pole. At the turn of the twentieth century Johnston observed that the Bantu speakers of Eastern Buganda, meaning the Abaluyia of Western Kenya, had the greatest faith in divination by examination of the entrails of a sheep, goat or oxen (1902:751). The presiding *mantis* would then utter words to appease the angry ancestral spirits: "If you, *imisambwa* are angry with us, here is something for you to eat and be satisfied. Let the trouble go and drive away the evil spirits" (Huntingford, 1944a:32). Pieces of the roasted ritual meat would then be thrown in different directions and the spirits invited to partake. It was usually the ants and other crawling insects, which feasted on the meal, but this only confirmed that the spirits were happy and appeased. The elders and the sick also partook the meal, indicating communion with the ancestors. All trouble was believed to go, and the sick was healed. Were gives another version of a typical prayer on this occasion:

Grandfather there is food for you, there is some food for you grandmother... Eat the food and bless the patient so that he may recover. This animal is for you; may you bring peace and good health in this family (Dundas, 1913:6).

The next unit of worship after the family was the lineage, after which came the clan. At these two levels public worship was carried out. In fact, the clan

was the widest socio-territorial unit within which rituals were undertaken. There was hardly any congregation that went beyond the clan to form a supra-clan or a sub-ethnic concourse. Only among the Maragoli or Logooli sub-ethnic group did all the clans occasionally come to form a supra-clan congregation. And of course there was no time the whole Abaluyia sub-ethnic group ever came together for worship.

In fact, the term *Abaluyia*, used for the whole ethnic group, comes from the term "*oAbaluyia* or *uluhia*" which is the word for clan. In most cases, Abaluyia clans emanated from a paternal ancestor who gave the members a sense of community of interests, including his personal name (Wagner, 1970:54). The patriarchal exogamous clans constituted a sub-ethnic group. In this way all the seventeen Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups, the Maragoli, the Nyore, the Tiriki, the Samia, the Marama, and others, are constituted of specific clans (Were, 1967a:155). The clan among the AbaAbaluyia, therefore, was the widest socio-political entity, with gerontocratic influence of old men checked only by the fear of spirits of the dead who were "...as much part of the tribe as the living" (Huntingford, 1944a: 20). Elders were respected for their age, character and ability and because they were closer to the spirits of the dead who must not be offended because religion was part of "tribal" government (*Ibid*).

It was within this framework that public worship in pre-Christian Abaluyialand has to be apprehended. Whole clans would gather to invoke fallen clan heroes at the clan cemetery which was also accorded the status of the clan shrine. Such a shrine, where great clan ancestors were buried was known as *Eshihembekho* (Oponyo, 1999:0.1). The cemetery was usually visited during difficulties or emergencies, like severe famine or disease outbreak, poor growth of crops, prevailing death of animals in the clan. The ancestors addressed here were only the very prominent fallen members of various lineages which constituted the clan (Gimode, 1993:91). On such occasions the elders took their spears and went to the *Eshihembekho* where they sang songs of praise to the departed, and engaged in mock-fights, while making loud noises. These were believed to please the ancestors who then healed the society.

One occasion during which various lineages met as a clan was at harvest time when the first fruits were dedicated to the ancestors in a thanksgiving service. The latter's magnanimity had to be acknowledged. On this occasion the clan *mantis, umusalisi*, would kindle *ubwali* or altar/ritual fire at a crossroads within the clan territory. Every family would have a member bring a handful of sheaves of the first crop which were thrown onto the ritual fire as the congregation sang in praise of the dead lineage heroes (*Ibid*:88).

By mid sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the Bantu Abaluyia came into increasing contact with the Nandi-Terik who they influenced concerning veneration of ancestral spirits, but who in turn influenced them by introducing them to the worship of the Supreme Being. Gradually the monopoly of the worship of ancestors began to be shared with that of God, leading to an essentially syncretic combination of ancestor and Supreme Being concepts.

#### **4.5.4 Development of the Concept of the Supreme Being in Bantu Abaluyia Cosmology**

The acquisition of the concept of the Supreme Being or God by the Bantu Abaluyia of Western Kenya has to be understood in the wider context of the syncretising dynamic in the development of the pre-Christian religious complex in the region. The foregoing section has demonstrated that the taproot of the Bantu religion was ancestor-veneration. With time, however, they acquired and worshipped the Supreme Being. This section explicates this historical process.

##### **4.5.4.1 The Bantu Abaluyia Concept of God**

By the close of the nineteenth century the Bantu Abaluyia had a fairly well developed idea of God or the Supreme Being called by different names in

different dialects. The northern and central Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups (the Bukusu, the Kabras, the Tachoni, the Nyala, the Wang'a) and the Southwestern sub-ethnic groups (the Marachi and the Samia) called him *Were* or *Wele*. The Southeastern groups (the Logooli, the Tiriki, the Nyore, the Isukha and the Idakho), together with some Central-southern groups (the Marama, the Kisa and the Wang'a) variously called him *Nyasaye* or *Nasaye* or *Nasayi*. Other synonyms were *Imungu* or *Isahi* (Wagner, 1970:168). Another variation was *Asai* (Shackleton, 1931:14). This high God was personified in the sun and also called by the same word for the sun, *Iluva* or *Eriuva* (Burt, 1980:21). But this was rarely used. The commonest, however, for the southern Abaluyia was *Nyasaye* a name which they shared with the Nilotic Luo. The implications of this common usage are historical and are articulated in subsequent sections of this chapter

*Nyasaye* was conceived as a spirit of goodness, powerful and benign, without fixed abode and no definitive symbol except the sun (*Ibid*: 22). The sun was in turn associated with light and whiteness, whose benevolence was expressed in the health, prosperity and safety of his people. *Nyasaye* was believed to be the creator of everything and regulator of the balance between humankind and nature. According to Huntingford, the Abaluyia only vaguely apprehended God (1944a:30). In more or less the same frame of mind, Dundas wrote during the early colonial period to the effect that the Abaluyia had "a form of theism" (Dundas, 1913:3). This is in contradiction with the conclusions of

other observers. For instance, Father Stam, writing earlier, observed during the first decade of the twentieth century that the population of Western Kenya had concrete knowledge of God. He wrote: "Both the Nilotic and Bantu Kavirondo have a distinct idea of God, the Supreme Being" (Quoted in Ogot, 1967a:113). Consequently, questioning the knowledge of a Supreme Being among these communities is not an issue because it was a well established fact.

Probably a question that warrants a little more comment is the gender of God as conceptualised among the Bantu Abaluyia. Unlike the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik who conceptualised deity in feminine attributes, the Abaluyia and the Luo do not seem to have been bothered about this. God basically maintained the neutral gender. The engendering of deity with the male pronoun, 'he' was a typically Western Christian development of the twentieth century. In the pre-Christian days God was simply described as the moulder, the owner of the ring (especially on occasions when a circular rainbow formed around the sun) the one who manages all matters and the benevolent one among other terms. However, results of Nasimiyu's research (1986) among the Bukusu sub-ethnic group in northern BuAbaluyia indicate interesting conclusions. She posits that the Bukusu and other Abaluyia people sometimes addressed God as "Mother" during the female rites of passage (*Ibid*:259). She also posits that the rites performed over a pregnant woman were dedicated to God, the Creator and "the Great Mother" (*Ibid*:204). Accordingly, a child was born not of earthly

being nor of a ghost, nor of sorcery, but of the Great Mother" who was the source of all being. Nasimiyu argues that the Bukusu associated the motherhood of God with "... the generation of life, fecundity, kindness, compassion, meticulous care, devotion and beauty" (*Ibid*:260). She also cites the Isukha as another group conceptualising deity in feminine terms. She further cites a prayer recorded by Gunter Wagner (1970:299) as suggesting a female view of God: 'May God the Great one bless you so that you may recover, that you may bear the child well'. But Wagner did not categorically specify the gender of deity in the passage and nothing suggests that the gender could be female. Our study did not come across any evidence suggesting the female gender attributes of deity. What, perhaps, Nasimiyu aims at is to ignite a debate centring on the conceptualisation of deity in bisexual term.

#### **4.5.4.2 The Appropriation of the Concept from the Kalenjin and the Historical Significance of the Term *Nyasaye***

The word *Nyasaye* for God is found both among the neighbouring Bantu Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo, along with similarities in other elements of religion. One of the most intriguing questions in the religious historiography of Western Kenya is the origin of this term. Unravelling the conundrum has remained an insurmountable challenge. Oral sources, both among the Abaluyia and the Luo, provide no consensus on the geo-old issue. Respectable Abaluyia informants (Indimuli, 1999:O.I.), Kweyu (1999:O.I.) and Koricho

(1999:O.I.) were all, individually and separately, unanimous that the term came from among the Luo. On the other hand Oyiro (2000:O.I.) and Ngoha (1999:O.I.) all respectable Luo informants, also individually and separately argued that the term has Abaluyia origins and is very recent among the Luo, having been acquired from the Bantu remnants in the Alego, Ugenya and Gem areas in Luoland. At the intellectual level, Ogutu (1975) devoted a whole dissertation to the history of the Luo idea of God, and came to the conclusion that he could not unravel the conundrum of the origin of *Nyasaye*. He wrote:

The argument being advanced here is that before the colonial period the Luo and their Abaluyia neighbours had interacted so much that it becomes difficult to treat the contemporary Luo-Abaluyia separately, at least as far as their idea of God is concerned (1975:49).

This was virtually the same conclusion at the start of the twentieth century. He failed to establish the etymology of the term (see Ogot, 1967a:113). These conclusions are valid and a testimony of the intense interaction and syncretic emergence of the religious ideas. Ogot, however, took a stand and argued for the Luo origins of the term while dismissing the possibility of Abaluyia origins. The position of this study is that one cannot afford to be categorical in assigning this origins. However, it is our submission that between the Bantu Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo, the former would have closer claims to the origins of the term. We have critiqued Ogot's arguments elsewhere in this

study. What we shall do here is to attempt to demonstrate the greater possibility of Bantu Abaluyia, and specifically Southern and South-eastern Bantu Abaluyia, origins of *Nyasaye*.

Of the three latter day migrants into Western Kenya, the earliest were the Nandi-Terik who, as already demonstrated, occupied many parts of Western Province (Abaluyialand) and parts of the lake-shore areas of present Nyanza Province (Were, 1967a). The migration of the proto-Abaluyia groups like the Logooli, the Nyore, the Marama, the Kisa, the Tiriki among others therefore preceded the Luo in contacting with the Kalenjin with whom they simultaneously interacted, co-existed and also displaced them eastwards. The proto-Abaluyia Bantu clans formed part of the Bantu settlements on the Winam Gulf littoral areas stretching from Yimbo through Sakwa, Uyoma, Asembo, Seme to Kisumu. The incoming Luo interacted and displaced them eastwards and northwards while they in turn displaced the Kalenjin (Ochieng', 1976). Should we agree on this basic historical fact, and if we can also agree with the view that the Nandi-Terik were the first of the modern populations to conceive and worship God as being personified in the sun, then it follows that the proto-Abaluyia groups preceded the Luo in the appropriation of this concept from the Kalenjin.

The second argument is linguistic. Both the Abaluyia and the Luo clearly derive the appellation *Nyasaye* from the verb "to pray". In Abaluyia it is

'*khusaya*' while in Dholuo it is '*sayo*'. The Kalenjin word for God is *Asis*. However, the word for praying seems connected to the word *sai*. The conclusion of a typical Kalenjin prayer was "*kagesai*" or "I have prayed". Peristiany 1939:215). The South and Southeastern Abaluyia could most probably have taken this as a root-word and transformed it into the appellation for their newly acquired concept of the Supreme Being (Gimode, 1993:106). They could have heard the Kalenjin utter the word '*sai*' in their ceremonies associated with the sun cult. The word, thus, developed a new meaning. They had already used the word *khusaya*, to beseech, in the worship of the *imisambwa*. They combined this verb and the Kalenjin root, *sai*, to describe God as *Nasaye*, *Nyasaye* or *Nasayi* as the ultimate object of worship.

Among some of the Abaluyia groups this Kalenjin root is even stronger especially among the Tiriki, the Idakho, the Isukha and the Logooli. For instance, Shackleton noted that the main element in the Logooli biannual worship was prayer to *Nasaye*. He went on: "... in Maragoli, I think, *Asai* is more correct" (Shackleton, 1931:14). It was also not infrequent that the south-eastern Abaluyia used the word *Asai* in exclaiming in the face of perplexing situations. One would quip: "*Yaga ni aga Asayi*" Meaning this is only for *Asayi* (Avuya, 1991:O.I., quoted in Gimode, 1993:107). The implication was that the situation was beyond the ordinary and only *Asayi*, whoever he was (in this case God).

#### **4.5.4.3 The Bantu Abaluyia Double Worship of God and Ancestral Spirits**

The acquisition of the Supreme Being by the Bantu Abaluyia of Western Kenya began on a small scale in the seventeenth centuries, but became fully concretised in the nineteenth century largely due to increased interactions with the Nandi-Terik. It also led to changes in the whole structure of Abaluyia cosmology. The Abaluyia developed a new ontology that went beyond the ancestral spirits. In the case of the Abaluyia and the Luo the thesis of Horton on a shift from local spirits to macro abstract conceptualisation of deity holds true. But the appropriation of the macro-concept of the Supreme Being was an addition to rather than a replacement of the ancestral spirits. The Abaluyia fused the two concepts into a system that included inseparable worship of both. It was a double level of worship.

The new Abaluyia ontology included human agents with supernatural powers, ancestral spirits, and ultimately belief in the Supreme Being. A strange development in this religion was that as the concept of the Supreme Being became appropriated, the pristine Bantu feature of spirit possession reduced and almost died out. This was in contrast with the Luo who synthesized the latter in to new forms. Wagner summarised the Abaluyia ontology in the following terms. "In addition to the belief in ancestral spirits there exists among the Bantu Kavirondo the notion of a Supreme Being or High God as well as a number of minor spirit beings (1970:175).

What concerns us here is that by the close of the nineteenth century the two concepts of God and ancestral spirits were so closely related that their worship was almost undistinguishable. An observer could not categorically tell what the object of worship was. Some Western observers have summarily concluded that it was ancestor worship. A majority of African as well as some Western authorities on the subject have painted the picture that the worship was not meant for the spirits but for God, that ancestral spirits were mediums relaying worship to God. A few examples of these two positions will suffice. The Logooli were the only Abaluyia sub-ethnic group which carried out a whole community worship service. This was biannually at the Mungoma Hill in South Maragoli (Gimode, 1993:107). According to Wagner, who did his research in the 1930s, the *Mungoma* sacrifice was not only to *Nasayi* or God, but also to ancient ancestral spirits in general, and to "... a certain *Angoma* who lived a long time ago, before the Logooli tribe was founded" (1970:291). In the same breadth Wagner observes that this sub-ethnic concourse was dedicated to an ancestral spirit and not to God; that there was no evidence in the ritual procedures, songs and prayers "... to support the view that *Asai* is addressed" (*Ibid*:296). On the other hand Father Stam pointed out that in spite of preoccupation with sacrifices to ancestors, the Abaluyia were monotheists. He authoritatively noted of the Wanga sub-ethnic group:

Thus at first sight the Bahanga seem to be ancestor worshippers. In reality, however, they

adore the one God, the creator and life giver. If sickness breaks out and continues, the native dedicates a white chicken to God. In time of sowing and harvesting, he sacrifices a white chicken to God, because he is conscious that all life and all fertility proceed from God alone (Quoted in Were, 1973:4).

This is the same view taken by Were. For him all religious ceremonies" ... in which ancestral spirits are involved or appeased constitute the worship of Were" (Were, 1973:10). In other words the role of ancestral spirits was intermediary, so that they were not worshipped.

The position of this study is somewhere in between the two views, and comes close to the views expressed in these early ethnographic researches by Dundas and Huntingford. For Dundas, the Bantu Abaluyia religion during the early colonial period constituted a "... form of theism continued with ancestor worship" (Quoted in Were, 1973:3). Similarly, Huntingford summarised it as a belief in the existence of God who was approached through the medium of the spirits of the dead, and "... to whom private respect is paid" (1944a:30). The fact of the matter is that before the appropriation of the Supreme Being, *Nyasaye*, the Abaluyia had worshipped ancestors as the ultimate object of veneration. By the eighteenth century, and especially in the nineteenth, they had fused the two together, so that they worshipped God along with the ancestral spirits simultaneously. At the dawn of the twentieth century a Abaluyia elder would wake up in the morning and spit toward the rising sun,

invoke blessings for his family from *Nyasaye*, while mentioning the names of his foregatherers, *abaguga* (Musia, 1991:O.I., cited in Gimode, 1995:105). This was topflight syncretism.

#### **4.5.5 The Idiom of Spirit Possession Among the Bantu Abaluyia**

One of the most antique religious phenomena in the lake region of Eastern Africa was that of spirit possession. In the Western Kenya lake-shore it goes back to time memorial, but was certainly well developed by 1000 A.D. The pristine Bantu fishing and cultivating settlements were familiar with this before the "modern" immigration brought in new populations during the second millennium A.D. These latter groups - the proto-Abaluyia clans and the Kenya Luo - inherited this cosmological outlook of nature or non-ancestral spirits invading some individuals and making them their medium to speak their will. The precedence of the proto-Abaluyia clans like the Logooli, the Nyore, the Samia, the Marama among others made them among the first of these latter-day comers to adopt these cults associated with the lake and the land. They venerated possession cults of *Mumbo*, *Sumba*, *Sepe* and *Yie* or Canoe in the period between 1400 and 1600 AD (Odhiambo, 1975:119-122). The Samia and the Marachi developed the Sumba snake cult around this time. Similarly, the lake cult of Mumbo found its way into proto-Abaluyia cosmology around this time (Ogotu, 1975:43). A possessed medium was to become the revered mouth-piece of the spirit. They would prophecy and

foretell the future. They would diagnose the cause of misfortunes and prescribe the wishes of the spirits.

The Bantu Abaluyia diviner of the nineteenth century, *umukhumu*, is to be traced from this period. Indeed, possession became the criterion by which some families hived off from whole populations to migrate to new areas by following such a *mantis* who was instructed by a spirit to move away with a group. Most eponymous ancestors of the various Abaluyia clans and sub-ethnic groups are traceable to some such figures in the past. Perhaps, the best example is that of the Logooli. Oral traditional posit accounts that these are the descendants of one MuLogooli who was a ritual expert and great medium of the spirits. He would foretell and would divine in difficult situations and held the community together by a ritual drum called *engoma*. This kind of drum was common among the Uganda and Rwanda Bantu clans, but was the only one of its kind in Kenya. He is supposed to have led his band of followers from Uganda into Western Kenya, moved across the Gulf littoral and settled at Mungoma Hill on the Abaluyia-Luo border near Maseno (Gimode, 1993:68).

A variant of this version states that the name MuLogooli is actually a mantic appellation for a person who could unravel mysteries, *umulongoli*. He could foretell as well as expose hidden secrets. Because of these arts, he was able to gather around him a band of followers who he galvanised into the nucleus of a

sub-ethnic group called the Maragoli. Following these traditions Ochieng' came to the conclusion that the Logooli could well have originated from such a *mantis*. He wrote: "It is not altogether incredible, or farfetched for one to imagine that the ancestor of the Logooli may have been a seer or medicine man" (Ochieng', 1974:48).

In the paradigm of MuLogooli there arose many diviners in Abaluyialand in the subsequent years. Yet the phenomenon of spirit possession, however, increased considerably in the subsequent years. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spirit possession gradually declined as the concept of the Supreme Being began to take the central cosmological position along with the familiar ancestral cult. The diviner, *umukhumu* continued to operate, but more and more as an occasional "consultant" rather than a regular "doctor". This was in contrast with the development of the possession phenomenon among the Luo who synthesized it to even more complex levels.

#### **4.6 The Experience and Contribution of the Kenya Luo to the Western Religious Complex**

By the close of the nineteenth century the Luo religion comprised of three main features - worship of the Supreme Being, the cult of ancestors and existence of several free spirit or *juogi* cults. The history of these features is the history of the Luo interaction with their neighbours which resulted in the acquisition of new ideas and transformation of old ideas. This was a typically syncretic process.

#### **4.6.1 Transformation in the Luo Concept of God: From *Jok* to *Nyasaye***

The Luo concept of God in the nineteenth century was a product of several centuries that involved the group's migration from the South Sudan through modern Uganda and into Western Kenya, and the interaction with the Bantu speakers who preceded them in their present areas of occupation. The Kenya Luo are linguistically, culturally and historically linked to other River-Lake Nilotes in Uganda and in South Sudan. These include the Dinka, the Nuer, the Shilluk, the Alur, the Lugbara, the Lango, the Acholi and the Padhola. All these groups have what Ogot has described as a "... Nilotic view of reality" (Ogot, 1972:122). They tend to perceive and to relate to the world around them in very much the same way. At the centre of this view is the concept of *Jok*. What *Jok* exactly is has remained a question of serious polemics even among Nilotic scholars themselves. Some have called it God or the Supreme Being. Foremost in advancing this view is Ogot. He states that *Jok* was "... the essence of every being, the force which makes everything what it is, and

God Himself, 'the Greatest *Juok*' is life force itself" (Ogot, quoted in p'Bitek, 1971:53). For Ogot *jok* or *juok* was the Supreme Being, the primordial and ultimate source of all being. In this Ogot was concurring with Thomas Scott who studied the Lango and the Acholi and concluded that *jok* was their Supreme Being who was regarded with reverence almost semitic in spirit (Ogot, 1962:111). Pushing this line of thought to its conclusion, therefore, Ogot argues that all the River-Lake Nilotes worshipped the Supreme Being associated with the concept of *jok* and also itself called *jok*. The Nuer called him Kuothi, the Shilluk called him *Juok*, the Dinka called him Nhialic, and the central Luo (the Acholi and the Lango and the Southern Luo (the Padhola the and Kenya Luo) called him *Jok*.

Other scholars dispute the view that *Jok* is the Supreme Being of the River-Lake Nilotes. It was rather "spiritual essence" possessed by anything that is sacred - an extraordinary phenomenon that filled men with awe (Whisson, 1964:4). For p'Bitek it was a generic term that needed to be qualified by proper names and so meant many things: chiefdom *jok*, soil, large snakes, spirits in a diviner, ancestral ghosts (P'Bitek, 1968:8). Hinga has argued that *jok* may be conceptualised as the Nilotic realm of the divine or spirit and the embodiment of this spiritual power (1990:270). This means *jok* is like neutral supernatural mystical power pervading the universe which can be manipulated for good or for evil. This may account for the exceedingly magical element in Luo religion.

What concerns us here is that the Luo first conceived of the divine in terms of the concept of *jok* which came to be altered in the process of their migration and settlement in Western Kenya. On the basis of this it is reasonable to gauge change from what was their main pre-occupation before and after making contact with other people. The Luo had apparently developed belief in a high God by the time they began entering Western Kenya at the start of the sixteenth century. He had guided them in their nomadic phase, hence was no longer called *jok*, but came to be called *Were Nyakalaga* (Ogot, 1967:112). This is a more pristine terminology in Luo reference to God, used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was also described as *Obongo Were* or *Obongo Nyakalaga*. *Nyakalaga* means "infinite one found everywhere" (Ngaho, 1999:O.I.) *Obongo* means "one without family relations" (*Ibid.*) *Were* means one who saves and delivers. It comes from the verb "*waro*" or "save" Hence *Obongo Were* was "one who saves" (Ochanda, 1999:O.I.).

The Luo entry into Western Kenya brought them into close interaction with the Bantu speakers, later the AbaAbaluyia, who influenced both their political economy and their perception of the divine. This was especially the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They changed gradually from pastoralism to cultivation and fishing, from nomadic lifestyle to sedentary life. They had come to an area where the agricultural economy depended on the rain from the sky. Their idea of God had to change. The Bantu speakers had

already acquired the sun-centred worship of the Supreme Being from the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik and used as one of his names *Liiva* or Sun. The Luo concept of were also confronted the Luo realities and had to adjust. To their divine nomenclature they added *Chieng'*, the sun, already associated with worship of the Supreme Being in the region. This is not in dispute, given the fact that of all the River-Lake Nilotes none except the Kenyan Luo had a history of associating deity with the sun. This was clearly a Western Kenyan acquisition.

The Luo veneration of the sun acquired features that had already taken root in the communities that preceded them in the area. The daily morning and evening family service at the homestead shrine involved spitting towards the luminary and invoking the words: "May it rise well for me" or "let it rise with good luck for me and my family" (Amolo, 1972:38). The same format of worship took place at sunset. With time they came to regard the sun as the "eye of God" or *Wang Chieng'*. Similarly, the moon, *dwe*, came to take on religious significance when praying for certain special wishes. It became fashionable to pray for a fiancée while facing the full moon.

By far the commonest name for deity at the close of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century had become *Nyasaye*. Indeed, *Nyasaye* would be adopted by the missionaries as the Luo equivalent of the Christian God. The term *Nyasaye* has a long and intricate history which characterises the

intense interaction between the Bantu Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo and the attendant exchange of cultural artefacts between them. Indeed, the question of who borrowed from who has remained a long-standing debate among scholars of religion in Western Kenya. Among the Luo, it became current after the Luo settlement in the region at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Some scholars have argued for a Bantu Abaluyia origin of the term, while others have argued for a Luo origin. While the Northern Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups – the Bukusu, the Tachoni, the Kabras, the Nyala, the Tsotso - use the term *Wele* for God, most of the central and southern Abaluyia use the term *Nyasaye*. These include the Nyore, the Logooli the Tiriki, the Idakho, the Isukha, the Kisa, the Marama and sometimes the Wanga. Father Stam, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, can be relied on to give a more concrete picture concerning the term just at the end of the nineteenth century. He wrote that it was difficult to get an agreement on the etymology of the term *Nyasaye* because the two groups - the Abaluyia and the Luo - were exceedingly similar in this. He wrote:

Though entirely different in origin and language, the religious beliefs of the two races (Nilotes and Bantu) are very similar, differing only in minor points of ritual. Both Nilotic and Bantu Kavirondo have a distinct idea of God, the Supreme Being. The first call him *Nyasaye* (from *sayo*, adore) and the latter *Nasaye* (from *kusaya*, to beseech). He is believed to be the creator or originator of all things (Quoted in Ogot, 1967:113).

This study takes the position that Stam's conclusion, being made when Western Kenya was virtually still untouched by Christianity, is most valid. The inability to trace the roots of the term in either the Bantu Abaluyia or the Nilotic Luo should be treated as an indicator of the thoroughly syncretised pre-Christian cosmology of the region. The positions taken by various scholars have not been successfully verified. Here we shall focus on the arguments given for and against possibility of a Luo origin of the term. In 1968 p'Bitek argued that both the terms *Were* and *Nyasaye* among the Luo were probably appropriated from the Southern Abaluyia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during intense interaction (p'Bitek, 1968:10). In his work, p'Bitek argued that as used by the Luo the term *Nyasaye* had a plural form, namely *nyiseche* and so bringing into question its use for the Supreme Being. Ogot's angry response was that p'Bitek made assertions without evidence in favour of the Abaluyia origin of the term. His own firm position was that *nyasaye* was a Luo coinage for the high God; that the Luo word for "... uterus is *Nyasaye*, plural *nyiseche*. But who can blame the Luo for connecting creation with the uterus and with God!" (Ogot, 1971).

Perhaps, more than any other historian, Ogot has done a lot of research on religion in Western Kenya and in Uganda. He was the inspiration of some of us to hazard into the treacherous terrain of religious historiography. However his exegesis on the particular issue of tracing the origins of the concept of the

high God in the region leaves one with some uneasiness of possible ethnic bias. His treatment of the two appellations for God - *Were* and *Nyasaye* and the Nilotic concept of *jok*, bring out this rather clearly. We shall here confine ourselves to the term *Nyasaye*. In his work of 1967 Ogot argues that the Luo God simply transformed from *Jok* to *Were Nyakalaga*, God of the nation on the move (migration). Then, because of the frequency of prayers, "*Were Nyakalaga* (Omnipresent) was now called *Nyasaye* - Supreme Being who was constantly and regularly adored or beseeched" (1967:114). Yet he does not indicate anything that suggests that suddenly the Luo needed to pray much more than they had before, now that they had settled in Western Kenya.

In the effort to justify the Luo origin of *Nyasaye*, Ogot attempts to draw parallels between the history of the Luo migration from the Sudan and that of the Israelite exodus from Egypt through the Sinai desert to Canaan. He rightly states that the influence of a people's manner of migration and settlement is telling on their religion. He observes:

Tahweh was not the ancestral god of Israel but was the god of the Kenites who dwelt at Mount Sinai. But although Israel had no national claims on him, the Israelites believed that he had taken pity upon their suffering in Egypt and in the wilderness, delivered them from bondage, and finally brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey (*Ibid*:114). (The text bears Tahweh instead of Yahweh).

Ogot fails to push this analogy to its logical conclusion. He describes a typically historical encounter of religions in the history of the Israelites. But he "refuses" to acknowledge the influence on the Luo of their interactions with other communities in the region. He depicts the Luo as having the preserve of genius, contributing to others but desiring nothing from them in turn. This is in line with Ogot's tendency to divide cultures in high and low. He summarised the Luo encounter with other communities in Western Kenya in these terms:

We can nevertheless infer that the pre-Luo inhabitants of the region did not possess higher cultures, for physical influence apart, they did not seem to have influenced the Luo culturally. In fact in most cases, they have adopted the Luo culture and language (Ogot, 1967b:142).

It was most likely in partial response to this kind of assertion by Ogot and Were on cultural interaction in Western Kenya that Ochieng' strongly warned that such divisions of cultures by intellectuals is essentially based on nothing but pre-judgment (Ochieng' 1976:45). It was against this background that Ogot reacted rather strongly to Aidan Southall's suggestion that the Luo appropriated the name *Nyasaye* for God from the Bantu Abaluyia is to be understood.

Southall had simply argued that the facility with which "... the Luo incorporate linguistic borrowing even in the case of fundamental concepts

(*Nyasaye*-God, Wasigu-enemies) is in marked contrast to the persistence with which they have retained the other elements of their culture and imposed it on the non-Luo groups assimilated to them" (Quoted in Ogot, 67:113). But Southall had evidence and was not being dogmatic. For instance, Ogot asserts firmly that *jok* was the Supreme Being among the River-Lake Nilotes. Yet such a central concept simply got edited out of the Southern Luo lexicon for God. Ogot himself simply states that for the Padhola and Kenya Luo, the name "*Jok*" to mean 'God' has to a large extent been superseded by '*Were*' and '*Nyasaye*' respectively (Ogot, 1975:124). Ogot's evidence for the Luo origin of *Nyasaye* is not airtight. He argues that all Kenya Luo use the word *Nyasaye* while only the Central-southern Abaluyia use it because of their "... prolonged contact with the Luo during pre-colonial days" (Ogot, 1967:11). The fact of the contact and interaction is obvious, but it does not necessarily indicate the direction of the flow of influence. The fact that only the Southern Abaluyia use the word does not mean that they could not have coined it. In fact, the high level of hybridity of the southern Abaluyia could point to its origin among them from earlier stocks.

Ogot then argues that *Nyasaye* is also the term for the uterus, which they regard as the source of life, while the Abaluyia do not call the uterus so. Our response to this is that the term is not unique to the Luo, because the Bukusu sub-ethnic group of the Abaluyia also call the uterus *Nasaiye* (Wagner, 1970:296). But more importantly, it does not feature among any of the

cousins of the Luo in Uganda and the Sudan! One is left to wonder how the Luo came to discover this only in Western Kenya? Why couldn't their closest cousins, the Padhola, have the slightest idea about this? Ogot goes on to state that the Luo use the term *Nyasaye* for luck - good or bad - in line with the Nilotic concept of *Jok*. This really proves nothing. Finally, Ogot posits that the Abaluyia term *kusaya*, meaning "beseech" from which the name *Nyasaye* is supposed to be derived, is itself a Luo verb "*sayo*", which means 'beseech' or 'implore'. This argument is, however, double talk. The Abaluyia can also argue that the Luo verb is Abaluyia-derived. It proves nothing. After all, the fact that the central Luo cousins of the Kenya Luo do not have letter "s" in their alphabet could be treated as a strong indication of the latter's later acquisition of the verb. Indeed, the actual Luo verb for prayer is *lamo*.

Ogotu, like Stam, hesitates to make any categorical conclusion on the origin of the term *Nyasaye*. He posits that before the colonial period the Luo and their Abaluyia neighbours had interacted so much that it became difficult to treat them separately, "at least as far as their idea of God is concerned" (1975:49). He does not agree with Ogot's finality on the Luo origins of the word, while he does not credit the Abaluyia with it either. Be it as it may, this study has attempted to demonstrate why the term should possibly be attributed to the Bantu as the first users.

#### **4.6.2 The Development of Ancestor Veneration Among the Luo**

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Luo of Western Kenya were great adepts at ancestral veneration. This continued deep into the era of Christianity in Western Kenya in the first half of the twentieth century. The development of the ancestral cult could be described as a function of changed physical and social environment and the Luo response to these conditions. It is apparent that during their migration from South Sudan, the lifestyle of the Luo people had not favoured the development of ancestral veneration to any detailed level. A people on the move have little attachment to the dead. It is only in sedentary circumstances that the grave of an ancestor assumes religious significance. For the Luo, this took place as they entered, interacted with the Bantu and settled in Western Kenya.

The initial level of interaction in the fifteenth and sixteenth century may have been low-keyed. Beginning in the seventeenth century the interaction gradually intensified, so that it can be submitted that eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries were the prime period of interaction between the Luo and the Bantu populations. The Bantu-speaking populations in the low lying plains of the Lake Nyanza were over the centuries gradually displaced by the Luo. This did not mean large scale massive evacuation of whole populations. If anything, it was a slow, gradual process of the Luo spreading into what were formerly Bantu territories like Uyoma, Asembo, Seme, Sakwa, Yimbo, Alego, Gem, Ugenya and Kisumu. This took place over centuries. In fact, the element

of assimilation of these Bantu population into the Luo culture was as high as its displacement. It was this slow process that witnessed the transformation of the Luo into sedentary populations that developed a "... deeper emotional and ideological attachment to their land" (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:7). A prominent element in this transition was the appropriation and perfection of the ancestral cult from the Bantu populations. Elsewhere in this work it has been demonstrated that the pristine religion of the Bantu Abaluyia had been ancestor-worship to which they added the worship of the Supreme Being much later. For the Luo, their concept of God was refined in Western Kenya (Ogot, 1967:114) while at the same time they fused onto this the practice of venerating ancestors. Before arrival in Western Kenya and confrontation with Bantu-speakers, the Luo attitude towards land had been utilitarian and "... lacking mysticism of earth divinities" (Ogot, 1967b:9). The attitude dramatically changed with each family coming to be "... closely tied religiously and spiritually to the land of the ancestors (*Ibid.*). What Ogot means here is that in place of earth divinities witnessed elsewhere in human societies, the Luo came to treat their ancestors as the agents through which they would meaningfully relate to the land. They entered into "... everlasting bonds with the ancestors who conquered the land for the living generations" (Ogot, 1975:40). From this it can rightly be concluded that the day-to-day existential needs of the Luo in Western Kenya made them to appropriate from preceding populations the veneration of ancestral spirits in order to address

problems, such as famine, barrenness, disease and others (Odhiambo, 1975:121). They refined the cult by their own genius in order to fit it in an ontological order that recognised *Nyasaye* as the overall. It is to this relation that we turn.

Over the centuries the spirits of the ancestors, *kwere* came to play a central role in Luo religion. By the close of the nineteenth century they had become the most important agency of the supernatural in daily life (Whisson, 196:6). On the whole the spirits were perceived to be inclined to benefiting the members of the society. They were part of society and were expected to do good for the living (Omwadho, 1999:O.I.). They were invoked for help while gifts and sacrifices were offered to them. Libations of beer or *kongo* ' would be first poured into the ground for the *kwere* before the rest would partake. Gradually the Luo developed most ideas about ancestral spirits to even more complex levels. Whereas the Bantu AbaAbaluyia and the Nandi-Terik believed that ancestors would take the form of snakes or pythons and visit the living, the Luo expanded the range of these ancestral vehicles to include water snakes, old leopards and boats or canoes (Odhiambo, 1975:121).

Ancestors would be invoked to help, but they could also become a source of trouble for the family. They could invade the living and cause suffering if they were neglected. Such negligence involved a person dying and the clan not performing the appropriate mortuary rituals in full. The body of a Luo who

dies far away from Luoland must be transported back home for burial on the ancestral land, preferably beside preceding family ancestors. Such is the bond with the ancestors that the Luo, until the close of the twentieth century, considered it poor investment sense to buy land outside Western Kenya and specifically Luo Nyanza. It became a strong belief that failure to observe such requirements offended spirits of the ancestors who become haunting entities called *jochiende*. Other ancestral spirits would become *jochiende* if, for instance, the owners met their death by murder or some malicious machinations of the enemy. They would come to take vengeance on the perpetrators of the crime.

Ancestors came to be perceived as the embodiment of the "... best values held dear by the community" (Hinga, 1990:120). They came to contribute a new entity in Luo cosmology, a powerful communion of saints who were "... close enough to God to make useful intermediaries when the living petition the dead" (Onyango-Ogututu and Roscoe, 1974:12). On the whole, the *kwere* were perceived to relate with the community at certain levels, from the family to the clan. As was in the case of the Bantu Abaluyia, veneration of the ancestors quickly become also part of the worship of the Supreme Being. Ancestors played the role attributed to saints or spiritual intermediaries in other religions. It became a double-level of worship, addressing agents that they were more closely familiar with because they were part of the 'ethnic' or family though residing in the spiritual realm. The Luo ontological structure was such that the

'living-dead' or *kwere* occupied the immediate position between men, the spirits and God in an ascending order. They were spoken to in human language and were believed to intervene in human life or to act as intermediaries between human beings and God. This study does not subscribe to the view that ancestors were not worshipped. They were worshipped along with God.

At family level the *kwere* related with the living because they were known to the family, especially the elderly. They were called upon to intervene in matters affecting the family - disease, ill-fortune and other circumstances of misfortune. The eldest male in the family presided over the invoking of the divine, function, or alternatively called a known ritual specialist to assist if the problem was severe. Thus at family level the *kwere* were addressed as "grandfather". A typical prayer went:

*Jojuok* (Nyasaye), the mysterious one who streams among us, may your help reach all the horns of the world; calm the violent *Jochiende* who roam around us. May our prayers reach you and your companions; may you bless our homesteads; *Juok* of our ancestors, descend for us; save us from the forces of the nether people; paralyse all magic and foes, that our seed might multiply like sand. Take this gift, grandfather, and eat, with your friends (Quoted in Onyango-Ogutu and Roscoe, 1974:12).

This prayer brings out the personal element of invoking a specific family ancestor while at the same time conjoining the Supreme Being, Nyasaye, in

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the plea. At a wider territorial level, the Luo developed the veneration of clan-heroes who had played leading roles in the affairs of the clan. Folk-heroes were canonised into prominent ancestors and became the rallying point of whole clans, especially during crises like war or disasters like rinderpest and famine. It was believed that worshipping such *kwere* would result in positive intervention following the positive attributions or virtues of such ancestors, for instance courage, benevolence, prosperity among others. At certain times clans were forced to call upon known great ancestors who may not necessarily have belonged to their specific clan, but whose valorous life invoked reverence in them. These included Ramogi the great ancestor of all the Kenya Luo who first led them into the region, Gor Mahia and Luanda Magere the mythical Luo warriors and magicians.

#### **4.6.3 The Idiom of Spirit Possession in Luo Cosmology**

Of the three ethnic groups studied in this chapter, the group eliciting least conceptualisation of reality in increasingly spiritual terms was the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik. The pristine Bantu-speakers on the lake-shores of Western Kenya were early adepts in identifying a world of spirits and relating to these as religious phenomena. Apart from their preoccupation with the spirits of the ancestors, they were adepts at identifying and interpreting free or nature spirits associated with the lake. It was to this spiritual world that the in-coming Luo became heirs after 1500 A.D. The latter did not just inherit but actually

synthesised the spirits and spirit-possession phenomena to a most complex level by the end of the nineteenth century. The lasting contribution of the Luo is to be found in this genius of religious engineering in transforming what they received.

These free or nature spirits, as contrasted with the ancestral spirits, which the Luo first inherited from the Bantu speaking fishermen and cultivators in the lake-region came to be known in Dholuo as *juogi*. They included Mumbo, Sumba, Sepe, Wagande, Wang-*cheng*, the *yie* or canoe spirits among others (Odhiambo, 1975:119-122). Most of these were associated with the lake and fishing, and so came to be collectively known as *juok nam* or lake divinities. One example of this pneumatic engineering by the Luo was the fusion of the ideas about ancestor worship, dreams and family participation in the launching of the canoe. This was a deliberately syncretic process that combined the ancestral spirit and the spirits of the lake. Both spirits then entered or possessed a human being who then spoke as the mouthpiece of the boat (*Ibid*:122). A common but erroneous view of the *juogi* is that they were solely malevolent problem-causing spirits. The fact is that *juogi* were both good media and bad ones. This was well put by Ocholla-Ayayo.

A person may be possessed by *juok* in two ways: the one possessed by bad *juok* directors him to evil deeds; this category is what the Luo call *jajuok* or *jasihoho*. And the other possessed by good *juok* are diviners, prophets and priests... they are wise in helpful magic... They

can foresee the future... the *ajuoga* and the *jajuok* are completely different people practising different functions (1976:160).

It is along this broad division that the history of spirit possession in pre-Christian days among the Luo has to be understood. The Luo came to develop a strong belief that the root-cause of disease - both bodily disorder and mental illness - was caused by the supernatural and specifically the *juogi*. Those who were possessed by such spirits or who had knowledge of manipulating them to cause harm or disease to other people were variously called *jajuok*, *janawi* and *jandagla*. These were the sorcerers and witches who were essentially anti-social agents of the evil spiritual forces (*Ibid*:162).

There was an array of specialists who formed the counterpoise to this malicious category. They provided the spiritual answer to the problems encountered in daily life and which were perceived to be spiritual in origin. Some had the wisdom and knowledge of manipulating magic for the good of society. They were called *jobilo*. But there were those who were possessed by specific spirits in whose name they spoke to solve problems of society. They were called *jajuogi* (diviners) or *jadil* (exorcists). The experience of empowerment or possession of such an individual by the patron spirit was painful, but was a prerequisite for such traditional healers. The experience was a sign of divine call to be a prophet-healer (Onyango-Ogutu and Roscoe, 1974:14). Spirit possession was accompanied by exteriorised psychosomatic

phenomena, such as uncontrollable shaking, falling into trances and speaking in unintelligible tongues (Welbourn and Ogot, 1966:13). In many cases possession took the form of *donjo*, making the possession candidate to go wild (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:112). In short, possession was not necessarily perceived to be bad because it was a source of gifts of prophecy and tongues and power of controlling the spirits of nature (Opwapo, 1981:161). When they were not controllable, however, the spirits became dangerous, acting with violence and incoherence in the bodies of their hosts, doing harm to them and those around them. The *jajuogi* became an important expert in Luo society. He was virtually the last resort. He or she was consulted when disease-causing *juogi* struck someone in society. He or she would discern the kind of *juogi*. He or she was the expert capable of disciplining possession spirits by offering a long and sometimes-costly treatment till patients gained control of themselves.

The most pre-Christian syncretic feature in the history of the Luo spirit-possession began at the end of the eighteenth century, picked pace in the nineteenth century, and continued well into the twentieth century. This was the *Lango* spirit-possession phenomenon. It owed its origins to the battle experiences between the borderzone Luo and Kalenjin as populations increased and pressure on territorial space brought the two communities into increasing interaction (*Ibid*:40). This inter-ethnic contact and strife led to a series of bloody battles between the Luo and the *Lango* - Luo term for Kalenjin and Maasai. It was in one such battles at the end of the nineteenth

century that the Nandi were heavily defeated by the Luo, which in turn led to one of the reasons the former killed their great mantis, Orkoiyot Kimnyolei for failing to give them proper guidance and ritual protection. Following the deaths in these clashes there was an increase of natural disasters such as drought, pestilence and disease (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:72). These were attributed to the spirits of the slain Kalenjin warriors. These warriors were known for their wildness and violence. It was consequently believed that their spirits possessed the local Luo who elicited similar signs. The spirits were wild, making the possessed persons to behave like the Kalenjin warriors in a battle frenzy.

The result was the emergence of the Lango cult while the possessed individuals were also called the *jalango* (Ongoro, 1997: O.I.). The initiation into the cult and the appeasement ceremonies of the possessed involved the use of battle regalia of the Nandi - a double-spear (*hong mbidho*), a small shield (*okumba*), a battle stick (*ruga*), a sword (*ligangla*), and a large bell called *ombono* (Odhiambo, 1975:119). What is further significant for the purposes of this study is that the phenomenon and characteristics of spirit possession became such an ingrained part of the Luo cosmology that when pneumatic theology was first propounded in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not altogether new. It was received within this indigenous framework of spirit possession.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5.0 PATTERNS IN THE SYNCRETISATION OF MISSION CHRISTIANITY IN WESTERN KENYA, 1900 – 1930**

This chapter focuses on the overall civilising mission of the Western world leading to colonisation of the rest of the world and the unique role of the missionaries in this enterprise. It highlights the convergence of a multiplicity of missionary societies' in the race of missionising Western Kenya particularly among Abaluyia and the Luo. It looks at the typically syncretising responses of the Africans to mission Christianity in the first half of the twentieth century and the contrasting unique pattern of the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik experience of Christianity.

#### **5.1 The Western European Colonising Mission in Africa and the Role of the Missionaries**

The Western missionary activity in Western Kenya at the turn of the twentieth century, as in other parts of the world, has to be investigated against the background of the European civilising mission of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The "mission" was essentially a cultural and economic project, seeking to achieve hegemonic domination and control of non-European societies (Aseka, 2002:29). This mission was the "central impulse" of the

European expansion, including in its train merchants, administrators, missionaries and anthropologists (Fernandez, 1978:96).

The mission was also perceived as part of the Western Christian religion which, it was assumed, had universal efficacy. The assumption was that what was good for a white-man was certainly good for anybody else. It was in fact the element of Christianity, conceived in Western terms, which was seen as the essential agency for the civilisation of the non-European world. Christianity was the mighty lever, and true civilisation and Christianity were inseparable (Bediako, 1992:228). Consequently, Western civilisation was epitomized by Christianity and its practitioners. The Christian religion, the school, technical and industrial training, agricultural skills and commercial enterprises were all part of the package that was expected to turn around the "Dark Continent" into a place of wealth, culture and enlightenment.

This was perhaps best put by David Livingstone, the much-vaunted missionary-explorer of East-Central Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century. He advocated African conquest and conversion of its people to Christianity as part of the divine mandate. For Livingstone, Christianity and commerce went hand-in-glove. He desperately recommended the introduction of white settlers into Africa to tap the mineral and agricultural potential (Ochieng', 1974). In this way the Livingstonian trio of Christianity, commerce and civilisation were *sin qua non* for the development and civilisation of the

African (Spear, 1999:4). Civilising involved the total destruction of African culture and religion, and in this enterprise the missionaries played a specially prominent role. They surpassed all the other agents of Westernisation in the attempted execution of the programme of *ethnocide* and *religiocide* in Africa. In retrospect their activities may be described as the missionary misdemeanor or misadventure in Africa. Their writings provide a perfect mirror of their attitude and activities. It was they who wrote the first documents on African culture and religion to be read in the West, the same culture they sought to exterminate and replace. Bediako rightly observes that European ethnocentrism has been a significant factor in the story of Christianity (1992:235). Probably the harshest, yet reasonably accurate, description of the missionary activities on the continent is that by Beidelman who states:

Christian missions represent the most naïve and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thoroughgoing facet of colonial life. Administrators and planters aimed at limited ends such as order, taxation, cheap labor, and advantages against competing Europeans; and in that quest sometimes attempted psychic domination as well. Missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native people, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body (Beidelman, 1982: 5-6).

While the administrators sought to build on the tribal foundation, missionaries more frequently saw tribal conservatism and prejudices as obstacles to evangelisation (Lonsdale, 1964, 144). It became, therefore, the missionary goal to distort the African consciousness, believing that it was necessary to

destroy the African self-image, the African *persona* as a precondition for reinventing his psyche after the Western pattern. They sought to undermine the African value systems in order to replace it with the "Christian value system" consisting specifically of Western European cultural norms of religious, social, cultural and economic behaviour to which African societies and individuals needed to be molded (Spear, 1999:3). As a result of their preconceived perception of Africa, the missionaries tended to view:

... everything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best valueless; and to consider the African, once converted from paganism as a sort of *tabula rasa* on which a wholly new religious philosophy was somehow to be imprinted (Hastings, 1967:100).

Explorers, anthropologists and especially missionaries assigned simplistic, misleading and distorting rubrics to the African categories by specifically targeting and emphasising the bizarre aspects of African culture (Hansen, 1995:145). But in their overzealous descriptions they ended up in many respects adopting an attitude at variance with the Bible itself in which the apostolic approach to proselytisation had been to reach out and to win for Christ people in their own cultural milieu. They launched a frontal attack on African indigenous beliefs and practices which they variously described under such rubrics as fetishism, animism, witchcraft, magic and others, with the express objective of "emancipating" the African from his indigenous outlook (Adom-Oware, 1992:174). The entire social organisation, along with indigenous beliefs and rites, was denigrated in these writings. It would not be

farfetched to describe these missionaries as "latter-day judaizers" who wanted their culture accepted by all means possible as an essential part of Christianity, least conscious of the different cultural histories of people. They sought to impose Western moral codes on the prospective converts, knowing well that this had no basis in Scripture. Perhaps what was directly lacking in this scenario was a St. Paul to confront them and put the introduction of Christianity in Africa in proper perspective. For them, to accept Christianity was to accept to "... participate in a Western interpretation of reality."(Williamson, 1965:168.

The missionary attitude towards African religions was one of confrontation and condemnation, and certainly not of dialogue with the indigenous people (Ukpong, 1992:42). Their racial prejudice would not allow them to be objective in describing African religious categories. Livingstone condescendingly described Africans as "... merely grown up children, a race that will only attain the maturity of other men after they have been persuaded to stop worship of hills, wood, rivers and malignant spirits of their own dead" (Ochieng; 1904).

In this scathing attack on African spirituality, explorers and anthropologists were not left behind. In 1867 Samuel Baker, a British explorer, wrote of the Africans in these terms: "Without exception, they are without a belief in the Supreme Being, neither have they any form of worship or idols; nor is the

darkness of their minds enlightened even by a ray of superstition" (Quoted in Ray, 1976:43). This was either a misunderstanding of African cosmology or gross mischief at the expense of a whole race of people. It was the same mischief which drove his compatriot, Richard Burton, to reduce the African religiosity to this ridiculously expressed description:

The Negro is still at the dawn of faith -fetishism and has barely advanced to idolatry... He has never grasped the ideas of a personal deity, a duty in life, a moral code, or a shame of lying. He rarely believes in a future state of rewards and punishment, which, whether true or not, are infallible indices of human progress (Quoted in Ray, 1976:43:44).

Yet, perhaps the most extreme accounts on African religion were those by some missionaries which depicted African religion not just as a bizarre phenomenon, but actually dedicated to the worship of the Devil and his horde of demons. They impressed these upon the Africans, seeking to convince them that Africa was the background of the Devil and African customs were satanic, in need of being overthrown at all cost in preference for European ones (Spear, 1999:10). It was from such a cultural background, thoroughly coloured in racial and cultural prejudice, that white missionaries who arrived in Western Kenya at the turn of the twentieth century came. What they had read of Africa before, they seemed to confirm.

Of the three pioneering Quaker missionaries to the Southwestern Bantu Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups, two spoke extremely negatively of what they thought of the African. Willis Hotchkiss had first travelled in the company of the first Africa Inland Mission group of seven missionaries in 1895 under Peter Cameron Scott. He had gone back in 1899 and written *Sketches from the Dark Continent*, which he used to solicit for funds and to ignite missionary interest in Kenya (Fish and Fish, 1989:13). In this, among other views, he provides his view of the African condition in relation to Christianity. For him there was a:

.... Divine potency in the Gospel of Christ to reach down the lowest depths of African heatherism, and transform it, creating those lower ones a new in the image of God ... the awfully degraded African ought to hear the message of God's love (quoted in Kasiera, 1981:99).

Hotchkiss's attitude towards the Africans who he hoped to convert to Christianity was thus extremely condescending. For him Africans were lawless, barbaric and unstable. The only hope lay in 'civilising' the African, implanting in him a belief in Christian attitudes and fortifying his vacillating character by training him in habits of industry (Kay, 1973:63). What was needed for the African, was the Protestant ethic of clean living and hard work in order to develop in him "... the moral fibre he needs to escape his world of sin and degradation" (*Ibid*).

Hotchkiss's first prescription, therefore, was *ethnocide* - a complete extermination of what had constituted the Bantu Abaluyia social-cultural edifice. For him, "... there can never be a real change of heart that is not followed by a radical cleansing of the social conditions..." (Fish and Fish, 1989:25). Of course Hotchkiss came back to Kenya together with Edger Hole and Arthur B. Chilson, to begin Friends Africa Mission (FAM) in south-Western BuAbaluyia. Chilson was soon to be quoted in a paper in America stating: "Every thought of the African's heart is evil. There is usually the most degrading and filthy talk among most men and women. They wear nothing" (Edna Chilson, quoted in Kasiera, 1981:195). It is not surprising that in one of the reports he filed back home, Chilson described their arrival at Kaimosi, which became their headquarters in Western Kenya, as having arrived in the kingdom of Satan among the Tiriki!

Writing about Quaker history in Western Kenya much later on, Levinus Painter would still talk about indigenous Abaluyia religion in such pejorative terms as the pioneering missionaries had used. He summarized the religion as "African animism undergirded with a depressing fatalism." For him the African *mantis* were witchdoctors who "...profited at the expense of human suffering and misfortune" (Painter, 1966:16). Such, then, is a representative sample of common attitudes of the missionaries who arrived in Western Kenya, armed to combat, destroy and replace indigenous cosmology with Western culture and religion. A summary of the background of these

missionaries is in order before surveying the strategies they employed in their fight against African worldview.

## **5.2 The Influx of Missions into Western Kenya 1900 – 1910**

Christianity has been in Africa since its origins as a formal religion. However, the forms found in Eastern Africa grew out of the "... mission enterprises that originated in Europe in the nineteenth century" (Maddox, 1999:25) Protestant missionaries were fuelled by the nineteenth century "... evangelical fervour and pietistic Christ-centred concerns," (Spear, 1999:4). These centred on gathering small flocks into Christian villages and preaching individual salvation, confession of sin, the constant struggle between God's word and Satan, and the eminent end of the world (*Ibid.*). In most cases they were puritanist, narrow-minded and lacking in theological training (Odhiambo, 1973:3). Their motive power was propagation and universalisation of evangelical values. In this way they understood their mission as turning the African world upside down by transforming them into practitioners of Western culture and Christianity. It is not far-fetched to say that with their arrival the stage was set for a bruising battle of antagonistic cultures.

The first Protestant missionary society in Kenya in modern times was the Church Missionary Society (CMS), founded in England in 1799 to concretise

the ideas of the Evangelical Movement as expressed in the Church of England (Odhiambo, 1973:1). It was to become the largest missionary body in Kenya and Uganda. The first CMS missionaries were Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebmann, who came to Mombasa in 1844 and 1846 respectively. Not much came of their enterprise until 1877 when CMS sent missionaries to Buganda. Here the impact was strongly felt though at the cost of the life of Bishop Hannington and the martyrdom of the first converts in 1886 at the orders of *Kabaka* or King Mwanga of Buganda. By the close of the nineteenth century the Church in Buganda was strong enough to send Baganda converts as evangelists in the lake region of East Africa.

Similarly, Roman Catholic Mission work in the interior of East Africa began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It began by the White Fathers who came to Buganda in the late 1870s and who in turn invited the Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM) to come to the area in 1895 (Lohrentz, 1977:149). It was this latter who carried out the responsibility of spreading the Roman Catholic faith in what is today Uganda and Western Kenya. In a nutshell, Western Kenya was to become a unique mission- field, attracting both Protestant and Catholic missionaries. Within the first decade of the twentieth century there was already an influx of missions in the region. They came from two directions - the Anglican CMS and the Catholic MHM came from Uganda to the west where they had already become established; while the, Protestants came to the region via Mombasa, courtesy of the newly completed Uganda

Railway which had reached the L. Victoria port-town of Port Florence or Kisumu in 1901. At the time Western Kenya was part of the Eastern Province of Uganda.

Perhaps a little more needs to be said about the characteristics of the missionary societies that converged on Western Kenya. The missionary movement was made up of a "... bewildering array of different denominations, sects and orders", each in its denominational garb, its own theology, ritual practices and strategy of conversion and came from different nationalities and ethnicities (Spear, 1999:5). But they were in agreement on one thing, that African culture and religion must be destroyed and replaced with Western culture and Christianity. They also had a vision, at least in theory of searching up a "...self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending" indigenous church (Willis, quoted in Lonsdale, 1964:172). One school of thought among the evangelicals, and especially as associated with the CMS in England, however, had a different idea of how to approach the mission field. This was a liberal wing which argued that Christianity "... should be adapted to non-Christian traditions" (Odhiambo, 1973:5). It espoused a mission approach that was accommodating of the culture and thought patterns of the mission-field societies - an approach that we may in retrospect, call in this work the 'syncretising dynamic' in encounter of religions. One of its leading authorities was H.D. Hooper who admonished that missionaries should "... not seek to create isolated Europeanised

Christian aliens among their own people, but to raise a community which will grow and develop on its own lines at once Christian and African” (Quoted in Odhiambo, 1973:5). These views were endorsed by the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, which can be seen as a more or less twentieth century rendition of the Jerusalem Council during the Apostolic era when St Paul stood firm against the “Judaizers” imposing Jewish culture on Hellenic converts.

In my view, this liberal wing of missionary thought at the start of the missionary enterprise in Africa was the best opportunity for laying a properly structural foundation of the encounter between African cosmologies and Western culture. Unfortunately, what Hooper had feared unfolded for the whole of the first half of the twentieth century in the case of Western Kenya. In the ensuing battle of cosmogonies, however, there was no winner, but rather a spiritual negotiation by the Africans for a Christianity that would make sense to them in their own culture.

Compared to modern Uganda, Christianity in Nyanza, present Western Kenya, made a late arrival by quarter of a century. Yet when it came it was through a multiplicity of missionary societies, mainly Protestant, who employed a rather excessive zeal in missionising the Western Kenyan populations, especially among the Abaluyia and the Luo. Within a decade of the completion of the railway, over half a dozen missionary societies were in the region, specifically in the border zone area of the Central and Southern Abaluyia, and among their

neighbouring Luo clans in Siaya and Kisumu districts. It is because of this common terrain traversed by a myriad of missionary societies that the history of Christianity in Western Kenya should not be approached on the basis of single group, or even more on that of a single missionary society. The patterns in missionisation among the Abaluyia and the Luo seem to have had a lot in common. The responses of the indigenes had even more in common. Of the three ethnic communities under study, the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik had a contrasting experience of mission Christianity. This is investigated only to show the other side of the coin in the responses of Africans to Christianity.

A brief profile of the different missions in the region, however, is necessary for understanding of the nature of the encounter between African cosmologies and Christianity. The first mission in southern Abaluyia was the Friends African Mission (FAM) sponsored by the Friends Society of America, better known as the Quakers. Hotchkiss, Hole and Chilson arrived in Kisumu in July in 1902 by way of the newly completed railway. Willis had initially come to Kenya with the AIM mission of 1895 led by Peter Cameron Scott before going back to America in 1899. On August 2, 1902, they settled on the timber belt that served as a natural border between the Bantu Abaluyia and the Kalenjin Nandi and Terik but more on the Abaluyia side among the Tiriki sub ethnic group. The Tiriki welcomed them but for purely strategic reasons. They needed them as a buffer between them and the fierce war-like and cattle-raiding Kalenjin Nandi-Terik. Otherwise they had no predisposition towards

Christianity. The two established their headquarters at Kaimosi in Tiriki. These Quaker ambassadors had come from rural America to work among the rural folk of Western Kenya, with little understanding of the "... culture and traditions of the people they were expected to serve" (Painter, 1966:18). They represented a fundamentalist Christian sect which had recently undergone radical transformation, emerging with a deep concern for mission work (Kay, 1973:15). The Quaker missionaries were to be most active among the Southwestern Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups, namely the Logooli, the Tiriki, the Idakho, the Isukha. In the late 1910s and in the 1920s they moved to open stations among the Northern Abaluyia groups like the Kabras at Malava and the Bukusu at Lugulu.

The AIM first came to Kenya in 1895 but reached only Ukambani area where their leader, Peter Scott died in 1896. Subsequently the group dispersed, to come back in the early twentieth century. They came from rural USA, Great Britain and other areas like Australia, but were heavily conservative (Odhiambo, 1973:5). In the wider Kenyan context they treated other Protestant groups with suspicion. In Western Kenya they worked among the Luo of Kisumu District and among the Kalenjin. Among the latter they had little success until after three decades due to the extreme conservativeness of their culture. Among the Luo the first missionaries were Mr. And Mrs. Ernes who settled at Ogada in Nyahera, some ten kilometers Northeast and Kisumu town near the border between the Luo, Abaluyia and Kalenjin. They worked

among the Karateng, Kapuonja, Korando, Kogony and Kajulu Luo clans (Ujwala, 2000: 0.1). It was from Ogada that the AIM mission expanded to the Kano plains and to Nyakach, where station was set on the cooler Nyabondo Plateau (Obiayo, 1999:0.1). The Jokano welcomed the AIM missionaries in the hope that their message would touch their marauding Kalenjin neighbours who raided them from the Nyando Escapement.

The South African Compounds and Interim Mission (SACIM), later known as Church of God (COG) was started among the southern Abaluyia sub-group of Bunyore at Kima in 1905. It was a project of SACIM in Johannesburg which had been started in 1883 by A. W. Barker (Lorentz 1977:158). From Bunyore they later moved to work among the Kisa and Marama. Ingotse mission was started among the Batsotso and at Bushiangala among the Idakho in Central Buluya. Like the other protestant missions the philosophy of SACIM was narrow and fundamentalist, perceiving their task as being solely to bring a new moral order to the converts, and to preach sanctification by the Spirit (*Ibid:157*).

In 1909 Clyde Toliver Miller of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Iowa, USA, started the Pentecostal Mission at Nyang'ori, among the Kalenjin Terik. He belonged to the "Jesus Only Movement", but left in 1922. The mission was later taken over by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada in 1924-25. PAOC commissioned Mr. And Mrs. Otto Keller to take charge of the only

Pentecostal mission in Western Kenya, a responsibility which they carried out till 1942 when Keller died. The Nyang'ori mission became unique with time because of two developments - firstly, most of the members came from among the Abaluyia Maragoli and the Tiriki sub-ethnic groups and not from among the Kalenjin Terik. Secondly, when the Holy spirit movement broke out in the later nineteen -twenties in Western Kenya, the only mission that would seem to understand them was the Nyang'ori mission. It would absorb some of the defectors from mission churches who wanted to experience *glossolalia*, while the majority of the defectors would go on to form indigenous independent missions and congregations.

The Salvation Army was a late-comer in the Western Kenya mission field, arriving in 1921 and picking pace in the 1930s. It tried to find a foothold in areas already dominated by the others, especially in the FAM strongholds, where it capitalized on the differences that had emerged between the Africans and the missionaries in Tiriki, Maragoli, Nyang'ori and Bunyore areas (Sangree, 1966: 134).

The biggest Protestant mission to work in Western Kenya however, was the CMS whose operations were among both the Luo and the Central Abaluyia groups. The CMS found its way into the region from Uganda, so that until 1921 it operated in Western Kenya under the auspices of the Uganda Diocese and not the Mombasa Diocese. Two related factors seem to have provoked

CMS activities in Western Kenya, namely Islam and the completion of the Uganda Railway. With the railway there was a sudden influx of new people into Western Kenya who were Muslims. These were traders, interpreters, clerks for the new administration, office boys and tailors. It was this fact of the rapid advance of Islam "... that first wakened the Christian Church to its responsibilities" (Richards, 1956:9). At the same time the railway was like a double-edged sword in the origins of missionisation in the region. It was the railway which enabled most of the first missionaries to come into the region.

Lohrentz argues rather convincingly to the effect that Western Kenya became a mission field by default, at least for the CMS. The interest that pioneer missionary Willis expressed was cast in rather negative terms: namely that the Uganda Railway was a "bad omen" because it would bring Africans into contact with the "... secular aspects of European culture before they had a chance to be Christianized" (Lohrentz, 1977:15). For Willis this would render "conversion of such unfortunate souls" even more difficult. Consequently missionization had to commence immediately "before the similar European influence became strong" (ibid). In July 1904, Bishop Tucker of Uganda and Willis visited Kavirondo the common name for Western Kenya by foreigners to survey for a site for a mission station. He first began work at vihiga in Maragoli Hills in 1905 where he was joined by Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Savile (Richards, 1956:10). The latter preceded Willis to put up the first structure of a mission at Maseno, on the Luo-Abaluyia border,

but more inside Luo territory. In 1906 Willis took up residence at Maseno. Later in 1912, the colonial government urged the CMS to extend its activities to Butere among the south-central Bantu Abaluyia groups like the Wanga, Marama and parts of Kisa.

Like the CMS, MHM found its way into Western Kenya from Uganda. The mission was to heighten the contrasting missionary ideologies and approaches the indigenes of Western Kenya, providing a basis upon which contrasting factors led to contrasting patterns in the syncretisation of mission Christianity in the region. The first CMC came to Western Kenya in 1901 with the arrival of the railway in Kisumu. Initially they did not come expressly to work among the Luo, but rather to minister to those of their faith who had come with the railway (Barker, 1950:25). It was however not until 1904 that a Dutch priest, Pere Bouma, started a station in Kisumu. This was followed by a second station at Ojola, some fifteen miles North-east of Kisumu, in 1906 by Father Grimshaw (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:viii). From this two centres Roman Catholic outposts spread among the Luo over the subsequent years. Within fifteen years, seven thousand Luo had been baptized into the Catholic faith, many of whom had come to form an effective *corps* of proselytisers (Ogutu, 1981: 49). Meanwhile, the first MHM station was established at Mumias in 1904 among the Abawanga sub-ethnic group in central Abaluyia. In 1906 Father Brandsma set up the Mukumu Mission station among the Isukha (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:70), setting a stage for competition with the FAM It

was, however, not until the 1930s that the MHM ventured among the conservative Nandi to the east.

Because of the bewildering array of different missions in the same area, bitter rivalries became a common feature among them, leading to the question of spheres of mission influence or the principle of comity. Indeed, it was “not purely in jest” that many Africans viewed missions as “European tribalism” (Spear, 1999:5). Between 1907 and 1909 meetings were held to settle the issue according to which the CMS would limit its activities to the Nilotic Luo, the SACIM among the Banyore and the FAM among the Logooli, the Tiriki, the Isukha and the Idakho (Lohrentz, 1977:166). In 1911 the radius between any two central stations was increased from three to eleven miles (*Ibid*). It was following this that the CMS established a station at Butere in the area of the MHM, but a reasonable distance from Mumias. The Africans were not happy with this policy of comity or spheres, arguing that what Europeans agreed upon amongst themselves was not binding on them (Omulokoli, 1981:423). They wanted freedom to go to any mission they wished. At the same time the policy failed to work because of logistical reasons like intermarriages and trespassed social mobility which made people shift allegiance to other areas (Sangree, 1966:172). With the start of the Holy Spirit movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s, those Africans who wanted to set up their own missions asked the government to abolish the spheres. At the

same time, the Salvation Army, a late comer into the mission field, campaigned hard for free mission activity in Western Kenya.

### **5.3 The Missionary Strategy in the Deculturation of the Abaluyia and the Luo of Western Kenya, 1900 – 1920**

#### **5.3.1 Conceptualising Encounter of Cultures**

Frankfurter (2000) provides a convenient general framework of studying the introduction of Christianity in a new mission area and the attendant identity and ritual crises. According to him, tension builds up between a new generation of converts and the elderly folk who maintain many of the old traditions (2000:289). He especially detects such tension in the colonial system which may wish to subvert the traditional systems of prestige that put power in the hands of the elders and instead redirect it to the younger generation. Christian missions which followed hard upon colonisation "... tended to favour younger members of native communities" (*Ibid*). Fired up with the new cosmology, power and social positions, the younger Christians occasionally struck against the elders, accusing them of sorcery and devil worship and often engaging in violent purges (*Ibid*: 290). In such a situation "... the younger are suddenly thrust into power within a culture traditionally controlled by elders and ancestral cults" (*Ibid*).

Western Kenya would appear to be a perfect example against which such a conceptual framework may be applied in the first two decades of missionisation and colonial rule. The first generation of converts to Christianity played a big role in the missionary goal of destroying African culture and religion as part of the process of proselytisation. Among both the Abaluyia and the Luo, the first cohort of converts imbibed Western material culture and lifestyle as both markers as well as instruments of advancement. Those who wished to share in the European status "...accepted too enthusiastically the blandishments of the West" (Lonsdale, 1964:39). These were the new men who had nothing to gain by rejecting alien domination and religion. All they asked for was to be taken more into the confidence of their rulers and tutors (*Ibid.*:188). They saw in the new situation opportunities to attain old goals and as allies of the British they were ready to participate in the defeat of "traditional" enemies (Kay, 1973:15). In addition to these objectives, they played an even greater role in spreading Christianity and systematically tearing into the edifice of the African culture. They were few but increased gradually over the decades into a dedicated *corps* of catechists, teaches and evangelists. Among the Luo then were called the *jomosomo* (the schooled ones) or the *jonanga* (the clothed ones) (Oriedi, 1999:0.1). They were the young who usually stayed at the mission stations, believed by the rest to have been brain washed to value Western item as superior.

Among the Abaluyia they were called *avasomi* or the readers, meaning the literate who had expounded Christianity and the Western ways. Probably the most prominent name among them in the FAM areas was that of Yohana Amugune, a Maragoli who seemed obsessed with destroying every vestige of his own culture. He played a leading role in making the Maragoli attain the tag of "the most deculturalised" group among the Abaluyia. He converted in 1909 at the Vihiga Mission under missionary Emory Rees. He became an itinerant preacher, educator and activist for "modernity". He went out of his way to break most common Logooli taboos with glee, to show that traditional culture was useless. He led a number of compatriots to be circumcised at the Vihiga mission and never attended the long period of seclusion during convalesce called *itumbi*. In the process the groups abstained from ritual, drinking, dancing and sacrificing which Emory Rees had told them were evil (Kay, 1973:128). This was a big blow to indigenous culture. The equivalent of Amugune in Central Abaluyia was Chief Joseph Mulama whose activities centred on the Wanga, Kisa and Marama. He was essentially the engine of change in the area. More than anyone else he helped in the campaign to get a CMS mission started among the Abaluyia by giving part of his land for church and school construction. He emphasised missionary education and he got baptized in 1917. He won many of the residents of the area to the Anglican faith to the chagrin of the MHM at Mumias. Even then he never totally

exchanged traditional customs for Western ones as did Amugune. This is illustrated elsewhere in this work.

### 5.3.2 The Christian Villages

Perhaps one of the most lethal weapons in undermining indigenous cosmology was the idea of creating "Christian villages" for the converts. Among the Abaluyia these were near mission stations. This was done to immunise the converts from the influences of their 'pagan' clansmen (Merritt, 1976:206). Such villages consisted of a school building used for church services and houses build in straight lines where the converts lived. "Heathen" practices, such as beer drinking, dancing and playing local music were not tolerated. Residents were punished for not being properly dressed and for failing to keep their houses spotless clean (*Ibid.*: 207). In Abaluyialand this feature in mission Christianity persisted till the 1930s when it was abolished. But in some areas the features persisted. For instance, in Bokoyani, South Maragoli, the last village was not demolished until 1955 (*Ibid.*:210).

In Luoland such Christian villages were in evidence as early as the 1910s. Yet the difference with the Abaluyia villages was that these were in the most an initiative of the *jomosomo*, the first cohort of converts. According to Hoehler - Fatton, these had turned their own homes into "mission stations" (1996:71). These 'homes' or *dalas* were marked by features that sharply departed from

the traditional Luo society. They banned polygamy, observed strict hygiene and practiced Christian "purity". In the words of Whisson, they were "... beacons in a heathen night" (Whisson, 1962:16, cited in Hoehler - Fatton, 1996:71). This had a devastating impact on indigenous lifestyle.

### **5.3.3 The Missionary Onslaught on Ancestor Worship**

The missionaries recognized that the worship of ancestral spirits formed the most consistent religious practices of both the Abaluyia and the Luo. They therefore directly struck at this system. Among the Abaluyia they embarked on a concerted campaign to remove stones from the indigenous family shrines. Zealous converts began uprooting the stones from their homestead beginning around 1912. Radiating outwards from the mission centres - Kaimosi, Vihiga, Maseno, Kima, Lirhandu, Butere and others - an ever-increasing number of family and sub-clan heads led their people in abandoning the use of the *ulusambwa* or shrine. In the FAM areas especially, Chilson and Rees led the believers in renouncing the old belief system (Merritt, 1976:210). This crusade shook indigenous cosmology to its foundations.

### **5.3.4 Industrial Approach to Missionization**

One aspect of missionisation which was emphasized in the FAM and CMS areas was the presentation of industrial development as part and parcel of

Christianity. In the process, indigenous cosmology was depicted as backward and unprogressive. In no uncertain terms, the FAM argued that the "... industrial feature was to exert continuous Christian influence over the natives employed" (Painter, 1966:24). This, it was hoped, would teach the natives habits of industry leading to "... a self-supporting native Christian Church" (*Ibid*). With time Chilson was to boast that industrial work was one of the "... most powerful agencies used of the Lord to bring the Gospel to the people" (*Ibid*). This was one of the most practical examples of what the Western world conceived the civilising mission to be.

### **5.3.5 Other Factors Abetting the Weakening of the Indigenous Cosmology**

There were several other natural and human factors which abetted the attempted ethnocide and genocide visited on the Western Kenyan societies by the Western world personified in the missionaries. For instance missionaries were purveyors of many new material goods which had definite impact on the indigenous people. This was done in the initial years of missionisation by both the Protestant and the MHM. These goods included fine food, sugar, clothes, blankets and other exotic items. In the early years of missionisation in Gem, Maseno and Alego, Tuesdays and Fridays were reserved for distribution of items from the missionaries. These days were to remain market days throughout the twentieth century (Otieno, 2000:0.1).

Then there were the large numbers of the Baganda in Western Kenya, always at ease with the Europeans. In 1904 there were about five hundred of them who challenged the bulk of the Abaluyia and the Luo to reconsider their traditional orientation towards life in general and towards the Westerners in particular. These Baganda were Christians, literate and earning good salaries as clerks, porters and hut-counters for purposes of tax-collection. This smote the young Western Kenyans with envy. The latter aspired to be like them and to take their positions of prestige. This would be at the expense of indigenous culture.

In 1907 there was an acute famine in Western Kenya. The missionaries joined the government officials in distributing relief food. This act was used by the missionaries to the maximum in convincing the Abaluyia and the Luo that they were good people who meant well and could be trusted (Lonsdale, 1964:176). Then in 1918 another famine struck in the region. Once more, the missionaries helped in the distribution of maize - a new staple in the region which replaced eleusine.

The World War I saw the recruitment of Abaluyia and Luo men who left the confines of Western Kenya for the first time. In the course of their tour of service, they attained new tastes, especially Western and developed a worldview that was broader than their specific indigenous outlooks. At the same time, the imposition of taxes on the Kenyans, like elsewhere in

colonised areas, disrupted traditional patterns of life. Men left their villages to go into the "White Highlands" to work on European settler farms, where they imbibed new values. The missionaries on the other hand cashed in on all these forces to spell out what was Christian and what was not. Burt records that they made the Africans ashamed of their own culture by undermining their material culture and related practices as heathen - clothing, body decoration, initiation equipment, musical instruments and others. (Burt, 1980:521). This was part and parcel of the programme of *ethnocide*.

#### **5.3.6 The Western Education: Master-key in Colonial Order**

Perhaps, more than any other factor, Western education was the single-most factor in the demolition of the pre-Christian worldview. Yet we must consider it in right context in respect to those who participated - the providers and the consumers; the Europeans, especially missionaries, and the Africans. The questions to ask are: What were the different goals of the two categories of participants? How did they play out their game? What was the net effect for them? Did all the missionaries share the same views on education provision to the Africans? It is a fact that Africans in colonised areas came to espouse great desire to acquire Western formal education. This was especially the case in Western Kenya among the Abaluyia and Luo after the first decade of colonialism. It became clear to the Africans that things were changing first and would never be the same again. To survive, there was need to speak and

act in the idiom of the adversary. To fit in the emerging colonial political economy, Africans badly needed the Western education which was the masterkey. Education guaranteed good paying jobs, money to pay taxes, modern material items and many more. It was the gateway to the new standards of high social status (Oyiro, 1999:0.1). The ability to read, speak and write English opened the door to many opportunities, making the Africans to begin the "scramble for the school" in the 1919s. But the main provider of education were the various missionary societies in the region. These had early realized that education would be needed by the Africans and then appropriately positioned themselves to maximize in the realisation of their primary task by twining Christianity and education. The government role in providing education the first few decades of colonialism was minimalist. The bulk was handled by the missions.

In all fairness not all the missions shared the same views on education and hence not all were eager in providing quality education. In this category were the Salvation Army, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Church of God Mission at Kima, and especially the various Mill Hill stations. Each mission society had its own attitude toward African education. The theological beliefs, social values, and their perception of the overall missionary purpose influenced their ideas about education (Lohrentz, 1977:114). None of the missions perceived education for Africans as an

important matter in its own right. It was essentially an adjunct to missionisation.

The MHM viewed the education of the Africans as an unnecessarily vexing question. For them the only duty was to evangelise and not to become “schoolmasters”. In central Abaluyia they established the Mumias School, but ended up imparting primarily religious instruction. According to Father Biermens, they started schools so as.

... to enable the young people to refresh their religious knowledge at home by reading what Catholic books there were. These comprised a catechism, a simple prayer book, a simple Bible and church history. Reading, as such was not of obligation to us (Quoted in Lohrentz, 1977:155).

The MHM did not like the effort made by the CMS to give Africans quality education. This was because it challenged them to do the same or lose African youths in their areas of influence to the Anglicans. The two missions who seriously undertook education programmes were the CMS (in both Luoland and Abaluyialand) and the FAM (in Abaluyialand). Even then the former were in a class of their own. The FAM instruction was mainly in vernacular and heavily laced with religion. Education was first and foremost an instrument of evangelisation (Kay 1973:98). The missionaries discouraged the teaching of English because they did not see the purpose for this in their

overall scheme. It could only make the Africans aspire for things other than religion.

Of all the missions in the region, probably the CMS provides the best example of giving the Africans the best education while using the school to accomplish the duo-purpose of evangelizing as well as destroying the indigenous cultural edifice. The basic plan of Willis, the first missionary at Maseno, was to establish the Maseno School and to use it both for evangelization and as "... a means of gaining influence through secular channels" (Lohrentz, 1977; 160). In the final analysis the end result would be evangelisation. The school project had at its core the two pegs of evangelism and church planting, although these were not always obvious (Omulokoli, 1981:422).

In his *apologia* of 1910 for establishing the school, Willis stated that from it the Gospel would spread into the surrounding country. He chose to base the school on the Iona model, which to all intents and purposes, meant to create a *tabula rasa* by wiping out African culture and religion from the *psyche* of the students. His justification is telling:

It secures what the old monasteries saved in the Middle Ages, and, in its measure, it effects what they effected. It affords a shelter amid a sea of temptation; it makes Christian teaching applicable and Christian living a possibility. It is significant that God does not attempt the practically improbable. He did not attempt to give Israel the Law in Egypt. He first brought them out, then He taught them. John the Baptist drew his hearers from their own surroundings

into the wilderness; then he taught them. The greatest of all sermons was preached on the Mount to those who would take the trouble to go there (Quoted in Richards, 1956:17).

Of course the FAM had their normal school at Kaimosi, but in organisation and efficient delivery it did not come anywhere near the Maseno School. Here it can be argued rightly that the first serious change in the Luo culture is to be associated with this school.

#### **5.4 The Pitfalls of Triumphalist Accounts of Missionisation in Western Kenya**

There is always the danger of casting the contact between the Western missionaries and indigenous societies in triumphalist terms. The establishing of mission stations and the winning of some converts in the early decades in Western Kenya has been portrayed as the triumph of Christianity over indigenous cosmologies. Painter, for instance, declared that by the 1910s Abaluyia religion was no more. For him, gradually there was no place for the old sacrifices, incantation and other practices because they had lost their meaning as their fears were "... dissolved by the alchemy of love" (Painter, 1966:28). Kay argues on more or less the same lines, rightly positing that in the face of the convergence of many factors in Western Kenya, spiritual but especially secular, cracks appeared in the traditional armour after two decades. He says "years of slow infiltration by forces of Western civilisation preceded

the wave of conversion to Christianity that swept Abaluyia at the end of the World War I” (Kay, 1973: 106). For Kay, the elders converted in the 1920s and the indigenous religious beliefs fell into disrepute. On her part, Hinga states that most of the land north of Lake Victoria - meaning the present Luo districts of Kisumu and Siaya and the neighbouring Abaluyia - had in a couple of decades yielded to colonialism “... and also accepted Christianity as the religion of their masters” (Hinga, 1990:72). The point is that this approach tends to depict the encounter and confrontation of African cosmologies in terms of zero-sum games where the winner, in this case Christianity, took it all. Before even examining the syncretising tendency in this encounter, a number of instances point to the fact that conclusions indicating outright and massive conversion are faulty. The "success stories" approach to reporting missionisation needs revision and should never be taken on face value.

#### **5.4.1 The Question of Numbers**

The statistics in the FAM mission field in Abaluyialand reveals very little progress at the end of the first two decades. At the close there were a total of three hundred and thirty-one (331) members in the whole of BuAbaluyia, of which two hundred and thirty-five (235) were among the Maragoli (see table below).

<b>Monthly Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Trainees</b>	<b>Total</b>
Maragoli	1917	235	459	644
Kisosh (Bukusu)	1919	0	35	35
Lirhanda (Isukha)	1919	62	166	222
Malava (Kabras)	1920	11	23	34
Kaimosi (Tiriki)	1920	23	55	78
<b>OVERALL</b>		<b>331</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>813</b>

Adopted and modified from Painter, 1966:79

Speaking of the Abaluyia mission field, Spear observes that the FAM had enjoyed "... only moderate success" until the preaching of the message of Pentecost by Chilson at Kaimosi in 1927, (Spear, 1999:17). It was in the 1930s and 1940s that massive figures of conversion began to appear in the mission records. Yet, even then, can statistics give us any clear picture of actual conversion? Even after a whole century of mission work in Africa, Adom-Oware warns of the distorting impression given by statistics. For him, the success of Christianity should "... not be measured in terms of the numbers of baptisms, confirmation, matrimonies, etc..." because people review these and fall off sharply (1992:174).

#### 5.4.2 Resistance by Elders

Hinga argues that historical accounts indicate that "... the Luo accepted Christianity with marked enthusiasm, and without much hostility" (Hinga, 1990:69). This statement is highly contestable and may only be acceptable to a very small extent. In the first place Willis found both the Maragoli and the Luo "...slow to respond, indifferent to the message, and suspicious of all strangers" (Richards, 1956:13). There was traditional resistance to Christianity in Luoland right from the start. This was led by the elders who had total faith in the indigenous culture and who believed that the observance of the customs and veneration of ancestral spirits was critical for the well-being of the living souls. Breaking taboos, they believed, would lead to *chira*, misfortunes. For the elders, the whitemen were a bad omen to the Luo society. This was because they preached against and diabolised the Luo beliefs and culture – Luo burial rites, polygamy, wife inheritance (*ter*) offering sacrifices to ancestors, beer drinking, visiting of the village *mantis* for magic medicine (Olwande, 1990:0.1). For them to be monogamous was to be mono-eyed, directly translated as *Wang achiel*, and with the negative connotation of a person who was socially and economically deficient and so unable to match the prowess of his colleagues.

Consequently they subjected to great ridicule those who attempted to go to the mission centres and who were considered outcasts, cowards basically

failures in the traditional setting. It is therefore understandable that hardly any adults were converted to Christianity from Luo beliefs, at least in the earlier years of missionisation. It is no wonder that missionaries, in their prejudices, came to develop great aversion for the Luo culture. It was this culture in its various dimensions that Willis described as being "...specific sins which are the ruin of these Nilotic people..." (Quoted in Omulokoli, 1981:126).

The Story was not very different in neighbouring Abaluyialand. The elders were bitterly opposed to the presence of missionaries and their message which together fought to overturn their worldview. By the mid-1920s the Church of God missionaries had totally failed to penetrate the older generation among the Banyore. A visitor at Kima in 1926 noted that most of the converts were young people, "... as it is difficult to reach and convert the old people" (Charles E. Brown, Quoted in Lohrentz, 1977:191). On the whole, the Abaluyia were extremely antagonistic to those who got converted and went to live at the "Christian villages". In some cases grandparents would kidnap the grandchildren from these homes and bring them to the family stone-shrine for the *liswakila*, or dedication ritual (Gimode, 1993:181). Thus it was mainly the socially marginal and those from shaky social backgrounds who first gave the missionaries a chance to convert them to Christianity. But it was from the Tiriki that Christianity received its greatest resistance, despite the fact that Kaimosi was the headquarters of the

FAM. The Tiriki had been heavily influenced by the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik from whom they had adopted the age-grade system and the unique style of ritual of circumcision which was at the heart of their culture (Lonsdale, 1964:128). It was not until the late 1920s that mission work began to catch up among them.

#### **5.4.3 The Fallacy of Equating School Attendance and Christianity**

The fact that Africans in Western Kenya scrambled for mission education in the inter-war years should not be seen to indicate that they were abandoning African culture and religion wholesale. African aspirations were different from those of the missionaries. Most espoused Christianity not because they were convinced that their religion was evil, but because the missions were the main and readily available agencies in providing education. Just as the missionaries used education to get at them for evangelisation, the Africans equally used the missions to get what they needed most, education. Bangura rightly observes that the early conversions to Christianity should be viewed as being often predominantly "... an instrumental step, rather than involving spiritual transformation from traditional to European religious beliefs" (Bangura, 1995:13). Some missionaries realized this early as reflected in the observation by one of them in southern BuAbaluyia in the first decade of missionisation: "To reach the people spiritually has been a greater problem than to give them something of an education" (Quoted in Kay, 1973:105).

A revealing aspect is the fact that whereas the missionaries wished to confine Africans to elementary education and religious instruction, the latter kept on demanding for more advanced and secular education from the mission schools. In 1921 the Maragoli raised a number of issues with the Mission Board in Kansas, USA. Among these was quality education. They stated: “we are being taught the Bible and we want to learn carpentry and English, also work in telegraphy and clerkship” (Quoted in Painter, 1966:39). In 1923 Chilson wrote that Africa was stretching forth her hands, “... but alas, for most part not towards God” (KNA, EAYMF 200/80, Chilson’s Report, 1923). In the same vein, Fred Hoyt spoke bitterly of the baneful effect of Western civilisation. The youths had drastically changed:

... as they are only thinking of the shilling they get, and the education they are wanting is such as to make it possible for them to make more money, rather than to return to help their own people (KNA, EAYMF 178/80. Fred Hoyt, 1933 Personal Report, Quoted in Gimode, 1993:176).

It would hence appear that the attraction of many to the missions was more out of material considerations than change in religion. Around the same time the District Commissioner for Kakamega, E. T. Waddington who wrote that the mission boys were better dressed and more intelligent, “... I however think it questionable if they are any better morally” (KNA, DC/NN 1/2:21). In 1945 the District Commissioner of North Nyanza, that is Kakamega, would also acknowledged the obvious influence of the mission in the district. But he

clearly noted that it was not spiritual but rather "...largely a desire for education" (KNA, DC/NN 1/27:19). In the same year, the Provincial Commissioner's report of Nyanza (Western Kenya) emphasised what education meant to the Africans. It did not mean more Christianity but better adjustment to a changing world:

All the embarrassing demands made by Africans are connected with education... A Local Native Councilor will rise in Council and quite emphatically declare that so many primary schools were needed in an area, and that so many candidates should be sent to overseas universities without for a moment pausing to consider where funds should be found (Quoted in Onono, 1982:50).

## **5.5 Resilience of African Cosmologies in the Face of Christianity: Patterns in Syncretism in Western Kenya**

### **5.5.1 Conceptualising Confrontation**

The correct conceptualisation of the encounter between Christianity and indigenous cosmologies in Africa is the syncretic one. As demonstrated in the foregoing the triumphalist framework in which many narratives of missionisation have been cast is basically misleading. Writing about the encounter between Roman Catholic Christianity and Philippino cosmology in colonial times, Gerg Bangkoff gives useful clues that can be properly employed in characterising the encounter between Christianity and African cosmologies in Western Kenya. This was typically syncretic. The simple

effort to communicate any beliefs and values across cultural boundaries “...almost inevitably entailed a certain amount of syncretism, since the explanation of foreign concepts required some degree of comparison and assimilation to familiar ideas” (Bentley, 1993: 15-16 quoted in Bangkoff, 1999:49). For the Phillippinos, acceptance of Christianity did not involve whole acceptance of the alien religion, but rather they selected, adopted and adapted certain elements of Christianity which were “...fractured, restated in new terms, endowed with different meanings, and assembled in a new way that made sense and gave significance to the latter’s cultural point of view” (Bangkoff, 1993:49). In this way forms and symbols of Christianity had to be appropriated and incorporated within a pre-Hispanic mythology and tradition, with the result that was “...neither wholly indigenous, nor wholly exotic, but the formation of a hybrid cosmology” (Bangkoff, 1999:49).

The same may be said of the Spanish conquest of Latin America and the ensuing cosmological encounter. Here Christianity transformed Andean thinking and brought into existence a new religious vocabulary which described Andean religion (McCommack, 1988:1006). Speaking of the African situation, Ben-Jochannan admonishes against the triumphalist assumptions of Western Christianity and Arab Islam, and even Judaism. He argues:

...it is virtually impossible to find an African convert who has surrendered all of his or her traditional culture and religious practices-especially customs associated with

accepted worship and oracles-for European style Judaism and Christianity or Asian Mohamedism (Ben-Jochannan, 1970:xxiii).

Writing in the same frame of mind, Walls posits that Africa has provided best theatre where religions have had to negotiate and dialogue. He states that the realisation that religions are:

“...not mutually exclusive entities which replace each other in the process of religious change, but that a person’s or community’s religious experience has to be taken in itself and within its own setting”. (Walls, 1990:145)

Walls challenges us to entertain the startling idea that perhaps no one is ever converted from one religion to another (Walls, 1980:148, cited in Bediako, 1992:245).

What these perspectives are all advancing is that the coming of Christianity and Islam into Africa did not displace African cosmologies, but were rather accepted as “...a new perspective to be added to a stock of historically accumulated perspectives (Uzukwu, 1992:176). African religions were never exterminated, contrary to portrait of easy triumph in most literature on the history of Christianity in Africa. Mazrui explains that as people became converts, the old religion interpenetrated with the new one (1980:157).

Perhaps the most fitting summary of the encounter and interaction of the indigenous cosmologies and Christianity in Africa is the one provided by Were. He states that African religion was neither static nor devoid of

capacity for change. It was subjected to a ruthless and systematic onslaught by Christianity and the Western European civilisation and that Christianity threatened its very foundations and validity,"... but the latter neither yielded fundamentally nor resisted indiscriminately, and so managed to survive" (Were, 1973:1). For him, indigenous "...beliefs and practices stretch through the colonial period into our present time" (*Ibid*). This, he suggests, it did tactfully by being flexible and adaptable, meaning obviously that it applied the syncretic dynamic. It was lived and not preached and "... adopted those aspects of Christianity which were acceptable to the traditional way of life and successfully modified them to the local interests" (*Ibid*).

Were's thesis is particularly apposite for Western Kenya. On conversion, the Christians never really relinquished their religion. The missionaries could not eradicate African culture in them, even through the application of strategies like boarding schools and Christian villages, simply because their culture is deeply ingrained in their psyche and is lived every day through customs, practices and rituals. It is our argument Africans have belonged to and lived in two different worlds which they bring together in their minds by formulating a syncretism which works to protect their cultural heritage. These worlds are "...the real world of traditional culture and religion as well as the superficial but prestigious life of Sunday-to-Sunday Christinaity" (Umoren, 1992:62). As recently as the second half of the twentieth century, emerging literature attests to the enduring power and life of indigenous religion in

Christian garb. In the case of Western Kenya, Kay rightly recognised this enduring dynamic when he wrote that contrary to Western expectations, the convergence of Western and indigenous cultures in Western Kenya “failed to produce either the early demise of the traditional African societies or the immediate triumph of a new Christian culture” (Kay, 1973:72). What follows is the specific instantiation of the ‘middlepath’ process in the twentieth century, which passed for Christianity but was actually a highly syncretic development.

#### **5.5.2 The Christianisation of Custom, Rite and Other Related Institutions in Western Kenya**

It does not make sense to focus on spiritual aspects of syncretism only while putting aside cultural aspects like rites and customs. This is because religion in Africa manifests itself precisely in different cultural forms and practices. By taking two aspects – polygamy and circumcision – we seek to demonstrate the synthesis out of the traditional thesis and the Christian anti-thesis and to prove that African converts brought together the best of two worlds. One kind of dilemma which the Africans faced is reflected in the institution of marriage. Among the Abaluyia, but especially among the Luo, the marriage system was basically polygamous. The case of Chief Joseph Mulama in central BuAbaluyia illustrates this point and is only an obvious one among probably very many that never came to public scrutiny. Mulama had welcomed Canon

Chadwick in 1912 and was a staunch supporter of the missionary work and the 'modernisation' programme undertaken by the colonial government. He literally single handedly delivered a large part of central Abaluyia to the CMS mission at the expense of the MHM who had started their work in the area. Yet in this one area African culture, namely polygamous marriage, Chief Mulama failed to satisfy mission Christian standards. He had fourteen wives and thirty-six children and was not ready to practise monogamy (Lohrentz, 1477:135). Other sources give a higher figure of the wives (Hoehler-Futton, 1996). What Mulama did was to feign monogamy by sending all his wives to his old homestead at Nenyasi in North Wanga. He retained only one at his official residence at Butere and declared that he was now monogamous and should be baptised. He was duly baptised Joseph George Mulama in 1917, among the very first cohort at Butere. Because of this Archdeacon Owen praised him for being a role model. For this reason he wrote describing Mulama as a bold man who:

....sought honour not in a large harem, but in walking justly and righteously before his people.... He gave his people an entirely new conception of what home life meant, and delighted to do honour to his wife. Alone of all the chiefs who gathered at the government station at Mumias to join the peace celebrations, he brought his wife riding pillion on his motorcycle. That a man should take his wife to a function may not seem to call for remark with us, but in Kavirondo it is a milestone along a new road (Quoted in Lohrentz, 1977:137).

Yet following disagreements between Mulama and the Luo CMS members in south Wanga in 1930's it was revealed to Owen by some of them that Mulama was a polygamist (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:24). It was in utter shock that Owen removed the chief from his place of honour in the church. But Mulama was just one among many African Christians who lived double lifestyles, espousing Christianity but finding it hard to honour the Western cultural trappings that came with it. The contradictions and sinfulness attributed to polygamy only made the converts to practise it underground while remaining sincere believers in Christ. This baffled the missionaries. A case in point was that concerning Akhonya, one of the five pioneers converts at Kaimosi. The missionaries were shocked to find that he had two wives but had kept it a closely guarded secret (Kasiera, 1981:199). The account of this case by Alta Hoyt, a missionary is revealing of the frustrations the missionaries went through in trying to determine the 'status' of their charge:

Some of the natives are very disappointing, however.... He is now wanting another wife which accounts for his treatment of his present wife....the natives are such imitators and we cannot always be sure when they are sincere ....they are adepts at hiding their inmost hearts' secrets and can pretend piety almost to perfection (May 6, 1929, FUMA, quoted in Kasiera, 1981:199).

Yet if polygamy was a problem to the missionaries among the Abaluyia converts, the case was even more perturbing among the Luo. The

phenomenon is a particularly pervasive aspect of the Luo culture. The levirate marriage was especially commonplace among them, making sure that a widow was protected and offered security by an in-law after the death of the husband. At the same time it was prestigious on the whole to have many wives. It is against this background that we have to understand how the tenets of Western culture, especially as relating to monogamy, proved to be a disruption of the Luo culture. It was not going to be easy for the Luo to abandon this culture for a typically Western institution which had no explicit backing from the Bible. For the Luo, the great patriarchs of the Old Testament were polygamists.

In 1918 Canon A. E. Pleydell of Maseno lamented concerning the havoc caused by polygamy on mission work, and implied the need to review the mission statutes concerning it if the church was to make progress. He stated that there was a total of six thousand catechumens preparing for baptism – mainly made of young people and a few old women. He cautioned: “If we wish to see a real mass movement in Kavirondo I believe we shall have to adopt a new attitude towards polygamy. At present no polygamist can enter the catechumenate” (Quote in Lohrentz, 1977: 191). Just what crossed Pleydell's mind for a fleeting moment? Was it the idea of recognizing polygamy? It remains conjecture, given no further information on the subject after this statement.

As late as the 1950s and the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church in Luo Nyanza still experienced the perennial problem of professing polygamous Christians whose status therefore remained amorphous. Dirven records that "... half the Luo Catholics are excommunicated from sacraments because of irregular marriages. Most of the people thus excommunicated are women who are involved in polygamous or levirate marriages" (Dirven, 1970:141). Thus polygamy and Christianity were apparently not problems with the Luo, but with the missionaries. In her study among the Jorocho (Holy Spirit) Church members in Siaya District, Hoehler-Fatton records the same recurrent motif of apparent conniving at polygamy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she noticed that part of the proper ethos among the female believers was emphasis on the ideal of "... nonconfrontal, peaceful coexistence with one's co-wives..." (1996:116).

A second institution that underwent transformation while at the same time retaining African essence is the ritual of circumcision. This is basically a ritual observed among the Bantu Abaluyia and the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik, but not among the Luo. A majority of the Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups observe this rite. The few exceptions include some of those groups that have a lot of direct miscegenation with the Luo, especially in parts of Busia District. Circumcision was otherwise a major Abaluyia ritual serving to initiate the young men into adulthood. The most conservative brand of circumcision in the Christian era remained that of the Tiriki. Their rite, *idumi*, was adopted

from the Kalenjin brand which was used to bequeath agegrades and identity (Sangree, 1966:125).

Suffice it to say that circumcision was especially targeted by the missionaries for extermination in Abaluyialand on the biased premise that it was "...uncivilised, unhygienic and morally corrupting" (Merritt, 1976:205). For the first three decades, the Tiriki totally refused to give a hearing to the missionaries. It was not negotiable. Among the other groups, however, there was a willingness to adjust but certainly not to abolish it. The degree of change varied from one group to another and over the decades. On the whole it was the Logoli who apparently changed most rapidly and to a bigger extent. The rest of the groups along the continuum along which the Tiriki and Logoli were opposite extremes with every passing decade, however, most moved more towards the Logoli side. A case in point is that of Yohana Amugane and his cohort of Maragoli colleagues who began it all by being circumcised at the Vihiga Mission in 1910. They did not go for *itumbi* or seclusion period in the bush for months during recuperation. They stayed at the mission and went about attending to the day-to-day chores. This was an extreme departure from custom (Mwenesi, 1972: 52). What the Logooli Christians went on to do was to negotiate a Christinised ritual that shed many aspects of the traditional. But it is not correct, contrary to Kay's assertion (1973), that the 1910 circumcision was the last traditional one in Maragoli. A group of ten youths could not compare to thousands all over Maragoliland. For many years

traditions governing circumcision were kept by the diehards. A more realistic conclusion should rather be that a syncretic ritual came to be negotiated among the majority of the Logoli who kept aspects both from tradition and from Christianity in their practice. This was the same kind of syncretic circumcision ritual initiated by Father Vincent Lucas among the Masasi of Tanzania in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, though he euphemistically called it inculturation. In the Masasi case Lucas was fascinated by the possibility of leading converts to an understanding of the *Jando* (circumcision ritual) in both Christian and Masasi symbolism (Ranger, 1972). Among the Logoli there developed features like a shortening of the period of initiation and convalescence. Instead of the many trappings attending the pre-Christian ritual, including early dawn circumcision in a river valley, it was now done in a public ceremony with the healing period sheltered. In most cases, a group of youths in seclusion *itumbi*, would be under an elder who knew both the church teaching and the "positive" aspects of traditional circumcision so that he instructed the youths in good behaviour and maturity. The *kwaluka* or coming out ceremony brought out the syncretic aspect in their true colour. There were songs in praise of the ancestors in a large gathering of celebration. But in attendance and in between the programme, were the church elders leading in hymns, prayers and sermons (Sangree, 1966:138).

This Christianised version of circumcision spread to the other groups gradually, beginning with the southern groups and gradually spreading to central BuAbaluyia. But the Tiriki remained adamant until the 1930s before the first ray of change on a wide scale began to tilt the ritual towards a compromised version. Chief Amiani, the Tiriki counterpart of Amugune, had attempted to influence dilution of the custom by persuading some youths to rebel and to reveal the secrets of the seclusion period. He was cursed by the elders. In 1930 he sued for reconciliation and paid heavy indemnity before being forgiven. Yet a breakthrough came in 1940 when Sagwa, one of the hereditary initiation chiefs, *umukebi*, was converted to Christianity. He did this because the elders would not let his son inherit his mantle. He joined the Salvation Army and was immediately proclaimed the chief Christian *umukebi*. This gave the Christians a sense of identity and authenticity with the rest of the Tiriki while remaining Christians (*Ibid.*:138). Sagwa was thus a mediating factor, synthesizing the purely indigenous and the Christian culture. He supplied the mantle of traditional ritual and legitimacy by helping the Christian converts regain a sense of identity and belonging to the group. He maintained the distinctive Kalenjin feature of "...a small fold of foreskin bunched on the lower side of the penis" supervised instruction in local canons, while at the same time emphasising Christian behaviour and songs (Sangree, 1966:139). These dual features have characterised not just the Tiriki but all the Abaluyia groups that observe circumcision throughout the twentieth

century. Hospital circumcision which was introduced by the missionaries but vigorously resisted in the first two decades has had to be accepted by many individual families (Merritt 1976:206). But all the initiates come together on the day of “prayer and release” from confinement, *kwaluka*, and are given a common age-grade name to distinguish the cohort from the previous circumcision group.

Deep into the twentieth century the Abaluyia and Luo had beliefs and practices that clearly reflected two different sources of elements. A case in point was revealed in 1929 at one of Archdeacon Owen’s baptismal classes. He was leading Luo men to say emphatically in response to a question: “I do not believe in the evil eye”. The ‘evil eye’ is part of local belief in Western Kenya whereby a person is believed to be an agent of evil forces who, just by looking at another person, is capable of smiting him with or wasting away of the body even to death. In this particular incident one of the candidates who listened to his colleagues denying belief in the ‘evil eye’ gathered courage and stood up to put the case straight. He agitatedly broke out:

How can you tell the *Bwana* (meaning master) you don’t believe in the evil eye? You had your children exorcised. Why did you have your children exorcised? Because you believe in the evil eye but I believe that God is stronger than the evil eye and can keep us safe (Quoted in Richards, 1956:59).

We can deduce two things from this incident. In the first place the missionaries had made Africans to become hypocrites by stating only what would please the former. Secondly, they were actually genuine believers in the indigenous cosmology as well as in the power of Jesus Christ. This man's reaction represents a true portrait of the state of Christianity not just in Western Kenya, but all over Africa. The beliefs and practices of the forefathers were never abandoned in entirety, but were rather recast under cover of Christianity to reflect contemporary conditions.

Among the Luo and the Abaluyia, children were and are still named after their grandparents, together with Christian or more specifically Western name (Oriedi, 200:O.I). This is a subtle combination of Christianity and ancestor veneration. This trend was also discernible, for instance, in the relationship between the traditional ritual *mantis* and the Christian community. The latter believed that there were witches and sorcerers who were purveyors of black magic. To counter them, at least in the period before the Holy Spirit movement of the 1930s provided an attractive avenue out, they visited the *jabilo* (medicinemmen) and the *ajuak* (diviners) to provide both diagnosis and prescription (Otieno, 2000:0.1). These prepared protective medicine, *bilo* (fine ash) and *manyasi* (herbs). They also foretold what the future held for the clients. However, because of the aversion and disapproval from the missionaries and Africa church leaders, a Christian client would visit a *mantis* from a location far away from his or her home to avoid negative publicity.

Alternatively these were visited at night, under the cover of darkness, but denounced during the day time by the same clients. In the words of one informant, "...many Christians are double dealers" (Ogode, 1999:O.I). The same double religious life style applies to the mantis practitioners themselves. Some were full members of certain congregations while the majority had a definite association with the church. They earned their livelihood from their arts and had no shadow of a doubt that it was for the good of the society. But they also realised how important belonging to the church had become. They would make technical appearances on special Christian occasions, but in most cases they gave their wives, who were full members, offerings and tithes to keep their records at the church up-to-date. This would guarantee one a right to a Christian burial presided over by the pastor or priest once they died (Oyiro, 1999:O.I). In other cases, a ritual specialist would be a very strict church member. Audrey Wipper recounts of experts refusing to provide services on a Sunday. "Come tomorrow", they would say, "for now we are off to church (a Christian Church) (Wipper. 1979:51).

### **5.5.3 Recasting of the Ancestral Cult in Western Kenya**

One initial aspect of indigenous religion that underwent syncretic change in Western Kenya, but was not erased, was the veneration of ancestral spirits. On the surface, as Christianity took root in the region, it appeared that the rituals related with the worship of ancestors had been discarded and replaced

with Christianity. In actual fact old beliefs were "...vivid under the surface of new things" (Nakabayashi, 1981:89). They had been reorganised and augmented by Christianity (Sangree, 1966:163). It goes to confirm Meyer's conclusions concerning the Ewe that the evolution of grassroot Christianity could not be "... reduced to the intentions and actions of the missionaries" (1994:48).

By mid twentieth century, in fact throughout the century and into the twenty-first century, both the Luhya and the Luo have taken meticulous care of the burial or mortuary rites of their dead, especially the elderly. Instead the Abaluyia word for grave - *ikirinchwa* - means the guarded spot. This is the basic idea behind ancestor veneration, namely, not to offend the departed lest they come back and haunt the living in the form of evil spirits *evinanyenzo*. But the whole concept has been couched in a Christian context. Among the Abaluyia big and elaborate funeral rites followed by a grand memorial service after a year or so are believed to be *sine qua non* to reconciling the spirit of the deceased to its new condition. This memorial service, known as *kwitsulitsa* or *olovego* - hair-shaving ceremony - became exceedingly syncretic under Christianity. A Christian family would arrange with a pastor and church elders in drawing the programme for the occasion. Relatives, lineage members, friends, members of the host denomination and other denominations were all invited for the great occasion. The speeches for the occasion would be made by representatives of all these categories in praise of

the deceased in a manner more or less similar to the way it was done in pre-Christian times. But Christian songs, prayers and Bible reading would predominate the proceedings. On this occasion all family members would have their heads clean-shaven, hence the term *olovego*. It was symbolic of a befitting and final farewell to the deceased. Much later, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the aspect of clean hair-shaving began to be minimised, especially among the youths who found it rather embarrassing. The custom has gradually been adjusted to first reducing the hair accompanied by a narrow but clean cut of the hairline. Nevertheless, the ceremony has remained resilient. If and when a family experiences incessant misfortunes, one of the immediate options is usually to find out whether the senior fallen members of the family have had the memorial service performed for them.

Traditionally, it was believed that a family spirit of the dead would demand attention for food - meaning a ritual sacrifice - by occasionally causing such trouble. An animal was carefully prepared and methodically attended to in the process of the ritual. Some of these procedures were directly inherited in the Christian memorial service. The carefully selected animal from the fold (or bought for the occasion) was determined by the sex of the deceased, whether a bull or a cow. It was to be sacrificed in the morning at dawn of the memorial day in traditional manner. Yet a pastor or priest would be present to pray and ask God to bless it in terms such as "... may the stew or vegetables be

blessed". In pre-Christian days the ritual meal was eaten by the community and the ancestors to whom pieces of food were thrown in various directions.

In the Christian version the community still shares in the meal, accompanied by Christian prayers. Sangree was right around the mid-point of the twentieth century when he noted among the Tiriki that "... most of the traditional religious attitudes persist though now largely clothed in Christian dogma and ritual" (1966:169). This is not confined to the Abaluyia. A more recent study by McCall among the Igbo of Ohafia in Nigeria reveals the persistence of ancestor influence. He records that in a location where some thirty Christian denominations are active, the village *arunsi* or ancestral shrines "... are tolerated by most Christians and may continue to employ them to increase their success in life" (McCall, 1995:268).

Among the Luo of Western Kenya extreme care was and is still taken even to-date among Christians, concerning the internment of the remains of the deceased. The funeral rites were being observed to detail. The attachment to the "land where the remains of the ancestors lie", meaning Luoland, had become truly religious. No dead Luo may be buried outside Luo Nyanza (Ojwala, 2000:O.I.). This is because one was to rest where the ancestors were resting. Consequently, in spite of the Western education and the attendant lifestyle, care was taken to ferry back home every Luo who died away from Luoland, irrespective of whether he had settled there or not. The

last journey had to be made, somehow, to ensure that the deceased did not become offended and turn into a vengeful spirit, *jochiende*, to come visiting the living with disaster upon disaster. In the early twenty-first century this practice has not changed. Usually mortuary rites for a Luo Christian would constitute a dual practice of tradition interspersed with Christian rites. The traditions concerning the dead would be carefully performed, in most cases quietly and secretly, then the final programme would be given to the church. In fact, after burial, tradition took over. Rituals were observed, including the *tero buru* widow cleansing ritual for a woman who had lost her husband. This particular ritual has remained an extremely vexing aspect of the Luo culture to the Christians in particular and to the rest of the contemporary society in general.

A Christian woman had to enter into a leviritic marriage with her brother-in-law. This was a social insurance scheme, but it was also a traditional religious duty that one had to inherit his brother's widow, failing which ancestors would let loose *chira* or misfortune on the whole family. By the close of the twentieth century, and with the outbreak of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the merits and demerits of leviritic marriage had become a serious concern, with the traditional diehards insisting on its performance while Christians and the "moderns" were seriously considering how to escape the tradition, mainly for protection from the HIV/AIDS infection.

#### **5.5.4 Bible Translation in Western Kenya and the Syncretic Appropriation and Transformation of Spiritual Phenomena: Supreme Being, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, Satan and Evil Spirits**

The reduction of African languages to writing and the translation of Scriptures into these local languages and dialects was one of the methods used by missionaries in making Christianity real to the Africans. In Western Kenya translation of the Bible was a "piecemeal" exercise, beginning with specific gospels or epistles in the New Testament and ultimately covering the whole Holy Bible.

Among the Abaluyia the first efforts in translation were undertaken by Emory Rees in the FAM area, helped by a Logoli convert, Joel Litu. It was in *Luragoli* or *Olologooli*. First to come out was the Gospel of Mark in 1911 followed by the rest of the gospels and the Book of Acts in 1917. The New Testament came out in a single volume in 1929 (Mojola, 1999:38). In 1951 the first edition for the whole Bible was released. In the central Abaluyia areas the CMS missionaries translated the Scriptures into *Luhanga* or *Lwranga*. The New Testament came out in full in 1936 following the efforts of W. Chadwick and his successor at Butere, A. Leech.

Among the Luo the efforts of Willis yielded the Gospel of Mark in *Dholuo* Luo language in 1911 followed by Luke in 1912. Canon Plydell coordinated

an inter-denominational effort to produce the first complete translation of the New Testament in 1929. The first Old Testament volume was not released until 1953. It was out of the joint effort of Grace Clarke of the Seventh Day Adventist Mission (SDAM), Owen of the CMS, and H. Capen of the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) (*Ibid.*: 37). The work of translation among the Nandi began late, but progressed faster than the rest. The first was the Gospel of John in 1926, Romans in 1921 and Matthew in 1931. It was the work of the AIM missionaries. However, it was not until the arrival of the CMS-sponsored missionary Stuart Bryson from Australia that the work of translation got seriously underway. He was assisted by Samuel Gimnyigei, Reuben Seroney and Elijah Chepkwony. The New Testament was published in 1933 while the whole Bible in 1939 (*Ibid.*:30).

The primary objective of the missionaries was, of course, to replace the indigenous religions with Western Christianity. Yet, in their translation exercise, they were faced with the stark reality that they could not operate in a vacuum. They had no alternative but to use existing local terms which, unfortunately for them, evoked concepts they wanted to replace. The end result was a syncretism from the top and whereby African religious concepts which were adopted, sometimes misapplied, but overall the whole transformed to connote new composite meanings.

Meyer's findings in her study of mission Christianity among the Ewe of Ghana brings out these contradictions well. There the missionaries adopted one of the pre-Christian deities – Mawu - transforming it into the Supreme Being of the Ewe and then identifying it with the Christian God, *Jehovah* (Meyer, 1994:51). Yet the last thing Mawu had been in the pre-Christian days was a loving and caring God. In fact Mawu had been a deity with female attributes. The new Mawu was a syncretic deity. The missionaries had then dismissed the other Ewe deities - the *trowo* - into evil or demonic entities.

The missionaries needed a term for the Devil. For this they picked on the word *Abosam* which was associated with the power of witchcraft among the Ewe. Yet the missionaries simultaneously dismissed ideas of witchcraft, sorcery and evil spirits as heathen superstition. In the process, however, the Africans distilled their own synthesis from the missionary translation. They appropriated the concept of the Devil or Satan to personify the evil forces which they had been familiar with in terms of witchcraft and evil spirits. Above all, they had henceforth an antidote for it, the Name of Jesus Christ, the super-exorcist. When the missionaries attempted to dismiss these concepts, the Ewe joined the emerging Pentecostal Christianity or consulted the indigenous medicine men for solutions.

What happened among the Ewe mirrors what happened to mission Christianity - and later on indigenous independent Church Christianity - in

Western Kenya during the first half of the twentieth century. The missionaries sought to capture the psyche of the Africans by appealing to what was known to them already, indicating that they had worshipped the same God. The Abaluyia and the Luo called God by various names, the main of which was *Nyasaye* or *Nasayi*. This was adopted for the biblical God. The most popular expression among the Abaluyia became *Yahova Nyasaye*. For both the groups, the gender had been vague – conceptualized as neither male nor female. Now the gender was clearly masculine.

Among the Nandi-Terik, who had perhaps the most refined conceptualization of the Supreme Being in the pre-Christian times, the translation of God was extremely tenuous. The Kalenjin Bible did not call God by the erstwhile popular appellations of *Asis* and *Cheptelil*. This was because they were conceptualised in the feminine gender. It is most likely that this inhibited the uses of this nomenclature in the Bible. Instead the attributes of majesty were used in addition to the direct translation of *Chehova* from the Bible. Where “God” appears in the English Bible, the term *Chehova* is used. The main attribute appropriated from the pre-Christian Kalenjin worldview for *Chehova* is that of *kiptaiyat* meaning commander or leader of the forces. He is also known as *Kamugtandet* or the Almighty one. Be that as it may, the new God in Western Kenya was definitely a composite of the Western religious complex and the biblical deity.

Perhaps the most radical introduction into the Western Kenya complex constituted the other two aspects of the trinity – namely Jesus Christ, the son of God and the Holy Spirit. These directly replaced the intermediary categories, especially the ancestral spirits and the benevolent spirit cults like *Mumbo* and *Yie* in Luo Nyanza. These latter, as we have seen in the case of the ancestor cult, were categorized as satanic by the missionaries. In this way deity in Western Kenya acquired new elements while driving some of the old elements below the surface. But conceptualisation of the third period of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, was extremely difficult in all the languages. The Abaluyia alternately called it *omwoyo omulayi* (literally the good heart) and *omuya omulayi* (literally the good breath). The latter was also the case among the neighbouring Luo who called it *muya maler* (good breath). The idea of the Holy Spirit coming in the form of breath was adopted from the Gospel of John according to which Jesus breathed on the disciples the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). For the Nandi-Terik the term adopted for the Holy Spirit was *Atondoiyet*. Later translations among the Abaluyia described the Spirit by the Kiswahili designation *Roho Mtakatifu*.

Perhaps the most dramatic trade-off in the concepts between the missionaries and the African was in the entity of theodicy – the theory of evil and suffering in the world and the mechanism employed to counter it. The missionary teaching on this was vague. On the one hand they acknowledged that the anti-thesis of God was a being called Satan or the Devil who was responsible for

evil and suffering in the world. And to this entity they sought to consign the African religious heritage. On the other hand they dismissed belief in evil forces as mere superstition. On their part, the African took the biblical teaching on the Devil very seriously. Mission Christianity, indeed, helped to concretise this diffuse realm of theodicy by providing a personification for it in the figure of the Devil. By the teachings on the Devil, the missionaries inadvertently incorporated the doctrine of evil, so pervasive in Africa, into Christianity (Spear, 1999:8).

Until then Africans in Western Kenya, as in many other places on the continent, had wrestled with the forces of evil spirits and witchcraft. They had also had a vague idea of the realm of the dead or hell. The Abaluyia called it *emagombe* and imagined it to be below the earth and somewhere in the West (Wagner, 1954:33). Like in the case of the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik West was the direction of evil, sickness, and was called *Embo* and identified with Luoland or Lake Victoria, the dumping site of all evil.

Africans appropriated Satan (variously called *setani*, *shaitani* or *Isidani*) for the evil forces including sorcery, witchcraft evil and other subterranean manifestations and their agents. But above all they had the perfect antidote for the menace, the Name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When, however, the missionaries attempted to play down this realm by dismissing it as sheer superstition, African Christians responded in two alternative ways. In the first

three decades of mission Christianity they secretly visited the indigenous *mantis* while going to church simultaneously. However, when the indigenous independent church movement became a reality in the 1930s, there was no need to go to the *mantis* because the spiritual warfare between God and the Devil was officially recognized and constituted a main plank in Christianity.

### **5.6 Mission Christianity and the Nandi Culture and Cosmology**

There are two contrasting perspectives of the encounter between Kipsigis cosmology and Western mission Christianity. Fish and Fish have argued that the monotheism of the Kipsigis made it easy to accept the Christian message and that transition to Christianity was not as drastic or difficult as was the case with idol-worship groups in Asia (1989:3). Mwanzi concurs that Christianity did not constitute a revival or an innovation among the Kipsigis because they were familiar with the monotheistic God. He, however, draws a contrasting conclusion on conversion, namely that this familiarity robbed Christianity of its charm and hence indifference on the part of the Kipsigis (Mwanzi, 1976:58). We are more inclined to go along with Mwanzi on the idea of indifference but not with the explanation he gives. What is said of the pre-Christian Kipsigis cosmology can to a large extent be said of their Nandi-Terik cousins and neighbours. The history of the interface between the Nandi cosmology and the Western Christianity has to be couched within the overall contrasting relationship between the group and the British, which boiled to the

conflict between a conservative Nandi culture and a Western culture, seeking to dominate the rest of the cultures of the world. The overall effect was that by the mid-twentieth century the Nandi of all the ethnic groups in Western Kenya were the least touched by Western culture in general and Western Christianity in particular. While the Abaluyia and the Luo came to strongly identify themselves with the missionaries - at least for purposes of acquiring education to participate in the colonial political economy – the Nandi-Terik remained aloof and uninterested. Ultimately there was very limited penetration of Christianity, a fact that was reflected in an emerging culture that was more Nandi than Christian.

#### **5.6.1 The Nandi-British Relations**

The first European to appear among the Nandi was a trader who came around in 1896. He began on the wrong note of offending the Nandi by his "...aggressive actions" (Huntingford, 1969:19). The response of the Nandi was equally aggressive towards his retinue. This initial incident proved to be a microcosm of a potentially explosive hostile relationship between the Nandi and the British in the colonial period. The Nandi became hostile to strangers, especially the whites. The government in turn set up a government post at Kipture, near Kapsabet, to monitor the Nandi more closely. At the same time the Nandi began their resistance against the British attempts to colonise the group. This ended in 1905 with the assassination of Orkoiyot Koitalel arap

Samoei – the great Nandi leader – and the subsequent “pacification” of the Nandi. The consequences of the resistance left a hostile mindset among the Nandi against all whites. The colonial government moved quickly to establish an administrative headquarters, first at Kaptumo and then shifting it to Kapsabet in 1907. At the same time this opened the gates of white settlement on the Uasin Gishu Plateau, around the Kaimosi timber belt and in the Kipkarren River Valley. The net effect was that this signification of white presence only aroused and sustained more hatred for everything Western. Indeed, they made up for what they had lost in war by staging a cultural resistance that poured scorn on the Western cultural trappings. “Our people hated and despised the whites, the missionaries included, for what they did to us” (Chepsiror, 1999:0.1).

Huntingford captured this general mood among the Nandi at the start of the 1940. He noted that the Nandi thought “...himself at least the equal, if not the superior, of the whiteman”. Hence he was least impacted on by Western civilisation (1944b:21). The Nandi looked down upon things of European origin and dismissed them with contemptuous humour. They would, for instance, not allow the oxen to plough because it would render the men redundant - because their specialty was animal husbandry - and because it was the work of women to dig, not of the oxen (Fish and Fish, 1989:31). They would not sell milk to the Europeans for fear that they would boil it, thus “insulting the cattle” and reducing the supply (Huntingford, 1944b:21). In the

years between the two world wars they changed little, and even then very superficially at that. The mood remained essentially the same virtually for the rest of the century. Matson sums the Nandi well: that they were extremely conservative and insular; that they accepted new ideas only after a long reflection; and that they frowned on divergence from custom (Matson, 1972:11).

### 5.6.2 The Nandi Cultural Resistance

The antagonism that the Nandi felt for white people came to be objectified in their dislike for the Christian missionaries who, in the process of evangelising, had singled out Nandi culture for condemnation. The latter strongly felt that until the Nandi culture was rooted out, especially circumcision and polygamy, Christianity could not begin to take root. They considered the Nandi circumcision songs, *kanyanda*,<sup>1</sup> and the kneeling and praying before the *mabwaita* during the ceremony as satanic worship. They were especially opposed to female circumcision (Lelei, 1999:O.I). So strong was the missionary assault that the Nandi even decided to boycott attending mission schools. This is revealed in the following passage by Huntingford who wrote on the origins of the Kapsabet Government School in 1925:

Till 1924 the Nandi attitude was said to be hostile to education of any kind. What seems to have frightened them was the Christian religion on the grounds that it would interfere with certain of their customs, e.g circumcision, the

importance of which to the tribe cannot be overestimated. The missionaries seem to have set their minds against circumcision, whether male or female. The question of the merits and demerits of the latter is at present beside the point. All that can be said at present is that in order to get any sort of hold on this tribe all reference to circumcision must be omitted. This... is the reason why no mission has yet been successful in Nandi (quoted in Langley, 1979:16).

The supremely important moment in the life of a Nandi youth was the moment of circumcision. It was so at the close of the nineteenth century when Hollis witnessed it (Hollis 1909), and remained so in the late 1960s and the early 1970s when Langley did her research and has continued so with some changes into the twenty-first century. It was a religious rite during which *Asis* and the ancestors were invoked for greater solidarity and prosperity among the Nandi. The attempt by the missionaries to destroy it aggravated an already bad situation. Though having lost political sovereignty, the Nandi, proud and conservative, were not going to lose their cultural sovereignty to an alien power without a fight. Consequently the elders were ready to fight against Christianity with all their strength. In this they were led by the *orkoiyot* Talai clan which produced ritual experts who had developed firm control over Nandi community and for who Christianity became a most direct challenge to their authority. They became the most indefatigable foes of the missionaries and their religion, Christianity.

In the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century, it was not infrequent that girls were snatched by warriors on the instructions of the *orkoiik* and the elders from mission stations, declitorised and then married off (Lelei, 1999:O.1). It was one such raid that culminated in the shifting of the first AIM base from Chebisaas to Kapsabet in order to benefit from greater government security.

### 5.6.3 Towards Syncretisation of Belief and Culture

The first contact between the Nandi and Christian missionaries was with the FAM among the Abaluyia at Kaimosi. The former were hostile and bitter following the Nandi resistance against the British colonisation. In 1905 they attacked the mission stations at Kaimosi just across the border among the Abaluyia - killing a young missionary called Wendt and leading to a temporary evacuation of the station by the missionaries to Vihiga in the heartland of Maragoli. By 1909, however, the CMS were ready to make a try at missionising the Nandi. They came from Kisumu and opened a station in Aldai area at Jebesaas or Chebisaas closer to the Abaluyia border. In 1912, however, after three years, they left because the Nandi "... showed little desire for Christianity (Langley, 1979:9). In 1914 the AIM got a lease for Jebesaas from the CMS. The former stayed here until 1924 when they were attacked by the Nandi, forcing them to relocate to the Kapsabet government headquarters where their security was better guaranteed. In 1925 the AIM

was offered a site at Namgoi on the outskirts of Kapsabet town. Until then, little had come of the efforts in getting the Nandi to convert to Christianity. Mr. And Mrs. Stuart Bryson, AIM missionaries from Australia, arrived and settled here and built the mission around this time. It was only then, in the 1920s, that the first stirrings of impact of Christianity on the Nandi community began to be seen. The AIM was to remain the most successful mission, by Nandi standards, in the area for the rest of the century. Given the martial and proud nature of the Nandi people and given their hostile attitude toward Europeans, it should be understandable why their response to the Christian missionaries was so negative. Yet, probably the worst affected by this standoff, however, were those Nandi who took steps to respond positively to Christianity. They became the punching-bag of the whole community, especially the elders. This cohort included usually the socially marginal by traditional standards. They were the outcasts and the poor; the idle youths and youth hated by parents who it was hoped would be converted and then cursed to perish; the stigmatised witches and wizards (Kibitok, 1999:O.I). These responded to the missionaries because of the friendliness and the relief the latter provided in form of clothes, blankets and food. The very first Nandi converts included Joshua Kibirgen arap Kosut (informant), Jeremiah Birir, Elijah arap Chepkwony, Reuben Seroney, Reuben Lagat, Samuel Gimnyigei and the the Simotwo brothers - Simon and Josiah. This was in the early 1920s.

The greatest test for Christianity in Nandi came in 1927, and the year remains unique in Nandi history as the turning point in the history of their culture in general and religion in particular. In this year, on a specific day, the elders of the Nyongi Age Group decided to carry out a cursing ceremony at Naingoi of all those who had accepted Christianity. "They hurled all sorts of bitter words at the converts and the AIM missionaries. We were told that by the end of the day, as the sun set, our lives would also set" (Kosut, 1999:O.I).

It was a great surprise that by the end of the day none of the Christians died. They lived while in their stead the elders who had done the cursing began to die one by one in the same year. Those who still survived ran to the missionaries to plead for forgiveness. "They were prayed for and stopped dying and converted to Christianity" (*Ibid.*). Following the failure of the elders' curse, the crippling fear that had controlled the Nandi began to wane. Gradually in the 1930s and 1940s the number of Nandi catechumens rose. In 1934 Samuel Gimnyngei was ordained the first AIM Nandi pastor. He was one of the first cohort of converts and a target of one 1927 elders' curse. He became the principal assistant of Stuart Bryson in the translation of Scriptures into Nandi. In 1931 they completed the translation of the New Testament. In 1938 the Old Testament was completed (Anderson, 1996:149). The whole Bible was published in 1939 (Mojola, 1999:29).

The second major mission in the Nandi country, the Roman Catholic MFM, did not start work until the 1930s when Father J. Kuhn came to Chepterit in 1936. Earlier efforts had been carried out by a Nandi catechist, Francis Biama, who had himself been converted and baptised while in Kakamega in 1920. He had joined the Kapsabet Government School in the mid-nineteen twenties where he served as a tailor-instructor.

By the close of the fourth decade Christianity had had an impact on the Nandi society, but not to the extent that it had had among the Abaluyia and the Luo. One thing remained prominent, that among the professing Christians, there was a composite approach to life in their cosmological wholesale for Christianity. The Christians discarded some aspects like one invoking of the *oik* or ancestral spirits. They maintained the worship of God, but with changes. The pre-Christian Nandi deity was conceptualised in feminine terms. On the other hand the Christian God was expressed in masculine terms. Consequently the first Bible translation into Nandi does not speak of *Asis* or *Cheptelil*, the indigenous Nandi deity, though the attributes remained the same for the Christian God. It directly translated Jehovah for *Cehova*, and used appellations from Nandi lexicon such as *Kiptaiyat* (Lord or leader) and *Yetindet* (Saviour). Jesus was directly translated as *Jesu* and the Holy Spirit was translated as *Atondoiyet*. These constituted part of the new cosmological hit *Jesu* and *Atondoiyet* became the counterpoise to *masampwanik*, evil spirits.

A second level of syncretic transformation was in the cultural rite of circumcision and the custom of polygamous marriage. Our concern here is the intricate manner in which custom and Christianity have impacted each other in society. In this respect the Nandi Christian continued with the practice of both circumcision and clitoridectomy in more or less the traditional form. People would be Christians, but when the season for the rite came they “put aside” Christianity to fulfill custom (Lelei, 1999:O.1). In fact the only group of girls who escaped declitorisation were a few of those who had come under mission control in the initial years of mission work, and who were “heavily guarded” by the missionaries. Otherwise, for the rest of the twentieth century theory was not matched by practice. The AIM remained adamant against the rite, while in practice “...most girls are circumcised in preparation for marriage” (Langley, 1979:14). This remained an operation done in secret because of the disapproval that accompanied it from the church.

The case was rather different with the male circumcision. Here the missionaries were unable to convince the Nandi Christians that it was evil at all. The Bible itself spoke of it as mandatory among the Israelites! What happened, however, was that gradually changes were accommodated into this traditionally rigorous rite. The first to attempt a ‘Christian version’ of Nandi circumcision was Father Kuhn of the MHM at Chepterit. In the 1930s and 1940s he, together with the Nandi veteran catechist, Francis arap Biama,

attempted to do what Father Vincent had done among the Masasi in Tanzania decades earlier. Their success was limited.

A few Christian circumcisers operated on the children of the converts and prayers and hymns were organised. Unfortunately the Nandi elders simply ignored it and very few Christian families co-operated. The effort was, however, continued by Jimmy Kimng'etich arap Kelel, a half-European and half-Nandi who had received medical training at the Medical Training Centre in Nairobi. In the late 1940s and the 1950s he circumcised children of Nandi Christians in hospital, using modern facilities and drugs. It was upon the parents to decide whether to undergo the rest of the traditional rites or not after the operation (Langley, 1979:15).

The custom of polygamy, like elsewhere in the Western Kenyan mission field, was an integral part of the Nandi culture but heavily criticized by the missionaries. The mission conditions deterred many from accepting Christianity. They declared that polygamy was incompatible with Christianity and demanded that the believers should put away all except the first wife. The Western concept of "the family" was so different from the Nandi concept.

The question that came up in the mind of the Nandi was why they had to observe Western culture to be Christian. For them the Bible did not state explicitly that monogamy was the Christian marriage (Kibitok, 1999:O.I). The survey of the Old Testament exonerated polygamy. At the same time, the

New Testament (1 Timothy 3:2) put limits on polygamy only to those who aspired to be leaders of the church. As a result, only the converts in the first three decades seriously observed monogamy. In the 1930s and 1940s, as more became Christians, they revived polygamy, albeit secretly. Much later, in the 1970s, Langley observed that fifteen to twenty percent of the marriages turned polygamous after conversion. In one of the parishes " ...all elders have taken wives" (1979:85).

Throughout the twentieth century the older missions, characterised by a rigid code of conduct, remained in a dilemma as to the exact status of their church members who exercised polygamy. These were AIM, the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. A much later arrival, the Finnish Pentecostal Mission (FPM), quickly read the prevailing situation and became permissive on the question of polygamy. It endorsed as full members polygamists who showed "...persistent signs of Christian faith" (*Ibid.*). Much later in the 1980s, the first and only indigenous independent mission among the Nandi allowed polygamy. This was the "Peace and Mercy Church of Africa (PMCA), constituted by Azaria Bor as a splinter from the SDAM (Bor, 2000:O.I). Perhaps the most fitting summation of the encounter and interaction between the Nandi culture and cosmology and the Western culture and Christianity is that by Langley. In her view:

Every Nandi toady, whether he calls himself Christian or traditionalist, Muslim or agnostic, belongs to more than one world – more than one order. Indeed, he may

belong to as many as three: his own tradition, Western culture and a particular Christian, Muslim or humanistic allegiance (1979:10).

This is an essentially syncretic summation. And whereas Langley did her research in the late 1960s and the 1970s, her observations were not particularly different from the obtaining situation by the mid-point of the twentieth century.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.0 THE IDIOM OF SPIRIT IN-FILLING IN THE SYNCRETIC INDIGENOUS INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT IN WESTERN KENYA, 1920-1950

#### 6.1 Background to the Independent Church Movement

The varying responses to mission Christianity in Western Kenya have been demonstrated in the foregoing sections. The apparent denominator in these was the syncretising tendency in cultural practices in general and in religious belief in particular, but all undertaken within the framework of the mission church. However, the one radical response taken by some Africans beginning in the third decade of mission Christianity was the move to totally sever links with the missions and to begin a movement that came to be described as the indigenous independent church movement. In Africa this movement first began in the late nineteenth century in Nigeria and South Africa, but gradually and prominently spread to new mission fields like Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zaire (Adom-Oware, 1992:172).

It is not the objective of this study to go into a full-fledged analysis of the complex phenomenon of ecclesiastical independency. Rather, it is to establish that this was one version of responses that most fully interrogated the character and aims of Western mission Christianity. The movement sought to show that Christianity was not synonymous with Westernisation, and that a

genuine indigenised Christianity relevant to the African conditions and founded on preceding African religiosity was not only desirable but actually possible. What the movement set out to do was to divest Christianity of its Western cultural vestments (Gimode, 1993:192). The independents questioned the assumption that to be a good Christian, or an acceptable politician, one had to be a good European (Lonsdale, 1964:366). The theology of indigenous independent churches focused on interpreting and translating the Bible into genuine African categories. Today scholars agree that the African Christian theology had its first stirrings in the activities of these indigenous independent churches.

Independency can be properly perceived as the African critique of mission Christianity. The phenomenon is best explained not by any one factor but a multiplicity of factors. These included among others conflict between Christianity and African customs, domination of Western personnel in church administration, power struggle among Africans themselves and the desire to conceptualise the biblical faith in terms that satisfied the African spiritual thirst. It also included the primary phenomenon of the Holy Spirit and its manifestations. It is the argument of this study that this boldness in interrogating Western Christianity began as Scriptures became translated into various African languages and dialects, opening a totally new dimension in the African perception of Christianity and reinterpreting it in the light of the

scriptures. When the Scriptures rather than the missionary became the primary point of reference, conflict became inevitable, opening yet a new phase in African Christianity. We are arguing that the motive power behind this phase was the syncretic dynamic. Lamin Sanneh captured this transition well in the following words:

Faced with this bewildering situation, Africans began earnestly to inquire into the Christian Scriptures, which missionaries had placed into their hands, to see where they had misunderstood the gospel. What they learned convinced them that mission as European cultural hegemony was a catastrophic departure from the Bible (1989:162-63).

Against this background Africans confronted the contradictions between the message and the messenger, namely the missionaries. They responded in a number of ways, but the most radical response was the establishment of indigenous independent churches. It can rightly be concluded that these churches went "... farthest in syncretising Christianity and indigenous African religion" (Kiernan, 1994:69). Independency became an avenue along which Africans examined Christianity afresh, interpreted it in their own cultural and historical contexts, and appropriated it as their own, and in the process they forged "... African churches distinctive from European Christianity of the missionaries" (Spear, 1999:4). The primary sources of this new interpretation of faith were the Old Testament accounts that clearly resonated a lot with the indigenous African worldviews, the ministry of Christ in the New Testament,

and the African prophetic tradition (*Ibid*:8). It was this compatibility which was in clear contrast with the European tradition that provided both the justification for and emphasis on the Africans' own understanding of Christianity.

This typically syncretic process was, however, "... not a blind regurgitation of traditional thought forms", but rather a process by which traditional notions were "... interpreted in a manner recognizably more Christian" (Hinga, 1990:276). It was not a mere "slavish continuation" of traditional belief and practice, but rather an enterprise that involved significant shifts and transformation of belief and practice. Independency involved serious transformation of the two worldviews into a synthesis that passed for Christianity. In the process of this, Africans made a contribution to world Christianity by their creativity and by bringing to the fore biblical aspects that had been sidelined during the long history of Western Christendom. This was especially the case in regard to the whole realm of pneumatology, which became the main plank in independent church doctrine.

## **6.2 The Origins and Characteristics of Independency in Western Kenya**

Latourette describes Christianity as being the "most quarrelsome religion", with a history of so many acrimonious divisions (1970:63). This history he

attributes to a "... logical outgrowth of the individualism bred by the belief in the Holy Spirit" (*Ibid.*). There is a lot of validity in this perspective especially when viewed against the Holy Spirit movement in Western Kenya during the first half a century of missionation. The pneumatic movement may not have created individualism in the region, but it certainly led to boldness in free expression by the African Christians on matters of faith - a process that was certain punctuated by much acrimony between them and the missionaries.

Hoehler-Fatton has rightly observed that the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit in East African was a product of three combined sources: The East African Revival of the 1930s and 1940s, the growth of ecstatic African churches, and the popularity of Pentecostalism in Africa (1996:73). A revival wave flourished within the mainstream churches. It started in Rwanda, spread Eastwards to Uganda and ultimately to Western Kenya in the fourth decade of missionisation. It was popular among the Africans, emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit and calling upon believers to rededicate themselves anew to Christ. Because of the apparent pathological abhorrence of spirit-manifestation by most white missionaries, this revival was opposed in the mission-based churches in the lake-region of East Africa but not suppressed. Ultimately it was accepted but its activities were closely supervised by the white missionaries.

In the particular case of Western Kenya our focus is on the rise of the African inspired independent churches associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its manifestations in the region beginning in the 1920s. This movement took the Abaluyia-Luo borderzone area under study by storm, but characteristically never took a foothold in the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik area. It has already been demonstrated how the Nandi resisted Mission Christianity and only began giving in during the third and fourth centuries of mission presence in Western Kenya. Even when they did, they accepted mission Christianity but never formed any independent Spirit associated sect as did their neighbours. The occasional presence of such spirit tendencies in Nandi area was a function of Abaluyia and Luo immigrants or workers on European farms. The Nandi's conservative and martial spirit, more like the Spartan city-state of Ancient Greece, did not depart from their pattern of rigorous examination before imbibing any new ideas.

The only serious form of indigenous independent church movement among the Kalenjin is beyond the scope of this study. It started in the 1960s and was more culture-oriented, addressing the question of marriage, than pneumatically informed. The Apostolic Faith Peace and Mercy Church began among the Kipsigis, breaking away from the Seventh Day Adventist Mission (SDAM). It spread north-westwards into the Nandi-Terik areas in the 1970s and especially 1980s. (Boc O.I.2000). Africans dismissed the one-one-woman principle as Western imperialism, favouring instead a church that was

silent on polygamy. Because of this cultural permissiveness, the membership of the church has continued to grow rapidly.

The main theatre of independency was therefore among the Abaluyia and Luo. And although concrete evidence of the movement is manifested in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this was only a culmination of a long process that began as early as 1910s. Writing on the latter-day movement of Legio Maria in the 1960s and 70s, Hinga rightly states that there had been an undercurrent of African disaffection with Mission Christianity almost from the very beginning of encounter with the Africans (1990:71).

In Western Kenya, among the Abaluyia and Luo, the break away churches associated with the ecstatic Holy Spirit movement came to be variously called "*Dini ya Roho*", "*Lyahuka*", "*Joroho*", "African Church of the Holy Spirit" (Lonsdale, 1964:358). These have been given alternatively the generic term "spirit churches". Perhaps the question of the name was best put by Storrs Fox, District Commissioner for Kisii who stated in 1941: "The sect is variously called *Jo-Roho*, *Wa-Roho*, and *Watu-wa Roho*. The exact name does not seem important especially since it means the same thing in diverse languages" (KN,DC/NN/10/1/3, DC Storrs to P.C. Nyanza, 17/5/1941).

The exact origins of these churches in Western Kenya is rather shrouded in mystery, but they are generally traceable to the activities of some of the African Christians among the Friends African Mission (Kaimosi) and the

Church Missionary Society (Maseno). A number of researchers, including Lonsdale (1964) and Merritt, (1976) associate the origins of the movement with the preaching of FAM pioneer missionary Arthur B. Chilson in 1927. Hoehler-Fatton proposes a broader and earlier origins among the AbaAbaluyia and Luo Christian themselves. For her the cultural and social exchange between the Bantu AbaAbaluyia and the Nilotic Luo over centuries would suggest a common development of the phenomenon among them. She has suggested that "... *Roho* religion had slowly been developing throughout Western Kenya and that early Abaluyia and Luo proponents mutually influenced each other" (1996:74).

This position seems to be more realistic because there is evidence of earlier Spirit manifestations. Johana Owalo's Nomiya Church is as old as Christianity in Western Kenya (see 5.6.3). Then, as early as 1912 a small group of Christians in Musanda area on the Abaluyia-Luo border experienced the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, especially in the life of one Ibrahim Osodo (*Ibid*:12,13). According to Kasiera, Arthur Chilson had encouraged and cultivated the desire for the outpouring of the Spirit among both the Africans and the missionaries from as early as 1915. He had commented in that year: "We are seeing the greatest need and praying earnestly for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon missionaries and native Africans" (Quoted in Kasiera, 1981:240). Suffice it to state here that by the time that the

movement took clear shape in the 1930s, it had been slowly developing for at least two decades.

One aspect of the *Roho* churches that delineated them as an entity different from the mission-based churches was the general common characteristics that defined their spiritist religiosity. The king pin was the place of the Holy Spirit or charismatic pneumatological theology which encouraged a lifestyle like that of the first church in the Apostolic days and exorcising of evil spirits. Its elements included Spirit infilling, *glossolalia* and divine healing. The movement eschewed ecclesiastical structures of the mission churches and cultivated instead a religiosity of spontaneous experience and expression. They emphasised the aspect of public confession of sins and honesty before God as a prerequisite to forgiveness (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:179). They imbibed enthusiastic singing, rituals of purification, intermittent preaching, and possession by the Holy Spirit. Baptism by the Holy Spirit was manifested in charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues, dreams and visions, and prophecy..." (Spear, 1999:17). This worship was physically demonstrative, where they shook their bodies, shouted loudly and often fell down unconscious (Nakabayashi, 1981:96). The churches had a distinctive mode of dressing. They wore long robes (mainly white but in some groups multi-cloured), usually imprinted with crosses and/or initials of the specific sect, with white headgear, and with men wearing long beards.

What seems to have concerned these churches most was a religion that addressed their existential needs based on the biblical teaching. This was the case especially in relation to divine healing and exorcism of evil spirits - aspects that were emphatically discouraged by the Western missionaries. Africans began to question the fact that missionaries found these offensive to indulge in when they were at the core of Christ's ministry.

Perhaps it was this response of hostility from their "spiritual masters" that made the Africans respond by an equally assertive stance. The missionary paternalism had roundly dismissed the competence of the African Christians in interpreting matters related to the Holy Spirit. In most cases Africans were treated like children who needed guidance. Three examples of this attitude will suffice.

In the FAM mission area among the AbaAbaluyia, missionary Jefferson Ford argued that Africans did not know enough to judge for themselves. He stated: "yet I cannot feel free to leave the native Christians, our own children in faith, as sheep without a shepherd" (Quoted in Kasiera, 1981:449). For him the Spirit of God should not manifest excitement and should not lead to physical manifestation. Consequently, in 1932, he ordered those AbaAbaluyia believers who danced and got possessed to stop it or leave the mission (Sangree, 1966:180). Earlier, in 1928, another FAM missionary, Fred Hoyt and his wife Alta, accused the Africans of having "... such a hazy superficial

idea of the work of the Holy Spirit, a stereotyped blueprint way of looking in people's hearts", and working themselves into emotional states (Cited in Kasiera, 1981:388). For the Hoyts the alleged manifestation of the Spirits among the adepts was inspired by evil spirits (*Ibid*). These missionaries believed, in contrast to seventeenth century Quakers, that "... the true presence of the Holy Spirit of God is always a calm and serenity producing experience" (Sangree, 1966:185).

Archdeacon Owen of the CMS Maseno derisively characterised the manifestation of the Holy Spirit among the Alfayo Odongo related Holy Ghost group at Musanda on the AbaAbaluyia-Luo border. For him the phenomenon was a combination of mere hysteria, emotionalism and fraud, whose leaders were "... mad people who believed themselves divinely inspired" (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:7).

### **6.3.0 Indigenous Independent Churches in Western Kenya**

The period between 1930 and 1950 witnessed the emergence of three main "*Roho*" or Spirit independent churches in Western Kenya. These were the *Iyahuka* (literally meaning separatist) Holy Spirit Church among the Southern Abaluyia; the Holy Ghost Church associated with the martyrdom of Alufayo Odongo Mango at Musanda on the Abaluyia - Luo border; and the Africa Israeli Church Nineveh among both the AbaAbaluyia and the Luo. The

earliest indigenous independent group in the whole of Kenya was, however, the Nomiya Luo Church which arose among the Luo as early as 1912, although it cannot be treated as being pneumatically powered. We will treat it together with the spirit churches as a case of contrasting features.

Our main concern here is to demonstrate the syncretising tendency that underlay the theologies and practices of these churches in the quest to make Christianity more indigenous and different from Western mission Christianity. A brief survey of the circumstances leading to the emergence of each of the groups is necessary.

### **6.3.1 The Abaluyia Based *Lyahuka* Independent Church**

The origins of the *Lyahuka* or separatist movement are associated with the preaching of American Missionary Arthur Chilson on the in-filling of the Holy Spirit in 1927. This was in the Quaker Mission sphere of influence in Southern Abaluyia among the Maragoli, Isukha, Idakho and Tiriki. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit first occurred among the youths who repented their sins and openly wept, following Chilson's sermon based on the second chapter of the book of Acts of the Apostles. The sermon emphasized confession and repentance of sins, prayer, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. The youths responded by singing and praying in loud voices, while others were overcome by emotion and cried (Lumwagi, O.I., cited in Gimode, 1993:197).

The foremost characteristics of Quaker worship, until then had been its notorious formality of "dos" and "dont's" that reflected the Euro-American cultural background of the missionaries. It stressed gentle behaviour in worship and gave no room for expression of emotional experience. The mission prohibited dancing, hand-clapping and spirited hymns in favour of slow, dignified tempo (Sangree, 1966:185). It was, therefore, ironical that the "outpouring" of the Spirit did not first take place in the institutional Pentecostal mission at Nyang'ori, but rather from "... the austere background of FAM" (Welbourn, 1966:74). Tisdall, the District Commissioner, North Nyanza, also noted in his report that "... the unpleasant Holy Rollers" were not from the Pentecostal mission as was often believed, but were rather dissidents from the FAM (KNA, DC/NN/1/20:16).

Writing about Chilson, Sangree states that he favoured prayerful counselling, urging believers to seek quieter expression of one's religious zeal (1966:172). This does not concur with oral evidence, which overwhelmingly credits Chilson with being extremely emotive in the late 1920s. It was this demonstrative worship that saw him weep freely without shame, which in turn encouraged the Abaluyia believers to take him for a model. After all, if a European could weep, why not Africans (Kadenge, O.I., in Gimode 1993:197).

As he left for Furlough in 1928, Chilson would state that he had sensitised the Abaluyia on the matters concerning the Holy Spirit, to the extent that "... they were weeping over their sins, coming with stories of past sins and so broken in spirit that they would hardly talk" (KNA, EAYMF 126/80, Chilson's Report, December 1927). Yet, as he went, Chilson was replaced by Fred and Alta Hoyt. These strongly disapproved of the emotional mode of worship. The Hoyts and the FAM African elders led by Yohana Amugune and Daniel Akelo set out to ruthlessly stamp out the "nonsense of body shaking" once and for all (Kadenge, O.I., in Gimode, 1993:199). This led to doctrinal and physical conflicts which ushered in a period of intense persecution until 1933 when separation or independency officially took place. The overall leaders in this were Yakobo Buluku, Yosefu Chegero and Solomon Ahinduka.

But this was not a seamless organisation with homogeneous ideals. Differences cropped up leading to two main camps: A moderate camp led by Yosefu Chegero and Ahinduka, which drew its membership mainly from the Kitsungu clan of North Maragoli, the Isukha, Idakho and later Tiriki. It has been described in the colonial records as "The African Church of the Holy Spirit" (ACHS), but was later in the 1970s registered as the "Lyahuka Church of East Africa". The second group led by Buluku and Daniel Sande espoused extremist doctrines and was confined to South Maragoli, organised around the Bokoyani clan of Buluku. Hence its headquarters and name derived from this clan, namely Bokoyani, meaning area of the Bakoyani clan. It came later to be

registered as Bethel-Bokoyani Holy Spirit Church of East Africa. They argued that just like God appeared to Jacob of the Old Testament at Bethel, so God also appeared to Buluku at Bokoyani to lead the *Roho* people (Kisango, O.I., in Gimode, 1993:200).

### **6.3.2 The Musanda-based *Joroho* Church**

In its various forms today, the Musanda-based *Joroho* group traces its origin to the *Roho* or Spirit movement that first emerged in Western Kenya among the Luo, and which culminated in the death of its charismatic leader, Alfayo Odongo Mango, in 1934. Mango belonged to the militant Luo-Kager clan which lived in the Wanga territory as tenants at Musanda (Lonsdale, 1964:360). He was a CMS pastor and in overall charge of the CMS Kager teachers and adherents in this Luo outpost in Wanga territory. Apparently, Mango first experienced the working of the Holy Spirit in 1916 as a young catechist preaching in Alego area of Siaya District (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:18). But it took some one and a half decades for the Spirit in him to realise full manifestation which in turn ended up in his martyrdom and ultimate divine status. The events that brought this to the fore began in earnest in 1932 when, as a tenant, Mango had been forced to leave his village, Iwinda, in Musanda area, for a year. When he came back in 1933 he was troubled because of the government's refusal to recognise the Kager land claims. He was also unhappy

that the CMS mission at Maseno, which he had faithfully served, did not back his land claims (KNA/DC/NN/1/15:13).

In the second half of 1933 Mango and his nephew Lawi Obonyo - who had espoused the Holy Spirit and was an itinerant preacher - gathered a group of *Roho* adepts at Mango's home of Iwinda. It became a "... major locus of the *Roho* movement in North and Central Nyanza" which was simply called the *Joroho* (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:47). They basically established a *commune* of the saved, more or less on the lines of the Apostolic Church in the first century. This made them increasingly outlandish in behaviour and a source of curiosity to the fellow Luo and of irritation to the AbaAbaluyia. In the long run the relationship between the group and the outsiders became increasingly acrimonious. On January 21, some Wanga provoked a section of the *Roho* group. In the process two of the former were killed.

In the evening of the same day the Wanga came back to revenge. They used spears and other weapons in addition to burning the houses in the compound. In one of them Mango burnt to death, bequeathing the *Roho* movement in Western Kenya with its first martyrs (Lonsdale, 1964:360). Instead of diminishing, the movement grew stronger, developing unique theological features. Much later, in the 1960s, the group would split into three, though subscribing to the same theological orientation. They were: the Musanda Holy

Ghost church of East Africa; the Ruwe Holy Ghost Church of East Africa; and the Cross Church of East Africa.

### **6.3.3 The African Israel Church Nineveh Church**

The last major independent church to emerge in Western Kenya before mid twentieth century was the Africa Israeli Church Nineveh. In contrast with the previous Spirit churches in the region, it broke away from a Pentecostal mission - the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Nyang'ori. While the previous independent churches had one major complaint, namely the restraint by the missions on free Spirit expression, the Israeli Church did not have this as a problem. Rather the AICN has to be viewed more in terms of personality clashes and the question of leadership. It was a product of ecclesiastical-hierarchical conflicts.

The founder of the church, Zakayo Paul Kivuli, was born in 1886 in South Tiriki Location at Kipsimwoti. His parentage was mixed. His father, Menywa, had ancestry among the Luo of Ugenya, while his mother was a Maragoli. They had settled and lived among the Terik, where he was circumcised after the Kalenjin manner in 1911 (Kivuli II, 1983). He attended school at the Nyang'ori Pentecostal Mission from 1918, where he also became a Christian. He joined the Jeane's School, Kabete, in 1927. In 1929 he was appointed by

missionary Otto Keller as the Inspector of the Pentecostal Schools in Western Kenya.

In 1932 Kivuli received the Holy Spirit, and was advised by Keller to take up preaching (*Ibid*). In 1936 he was Chairman of the African Church Committee of the Pentecostal Mission (Welbourn, 1966:78). Trouble began between him and Keller in 1940 over the election of the African representative on the Mission Council. According to his supporters, Kivuli won the election, but his cousin-cum-step-brother, Zakariah Oyiengo refused to own up to the results, arguing that Kivuli, as a younger cousin, could not lead him. Oyiengo's mother had been remarried by Kivuli's father according to the leviritic arrangement after her husband died. The end result was conflict percolating from one family to the church. According to the members of AINC it was Keller himself who decided to break the deadlock by granting Kivuli permission to start his own church in January 1942. In February, 1942, Keller officially blessed the first congregation of African Israel Nineveh Church, giving Kivuli two years of experimentation within which to return the congregation to the mission if he was unable to continue. In the same year, however, Keller died as more and more people left the mission for the African Church (Kivuli II, 1983). Paulo Zakayo Kivuli became the first High Priest and remained so until his death on November 10, 1974. Meanwhile the church had spread in Southern BuAbaAbaluyia among the Logoli, the Tiriki, the

Isukha and the Banyore and farther a field into Luoland areas especially in Kisumu and Siaya districts.

In a nutshell, AINC is a Holy Spirit Church that came later than the Luo-based *Joroho* and the AbaAbaluyia-based *Iyathuka* groups. Our focus remains on the latter two because of their deep historical conflict with mission Christianity. Most features in AINC are found in and first appeared in the two predecessors.

#### **6.3.4 The Nomiya Luo Church**

Chronologically, the Nomiya Luo Church (NLC) was the very first independent Church in Kenya, beginning in 1912 and basically contemporaneous with mission Christianity in Western Kenya. It cannot be categorised as being specifically influenced by the Holy Spirit or *Roho* movement, but it is significant as the first effective manifestation of an organisation that rose as a counterpoise to dominant Christianity, and as a poignant statement underlying the heterogeneous nature of perception of religious phenomena. Perhaps, more than any other independent religious movement, the NLC is the most obviously syncretic religious manifestation in Western Kenya. It is even debatable if it should go by the designation of "Church". Some have even contested the idea of it being an independent

movement, since it broke from no mission but was an outright blend of diverse beliefs from the start (Burgman, 1990:288).

The founder of Nomiya Luo Church was Johana Owalo. He was born around 1870 in the Orenge area in Asembo Location of Siaya District (Opwapo, 1981:57). Owalo came in early contact with the Christian missionaries of different persuasions in Western Kenya. As early as 1900 Owalo was a frequent visitor to Kisumu (*Ibid*:63), where he most probably met some of the pioneer converts at Kaimosi. In 1905 he went to the Roman Catholic Station at Kibuye in Kisumu where he began his education. It was here that he was baptised Johannes in 1906, and where he worked as a houseboy before getting into the employ of Alexander Morrison, a court judge (*Ibid*).

This contact was crucial in the development of Owalo's religious thought because when his employer was transferred to Mombasa, Owalo went with him and got exposed to the teachings of Islam while at the same time imbibing Morrison's Unitarian Christian views. It was while in Mombasa in 1907 that Owalo claimed to have experienced visions in which he was given a guided tour of heaven during which he was given the commission to found a "Luo" church. Owalo came back to Western Kenya later in the year where he flirted with the Roman Catholic Mission as a catechist at Ojola from where the angel Gabriel ordered him to leave. In any case, he had taught the catechumens not to answer to "Hail Mary", upon which discovery the church excommunicated

him. In 1910 he joined Maseno staff but refused to work with the others because of his firm disapproval of the teaching on the "trinity" and his advocacy of polygamy. Willis refused to confirm him by the laying on of hands, and he was ultimately excommunicated (Opwapo, 1981: 74-76). It was following this that Owalo ultimately answered to the commission to found a religion answering to what he perceived to be the needs and aspirations of the Luo. He went to Asembo and started his thoroughly syncretic religion. By the time he died in 1920, barely fifty years old, Owalo had seen the church take root in Luo Nyanza and the Luo Diaspora, with the majority of the congregations emerging in Siaya, Kisumu and South Nyanza, and smaller ones in Northern Tanzania, Kericho and Nairobi (Ochieng', 1973:60).

### **6.3.5 The Musanda-Bokoyani *Roho* Complex**

It is apparent that the degree of similarity in concepts and liturgy between churches is determined by the history of the groups. Consequently the chronologically oldest group (Nomiya Luo Church) and the latest (African Israel Nineveh Church) tend to have features unique to themselves. Conversely the *Lyahuka* or separatist *Roho* church movement that broke from the FAM and the Mango-derived *Joroho* movement that broke from CMS shared similar backgrounds of being powered by the desire to freely manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. They had similar histories and came to display a lot of

similarities in their appropriation and indigenisation of Christianity. On this basis we can talk of a "Musanda-Bokoyani" *Roho* complex in Western Kenya.

The two broke away from different missions which were extremely hostile toward manifestations of the Spirit. Both the FAM and the CMS missionaries were perceived as conniving at the ostracisation and persecution of the *Roho* adepts and their leaders by the African Mission Christians. It was this common background of persecution and criminalisation at the hands of the mission Christians that made the two groups to perceive each other as family. This was especially the case after Alfayo Odongo's martyrdom in January 1934. Lonsdale's comment that with Mango's death *Roho* had acquired its first martyr has to be interpreted from this wider regional perspective and not just in reference to the Musanda *Joroho*. It was this martyrdom that helped Yakobo Buluku and Daniel Sande to hive off from the initial *Lyahuka* or Separatist Church in South-Eastern Abaluyia in order to pursue a more focused Spirit-filled Christianity. He and his band of supporters were ready to go all the way, never giving in an inch to FAM teachings inspite of regular beatings. Ultimately Sande and Buluku died (in 1936 and 1938 respectively) of accumulated injuries.

For the Bethel-Bokoyani group the Musanda groups were brothers because they believed in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that their leader Mango and some of his followers had been killed, the *Joroho* Luo were more

of their brothers than their fellow Abaluyia Friends Mission Christians. And, just as the *Joroho* developed a negative and recalcitrant outlook towards the CMS, so the Bethel -Bokoyani group developed the same towards FAM. The wall of ethnicity collapsed as the two synthesised Christianity anew, developing features that were totally different from Christianity as practised in the missions. A symbol of this partnership was the marriage of Buluku's sister to one of the *Joroho* pioneers, Silvano Nyamogo (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:96). The two groups conducted cross-ethnic crusades, preaching virtually the same *Roho* message, and stressing the ability of the Africans as better interpreters of the pneumatic realm compared to the Western missionaries. Some congregations in Luoland actually came to owe their allegiance to Bokoyani without any sense of betrayal.

There were similarities in quite a number of their practices. Both the Musanda-based and the Bethel-Bokoyani based groups tended to develop a negative stance towards temporal issues like education, hospital treatment, and interaction with wider society. The groups increasingly developed *commune* model of living, attempting to recreate the first century Apostolic-type of society as recorded in the book of Acts. The homes of the two leaders became the loci of activity for the believers. Both groups had the habit of praying and fasting at hills and other strange physical phenomena like cliffs, rock outcrops and caves. Among the Abaluyia such hills were Imbinga, Muhalia, Gure and Mungoma (Asava, O.I., cited in Gimode 1993:211). The

Luo-based *Joroho* similarly worshipped at such sanctuaries like the Kajulu and Rowalo hills, and the huge boulders in Kano and Seme (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:135). These sanctuaries were associated with indigenous beliefs regarding folk-heroes like Luanda Magere, the greater warrior venerated for his physical prowess. Among the Logoli section of the Abaluyia, biannual sacrifices were observed in pre-Christian days at the Mungoma Hill associated with Mulogoli, the eponymous ancestor of the Logoli. The transformation of these indigenous features into Christianity was given biblical backing by the *Roho* leaders. They wondered why missionaries found it objectionable to worship at hills when Moses of the Old Testament and the reception of the ten commandments were associated with Mount Sinai. They further argued that Jesus Himself prayed and taught on hills.

Another feature that characterised the two groups with pre-Christian roots was public confession. It was traditional for a person who had broken taboo to confess before the council of elders and to be fined then forgiven and rehabilitated. In this way the stigma was removed. This was incorporated into the regular practice of confessing sins as a prerequisite for forgiveness and then in-filling of the Holy Spirit. Such confessions among the *Roho* people, however, had caused a lot of dissension in the churches especially before the full separation from the missions was realized. The *Roho* adepts believed that for the Spirit of God to be fully operational in their lives, they must be truthful

as a mark of difference from the mission-based Christians who entertained sin while professing Christianity.

Consequently, among the FAM congregations in Southern BuAbaAbaluyia, conflicts had taken the form of physical fights as "horrible" sins were confessed in public, sometimes before children and even in-laws. People confessed to theft and adultery in large congregations. In 1926 Elijah Ukilu confessed to adultery committed four years earlier (KNA, EAYMF 126/80). Among the *Joroho* of Musanda the denunciation of the false piety of some of the leading lights in the Anglican Church led to serious trouble for the members. One of the *Joroho* pioneers, Zakayo Wandeyi, exposed Chief Joseph Mulama's polygamous life to Archdeacon Owen (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:24). In return Mulama tacitly connived at the persecution of the *Joroho*.

#### **6.4 Comparative Aspects in the Syncretising Dynamic in the Western Kenyan Independency**

A number of aspects related to belief and practice easily lend themselves for comparison between the different groups of independent churches considered in the region. The degree of syncretism and extent of similarity differed from aspect to aspect, and depended a lot on the origins and history of each group. An examination of two of these aspects, Christology and the Holy Spirit, will suffice.

#### 6.4.1 Independency and Syncretistic Christology

In commenting on the role of the prominent individual in a religious movement, Fernandez observes that the founder occupies a central place. He states that it is the:

"... pronounced personality of their founders and leaders which attracts followers and which is reflected in the frequency with which these movements are identified with individuals" (1978:209).

He further argues that the emergence of African prophets is influenced by several sources, namely: The Old Testament model and Western individualism on the one hand, and their own characteristic traditions and a diversity of culture herotypes on the other (*ibid.*). This is an essentially syncretic development. The truism of this perspective is apparent in the founders and leaders of the case studies considered in this chapter. A group's understanding of Jesus' Christology came to be greatly influenced by their perception of their leader as well as what the leader taught about Christ.

It would appear that the Luo view of Christology in the indigenous independent churches drew from the history of folk herotypes of the past, while this did not manifest itself heavily among the Abaluyia. The cases of the Luo Nomiya and the Mango derived Joroho group developed ideas or theologies about Jesus Christ that were filtered through their previous cultural experiences. This led to the ambivalence of the place of Jesus in relation to

their own leaders, namely Owalo and Mango. The overall outcome was a syncretic christology drawing from the Bible and from the local lore.

On March 1, 1907, the founder of the Nomiya Luo Church, Johannes Owalo, claimed to have been transported to heaven where he was given a guided tour by angel Gabriel. In the first heaven he saw apostle Peter, Mary the mother of Jesus, and other people. In the second heaven he supposedly saw Jesus before whom he tried to kneel in worship, but who stopped him. In the third heaven he saw Jehovah God who was worshipped, and who commissioned him as a prophet to the Luo nation (Ochieng', 1973:58). Owalo further observed:

When all the 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 entering together. Then the Europeans, the Goans and the Indian Banyans attempted to enter but the angels closed the gates and chased them away, kicking them out (*Kitap Lamo mar Nomiya Luo Church*, i.e. the Nomiya Prayer Book, 1957:121, quoted in Opwapo, 1981:65).

What emerges from this is that Owalo viewed himself as a prophet from God to the Luo people. Just like Jesus was a prophet to the Jews and Mohammed to the Arabs, Owalo believed that he was commissioned to be a prophet to the Africans, specifically to the Luo. Thus in one stroke he contested the superiority of Jesus as Saviour and as deity by dismissing the veracity of the

trinity, while at the same time dismissing the Roman Catholic apparent deification of the Virgin Mary.

Instead he perceived himself as being equal with Jesus and Mohammed as prophets, *nabi*, to their specific races. Africans were in this respect higher than the Europeans and Indians because they had Owalo while the latter had no prophet. In this way, Owalo took elements from the Old Testament and the Qura'n, which he fused into the indigenous Luo concept of a great *mantic* figure-cum-warrior in the tradition of ancestral folk-heroes like Ramogi and Lwanda Magere. It was with this self-perception that Owalo communicated his message to the Luo people, some of who accepted him as such. His alleged special revelation became the basis upon which he built a new religion, a basis which would not be questioned by the followers. It was because of his status as prophet, for instance, that the Luo adherents accepted his instruction without questioning that all the males in the group observe the rite of circumcision contrary to Luo custom.

When Owalo died in 1920, his followers gave him the send-off befitting a Luo hero by performing all the traditional rituals. Although Owalo never lay any open claims on messianic status, his insistence of equivalence with Jesus as servants of God implicitly indicates that he perceived himself to be the messiah of the Luo. This perception was taken up by his followers both during his life and especially after he died. For instance, it was widely expected that

after the funeral he would resurrect. In anticipation of and acceleration towards this, they held night prayer meetings for sometime on hills like Korango, Kaonje, Abuyu, and Rambugu (Opwapo, 1981:103). When this did not happen, they went ahead to immortalise their messiah in a number of practices.

In their songs and liturgy, they adopted some of the hymns from the Anglicans, but edited out the name of Jesus and replaced it with *Jehova*. Also, beginning with the first anniversary in 1921, they instituted the annual festival of remembering his death. On this occasion they sang songs in praise of Owalo, and engaged in social activities like sports and music competition and fanfare. Before the prophet's death these had been observed on the eve of Christmas and on December twenty-sixth. Now they were given new meaning, shifting attention from Jesus Christ to Owalo.

Similarly, following a history of squabbles over leadership from the time he had died, the church instituted a new festival to give itself a new lease of life. Starting in 1948, March 1 was declared the day to celebrate the covenant day of *Nabi* Owalo. It was marked as the day Owalo supposedly ascended into heaven, and the day of salvation for the Luo who now had access to heaven. Their songs and liturgy gave space to the name of the messiah, Owalo, whom they looked forward to meeting on getting to heaven.

Yet ambiguity still surrounded their view of Jesus Christ in particular and Christianity in general. Given the multiplicity of its sources - The Old Testament, the Quràn and indigenous folklore, it is clearly a misnomer to describe Owalo's organisation as a church, a Christian church. Owalo's thoroughgoing syncretism did not pretend for a moment to pay allegiance to Christ. The other independent churches had clearly a defined perspective of Jesus, the founder of Christianity. It is highly paradoxical, therefore, that the NLC observes the death and resurrection of Jesus, because it is these dimension that bring out most explicitly the christology of Jesus as Saviour of humankind.

Among the *Joroho* Luo group based at Musanda, Mango was the overall leader assisted by a number of lieutenants, key among who was Lawi Obonyo. The two clearly espoused the christology of Jesus, and saw themselves as His servants, unlike the case with Owalo who openly spurned it. Mango was a padre of the Anglican Church who had served with dedication not just in Luo Nyanza but had also had a stint in Nairobi. Even as he and his close associates began to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no evidence that Mango saw in Jesus' divine status a model to aspire to. And even in his last hour as he burnt to death, he never questioned the role of Jesus' redemption of

humankind by his own sacrificial death. Hoehler-Fatton records a common song he sung as he died:

Thank you, Jesus thank you, Jesus.  
 Saviour of all people, son of God.  
 You love people, you love all people.  
 You teach them your word, until they accept it.  
 You have died for us on the cross (*Ibid*: 63).

It is clear that in his struggle to get recognition of his clan land rights in South Wanga area, Mango perceived favouritism by the colonial government and lack of effort to assist from the Anglican missionaries who were his immediate superiors. But this did not translate into any apparent revision of his commitment to Christianity.

After his death and that of several other associates, the *Joroho* movement took a completely new turn as the martyrdom came to be interpreted in a new light by the followers. Hoehler-Fatton's study captures this transformation of christology well. For her the Musanda saga came to constitute a fusion of two metaphors - the biblical and the indigenous (*Ibid*:3) To the believers, the sacrifice of Mango and the other martyrs was salvific, and that in the person of Mango, "... God fulfilled his promise to provide Africans with a saviour of their own..." (*Ibid*.). With Mango the new age of the Holy Spirit also came to the African Church.

For the *Joroho* there was now a messiah who would usher them into heaven, and who was the dispenser of the charisms of the Holy Spirit. Their theology

became *mangocentric* and *Afrocentric*. His death became sacrifice, as he was transformed in the minds of the believers from a temporal leader to a spiritual saviour. With time, Musanda, the home of Mango and the cemetery of those who died with him, became the pilgrim city and the foremost shrine of the *Joroho* (*Ibid*:38). Consequently the anniversary of Mango's death was constituted into the greatest *Joroho* holiday, the *Sikukuu mar Rapar* or the Great Celebration, when believers from all over the country come to Musanda in remembrance of the martyrdom of their saviour (*Ibid*:131). It has ever since replaced the normal Christian Easter festival, giving indigenous signification to the theme of the redemptive death of Jesus Christ.

The similarity between the Nomiya and the Musanda theologies in relation to Christ are easily understandable once we examine the pre-Christian Luo *mantic* tradition. A male figure with prophetic and charismatic power easily fits into the framework of traditional Luo theology (Hinga, 1990:251). It was in this light that Ogot perceived Simon Ondeto, founder and messiah of the Legio Maria sect in Luoland later in the 1960s. Ondeto was "... just one of a long line of prophets who emerged in Luo society form time to time... it is not a recent phenomenon" (Ogot, 1974:40). He was thus the successor of famous Luo prophets like Gor Mahia, Odera Sande, and Obondo Mumbo (*Ibid.*) and Luanda Magere. Before Ondeto, however, Owalo had played a similar role in the 1920s, while Mango had been perceived also as such by his followers.

Among the Abaluyia-based independent churches the christology of Jesus remained undisputed. At no time did the leaders of the movement, and their followers after them, come anywhere near deifying them. The most they did was to canonize them into sainthood. Among the Bethel-Bokoyani Holy Spirit church of East Africa, Daniel Sande died on November 5, 1936, as a result of injuries inflicted by members of the FAM mainstream church. Buluku died on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1938 (Gimode, 1993:225). Both days were instituted as annual rest days in honour of the martyrs. The days were marked by gathering at Bokoyani for worship of God and in praise of their heroes. Songs were composed which urged the members to remember the sacrifice of the leaders who were now with Christ in heaven, and to copy the same courage and apply it in their lives.

#### **6.4.2 Spirit Infilling and Spiritual Warfare**

All over Africa ethnography attests to widespread occurrences of 'dissociated' states and spirit possession in one form or another (Sangree, 1966:183). It was there in the pre-Christian context, got incorporated with Christian worship, and found full expression in the indigenous independent church context. The desire by the African Christians in Western Kenya to experience the Holy Spirit of God has to be understood against this background. Spiritism is one of the main planks of indigenous African religion. African converts to mission Christianity read about cases of spirit-infilling in the Bible. In the Old

Testament they read of the Spirit of God who came upon the prophets, endowing them with charisms. In the New Testament there was the promise of the Holy Spirit for all who believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and their Saviour. These ideas resonated with indigenous cosmology which, unfortunately, the missionaries sought to destroy. The Holy Spirit did not thus come as a totally new phenomenon to Africans. They embraced it within the framework of spirit-possession of which they were familiar, and which they sought to recast in terms that they understood best.

Of the indigenous independent churches examined in this chapter, the most distinguishing feature was their espousal of belief in the working of the Holy Spirit and the manifestations associated with it, namely in-filling of individuals by the Spirit, the tendency to receive visions and to dream, and the ability to apprehend negative spiritual forces and to fight them by aid of the Holy Spirit. The leaders of the Musanda based *Joroho* group, Mango and Lawi, emphasized the agency of the Holy Spirit and the ecstatic fervour in worship (Hoehler-Fatton, 1996:72). This pre-occupation with the working of the Holy Spirit had a strong indigenous background. The nineteenth and twentieth century Luo conception of spirit possession formed a deep paradigm upon which Christian claims and biblical symbols were grafted. "This process not only rendered the grafted material dependent on a different source of nourishment but also prompted a new distillation or realignment of certain key elements in the base of the trunk" (*Ibid*:170).

The *Joroho* took indigenous Luo features on spirit-possession and interpreted them in a recognizably more Christian light. In the pre-Christian days spirit-possession among the Luo was predominantly associated with women. Women were agents or media of the *juogi* or spirits. When a spirit chose and entered a medium for the first time, the latter would writhe in pain, while making shrieks and grunts (*Ibid:62*). In the nineteenth century the *Jalango* spirit-cult became pronounced among the Luo bordering the Kipsigis and Nandi - collectively known by the Luo as *Jalango*. It was believed that the spirits of the dead Kalenjin warriors - known and feared for their fierceness - would possess women who then acted violently. It was partially against this background that the Bible reading of the Holy Spirit was integrated and which became a way of life for the *Joroho*.

Among the Abaluyia a thoroughly spirit-oriented background preceded the coming of mission Christianity and teachings on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In the pre-Christian days spirit-possession had been associated with visions and dreams and their interpretation. Unfortunately these were no part of the missionary teaching. They featured nowhere and were discouraged in the creedal missionary Christianity. Yet the Africans realised that these notions were replete in both the Old and the New Testaments. The *Dini-ya-Roho* took these features and subsumed them under the Christian rubrics of

the working of the Holy Spirit. The notions found their way into a redefined and syncretised Christianity.

Perhaps of all the concepts in mission Christianity none was more apparent and amenable to the Abaluyia and the Luo cosmology like the biblical concept of spiritual warfare against evil spiritual forces. Africans were extremely familiar with exorcising evil spirits and fighting against the powers of witchcraft and sorcery on a regular basis. These evil forces were believed to wreak havoc upon the living by disordering and causing imbalance to human minds, resulting in mental illnesses (Hinga, 1980:288). This was also reflected in somatic disorders in their various manifestations. A range of spirits or their agents were held responsible for these.

There was thus a clearly defined world or entity of evil forces against which another entity of good forces was ranged in opposition. In different African societies there were mechanisms with which to fight the evil forces. The office of the mantis had multiple roles that ranged from temporal to spiritual. Among the Abaluyia *umufumu* (or *umukumu/umukhumu*) was a diviner who had power to communicate with the spirit world and to provide solutions to problems afflicting society. Among the Luo the diviners or *ajuak* had special spiritual powers to discern, to diagnose and to prescribe solutions.

It was against this background of constant spiritual warfare that the Christian message was received by the Africans. Initially the only source of Christian

knowledge available was missionary teaching. Translation of the Scriptures, however, enabled Africans to read for themselves. In the process they came to realize the astounding pneumatological parallels between their indigenous cosmology and the biblical spirit world. It also became clear that what the missionaries taught on spiritual matters was essentially at variance with what the Bible taught.

Mission Christianity had refused to acknowledge ideas of spirits of the dead (ancestors) and witches. They dismissed these as superstition and heathen survival (Meyer, 1994:58). In fact they had personified all pre-Christian belief in such spirits into the Devil or Satan and his works, and from which the Christian converts needed to steer clear. But this missionary construction of the Devil and his host of evil forces was conceived differently by the Africans. According to them, Western missionaries were indulging in a game of self-contradictions. They could not simultaneously speak of evil forces as well as deny their existence as well as the means to deal with them. What the Africans did was to appropriate the concept of Satan and to reinterpret their own cosmological warfare in Christian terms. They now described or perceived all forms of evil forces experienced in the pre-Christian days as being the work of the Devil. Secondly, they realised that these phenomena - Satan and his host of demons - were replete in the Bible which recognised them as the agents causing mental and physical disorders. It was not an experience or phenomenon unique to Africans contrary to the portrait given by the Western

missionaries. Thirdly, a big element of the mission of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels was to heal the sick and to exorcise evil spirits from those who were possessed. For the Africans, Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, was the greatest exorcist and the perfect antidote to the evil forces personified in the Devil.

It was not surprising that a major cause of independency from mission Christianity in Western Kenya was the interpretation of the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit and with it other spiritual phenomena. The Africans perceived the missionaries as having failed to properly understand the Bible and to interpret it correctly.

The refusal to acknowledge manifestations of the *pneumatic charisms* had made Western Missionaries attempt to jettison a big area - the area of spiritual warfare and divine healing by miracles - from Christianity. This the Africans were not ready to surrender. They instead fused their own understanding of spiritual warfare with that found in the Bible. They perfectly understood the mission of Jesus as recorded in the gospels and lay claims on the promised Holy Spirit who would enable them carry on with the same mission. It is therefore understandable that the primary concern of most indigenous independent churches is the battle against all manifestations of the Devil, and the claims to healing in the name of Jesus and by the agency of the Holy

Spirit. In this way the independents found a way that addressed the problems of evil in a practical and biblical way.

Of the indigenous independent churches considered in this section concerning spiritual phenomena, the Nomiya Luo Church warrants a little more treatment about its perception of the Holy Spirit and the attendant spiritual warfare. In its early decades, the church had little or no room at all for manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Owalo's teachings centred on God and himself. It was not until three decades after his death that the Nomiya members could freely espouse ideas about the Holy Spirit and its characteristics as experienced in the various *Roho* groups in Western Kenya. This was after many members found their religion to be at odds with the rest of the churches - especially the independent churches. In December 1947 the Nomiya leadership introduced *mony* or all-night prayer meetings meant to drive away the devil (Opwapo, 1981:118). But explicit acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit came as late as 1961 when Johannes Owigo began to preach about healing and exorcising with the help of the Holy Spirit *Muya Maler* - or literally the "good breadth". They confessed to having charms and dubbing in witchcraft and were delivered.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### 7.0 CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters have attempted to demonstrate the fact that syncretism informs development of religious traditions. The latest studies in religion today, focus on issues related to translation of religious meanings across cultural boundaries. The emphasis is now on hybridity and cross-cultural interpenetration of beliefs and practices. This study has been undertaken on these premises. It has dismissed claims to orthodoxy and purity by both authorities and laity of some religions.

The study has been undertaken within an innovative theoretical framework that explicates the syncretising dynamic in the trends in the different scenarios of religious development considered. It has combined the Hegelian dialectical triad and Aseka's triad theory of consciousness to forge a conceptual tool within which the assumptions of the study have been tested. For Hegel the nature of thought was dialectical, whereby every thought bears within itself its own opposite so that their relationship involves a thesis and an anti-thesis. These do not rest in perpetual opposition but rather confront each other to form a synthesis which is a higher unity that has aspects from both the thesis and the anti-thesis. When the synthesis is achieved it becomes a new thesis, generating another antithesis and leading to a clash and a new synthesis. Our study has taken this dialectic of thought and applied it to the realm of confrontation between different religious traditions. Accordingly, when two traditions confront each other, neither of the two is vanquished. Rather the

practitioners of the initial religion select some aspects from the foreign which they merge with some of their own to form a syncretic tradition.

The second aspect of the theoretical framework derives from Aseka's theoretical formulation of the triad theory of consciousness. Aseka dismisses the perennial preoccupation with the Cartesian duality in the Western academy which has confined the human personality to the body or *soma*, and the soul or *psche*. Aseka instead argues for the third entity in human personality, name the *pneuma* or spirit. It is by focusing on this that we can undertake a study of religion. A combination of the Hegelian dialectic and Aseka's perspective of the triunilateral consciousness has provided a framework within which to outline the history of Christianity in the West and indigenous religion in Western Kenya as well as the synthesis of the two.

The study has traced the etymology of the term "syncretism" to the ancient Greek habit of the Cretans burying their differences and quarrels to come together in the face of a common enemy. But a term that was positively used came to acquire negative connotations in the seventeenth century which in turn were passed on to the contemporary world. It came to connote somebody else's religion in comparison to one's own. More specifically, the term came to be used by purveyors of Western Christianity to pejoratively describe the efforts made by the indigenous people in different mission areas of the world who attempted to take Christianity on their own terms and in relation to their religious and cultural heritages.

The study has endeavoured to show that the negative connotations assigned to the term are not warranted. It is impossible to study any one culture in isolation because all cultures have histories of contact and exchange. The Trans-Atlantic anthropology that was centred around Boas, Herskovits, Freyre and Ortiz brought to the fore the syncretic dynamic in cultures. Thanks to their efforts, the term syncretism has once more found its way into social theory discourse. Even among Christian scholars it is no longer anathema to speak or write of the syncretic dynamic. What is emphasised in such writings is, however, the fact that syncretism must be critical and not uncritical. The calling of the Second Vatican Council and the emergence of an African Christian theology in the second half of the twentieth century virtually gave sanction to critical syncretism, though without using the word. The study has argued that the litany of terms like accommodation, adaptation, adoption, contextualisation, indigenisation, Africanisation and inculturation used in Africanisation Christian theology are all indicators of a recognition of the dynamic of syncretism.

In the third chapter the study examines the Western Christianity that came to Eastern Africa at the close of the nineteenth century. This was a product of nineteenth centuries of syncretic reworking of Christianity into a specifically Western European cultural tradition that manifested itself in several denominations and whose doctrines and practices were then presented to Africans orthodox Christianity. In fact, the syncretisation of Christianity

began in the first century in the Mediterranean world. The Hellenic philosophical tradition became a main challenger to the nascent faith. The encounter between the two had definite impact on Christianity. The monotheistic streak of Platonism and the doctrine of the *Logos* were appropriated into Christianity through Christian leaders of a philosophical bent like Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Pantaeus Origen who saw no problem in vindicating Christian identity within the context of Greek philosophy. Similarly Manicheism and Neoplatonism were fused into Western Christianity through the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo.

It has been further demonstrated that Christianity in Europe took root after the conversion of Emperor Constantine, 306-337AD. He instituted imperial reforms that opened the floodgates of syncretism that fused Christianity and pre-Christian religious concepts and practices. Many aspects in historical churches – for instance vestments, images and processions – originated in the pre-Christian religious systems that fused with Christianity.

The study has established the pagan origins of key Christian festivals like the *Easter* and *Christmas*. Easter comes from Astarte, Phoenician goddess who was consort of the sun god Baal. There were equivalents of this couple among other Middle Eastern communities. At the Synod of Arles called in 314 AD by Constantine, the date of the Christian Passover was changed to a Sunday. This was the worship day for the Roman sun god, the *Sol Invictus*. It was also then that a number of features that came to be considered as being an

integral part of Easter were fused into Christianity. Such include the custom of observing the forty days Lent, the burning of palms on Ash Wednesday and the dyeing of eggs.

The study has similarly established the syncretic nature of the feast of the nativity or Christmas in the fourth century AD. It was actually celebrated in the Roman Empire as the birth of the Invincible Sun, *Sol Invictus*, at the end of the Winter Solstice. It was adopted by Christendom and to which more cultural accretions were added over the centuries. The burning of the Yule log is a contribution from the Norse country, while the Christmas tree is of German origin.

The elevation of the Virgin Mary to apparent status of deityhood in the Roman Catholic Church and the various forms of Orthodox Christianity takes its origins in the worship of goddesses in the ancient Mediterranean world in general and in the Egyptian goddess Isis in particular. The study has demonstrated that the Virgin was not an innovation but rather a continuation under a new name of the Egyptian goddess. It was a deliberate highly conscious process of syncretisation of Christianity by the Church Fathers to create a quarternity instead of a trinity by uplifting the Virgin Mary to goddesshood using the attributes of Isis. Consequently, it has been fairly justifiably concluded in our work that Western Christianity, like any other religion, is a thoroughly syncretic product.

Chapter four has focused on the precolonial and pre-Christian migrations into Western Kenya and the subsequent encounter and interaction of different ethnic stocks. We have argued that the region was a border-zone where human hybridity was matched by cultural exchange. The result was that the religious concepts and practices that evolved over the centuries were syncretic. Evidence has been adduced to establish the premises that the pristine Bantu Abaluyia religion centred on veneration of ancestral spirits. Religion was most regular in the homes, and spread out to lineages and clans as need for communal worship to address wider issues emerged. Only among the Logooli was whole ethnic annual worship observed when homage was paid to prominent ancestors of the past. In the course of their interaction with the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik, the Abaluyia appropriated the concept of the Supreme Being. This began in earnest in the seventeenth century and climaxed in the course of the nineteenth century. The result was a syncretic form of religion that simultaneously combined the worship of ancestors and of God personified in the sun.

The chapter further delves into the historical evolution of the Nandi-Terik monotheism from the Cushitic Oromo or Galla. The worship of the Supreme Being, Asis, personified in the sun, remained the mainstay of the Kalenjin groups especially the Kipsigis and the Nandi-Terik. Among the latter, however, contact with the Bantu Abaluyia neighbours led to the acquisition of the concept of ancestral spirits as an object of worship. It has been demonstrated that unlike the other Kalenjin sub-ethnic groups, only the

Nandi-Terik developed a syncretic cosmology that included spirits of the ancestors, *oiik*. In their worship there developed a combination of the *oiik* and the Supreme Being, *Cheptelil*.

The Nilotic Luo, began arriving in Western Kenya at the start of the sixteenth century. Their closest neighbours with whom they have interacted for five centuries, are the Bantu Abaluyia. By the time of their arrival in Western Kenya, the Luo cosmology was centred on a high God whom they called *Were Nyakalaga* or *Obongo Nyakalaga*. The rituals involved in the worship of Nyakalaga were not sophisticated. On entry in Western Kenya, however, the Luo acquired new features which were essentially syncretic in nature. Their new sedentary lifestyle led them to appropriate belief and practice of venerating ancestral spirits. They also refined their concept of God whereby they focused attention on the sky-based worship of the Supreme Being, *Nyasaye*, personified in the sun, *chieng*. The worship of *Nyasaye* also simultaneously involved invoking of spirits of the ancestors. In addition to these, the Luo acquired from the Bantu Abaluyia belief in possession by nature spirits called *juogi*. It became an integral part of indigenous Luo religion and persisted deep into the twentieth century after they had embraced Christianity, leading yet to another pattern of syncretism.

Chapter five focuses on the encounter between indigenous cosmologies and mission Christianity in Western Kenya. It has articulated the view that studies that treat the encounter in triumphalist terms of the Christian faith are not

adequately conceived. The right conceptualisation is the syncretic one that demonstrates a dialectical encounter that resulted into a new synthesis among Western Kenyans. The chapter demonstrates the reasons for the similarities in the Abaluyia-Luo response to Christianity as well as the contrasting scenario among the Nandi-Terik. The Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo embraced mission Christianity for practical purposes, namely the fact that the missionaries were the main agency that provided Western formal education which was a prerequisite to succeeding in the new colonial political economy. It was not because the Western Kenyans found their religious beliefs and practices obsolete. Instead, when they embraced Christianity they did so along with their indigenous beliefs which were reflected in the adoption of the name *Nyasaye* for the Christian God, together with the elaborate aspects of ancestral veneration which came to be given an increasingly Christian outlook. We have shown that of the three ethnic groups under study the Kalenjin Nandi-Terik were the most conservative and so least penetrated by Christianity and Western culture. It was not until the 1920s and especially the 1930s that the group began to respond to the new faith. When they did, however, it was not a matter of Christian victory over indigenous cosmology, but a synthesis of the two.

In chapter six the study has grappled with the phenomenon of the indigenous independent church movement in Western Kenya. It has indicated the multi-causality of the phenomenon, but emphasized the pneumatological dimension which was discouraged by the missionaries. Africans found easy resonance

between the spirit world as explicated in the Bible on the one hand and the African universe which was essentially interpreted in spiritual terms. The translation of scriptures into indigenous languages and dialects confirmed the fears of the Africans that Western Christianity was only a specific cultural brand which had radically deviated from the teaching of the Bible concerning the Holy Spirit, and which they were determined to recover at the cost of severing links with Western missions.

Even then, independency was not a homogenous phenomenon in the region. It never developed among the Nandi-Terik. It featured prominently among the Central and Southern Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups and among Luo clans of Kisumu and Siaya Districts. This general lake area of Western Kenya had a long history of pre-Christian spirit possession associated with lake spirits. The idiom of in-filling by the Holy Spirit was thus not unprecedented but rather built on a long tradition of interpretation of human life in terms of the divine.

Throughout the study, the Hegelian dialectic and the triune nature of the harmony personality have been applied in the confrontation, encounter and interaction of different cosmologies. The historical trajectory of these encounters has been a dialectic that leads to new forms which we have identified at every point as being typically syncretic.

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## LIST OF INFORMANTS

*Indimuli, Musa Shitandi* (Male). Age: 100

*Luyia (Wanga)*. Elder and former Court Assistant.

Interviewed at his home in October 1999.

*Onyino, Norah* (Female). Age: 78

*Luyia (Maragoli)*. PAG Church Women's Leader

Interviewed in April 2001.

*Ochieng', Patrick* (Male). Age: 70

*Luyia (Marachi)*. Prominent Elder.

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Koricho, Francis* (Male). Age: 72

*Luyia (Nyore)*. Former Teacher

Interviewed in May 1998.

*Mongch, Kiplagat* (Male). Age: 78

(Nandi) Elder

Interviewed in June 2000.

*Oponyo, Wabwoto Zablon* (Male). Age: 79

*Luyia (Marama)* Elder.

Interviewed in October 1999

*Cheruiyot, Ann* (Female). Age: 87.

*Kipsigis* (Married in Nandi). Former Teacher.

Interviewed in June 2000.

*Siren Gideon* (Male). Age: 65

Nandi AIC Pastor

Interviewed in June 1998.

*Kweyu, Makokha* (Male). Age: 78

*Luyia (Wanga)*. Village Elder.

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Bor, Azaria* (Male). Age: 59

*Kipsigis* (Settled in Nandi). School Teacher and Elder of the Peace and Mercy Church of Africa (PMCA).

Interviewed in June 2000.

*Kibitok, arap Kosobo* (Male). Age: 67.

Nandi. Well informed Elder

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Lelei, John* (Male). Age: 53.

Nandi School Teacher.

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Lagat, Kipsongok* (Male). Age: 72.

Terik Elder.

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Kurgat, Paul* (Male). Age: 90

Nandi Well Informed Elder

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Murbi, Kangani* (Male). Age: 82

Nandi Well Informed Elder

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Bartioy, Kipto* (Male). Age: 78

Nandi Elder

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Ngoha, James* (Male). Age: 83

Luo Well Informed Elder

Interviewed in May 1998.

*Mosin, Kiplangat* (Male) Age: 90

Nandi Well Informed Elder

Interviewed in October 1999.

*Wasuna, Petro Bitu* (Male). Age: 80

Luo, Karateng Elder.

Interviewed in July 1999

*Jeptoo Salome* (Female). Age: 82

Nandi Elder

Interviewed in October 1999

*Oyiro, Jacob Ogutu* (Male). Age: 75

Luo Elder

Interviewed in July, 1999

*Oriedi, Dalmas* (Male). Age: 75

Luo, Gem

Interviewed in January 2000.

*Ohwande, Reuben* (Male). Age: 79

Luo, Gem Elder

Interviewed in January 2000.

*Ojwala Samson* (Male). Age: 99  
Luo, Kapuonja Elder  
Interviewed in January 2000.

*Chepsiror, Kombir Kirongo* (Male). Age: 100  
Nandi Well-Informed Elder  
Interviewed in October 1999.

*Kosut, Joshua Kibirgen* (Male). Age: 100  
Nandi Pioneer Convert and Church Elder  
Interviewed in October 1999.

*Kemboi, Ann* (Female). Age: 72  
Terik Elder  
Interviewed October 1999.

*Obiayo, Jonathan* (Male). Age: 89  
Luo, Nyakach Elder  
Interviewed in July 1999.

*Odhiambo, John* (Male). Age: 71  
Luo, Kager  
Interviewed in July 1999.

*Otieno Felicia* (Female). Age: 83  
Luo Gem Elder  
Interviewed January 2000.

*Ogada, Ambrose* (Male). Age: 75  
Luo, Alego School Teacher  
Interviewed in July 1999.

*Nyamollo, Andrew* (Male). Age: 80  
Luo, Nyakach Elder.  
Interviewed in July 1999.

*Ochanda, Ogada Joachim* (Male). Age: 71  
Luo Ugenya Elder  
Interviewed in July 1999.

*Omwadho, Okowa* (Male). Age: 82  
Luo, Koluo Elder  
Interviewed in July 1999