

**THE AKAMBA TRADITIONAL RELIGION
AND CHRISTIANITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY**

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By

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
Master of Arts in Philosophy in the University of Nairobi.

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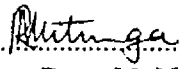


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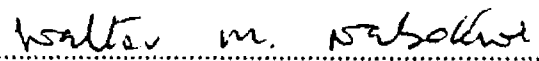
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DECLARATION

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

Signed 
Rose M. Mutunga

This Thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as University supervisor.

Signed 
Dr. Walter Nabakwe
(University Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This work is *dedicated* to my husband,
Harrison Musyoka and our son, Mwendwa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. G. J. Wanjohi and Dr. W. Nabakwe for their invaluable guidance that facilitated the presentation of this work.

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ABSTRACT

Many philosophers and theologians alike have written on African religious heritage from different perspectives. However, it is apparent in their works that not much has been done on the philosophy behind the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity among the Akamba. In fact, most of the available works seem to have generalised on all Africans. This necessitates looking at such a co-existence of the two religions in this particular ethnic community. Therefore, this study is an inquiry into the basic principles underlying the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity.

An endeavour is made to look at the universal concept of God, and how it compares with the traditional Akamba concept of God. It ought to be remarked that the traditional Akamba concept of God is not different from the universal one. Indeed, the traditional Akamba ascribe to God the same attributes that are universally accorded Him. This is contrary to claims by some of the biased early anthropologists who ostensibly asserted that the traditional Akamba do not acknowledge God.

The relationship between religion and culture, with special reference to culture and world-view, and how culture influences worship of God is critically analysed and evaluated. An important observation here is that culture

has an immeasurable influence over religion, so that people of different cultures find spiritual meaning and fulfilment through different belief systems and rituals of worship. In fact, culture seems to be the major principle underlying the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity among the Akamba.

The study goes further and explicates the traditional Akamba worship of God. The various components that constitute the Akamba traditional religion are looked at: and their effect on the faith of the Akamba in their traditional religion evaluated. It is observed that the traditional Akamba are so much attached to their culture that it is impossible for the majority of them to completely denounce their traditional religion in favour of Christianity.

Finally, the study attempts a comparison between the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity. But emphasis is on those aspects that seem to be responsible for the fundamental differences between the two religions hence their point of departure.

This inquiry found that the two religions in question are two different modes of worship directed to the same God. They are aimed at achieving the same goal; that of establishing and maintaining a good relationship between the worshippers and God. It would perhaps be safer to conclude that as of now, there seems to be no prospects that the traditional Akamba religion will

die soon as evidenced in this study that, the success of Christianity in Kambaland is superficial for the most part since many of supposedly practising and committed Christians hold the two religions in juxtaposition.

The study recommends that a better approach of educating the traditional Akamba on Christianity be adopted without necessarily having to sling mud at their religion and culture. Otherwise, the Christian approach has for the most part been one of being after triumphalism, conquest and victory over the Akamba traditional religion. In a nutshell, this is what this thesis is all about.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The present study is a critical examination of the basic principles underlying the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity. The study adopts Paul Tillich's definition of the term "religion". Tillich defines religion as "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life."¹ Such a concern is unconditionally serious and shows a willingness to sacrifice any finite concern which is in conflict with it. The predominant religious name for the content of such concern is God. This concern is manifest in various spheres of man's life namely: in all creative functions of the human spirit, in the moral sphere as the unconditional seriousness of the moral demand, in the realm of knowledge as the passionate longing for ultimate reality, and in the aesthetic function of the human spirit as the infinite desire to express ultimate meaning.² Thus the state of being ultimately concerned is itself religion. Religion serves as the ground and the depth of man's spiritual life, and essentially, it is the all-determining ground and substance of man's spiritual life.

Religion is more than belief and religious praxis is part of the cultural fibre of society. It is difficult to dissociate man's life from religion. Therefore, the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional feature that characterize a society or a social group cannot be disassociated from religion.³

There has been a general tendency by some scholars to regard any work that touches on a certain ethnic group as mere ethnography, but this does not apply to this study for it transcends ethnography. This inquiry is a major contribution to African philosophy - one area which has not yet been fully exploited. Even though there seems to be no general consensus on what constitutes African philosophy, this has not deterred the present study from venturing into the subject.

1.1 Statement of the problem

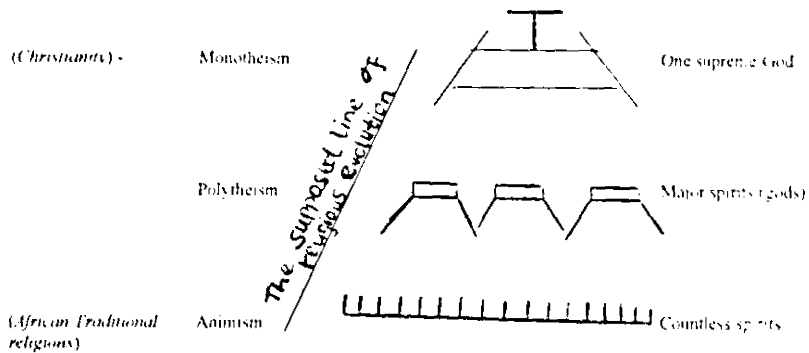
Religion has always served a purpose - a purpose which belongs to the very fabric of life itself and this is as much a fact of history as it is of experience. There is bound to be an aching void in life if people were deprived of their religion and are not provided with reasonable and acceptable substitutes. Bouquet expresses this fact more truly and forcefully when he notes that "anyone who is inside a working scheme of religion is well aware that to deprive him of that

scheme is to a large extent, so to speak, to disembowel his life."⁴ Religion seems to be part and parcel of peoples' lives: they are born in it, grow in it and live in it. Besides, religion is a sphere of human life and activity that appears to be inevitable. This fact is well reflected deep down in the nature of every person; thus there exists in every person an inherent urge which makes religion a matter of ultimate concern. In every religion, belief in some supernatural Power/God is quite central.

Mbiti notes that belief in God is a fact taken for granted by all African peoples; this belief is very common in African religious life and it is at the centre of African religion, dominating all its other beliefs.⁵ Various studies have been conducted on African traditional religion by many different scholars (see for example, works by Lindblom, Hobley, Idowu, Meveigh, Mbula, Ndeti, Mbiti).⁶ These studies have no doubt explored various aspects of African traditional religion. This notwithstanding, however, some of these studies are inadequate, perhaps misleading or even prejudicial especially those by the early European anthropologists as most of them seem to portray a grim picture of African traditional religion (see for example, Lindblom, Hobley).⁷ Thus such authors have characterized African traditional religion as primitivity, fetishism, animism, shamanism,

ancestor-worship, and also as being at the bottom in the supposed line of religious evolution while Christianity and other religions are portrayed as being superior, as illustrated in the following diagram.

An illustration to show the supposed line of religious evolution



Source: Mbiti, 1987:8.

Mbiti uses this illustration to summarise the descriptions of African religions by some of the biased early anthropologists. According to Mbiti,⁸ this type of argument was postulated by an English anthropologist, E. B. Tylor. Tylor defined religion as the "belief in spirit beings". He saw the anima as a shadowy vaporous image animating the object it occupied. Besides, he thought that the so-called 'primitive people' imagined the anima to be capable of

leaving the body and entering other men, animals or things; and continuing to live after death. He went on to say that such 'primitive' men considered every object to have its own soul, thus giving rise to countless spirits in the universe. Later, Tylor's idea was popularised by his followers and since then, the term animism has come to be widely used in describing traditional religions of Africa. The notion of countless spirits opened the way for the idea of religious evolution. This further led on to the theory that single spirits existed over each major department of nature. For example, all the spirits of the rivers would have one major spirit in charge of them, and the same for rocks, trees etc. Accordingly, this gave man the idea of many gods (polytheism), which in turn evolved further to the stage of one Supreme God over all the other departmental spirits. It is this type of argument and interpretation that places African religions at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution, while Judaism, Christianity and Islam are at the top, since they are monotheistic. However, Mbiti dismisses this theory for it fails to take into account the fact that another theory equally argues that man's religious development began with a monotheism and moved towards polytheism and animism.

Moreover, it is not clear how evolution progresses from animism to monotheism. Neither of the two theories is being

considered to be more cogent than the other in the present study because this study is not really concerned about the historical development of religion, but rather with religion as it is practised by people. Thus this study does not concern itself with either theory, but uses this argument to show the supposed position of African traditional religions in relation to the other religions as portrayed by the biased early anthropologists.

Mbiti argues that African traditional religions and Christianity are not entirely different for they both acknowledge God, spirits and divinities as part of their beliefs.⁹ But a close examination of both religions suggests some fundamental differences: one, the two religions are based upon different cultures namely, the African culture and the Western/European culture. Each of these cultures interprets and understands religion in its own way. Secondly, these religions show apparent differences in various aspects such as the selection of the religious leaders, days and places of worship, religious beliefs, rituals/ceremonies, the kind of offerings and/or sacrifices offered to God, and generally in their beliefs for example, the belief in death and the life hereafter. Moreover, it could also be argued that the co-existence of these two religions in many African communities is in effect a manifestation of the fundamental difference between the two

religions. Otherwise, if they were not different, then we would not be talking of co-existence of the two religions within one community; but about existence of a certain religion. Thus in many African communities, Christianity co-exists side by side with African traditional religions.

African communities have so far experienced a long history of Christianity. In spite of this, however, African traditional religions continue to persist. The philosophy underlying this persistence has not been adequately explored particularly, among the Akamba. In fact, there is no adequate philosophical study as such that has been conducted among the Akamba in this respect. Thus this study is undertaken with a view to investigating the philosophy underlying the co-existence of the two religions among the Akamba. Particularly, to establish the reasons that have ensured the continued persistence of the Akamba traditional religion amidst a rivalling religion (Christianity).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims at investigating the philosophy underlying the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity. Besides, this study makes a comparison between the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity, with a view to establishing what

fundamental differences may be responsible for the continued co-existence of the two religions.

1.3 Justification of the Study

Mbiti points out that "Africa is going through tremendous and rapid changes in every aspect of human life. Many individuals are becoming increasingly detached from the corpus of their tribal and traditional beliefs, concepts and practices. However, these concepts have not all been abandoned nor are they likely to be wiped out immediately by these modern changes."¹⁰ Along similar lines, Bascom and Herskovits note the following:

Despite the intensity of Christian missionary effort and thousand years of Moslem proselytizing which have marked the history of various parts of Africa, African religions continue to manifest vitality everywhere. This is to be seen in the worship of African deities, the homage to the ancestors, and the recourse to divination, magic and other rituals. A growing number of Africans to be sure, have been taught to regard the religion of their forefathers as superstition and to reject other beliefs and customs as outmoded. But there is no evidence which supports the assumption that so often

underlies thinking about Africa's future, that African culture, whether in its religious or other aspects will shortly and inevitably disappear.¹¹

Besides, Mbiti portrays Africans as people who have been having a wealth of traditional religious wisdom, and the Akamba are no exception.¹² The Akamba religious aspect is well reflected in their belief system: their beliefs are largely based on the individual's self-awareness, his relationship to others, his environment and above all, the world beyond, as Mbula notes.¹³ The traditional religions do not send or use missionaries to spread the religions, but they are strong and their strength lies in their being fully integrated in all the aspects of human existence, and as such, it may not be possible to completely wipe them out.

Evidence from the contemporary Akamba suggests this to be the case as traditional religious practices continue to exist side by side with Christianity, in spite of the long history of the latter in Kambaland. The reasons underlying this co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity have not been adequately explored. It is therefore, on the basis of this understanding that a philosophical study is undertaken to provide a better understanding of these two religions which co-exist among the Akamba.

1.4 Literature review

The issue of African traditional religion and Christianity has been covered in various disciplines. This has made available a vast literature on the subject. That notwithstanding, it should be noted that there has not been adequate literature on this subject by Africans. In fact, in the recent past people have had to rely on literature written by biased foreigners. However, this is changing as Africans have recently started venturing into this subject. See for example, works by E.B. Idowu, J. Mbiti, S.G. Kibicho, J. Mbula, T. Adeyemo, and J.N.K. Mugambi among others.¹⁴

African traditional religion has been poorly defined owing to preconceived notions about the religion. Consequently, derogatory names have been coined to describe the essential characteristics of African traditional religion namely, 'primitive', 'savage' and 'native'. Thus a look at works by most early western writers on Africa, reflects to a large extent frequent use of the word 'primitive' in their description of African traditional religion. See for example, works by G. Lindblom and C.W. Hobley.¹⁵ The term 'primitive' is used by these authors to imply anything that does not conform to a certain cultural pattern accepted as the norm by western authors; in consequence African traditional religion belongs to the category of those things

which have somehow been left behind in the race of cultural sophistication. To the western writers, African traditional religion is categorically 'backward', 'unrefined', or 'uncouth'. Nevertheless, this is not the truth about African traditional religion, and it would be more helpful if such biased writers had used the term 'primitive' in the positive sense to imply early, original or primary in the case of African traditional religion.

African traditional religion has often been treated by social anthropologists as if it were a bizarre museum item entirely different from other religious phenomena found in western culture. They have given it a conceptual interpretation that betrays their prejudices about African cultures, which in many ways are not valid and lack any rational justification. Africans have been described by some writers as pagans, heathens or people whose lives revolve around superstitions. E. Evans-Pritchard in his work Theories of Primitive Religion points out:

"I give an example from a region with which I am well acquainted. In view of recent papers and extensive monographs on the religion of the Northern Nilotes, it is strange to read what a famous explorer, Sir Samuel Baker, said then in his address to the Ethnological society of London in 1866. "Without any exception, they are without a belief in a Supreme Being. Neither have they any form of worship nor idolatry nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition. The mind is as stagnant as the morals which form its punny world".¹⁶

Such a view is wrong and not tenable in the light of the present evidence of religion in African cultures. Religious beliefs are a matter of common human experience; and there are certain problems or circumstances that evoke such experience and Africans are not innocent of such. Ginsberg observes the following:

At the core of the religious consciousness there are elements of genuine experience giving true insight into the real. The experience, however, is never merely intellectual but is permanently rooted in emotional needs. Man requires to be reconciled to his place in nature. He needs guidance in action, consolation in grief, fortitude in bearing irreparable loss. In varying ways, religions hold out hope of complete and abiding satisfaction. But they do not build this hope on any empirical investigation of the conditions of such satisfaction.¹⁷

Both the so-called primitive people as well as people of advanced cultures are predisposed to these experiences at various times and when in moments of exaltation, distress or debasement, they seek solace or expression of their feelings, it is only to a supreme being, above ordinary experience, that they turn to.¹⁸ Thus African traditional religion does not lack theological sovereignty and there is a clear distinction between ideas relating to the Supreme Being and other deities. While speaking of the Ashanti, Busia asserts that

"though Ashanti religious ceremonies concern these intermediary deities and the spirits of the ancestors, the people have a feeling of awe and veneration for the Supreme Being who is high above all deities and who animates them all".¹⁹

Such an assertion proves as false, claims by some western writers that Africans are heathens, pagans or ancestor-worshippers.

However, other authors seem to have done justice to this subject and their works no doubt carry insightful highlights on the subject. See for example, works by Meveigh, Mbiti, Idowu, Mbula and Shorter just to mention a few.²⁰ Mbiti, a renowned scholar on African heritage, has done quite a lot on African traditional religion, especially to advance a historical background of the religion. The origin of African traditional religion could be traced back to the origin of their belief in God. Mbiti notes that

*"all African Peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the Centre of African religion and dominates all its other beliefs. This belief is very ancient in African religious life".*²¹

This point is further emphasized by Idowu when he notes that "the living God is the real cohesive factor of religion in Africa and all religious beliefs are based on or at least point to God."²² Such contributions by Mbiti and Idowu dismiss as false claims by most western authors on Africa that Africans do not acknowledge the living God. Mbiti gives three possible explanations as to why African peoples believe in God.

First, through reflecting on the universe. Generally, African people believe the universe to have been created; a belief that

presupposes there was a creator of the universe. It is that creator that is acknowledged to be God. Thus people realised at a very early date that this vast and complex universe must have had an origin, and therefore came to the conclusion that there must have been someone, who originated it and this someone is God. Similarly, they reflected on the enormity and continuity of the earth and the heavens and concluded that there must be someone who looks after it, sustains it. Therefore, by reflecting on the universe it became both logical and necessary for people to hold a belief in God, as the explanation for the origin and continuity of the universe.

Secondly, people realized their own limitations. Man realized his own limitations and weakness. He saw how limited his powers and knowledge were, and this was particularly so in the face of situations that are beyond man's control, for instance death, calamities, the forces of nature (earthquakes etc.) Such are some of the forces that may easily have led people to speculate that there must be someone greater than all the forces and who has full control over them. From this speculation, people felt that they needed the help of this one in their experiences of powerlessness and limitation and this one came to be regarded as God. Thirdly, people observed the forces of nature such as storms, thunder and lightning, the phenomena of day and night, the expanse of the sky with its sun, moon and stars. Such as found in these heavenly bodies and force, no doubt drew people's attention from the very beginning. Moreover, people depended so much on the sky and what happened there. Thus from this dependence, they began to associate the heavens with the one whom they eventually called God. This could even be the reason why God is so much associated with the sky and the heavens.²³

It is on the basis of this belief in God that African traditional religion developed. From the above explanations, it is clear that the African belief in God is based on well reasoned logical arguments. These arguments could be likened to the famous arguments for the

existence of God, postulated by some early famous philosophers namely, Plato, St. Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, Descartes, and Locke among others. These explanations falsify claims by some of the early anthropologists that the "untutored African" had no knowledge of God.

Idowu observes that:

*"...those who hold the traditional faith and practice the African traditional religion are in the minority as compared with those who are Christians. This apparent situation has occurred because it has become unfashionable, by and large, for any one except an old person to declare himself an adherent of the traditional religion. This is well reflected in public records, like those of the hospitals, where religion is still indicated, people will claim to belong to either Christianity or Islam; and the same thing happens in any other situation where people have to answer the question, what is your religion?"*²⁴

However, this is quite misleading as Africa has such a wealth of God given heritage. Africa is blessed with so many indigenous spiritual and cultural treasures and that is why even while every African may wish to be identified with any of the so-called fashionable religions, most Africans are at heart still attached to their own indigenous beliefs.²⁵ Further, Idowu contends that this is the basis of the main problem of the church in Africa today; that most of her members display divided loyalties between Christianity and the traditional religion.²⁶ In fact, this is the major problem with most of

the Akamba who have been converted to Christianity. They identify themselves with Christianity, but at heart they are, for the practical purposes adherents of the Akamba traditional religion.

1.4.1 The Akamba traditional religion

While most of the other world religions such as Islam and Christianity have founders who started them, the Akamba traditional religion does not have such founders; it evolved slowly through many centuries as the Akamba responded to the situations of their life and reflected upon their experiences. Similarly, unlike Christianity, the Akamba traditional religion has no scriptures or holy books; it is chiefly oral and it is expressed in intuitive poetry, proverbs and myths. Its existence greatly depends on the memories of the religious leaders, and it goes without saying that inconsistency among the religious leaders is common since there are no scriptures for ensuring uniformity in administration of the religion. However, the fact that the Akamba traditional religion is expressed in poetry, proverbs and myths should not be misconstrued to mean that the Akamba do not use reason or that their religion is mythical as it has been claimed by biased western anthropologists. On the contrary, religion ethics and morals in African experience are not independent of life and reason.²⁷

The Akamba traditional religion is therefore imprinted in the hearts and experiences of the people and it is considered to be very pragmatic and realistic as it is applied to a situation as the need arises. Like in other African traditional religions, there is no apocalyptic vision in the Akamba traditional religion since religion is not meant for the salvation of individuals, but for the preservation of collective life and the community. Thus the Akamba traditional religion is not so much concerned about the beginning and the end of the world, but is rather more concerned with life experiences for example, the good life here and now, with health and prosperity, with success in life, happy and productive marriage, causes of diseases, failure and obstacles in the path of self realization and fulfilment. This is one aspect that makes the Akamba traditional religion to be very objective.

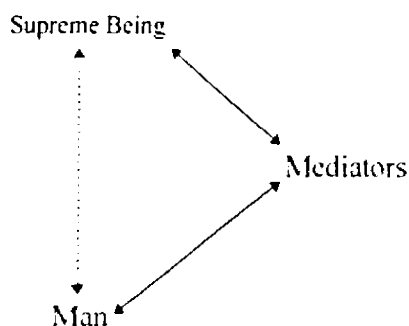
But some Western writers have portrayed the traditional Akamba as ancestor-worshippers. For instance , Lindblom alleges that the Akamba traditional religion is characterized by a developed worship of spirits of their ancestors, and a vague belief in a higher Being Mulungu (God).²⁸ Similarly, Hobley describes the traditional Akamba as having two gods namely, Ngai or Mulungu (God) and aiimu (spirits).²⁹ However, Mbiti's extensive and informative

researches on the Akamba and African theology have falsified the above allegations.³⁹

The traditional Akamba pray to God through intermediaries. These intermediaries are their ancestors. The ancestors are believed to solicit for favours from God on behalf of the worshippers, like the Catholics do when they pray to God through Mary (the mother of Jesus) and a communion of Saints such as St. Peter, St. Augustine, St. Mark, St. John and St. Francis among others. Shorter A. in his work prayer in the religious Traditions of Africa, has advanced a model representing the type of formal prayers said by the Akamba as follows:

Key

—— Formal Prayer
----- Experiential Prayer



Source: Shorter. 1975: 11

In this model, mediators are the ancestors and they act principally as channels of formal prayer to the Supreme Being. While there may be little or no direct formal worship of the Supreme Being,

His own characteristic power and presence are still apparently, directly experienced and acknowledged in life.³¹ The use of ancestors as intermediaries between the traditional Akamba and God has however been highly misinterpreted as ancestor-worship by most western writers, but this is not the case. This is sheer prejudice against African traditional religion as a whole, just because it is based on African culture that has often been portrayed as backward by biased western writers. Why should the use of ancestors in the Akamba traditional religion be branded ancestor-worship and the same is not said of Catholic when they pray through a communion of Saints?. Why has this not been regarded as idol - worship?. These point to the unfair assessment to which African traditional religion has been subjected by the so-called civilized western people.

Among the traditional Akamba, worship by either inhabitants of a village or a certain region in form of sacrifices and offerings is done at the sacred grounds, on special occasions like during a prolonged drought, famine, an epidemic or thanksgiving after a good harvest. The sacred grounds include sacred groves and shrines and are referred to as ithembo singular and mathembo plural. These groves are of a particular tree species called kiumo, but where this species is lacking, another tree species may be chosen to suffice. These sacred grounds

are regarded as sanctuaries for human and animal life, and animals or men hiding there must not be killed or attacked, and the grove must never be cut down. If however, the grove happens to be cut by somebody either out of ignorance or malice, then the offender is forced to pay some fine in form of either goats or cows so that the grove can be ritually cleansed. Otherwise, offerings and sacrifices made at family level are conducted within the homestead. All religious matters are conducted by religious officials who are mainly men, and are not paid for their services. But religious activities at the family level may be conducted by the family elder as these are usually simple.

It is however, important to point out that the official places of worship among the Akamba are used only on important occasions. Otherwise, families or individuals are not bound to any official spot for worship. They turn to God in acts of worship anywhere, without being bound to the feeling that God should be worshipped at a particular place. His omnipresence facilitates this and He can therefore be worshipped at anytime, where and when the need to do so arises.

1.4.2 Christianity among the Akamba

Christianity has been differently defined by various authors. However, being a religion with several thousand years of history and

thousands of millions of followers belonging to different denominations, it would be absurd to expect a uniform definition or expression of Christianity among authors. The dictionary of comparative religion defines Christianity as "a saviour-god religion, incorporating traditions of faith and practice current in Judaism and cults of Graeco-Roman world."³² This definition portrays Christianity as not only incorporating Jewish culture, but also as having been influenced by other cultures particularly Greek culture. But such a definition would be incomplete to Africans because Christianity in Africa has equally been influenced by the African culture, as evidenced by the African independent church movement, whose objective has been to ensure that Christianity in Africa incorporates African culture too.

The longman dictionary of contemporary English defines Christianity as "the religion based on the life and teachings of Christ".³³ This definition is too narrow and limiting for it disregards the cultural aspect.

A more comprehensive definition of Christianity has been advanced by Mugambi. According to him, the meaning of Christianity may be expressed in three complementary aspects, namely: as a way of belief, a way of worship, and a way of daily living.³⁴ As a way of

belief. Christianity proclaims a faith which is both a conviction about God, and a trust in the will of God. Its foundation is divine revelation, which is a disclosure of the will of God through the history of the chosen people of God, namely, the Hebrews and the church, and also particularly Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians affirm to be Christ. Central to the fundamental beliefs of Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the doctrine of the Trinity, God is confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus they are three persons, and yet he is only one God. This central belief is expressed in the Apostles Creed which is essentially a summary of Christian religious beliefs.

Christianity as a way of worship is expressed as follows: Jesus is believed to have taught his disciples how to pray. He in fact told them to say their prayers according to the following model:

· *"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven....."*³⁵

This hope is expressed in all Christian prayer and worship, and it is the core of Christianity as a way of worship.³⁶

The third aspect that Mugambi includes in his definition is, Christianity as a way of daily living. According to this, he asserts that Christianity is also defined as a way of love or charity. Love is a fundamental principle in the teaching of Jesus. This was very much

emphasized by st. Paul especially in Corinthians 13. "Love the Lord God, and love your neighbour". Jesus is believed to have given a concrete example of this - the parable of the Good Samaritan. At the end of his narration of the parable, Jesus told his questioner to "go and do likewise".³⁷ From the foregoing, Christianity could be said to be not only a belief or conviction, but also a way of worship, and it gives guidance as to what principles a person should apply in his daily conduct. Mugambi's expression of Christianity is worthy of note for it comprises all the essential elements of any religion namely: belief in God, worship of God, and the people's way of life (Culture).

As pointed out earlier in one of the definitions, Christianity incorporates various cultures. Initially, it was founded on Jewish culture, but later on it experienced a lot of influences from other cultures as it was spread to other parts of the world. For instance, it was influenced by the Greek (Roman) culture (in fact, in the recent past, some Christians have had to recite their prayers in Latin). This has been notable in Catholic, while in the Seventh Day Adventist church, they still use a latin greeting. When a prayer or greeting is said in such a foreign language which is not even commonly used by the people in question, then its meaning may not be grasped. These

foreign cultural influences ought to be replaced by African culture to enhance Africans' understanding of some aspects of Christianity.

Besides the Greek culture, Christianity has also been influenced by the European culture and in Africa, it has been influenced by the African culture. Thus we cannot point at one culture among the cited ones and claim that it forms Christian culture. The combination of these cultures is what we probably would call Christian culture.

The community of Christians forms the church. Christianity as the name suggests is a religion that endeavours to emulate Christ as much as possible, and much of its teaching centres on the ideals of Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity is very central to the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. According to this doctrine, God is confessed as Father, son and Holy Spirit, so that they are three persons and yet He is only one God. This doctrine makes the Christian conception of God totally different from that of the Akamba traditional religion, according to which God is perceived as being in one mode of existence. This certainly presents a lot of difficulties to the traditional Akamba in trying to grasp what Christianity is, and generally understanding some of the Christian concepts. For instance, it is quite difficult for the traditional Akamba to conceptualize God in the doctrine of the Trinity

because in their traditional religion, God exists as the Father, but the son (Christ) and Holy Spirit do not exist.

Worship in Christianity is centred on the church. The church is said to be a community that is close knit together by personal relationship with God. Its corporate cohesion and solidarity stem from the realization that the Holy Spirit is working in order to extend God's Kingdom among all peoples of the earth.³⁸ In this regard, Christianity has endeavoured to spread its tentacles to all nations, tribes and the Akamba are no exception.

Christianity was introduced into Kambaland by European missionaries in the nineteenth century. Commenting on Christianity, Mbula asserts the following:

*Christianity was based on the ethics of a given people, was and is still historical, claims to be universal monotheistic and redemptive. In it, the relationship between God and man is mediated by the person of Jesus Christ. It is revealed and not a natural religion, concerned primarily with the inner life of man in God. It saves man from sin, and centres on Christ's mediation. In Christianity, God is conceived on the one hand as a moral perfection, and on the other hand, man is regarded not only as morally weak, but also as morally blameworthy.*³⁹

This is a good summary of what Christianity is all about essentially. Man is portrayed as being a sinner by his very nature of being a descendant of the first parents (Adam and Eve) who are

believed to have committed the first sin and consequently fallen out of God's favour. It is believed that when Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed them and this curse was directed to all their descendants. An account of the fall of man is well given in the Holy Bible (Genesis:3).⁴⁰

Thus Christianity strives to restore the good relationship that existed between God and man, and was lost when the first man sinned. This restoration is, and can only be achieved if man first admits that he is a sinner, and believes in Jesus Christ to save him from that sin. This too is clearly stated in the Holy Bible.⁴¹

1.5 Methodology

In conducting this study, no field research was done. The study has for the most part relied upon relevant secondary information based on extensive field researches conducted earlier by various scholars on the subject. The information has been read, evaluated and analyzed with a view to achieving the objectives of the study.

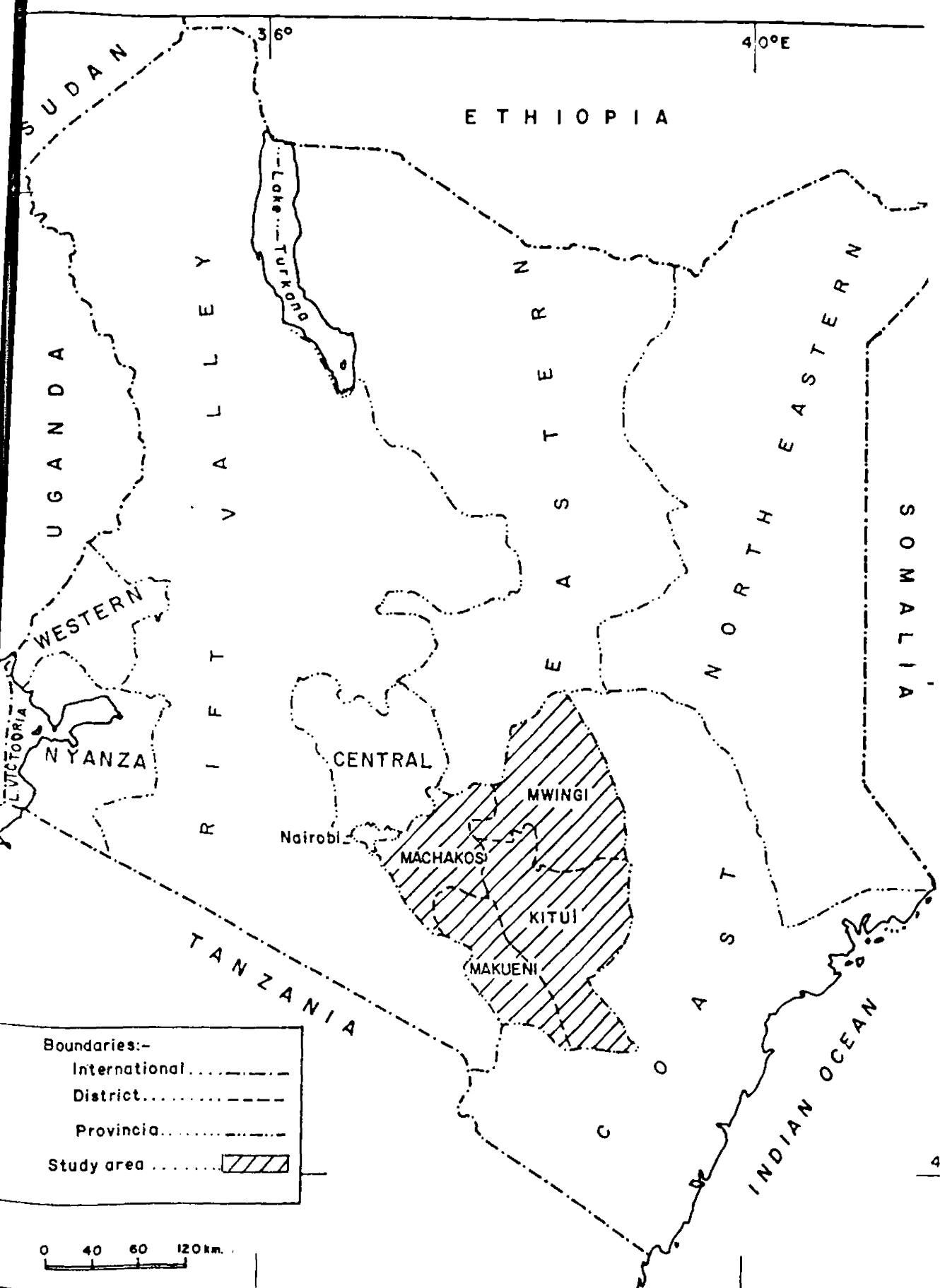
However, the fact that we have not used field data in this thesis does not in any way rule out its use by other scholars to increase scholarly work on this subject.

1.6 The Geographical Location of the Akamba

This study is about all the Akamba of Kenya. The Akamba occupy four major districts namely, Machakos, Kitui, Mwingi, and Makueni of Eastern Province. Kambaland occupies an area of 17,486 square miles. According to the Kenya population census of 1989, Kambaland has a population of 2,054,605 people.

Geographically, Kambaland lies between 4 minutes and 3 degrees South and 37 degrees and 39 degrees East (see Map). Two-thirds of Kambaland is between 1000 and 3000 feet above sea level, with a few inselbergs rising slightly above this altitude. This area has various types of soils namely, black and red loam cotton soils, grey clay soils and sandy soils. Kambaland experiences two rainy seasons namely Uua the long rainy season in the months of March to May. The short rainy season Nihwa is experienced from October through December and sometimes it may cross to January. The average annual rainfall is 500 mm. This rainfall is rather low and unreliable and this renders agricultural activities not only unpredictable but also expensive. Thus crop failures, drought/famines are frequent in the area. The vegetation in this area is mainly low bush and thicket with acacia trees as a common feature characteristic of a semi-arid environment.

The Akamba cultivate both food crops and cash crops. Their food crops include maize, beans, peas, pigeon peas, cowpeas, finger millet, sorghum, sugar cane and cassava. The principal cash crops are cotton, coffee, sisal, wattle, sunflower and tobacco. They also grow fruits such as lemons, oranges, mangoes, pawpaw, avocados and bananas. Besides crop farming, livestock rearing is important and they keep beef and dairy cattle, sheep and goats.



THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE AKAMBA

NOTES

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CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE AKAMBA CONCEPTION OF GOD

The concept of God is very difficult to define, but for the purpose of the present inquiry, the term "God" will be used to refer to the "Sole Supreme Being, eternal, spiritual and transcendent, who is the creator and ruler of all and is infinite in all attributes"¹. Before attempting a description of God, it is important to ask ourselves whether such a being exists. If he exists, is there any adequate evidence or indicator(s) that point(s) to such an existence. Thus before discussing the Akamba concept of God, we will briefly examine the various arguments or explanations that have been advanced to show that God exists, with a view to establishing whether the traditional Akamba have or had such arguments with regard to the existence of God.

Various philosophers have taken different stances with regard to the existence of God. Some have taken an atheist stance and consequently, denied any possible existence of God: for example, K. Marx, F. Nietzsche, S. Freud and J. Sartre among others. Others have taken a theist stand and argued that God exists: for instance S. ierkegaard and G. Marcel. Yet, others have taken an agnostic stance

and argued that there is no sufficient rational evidence to establish either the existence or the non-existence of God. Such philosophers include K. Jaspers and M. Heidegger.

In order to justify the theistic stance, various arguments for and/or possible indicators to God's existence have been advanced by many different philosophers. The present study looks briefly at five of these arguments and attempts to assess the extent to which they may be considered as evidence or indicators to the existence of God. The following arguments will therefore be considered:

- Cosmological argument
- Ontological argument
- Design/Teleological argument
- Morality argument
- Experience of God argument.

2.1.1 The Cosmological argument

The cosmological argument is based on the philosophical study of the origin and nature of the universe. It is therefore, an a posteriori argument for it depends on our experience of the universe. This view was first observed by some of the earliest philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Avicenna. Thomas Aquinas and later philosophers like Descartes, Leibniz and Locke also held it. The cosmological argument is based on four concepts namely: motion, efficient cause, necessary

being and contingent beings. According to the first concept (motion), things in the world are always changing or moving. These things cannot change or move on their own. There must be some being outside them that imparts change/motion in them. According to Plato, all motion in the world was ultimately due to the activity of the soul, which is perfectly good and wise and such is God. For Aristotle, the motion of heavens and other things that move, is intermediate and there must be something that moves things without itself being moved and this he called the first mover (God). However, the most famous version of the cosmological argument is that of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) Which he divided into five different parts and called them 'ways'. These five 'ways' are stated in Summa Theologiae 1.2.3.C. St. Thomas Aquinas argued that God cannot be known intuitively, but only by His effects hence his cosmological 'ways'.

The first 'way' begins with the point that things in the world are always changing or moving and concludes to the existence of one, first immovable mover (God). He thus argues:

Whatever is in motion is moved by another; and it is clear to the sense that something, the sun for instance, is in motion. Therefore, it is set in motion by something else moving it. Now that which moves it is itself moved or not. If it be not moved, then the point is proved that we must need postulate an immovable mover; and this we call God. If, however, it be moved, it proceeds to infinity, or we must come to an immovable mover. But

it is not possible to proceed to infinity. Therefore, it is necessary to postulate an immovable mover.²

This 'way' is based on the assumption that there can never be an infinite regress in movement; and therefore, there has to be a first mover to trigger-off the entire process.

In the second 'way', Aquinas argues from the observation of efficient production of things in the universe to the need of an existing, first efficient cause. According to him, there is an order of efficient causes among phenomena. Regress in these causes is impossible. For if there were no first cause, there could be no intermediate cause. Therefore, there must be the initial cause that is responsible for all other subsequent causes. This cause is itself uncaused and is God.

In his third 'way', Aquinas reasons from the contingent character of things in the world (none of them has to be) to the existence of a necessary one (which has to be). He thus argued that things in our experience can be or not be and there is no necessity of their existence. But if everything were like this, at one time, there would be nothing at all in existence.³ Therefore, there must be something the existence of which is necessary, and this is God.

The fourth 'way' argues from the gradations of goodness, truth and nobility in the things of man's experience to the existence of a

being that is most true, most good and most noble, and this he calls God.

In the fifth 'way', Aquinas argues from the orderly character of mundane events: that all things are directed toward one end (the principle of finality) or to serve a certain purpose, and concludes that this universal order points to the existence of an intelligent orderer of all things. He calls this orderer God.

However, the extent to which ~~to~~ cosmological argument succeeds in proving the existence of God is quite questionable, and consequently, a lot of criticisms have been levelled against it. In his critique of pure reason, Kant contends that the cosmological argument contains invalid assumptions which prove nothing. One of the assumptions is that from contingent events, we can infer that there must be a necessary cause of their existence. The principle of causality, that every event must have a cause, applies, as far as we can tell, only to the world of sense experience. But, in the cosmological argument, this principle about empirical knowledge is used to carry us beyond the world of sense experience to something that is supposed to transcend it. Thus this is unjustified. We have no basis for assuming that the principle we employ in the analysis of our experience can be made to apply to anything beyond experience.

Further, with regard to 'First cause', Kant points out that we have no justification for inferring that there must be a first cause. The principles which we follow with regard to the use of reason do not support the argument in question, since we have no rational means for arriving at the end of our quest for causes and explanations, nor have we any way of determining when the series of causes and explanations have been completed. Therefore, we can never be justified in claiming that we have found the first cause. All that we can recognize is that arguments that transcend possible experience whether they be about God, or anything else, are entirely speculative and prove nothing of which we can be certain.

Besides, a critic may argue that the universe was not designed for any purpose, and it is simply there. Also, not everybody thinks of God as the standard of perfection whether some things are considered to be more or less perfect than others.

St. Thomas Aquinas' cosmological argument about the first cause can only hold as far as his assumption that there cannot be infinite regress of cause and effect stands otherwise, in the absence of that assumption, then we would have room for regress in which case the position of the cosmologists would disappear.

This argument does not succeed in proving the existence of God beyond any reasonable doubt. All it seems to succeed in doing is probably prompting us to reflect on the universe. It can however be used to convince someone who is already a believer otherwise, it cannot convince a non-believer.

2.1.2 The Ontological argument

The term 'ontological' is derived from the noun 'ontology' which means a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of existence; hence the name of the argument.

This argument starts from the idea of God (which is assumed to be innate in every human being) as the most perfect and necessary being. Then, without recourse to empirical experience, the conclusion is drawn that this being exists, since existence is simply involved in its perfection and necessity. Thus this argument tries to establish that from the definition of a Supreme Being, it follows that He must necessarily exist. No knowledge about the world is required in order to develop this argument therefore, it is purely an a priori demonstration. This argument was first propounded by St. Anselm (1033--1109) in Faith Seeking Understanding, a work he later entitled Proslogium, meaning discourse. Anselm intended it to be "a single argument which would

require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists...."⁴ According to Anselm, belief precedes understanding. In his Proslogium, he declared that "I do not seek to understand that I may believe that unless I believe, I should not understand."⁵ Thus Anselm first believed that God exists, before setting out to prove such existence and consequently took the existence of God for granted. He grounded his argument on the proposition that "unless I believe I shall not understand."⁶ This means that the only person who could understand God's existence is one who already believes that God exists. Thus a non-believer cannot understand God's existence.

Anselm portrayed God as the greatest possible being. He defined God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived."⁷ He distinguished between existence in the understanding and existence in reality. He argued that whatever exists in reality is greater than that which exists only in the understanding (mind). That if anything exists in reality, that is, outside one's mind, it must necessarily exist also as a concept within one's mind since we form concepts of anything that exists. Thus he could conceive of God as existing not only as a concept in his own mind, but also as existing in reality, independently of his ideas. Since it is greater to exist both as an idea and as a real thing, than

merely to exist as an idea, God must exist both in reality and as an idea.

Besides Anselm, other philosophers like Spinoza and Descartes held the ontological argument too. In his meditations, Descartes argued that existence of God can no more be separated from the essence of God than the essence of a rectilinear triangles can be separated from the equality of its three angles to two right angles. Thus the concept of God includes in its very nature that God is an existent being. From the idea of God, it is concluded that He must necessarily exist, in the same way that from the definition of a triangle, we can tell that the sum of its interior angles equals 180^0 .

Like the cosmological argument, the ontological argument is not convincing. The conclusion from the idea of the perfect being to its real existence is scarcely convincing today. From Kant's time particularly, the objection has been that from the concept of God we can conclude only to the possibility and not to the reality of God. Kant⁸ argues that existence is not the kind of property that can be part of the definition of any concept. The idea or conception that we have of anything involves a series of properties or predicates for example, its shape, weight and colour. But existence cannot be such a predicate. If we conceive of something, and then conceive of it as existing, is our

idea of the thing any different?. One does not change the concept involved whether one merely thinks of it, or thinks of it as existing. Kant concludes that when this argument is applied to the ontological argument for the existence of God, the force of the concept or idea of God or a Perfect Being is not increased by thinking of it as existing, or merely thinking about it. Thus no bridge can be built from the idea of a Perfect Being to the actual existence of such a Being.

Another criticism of the ontological argument is that by Gaunilo who is a contemporary of Saint Anselm. In his essay, "On behalf of the fool," he argues that it is illogical to draw the conclusion that God exists from the fact one has an idea of God as a Perfect Being. That is, the existence of the idea of God in the understanding (mind) is not a guarantee of a corresponding reality of God. This is because not everything that exists in the mind always exists in reality. For instance one may have concepts of certain things for example, winged-horses and yet these do not exist in reality. Therefore, whatever is thinkable or imaginable may or may not exist at all.

Gaunilo used an example of a hypothetical perfect treasure island as an analogous case of Saint Anselm's version of the ontological argument which states that God exists on the ground that He is the greatest possible being. This example goes as follows:

*If someone should tell me that there is such an island, I should easily understand his words, in which there is no difficulty. But suppose that he went on to say, as if by a logical inference, "you can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent."*⁹

He therefore concluded that if anybody was to convince him this way, then such a person would have to show first that the hypothetical excellence of this island exists as a real and indubitable fact.¹⁰ Similarly, Anselm ought to have shown that God is a necessary being. Thus according to Gaunilo, one cannot prove the existence of a perfect treasure island on the basis of the fact that one has its idea in the mind. Therefore, one can hardly be sure that such an island exists somewhere in the world anymore than one can be certain that God exists just because God is said to be the greatest being anybody can conceive of. Existence in the mind and existence in reality are two different things and the former does not necessarily presuppose the latter.

Thus God's existence cannot be inferred from the fact that we have an idea of His existence. To conceive of God as the most perfect being does not prove His existence.

The reality of God if He exists, is in any case not directly given in the world. He is not among the objects that experience has no problems in discovering. There is no direct experience of God. Neither is there any immediate intuition of God as claimed in the ontological argument. The ontological argument assumes we could know the nature of God, that He is a Perfect Being before knowing whether He exists. God's nature can only be learned after one knows His existence, and not vice versa. The ontological argument as it stands, is only a hypothetical observation that if God is a Perfect Being, then He necessarily exists. Otherwise, it does not prove the existence of God beyond any reasonable doubt. As stated earlier, this argument appeals only to a believer. Such an argument could only be convincing on the assumption that ideas had a reality of their own.

2.1.3 Design /Teleological argument

The design argument is also called teleological argument and is closely related to Aquinas' fifth 'way' (stated earlier in the cosmological argument) for it is mainly concerned with the end or purpose of things.

This argument is based on the order, appropriateness, purposefulness, and insistent dynamism of all natural happenings in the universe. Then, with aid of the principle of finality, which assumes an intended purposefulness and excludes the possibility that everything happens by chance, the conclusion is drawn that there must be a world orderer and world Creator and likewise a supreme goal, a final end.¹¹

This argument was advanced by William Paley (1743 - 1805). In his work, Natural Theology, or Evidence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearance of Nature (1802), he argues that one can infer the existence of God from the order, design and purpose of things in the universe. He bases his argument on an analogy between a watch and the universe. He thus observed a similarity between the order and design in a watch and the order and design of the universe. He therefore argued that:

*Just as it is implausible to admit the order and design manifest in the watch, and yet deny that the watch required a designer, so too it is highly implausible to recognise the manifestation of order, design and purpose in the universe and yet not admit the existence of a designer.*¹²

The order in a watch is so designed towards achieving a certain purpose or end. Similarly, most of the natural activities that occur or go on in the universe are designed in such a manner that they maintain

their order. For instance, there is an order in the manner in which celestial bodies behave their movement seems to conform to a certain established procedure; for example, the movement of sun, moon and the earth, and the occurrence of the phenomenon of day and night. All these seem to conform to a certain established pattern. Paley argued that such order and regularity as manifest in the movement of the sun and planets may be the work of a Super-designer who may have instituted it for his own purpose.

Besides the analogy between a watch and the universe, Paley also considered the human anatomy. That the body is made up of many different limbs and organs each of which has its own specific function(s) and all these activities are well controlled and coordinated by the brain. Therefore, the body is so made for some purpose and so is the universe. He concluded that it is most unlikely that man could have created himself anymore than the most complex computer or robot can manufacture itself. In other words, the design and purpose of the human body and the universe at large is a reflection of the existence of a designer as much as the contrivance of a watch is an indication of the presence of a watch-maker. Such a Super-designer is God.

No doubt a considerable degree of orderliness is discernible in the universe particularly, with regard to the solar system and

differences among various organisms mainly in their sex and other genetical characteristics so that organisms of the same species appear alike generally. However, the proponent of this argument seems to have over-emphasized orderliness in the universe to the exclusion of certain phenomena that are a reflection of obvious cases of disorder in the universe. Such phenomena include disorderly earth-movements that manifest themselves in earthquakes, down-warping and upwarping of some parts of the earth surface, floods and deformations of some organisms. How then, can such disorders in the universe be explained?

Although there is a considerable general orderliness in the universe, it is impossible to prove that there is a designer just because there is order and design in the universe. Just like we infer the presence of a watch-maker from the contrivance of a watch, we cannot infer the existence of God as a designer from the fact there is design and orderliness in the universe. This is because a watch-maker is a human being, and therefore within our reach; but God surpasses such a demonstration!.

Another weakness of this argument is that it disregards the possibility of the existence of more than one designer. But the observed order and design in the universe may have been caused by designers; in which case there would be more than one God.

In conclusion, this argument fails to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the universe was designed by God. Indeed the design and order in the universe do not actually show who was responsible for them.

2.1.4 Morality argument

This argument was propounded by Kant. He argued that the existence of God could not be proved or known by pure reason or speculative reason. According to him, God can only be experienced as a transcendent being through the moral faculty of practical reason. He thus argued that we have a moral obligation or duty to act virtuously. According to him, moral rules or laws exist to the existence of God as the transhuman source of moral values. Further, he argued that everybody aspires for the perfect goodness, which comprises virtue and happiness. Human beings are capable of attaining virtue by themselves, but are incapable of making themselves happy without the assistance of God. Therefore, God must exist if men are happy. It was on the basis of this view that Kant postulated a moral Ruler of the world by means of which alone this goal can be reached. He therefore argued: "the idea of the highest goodcannot be realised by man himselfyet he discovers within himself the duty to this and."¹³

But critics of this argument hold that the existence of God cannot be inferred from morality because the latter can be explained in terms of human needs and desires; so that people choose to do that which is good for their society and at the same time fulfils their desires without necessarily associating such choices with the existence of God. Therefore, I am not in consonant with Kant that morality points to the existence of God. In consequence, his argument is inadequate as a proof of the existence of God.

2.1.5 Experiential argument

This view is based on the belief that God manifests Himself to various people in mysterious ways which show that He exists. Thus some theologians contend that God can be known by experiencing Him. Farmer, H.H. in his work Towards Belief in God argues that "those who have never experienced God and worshipped Him, will never know Him."¹⁴ Similarly, Martin Buber in his I and thou, asserts that God is pre-eminently personal. He argues that "God is a pure thou whose reality is known through person-to-person encounter."¹⁵

However, the extent to which this argument succeeds in proving God's existence is highly doubtful by the very nature of the argument; that God is knowable by personal experience. For instance

a religious person may claim that he has had a vision or a revelation from God and expect other people to believe him, yet it is not possible to establish whether such a person is lying or telling the truth. If we grant it that this person has had a vision or a revelation, then how can we surely know whether such a vision or revelation was a divine one?.

These questions are rather difficult to answer and consequently, this argument, like the preceding ones is equally inadequate as a proof of God's existence because any knowledge that is dependent on personal experience is highly subjective. It is impossible to ascertain whether a person has had an encounter with God.

From the foregoing, it is evident that none of the five theistic arguments for the existence of God succeeds in proving His existence beyond any reasonable doubt. The arguments are however, well reasoned sound explanations on which some people base their belief in God. The difficulties involved in all the proofs of God's existence could perhaps be due to the nature of the subject which is perhaps beyond our rational capacities. Nevertheless, these, argument for God's existence should not be taken too lightly. Despite all legitimate philosophical misgivings, they still present a challenge to thought that cannot be ignored.

Whether the foregoing arguments for the existence of God prove the existence of God beyond any reasonable doubt or not, is not important in this inquiry. What is important about them is that they testify to the fact that belief in God is based on well reasoned arguments, and they have been used here to show that theists do not hold their belief for the sake of it.

Having looked at the basis of the theistic stance with regard to the existence of God, we will in the next part of the chapter look at the universal concept of God with a view to establishing how this compares with the Akamba concept of God.

2.2 Universal concept of God

The problem of God is not one that has just emerged. It has been there since time immemorial. Many world religions hold various concepts of God, but none so far can be claimed as having a satisfactory description of God. Macquarrie notes that though the problem of God is not so loudly debated today in theological circles as it was a few years ago, this problem remains at the top of the theological agenda.¹⁶ Similarly, Gilkey asserts that questions of the reality of God and the possibility of language about him are still our

most pressing theological problems, prior to all other theological issue.¹⁷

To trace the history of the problem of God would be a cumbersome task, amounting to an explanation of the entire intellectual history of the West. However, on the philosophical side, one would first have to reach back to the atheistic thinkers of the nineteenth century namely: Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche; but these philosophers can only be understood in the light of their own predecessors such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Hegel. Going back into the past will not have any stopping-place short of the very origins of western philosophical reflection in ancient Greece and it is not our intention to do so in this inquiry. However, Macquarrie notes that:

It is important to remember that the crisis of theism has arisen out of a long and very complex process of development, powerful intellectual pressures have been at work and these cannot be ignored. It has become increasingly recognized in theology that Christian doctrine is not static but subject to development. The traditional doctrine of God cannot be simply maintained as if nothing had changed. It must be brought into confrontation with the critical pressures that have built up. If there can be a doctrine of God that is valid for our times, then it must have taken full account of the developments, both philosophical and theological, that seem to have militated so strongly against traditional theism. It has been argued philosophically, that the contemporary radical empiricism and radical existentialism have between them brought to expression the thought of the secular age, and seem quite hostile to any belief in God; or if not actually hostile, they seem to make

*belief in God a peripheral matter. Similarly, theologically, the decline of natural theology, the rise of demythologizing, the distrust of supernaturalism are among the symptoms of a deep bewilderment concerning the significance of God and his acts; thus, even in the church, the idea of God has become elusive, and it would seem that many of those who profess to believe in God would find it very hard to state clearly what they mean by professing such a belief or just how they differ from those who take up an atheistic stance.*¹⁸

Then how can we possibly talk about God?. How can we think about Him?. How can we adequately describe Him?. What language can we use to achieve this?. Such are some of the questions that still preoccupy both theologians and philosophers. These questions have been sharpened by the rise of analytic philosophy, which is mainly concerned with the logical analysis of our language in its many forms. In view of this, Macquarrie asserts that "our language can be slippery and misleading especially when we assess what we mean by the assertions that we make or what procedures are relevant for either verifying or falsifying these assertions".¹⁹ "Thus what at first sight may appear to be important and even sweeping assertions may turn out on investigation to be quite jejune and indeed to have very little ascertainable meaning at all. It has been alleged that this is especially the case with assertions about God."²⁰

Besides, religious ideas have offered various concepts of God; for instance some have thought in terms of one God, others in terms of a plurality of gods. Still, some have thought of God as having a nature we can understand while for others God utterly transcends human understanding. Still some have thought of God primarily as transcendent, external to, and even remote from the world (a withdrawn God), while others have stressed his immanence even to the level of pantheism. In view of this, it can hardly be claimed that there has ever been a clearly defined and universally accepted significance for the word 'God' as there has been for the words 'cat', 'chair', 'cow' and a great many others that are commonly used in our human language.

Macquarrie points out that there has been development in the idea of God and this has taken parallel lines in different religions. The oldest ideas of God were mythological; in mythology, God is another being within the world and may be the object of sense perception. There are for instance some surviving elements of this mythological thinking in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. According to this mythological thinking, God might actually be seen on the earth, and when the belief that He could be directly seen became intolerable, it was still believed that he might be heard (voices from heaven), or

that He might show himself in extraordinary perceptible events (signs, wonders, miracles). But gradually, these mythological ideas were left behind, and the gods are no longer located in the universe, not even on the mountain tops or in the sky, nor was it any more believed that they could be seen or perceived by any of the senses.²¹ After this, there followed more sophisticated ideas of God. For instance, the Old Testament prophets were already speaking of His transcendence and incomparability, and philosophical reflection further refined these ideas. Thus according to this reflection, God was no longer located in any particular place, though metaphorically He was said to be 'above' or 'beyond' the world. He was conceived as a being who is personal, but bodiless, invisible, intangible, inaccessible to any kind of sense perception. He was believed to have created the world in the beginning and to exercise a general government over it, perhaps intervening in its affairs from time to time to keep it on the right path. However, with the rise of modern science and its apparently unlimited capacity for accounting for events within the world in terms of other innerworldly events, the need for positing such a God has been gradually eliminated. Thus the God of metaphysical theism seems to have suffered the same fate as the God of mythology and fades out of the picture.²²

There is some special God-language that could be used to talk about God. The logic of God-language differs significantly from the logic of person-language.²³ For instance in the case of finite persons, we can and do predicate of them physical characteristics, but we never do so of God.²⁴ Similarly, Grisez notes that no expression can be used in an affirmation about God in the same sense in which it is used in a descriptive statement about a contingent entity.²⁵ Grisez uses analogical language in his endeavour to describe God. He notes that whatever God is in Himself, He requires nothing to exist other than to be what He is. Whatever anything contingent is, it does not obtain by being what it is. Therefore, whatever God is in Himself, it cannot be what anything contingent is. Thus whatever anything contingent is, God is not. This forms the basis of the negative way-describing God by negation. Thus all predicables which can be used in describing anything contingent should be used in saying what God is not. For instance, God is not a body, nor is He matter or energy. God has no sensible properties, no dispositions or capacities such as one finds in natural things. However, the exclusion of any predicable does not mean that its contrary can be applied to God; for instance, if God is not a body, it does not follow that God is a mind. Similarly, these negations should not be taken as indicating that God Himself is a mere

idea, nor that He is a negation because all these fall within experience and cannot therefore adequately describe/define God.

Grisez concludes that God is not anything contingent. He is something wholly diverse from all the entities with which man is familiar.²⁶ The negating statement of what God is not should always be complete. For example, if one says that God is changeless and fails to add a negation of the contraries of "changing", one suggests that God is static and inert, but this cannot be the case. Thus one must negate of God everything descriptive of entities given in experience. In reality, an existential description of a necessary entity is informative only if it is either negative or relational; that is, if it indicates how other things are related to God.

Besides description of God by way of negation, He may also be described by way of affirmation. However, no expression can be used in an affirmation about God in the same sense in which it is used in a descriptive statement about a contingent entity. Thus expressions that can be used in affirmation about God take on a special sense because their meaning shifts to accommodate what God is. No positive description of God is possible. God is not bodily, not mental, not changing, not static and not like anything within experience. God is said to be: the "wholly other", the "transcendent" and the "holy". The

"wholly other" means that God cannot be said to be whatever contingent entities are said to be. "Transcendent" means that God is not given in experience and cannot be described in the language used to describe experienced entities. "Holy" means the otherness of God. Grisez's method portrays and preserves the uniqueness of God, - that we cannot know Him in the same sense in which we know anything contingent for He is above this.

Catholic theologians agree that analogy is the only doctrine capable of safeguarding both God's transcendence and immanence and therefore, that it is the only adequate interpretation of theological language. They start from the fact that man applies his concepts to God. One says for example, that God is good, omnipotent, intelligent, father and spirit among other attributes. However, the meaning of these concepts should be treated as being partly the same and partly different from when they are applied to creaturely realities to avoid falling into anthropomorphism and agnosticism. Thus the meaning should be treated as analogous - that is, as being the same with regard to content, and as being different with regard to the mode of the attribute.

The Catholic theologians justify their position on the following grounds: that creatures are created by God and consequently resemble

Him; therefore, one may know God through them. Secondly, they argue that all man's concepts come from below, from creatures. Therefore he must start from these if he is to know God. However, this argument has been criticised for it turns the divine-human relationship upside down so that instead of starting with God in order to descend to man, it starts with man in order to ascend to God. But such criticism does not hold because, if we grant that God is the creator of everything and that He is transcendent, then, it would only be logical for man to start from what he knows (creation) and ascend to the unknown (God).

In Christian teaching, God is more complex in his being: He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is unquestionably transcendent. He is the "wholly other." All world religions have one thing in common, that they urge their devotees to love God, to worship Him, to serve Him to put their trust in Him and to set their hearts on Him among other things. Thus as Macquarrie puts it, 'God' is not a neutrally descriptive word. It is a word that evokes faith and commitment.²⁷ God combines highest value with highest reality; and this is further emphasized in a sentence from the New Testament; "whoever would draw near to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). God is the Supreme Reality - He is; and God is the supreme good, the reward of those who seek Him.

There is also one classic passage in the Bible in which God makes known His name to Moses: "I am who I am" or simply "I am" (Exodus 3:14). God not only is; He is in the most dynamic and creative sense.

The way a finite being is provides only a remote analogy to the way God is. He is being that imparts existence to all the beings. The creation story at the beginning of the Bible, 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3) is the beginning of God's letting be, His own dynamic creative mode of being. His causing is *fiat*. Similarly, in the New Testament, God is being referred to as the one who gives life to the dead and calls into being the beings that were not (Romans 4:17). In St. John's gospel, the same words of Exodus are echoed: "I am the bread of life... I am the true vine I am the light of the world I am the resurrection and the life" (John 6:35; 15:8-12; 11:25). It is as if all that man needs for his existence namely bread, wine, and light, the very life itself, all point beyond themselves to the "I am" who gives them being. Most profound and dramatic of all are the words in which Christ replies to the Jews: before anything was, there is the dynamic creative "letting be" that we call God.²⁸

This language of being is biblical, and Macquarrie argues that "it has a secure place in Christian theology from the beginning to our own time"²⁹ if the biblical information is anything to go by. It is

concrete and dynamic. It makes God meaningful to a man, who knows at first in his own existence what it means to be, in an active dynamic way. It clarifies the relation of God to the world, seen not as the relation of two equal beings, but of Being to the beings. This, like the analogical language makes room for both the transcendence and the immanence of God, and avoids the opposite errors of pantheism and deism. It preserves the divine mystery, yet also makes possible analogy between God and beings. It opens the way to endless possibilities of prayer and communion. Macquarrie points out that this last point is all important, for we could not think of God apart from the possibility of prayer to Him.³⁰

2.3 The Akamba Idea of God

No doubt Africans had some knowledge of God long before the advent of Christianity though some of the early missionary-anthropologists maintained that Christianity had come to introduce Africans to the knowledge of God: because the African traditional view of God was short of the attributes that are accorded to God such as loving, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and Creator among others. But, in traditional African religious thought, there was a basic generallity with regard to God despite the particularities of cultural

religious identity among various African peoples as Mugambi notes.³¹

For instance the God in whom Africans of a particular ethnic community believed was conceived by that community to be the same God whom other people believed in, although the name by which He was referred to differed from one people to another due to usage of different languages.

Traditional Africans knew God by various attributive names such as Creator, Supreme, Owner, Controller and Governor of the universe and all things, the ultimate provider and sustainer, Omniscient and Omnipresent among other attributes. Thus Christianity should not boast of having introduced the subject of God to Africans for they have all along known God whom they hold in high esteem. He communicated with them through divinely-inspired intermediaries and religious specialists. However, they on their part communicated with Him whenever need arose either directly or through the various intermediaries, by sacrifice and prayers of supplication and thanksgiving.³²

Mbiti, Kibicho, Idowu and other unbiased writers on African theology have through their works proved that African peoples had a concept of God. For instance, Mbiti, in a study of nearly three hundred ethnic communities in Africa found that it was possible to make some

general observations about the African ideas of God. He thus found that African peoples believed God to be transcendent, immanent, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.³³ Similarly, in another study, "The Kikuyu concept of God, its continuity into the Christian era and the question it raises for the Christian idea of revelation" Kibicho found that among the Kikuyu there was certainly a set of concepts of God, and that those Kikuyus who became Christians carried forward the basic traditional concepts into their new faith. Thus the same word Ngai they had used for God in traditional religious belief was the same one they continued to use with reference to God in Christianity.³⁴ Hence he found, many people believed that the God they worshipped in Christianity was the same God who had been known and worshipped traditionally.

Along similar veins Father Cagnolo - one of the early European missionaries among the Gikuyu described their earliest observation of the Gikuyu experience and concept of God Ngai as follows:

... Since our arrival among these people, we found that Kikuyu believe in a Supreme Being, spiritual, Ruler and Governor of the universe. He believes also in the survival of the soul. Like all the other Bantu tribes, they distinguish exactly two orders of ultramundane beings;

Ngai with the singular only as Supreme Being and source of all things, and the Ngoma or the innumerable spirits of the dead, with no connection with God but with us.

They do not know the forms and features of the Supreme Being, nor did they ever attempt to make material representation of Him

The Supreme Being is believed to be good per se and generally He is not invoked. Only in cases of public calamities, epidemics, droughts, mortalities, is God had recourse to in public prayers and sacrifices

In times of misfortune, or calamity, the Agikuyu do not imprecate, much less do they blaspheme God, who allows such evils, but with all compliance that borders upon fatalism, they simply say: "It is God's will."³⁵

Cagnolo concludes his description of the Kikuyu knowledge of God by saying that the new doctrine of Christianity "found a suitable soil for its growth in kikuyu monotheism, therefore the graft took hold and thrived".³⁶

While in the Western intellectual history there has been a strong debate as to whether God exists or not, and various arguments advanced in support of either position, this has never been food for thought in the Akamba traditional religion and African traditional religion as a whole since God's existence is taken for granted. He exists and His existence is unquestionable. The traditional Akamba took and still take the existence of God for granted. Thus while in the western intellectual history great philosophers such as Plato, Descartes and others are in record for having wrestled with the question of God's

existence, such are totally lacking in the history of the Akamba traditional religion.

According to available data on the traditional Akamba religious heritage, it seems that the traditional Akamba were probably not critical of the existence of God. They took and still stake the existence of God for granted. For instance recent works on the Akamba traditional religious heritage do not depict any critical approach to the existence of God.³⁷ Such lack of a critical view on the existence of God could perhaps portray the traditional Akamba as not being critical of the subject in question. However, this opinion can only be tentatively passed because so far, no philosophical research has been conducted among the Akamba to establish whether there exist(ed) indigenous Akamba thinkers who may have questioned the existence of God. Such a research has been conducted by prof. Orika in various communities among them the meru, Luo and Luhya. For instance, one of the Luo indigenous thinkers (Orika Ranginya) he interviewed on who God is, says that "God is the idea which represents goodness itself."³⁸ This thinker criticizes the traditional Luo for having thought of God in physical terms.³⁹ Such thinkers may be existing or may have existed among the Akamba, but have not yet been discovered. Thus there is need to conduct such an investigation among the Akamba to establish

whether there are such thinkers, for there could be a great wealth of philosophical discourse that has not yet been exploited.

The early writers on the Akamba religious heritage portray the Akamba as people who had no concept of God, and as ancestor - worshippers. Hopley claims that the Akamba have two gods namely: Ngai or Mulungu - an impersonal deity who is vaguely supposed to live in the sky, and Ajimu (spirits) which are innumerable and ubiquitous and are the spirits of their ancestors.⁴⁰ Similarly, Lindblom summarises the religious conceptions of the Akamba in the strict sense of the expression as consisting of: a developed worship of the spirits of their ancestors Ajimu and a vague belief in a Higher Being Mulungu or Ngai.⁴¹ Further, he alleges that among the Akamba, Mulungu is a conception which, both as regards meaning and name, corresponds to what is known from so many Bantu peoples, viz a divinity that seems almost impersonal since there are no conceptions - or very vague ones of its being and characteristics. Lindblom contends that Mulungu is not worshipped at all by offering of sacrifices, nor in any other way.⁴² According to Lindblom, the natives' dim conception of Mulungu or Ngai is apparently insufficient to enable them to form any idea of the appearance of this being. He concludes that this may be the reason why the Akamba have never found any representation of Mulungu.

However, Lindblom's contention seems to give the false impression that other religions have found a sufficient concept of God and so have a representation of Him and this is certainly not the case.

All these allegations are false and based on biased unfounded facts by some of the early Western missionary - anthropologists who seem to have conducted arm-chair researches on the Akamba, without necessarily having any field experience with them. Subsequent studies on the Akamba by scholars who have conducted field researches on this subject show that these allegations do not hold. Mbula, for instance asserts that the Akamba traditional religion was well reflected in their belief system. Their beliefs were largely based on the individual's self-awareness, his relationship to others, his environment and above all the world beyond.⁴³ Similarly, Ndeti notes the following about the Akamba and their religion:

A Mukamba is a homo religiousus to the extent that, in the traditional social order, to be non-religious was inconceivable. The family which provided the training in the practice of religion was a construction of the primordial hierogamy, and anyone in it or proceeding from it was attached by timeless bonds. The observance of family rituals, rites and religious acts of cosmological year are required of every member of musyi (family).⁴⁴

An extensive research conducted by Mbiti found out that the traditional Akamba had and still have a concept of God.⁴⁵ Like most

other religions, the Akamba traditional religion attempts to describe approximate the nature of God. The traditional Akamba use four different names for God namely; Ngai, Mulungu, Mumbi and Mwatuangi all of which refer to one and the same God. But Ngai is the most commonly used name for God. In fact, Ngai is the same name used for God by the Akamba Christians.

Belief in God is very central in the Akamba traditional religion. They believe in one God, whom they worship through prayers, sacrifices and offerings, contrary to claims by Lindblom. Through sacrifices and offerings, the Akamba restore the ontological balance between them and God, as Mbiti notes:

Sacrifices and offerings are acts of restoring the ontological balance between God and the departed and the living. When this balance is upset, people "experience" misfortunes and sufferings, or fear that these will come upon them. Sacrifices and offerings help, at least psychologically to restore this balance.⁴⁶

God is regarded as the highest and/or final authority. He is above everything that exists in the universe. He is the creator of everything and has full control over all his creation. The traditional Akamba attribute to God all positive moral attributes. Thus they associate such positive moral attributes as mercy, goodness and benevolence among others, with God. Consequently, among the

Akamba, it is often exclaimed: "Oh, the God of mercy!", or "Oh, if God were not the God of mercy!". The Akamba use these phrases when they invoke the mercy of God in connection with important events or undertakings; or when they perceive God's mercy to have been shown in such circumstances.

The traditional Akamba use two different names to describe God's activity as the Creator. These are mumbi meaning creator or maker, and mwatuangi meaning shaper. These two names mumbi and Mwatuangi complement each other in that in the former, God creates or makes things while in the latter, He gives them details, shape, distinctiveness and appearance. The traditional Akamba acknowledge God's providence and sustenance. Thus they commonly portray God as the most superior physician; for instance in time of a serious or chronic illness and when human help is slow or ineffective, the traditional Akamba either use the phrase "God is the most superior physician", or just say that "it is the will of God". Similarly, on being healed of such illness, a person or one of his relatives says, "Ah, if it were not for God's help, I (he) would be dead by now."⁴⁷ The traditional Akamba acknowledge God's work of salvation. This is well portrayed when after danger or misfortunes they exclaim, "Ah, if God were not there, I would have perished!". Such expressions describe

God as saving man from physical danger, afflictions, distress and trouble.

The traditional Akamba accord the following attributes to God: omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and transcendence among other positive qualities. This places God in a class of His own as He transcends everything in all aspects. Thus the traditional Akamba believe that they are incapable of hiding anything from God since He sees and hears everything, and He is everywhere. Although the traditional Akamba place spirits at a higher position than man, they hold that God is much higher than the spirits and therefore, the highest Authority. Owing to the omnipresence characteristic of God, the traditional Akamba believe that God is not and cannot be confined to certain places. It is on the basis of this reasoning that the traditional Akamba do not erect any temples for God, nor do they feel bound to worshipping in their official places of worship. This is very logical of the Akamba and further emphasizes God's omnipresence. They can for instance hold some of their religious dances like kilumi in any of their member's house. They only go to the shrines occasionally to give offerings and sacrifices that have a bearing on the whole community. Otherwise, the same may be done by individual families at family level

depending on the need or cause. This contrasts a lot with Christianity where there are set days and places of worship.

Although the traditional Akamba perceive God in terms of the attributes that they accord Him, this does not lead to a clear concept of God because all these attributes are abstract and even if one were to conceptualize them, he/she would not arrive at the nature of God as such. Consequently, the Akamba conclude that God cannot be easily known, they do not see Him, He is beyond their knowledge. Thus He transcends them in all respects and cannot therefore, know Him fully but only vaguely through his effects like creation. On the basis of this argument, the Akamba seem to reason from nature to God in their perception of God. They perceive God through his works; for instance Mbiti observes the following:

Man gives life even where natural objects and phenomena have no biological life. God is seen in and behind these objects and phenomena; they are his creation, they manifest Him, they symbolize His Being and presence. The invisible world presses hard upon the visible; one speaks of the other and African people "see" that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible.⁴⁸

Such reasoning from nature to God is similar to the arguments for the existence of God particularly, those that are based on the

concept of cause-effect relationship; for example, the cosmological argument which portrays God as the first cause.

The Akamba contention that God is unknowable contrasts a lot with what some scholars on African heritage seem to portray. Okot P'Bitek asserts that the Christian assumption that God is unknowable ^{He's a bit class} should not be applied in the study of African religion because most African peoples know the names, abode and characteristics of their deities.⁴⁹ Further, he argues that Africans know their deities by the diseases they cause. But his argument is very misleading and devoid of substance for he is equating God with the African deities. The fact that African peoples may know their deities does not in any way suggest that they also know God. God and African deities are two totally different entities. God is supreme while the deities are lesser spirits. Thus it should be noted that even if there are some Africans who idolize their deities, this is not the case among the Akamba. The traditional Akamba worship the only Supreme God and use their ancestors as intermediaries between them and God, but they do not idolize them.

The early anthropologists especially the evolutionists thought that monotheistic belief was the product of a long process of philosophical speculation in the so-called civilized societies. On the

basis of this, they found it difficult to believe that Africans for example could have an idea of God and a well developed religion.⁵⁰ This argument portrays blatant misconception of Africans by the early scholars, particularly those from the so-called civilized societies. The argument has been falsified by the findings of our inquiry about the traditional Akamba, that they hold a monotheistic belief in their religion. Furthermore, monotheistic belief and philosophical speculation are not preserves of the so-called civilized societies. Africans, and the Akamba in particular have practised these and still continue to do so.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the traditional Akamba have a well developed religion. They believe in and worship God, the only Supreme Authority acknowledged by most other religions for example, Christianity. Thus they are not ancestor-worshippers, contrary to some misleading literature by biased early western anthropologists. They had and still have a concept of God which is an approximation of the nature of God. Therefore, early missionary anthropologists should never boast that they introduced the concept of God to Africans because Africans and in particular the traditional Akamba knew God long before the advent of Christianity in Kambaland. The Akamba belief in God is well reflected in their

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traditional creed which summarises the basis of their religious beliefs (this creed will be discussed in Chapter 5). In part this creed states... and know that worshipping Ngai (God) restores blessing to man."

Although the traditional Akamba have a concept of God as revealed by the findings of this inquiry, this concept is only an approximation of the nature of God. This concept cannot, for instance enable someone to conceptualize the concrete nature of God. Thus like the universal concept of God, it only approximates the nature of God. Therefore, the Akamba traditional concept of God is perhaps not very different from the universal one as both concepts seem to accord God more or less the same attributes that eventually do not really lead to the concrete nature of God.

Although every religion may claim to have a concept of God, none of them has a comprehensive concept which portrays the real and exact nature of God. This is probably because, Human language can express God only in a veiled hidden way. Man always remains man, and even with revelation, he will never be able to understand God fully since God transcends man in all characteristics. We may need many concepts in which to think of God and to speak of Him, but whatever we think or say is likely to be still inadequate. This is perhaps due to our finite nature which contrasts a lot with that of God

which is infinite. An attempt by man to know the exact nature of God will always be a failure because man cannot have access to knowledge of a transcendent Being who is beyond human beings in all attributes. So far, no race nor religion that can claim an absolute knowledge of God because man remains finite despite his intellectual acumen, while God is infinite. We can only know God partially through his works; even the special revelation which is so much believed to be a sure way of knowing God in the Bible, does not lead to full knowledge of God. Our very nature is an inevitable limitation to our knowledge of God.

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CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RELIGION AS A PART OF CULTURE

3.1 Culture - its components

Although many definitions of culture have been advanced differing in wording and emphasis, the term "culture" in this study will be used in its widest sense to mean the totality of a people's way of life - the collective heritage of any given society. Culture has content which consists of the ideas and behaviour of members of the society. The behaviour of the members of a society may vary with respect to a particular type of situation and such variations are within a definite range. This range is what is called real culture pattern.¹ It is these ideas that make the various components of culture, namely, Politics, Ethics, Economics, Aesthetics, theoretical tools (logics), practical tools (Machines) and metaphysics, just to mention a few.

In every society, there are acceptable mechanisms and patterns of allocating resources for production purposes. These differ from one culture to another depending on what a particular society's economy hinges on. For instance a society whose economy relies a lot on animal products will allocate more of its resources for pastoralism

while an agriculturally-based economy allocates more resources to agricultural production.

Similarly, there are ethical values that govern the conduct of human individuals in their dealings with one another. Thus in every culture, standards have been set to guide members on how to conduct themselves without offending the morality of the society. These too differ from one society to another and what is a taboo in one society may have no ethical significance in another. For instance among the traditional Maasai, it is a taboo to beat a woman and if any Maasai man beats a woman, he must of necessity confess it and be cleansed of that evil through some traditional ritual. A Maasai man must have a good reason for beating his wife, let alone other women. In other societies, beating a woman has no ethical bearing on the morality of the society, whether she is someone's wife or not, provided that such a beating is justified. For instance among the Akamba, Kikuyu, Luo, Abaluhya, women may be beaten by men who are not necessarily their husbands. They do not respect women as much as the Maasai community does. Still, in other cultures, it is a crime to beat one's wife; this is particularly so in the Western culture.

Every culture has a set of values which is related to the sense of beauty. On the basis of this set of values, an object or a person is

considered either beautiful or ugly. Such aesthetic values are unique to each particular culture. For instance, in the African culture, there are traditional ornaments that were worn by women for the purpose of beauty, either around their necks, on the arms, ears and even at the ankles. However, the same are condemned by the culture on which Christianity is based. For instance some Christian sects like the Seventh Day Adventists do not allow wearing of ornaments as ornaments are associated with idol worship.

Culture is ordered so that behaviour in any society is not haphazard or random. Thus in any given society, there is a generally acceptable way of thinking and acting/doing things. Human beings, in order to live normal lives in reasonable peace, must behave in prescribed ways. These ways of behaving are acquired through socialization, education and experience. They are so institutionalized that they have become part of our social systems. Although we may be aware of these ways of behaving they are outside the individual, and they have the power of coercion over him. It is culture that distinguishes man from the rest of the biological world. Only man uses language, manufactures tools, and possesses art, religion, and other aspects of culture.² Culture is learned, it is not instinctive, innate or biologically determined. Culture varies from group to group and

from one period of time to another within any single group. Thus what has been learned can be modified through further learning, habits, customs, beliefs and social structures. Cultures vary and there are as many and cultures as there are environments. For instance, Ayisi notes that:

"when a man behaves in a way considered to be feminine in Ghana, it is said to be odd, and the only explanation given to this behaviour is that the man is impotent. An English gentleman gets up for a lady in packed bus, but the Ghanaian lady, unless she is westernized, gets up for a man".³

All these varied behaviours are part of culture. Differences in culture are due to several factors namely: race, ethnicity and climate, among others.

Every culture has both practical and theoretical aspects. The practical aspect of culture is culture in its concrete manifestation, in the way it is lived; the theoretical aspect of culture is the philosophy or justification that underlies it. For instance, if we go by the proposed definition of culture in this study - the totality of a people's way of life, then to talk of philosophy of a culture is to refer to the basic reasons and beliefs that justify the practises of that culture.⁴ Oruka and Masolo note that:

"the theoretical aspect of culture is the level at which the observable activities that emanate from culture and which in turn enrich it, are given meaning. This is also the level of

real cultural diversities because it is the level of deliberation and evaluation, identification of motives and the impulse to do or to act in a particular manner rather than another. More precisely, it is what underlies the overt actions that makes culture be truly human act rather than mere instinctive impulses".⁵

Philosophy and culture are very much inter-related, in that philosophy depends on culture. Philosophy is part of culture and springs from it.⁶ Similarly, culture is dependent on philosophy. In fact, it is philosophy that gives culture its meaning. Thus philosophy explains the purpose, reason and/or meaning of culture. Philosophy deals with questions that go beyond the mere observable facts surrounding man's life. It takes over from there, and continues to give them an evaluative or interpretative analysis. Then the role of philosophy becomes very fundamental in dealing with the essence of man - man's essential metaphysical origin and spiritual beginning in the world.

3.2 Culture and world-view

In every culture, there is a set of beliefs concerning the ultimate nature of reality - the metaphysical world-view. This set of beliefs forms the basis of religion for a particular culture. Religion is a component of culture. Religion is the substance of culture, and culture

in this case is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. Religion actualizes itself through cultural forms. Tillich notes that "this is well reflected in language used by religion. Every language is the result of innumerable acts of cultural creativity".⁷ He further asserts that human language is based on man's encounter with reality, and it is used for expression and communication, for literature and poetry and also for the expression and communication of our ultimate concern. Each of these cases uses language akin to that particular case. Religious language may be expressed in various forms for example, narrative, prophetic, poetic, liturgical. It is holy for those to whom it expresses their ultimate concern from generation to generation.⁸ Religion does not remain at the level of contemplation or speculation. Shorter argues that "it has to be translated into action, and applied to ordinary life, by means of a ritual phase. This is where there is an interplay between religion and culture."⁹ Thus religion demands action, and society determines the expression of this demand. This is where the cultural aspect of religion really comes in. The expression of this action is done in accordance with a people's culture. There is no religious value which is not expressed in a specific cultural form. Religion cannot exist except as

incarnate in culture. Faith cannot be communicated in the nude. "It is in the culture that faith finds the oxygen it needs to breath."¹⁰

Through religion, people express their world-view. There are as many world religions as there are world-views but for the purpose of this study, traditional Akamba world-view and Christian world-view will be considered with a view to showing how culture influences worship of God in these religions.

The traditional Akamba world-view is monistic. Thus the traditional Akamba thought views the universe as one. This is contrary to the Christian view according to which there is planetary plurality as there is in Graeco-Roman Cosmology in the context of which early Christian doctrines were formulated.¹¹ In traditional Akamba thought, reality has two modes of existence namely: the visible (physical/material) and the invisible (the spiritual). These two modes of existence are seen as two stages of existence. Thus an object which at one time exists in the visible material mode may continue its existence in the invisible spiritual mode after an event of transformation.¹² Therefore, in traditional Akamba thought, a person is believed to continue existing after his/her death in the invisible (spiritual) mode of existence as a spirit. Death is viewed as a stage in life; the stage by which one moves from the visible mode of existence

to the invisible (spiritual) mode of existence. Death therefore serves as a means of transformation of the body from the material to the spiritual mode of existence. On the basis of this, the traditional Akamba believe that human life (soul) is indestructible.

It is on the basis of this world-view that the traditional Akamba believe in the immortality of the soul, in the sense that the soul exists indefinitely. For instance, the soul exists in the body (in the material mode of existence) and after the death of that body, the soul enters the next mode of its existence (the spiritual mode of its existence) and continues existence as a spirit. This may be reincarnated into another person, and continue the cycle. While in the spiritual mode of existence, the soul is believed to exercise its influence over the lives of the living human members of the family.¹³ The traditional Akamba concept of the immortality of the soul is well exemplified in the traditional Akamba nomenclature. Newly born babies are named either after their departed/dead or living relatives.¹⁴ The frequency at which a certain departed person's name is given to babies depends on whether when he/she was a live he/she had a good character or not. This is because most Akamba generally believe that if a new born is named after one of the departed relatives, he/she will assume that person's character/behaviour. In fact, names of relatives who had questionable

behaviour when they were alive are shunned as no one would wish such character to be inherited in his /her family.

Owing to the continued existence of souls in the spiritual mode of existence and their influence over living family members these spirits are referred to as the living dead.¹⁵ These spirits become ancestors to the living human members of their families. Thus ancestors who died a long time ago are believed to continue influencing the lives of subsequent generations. This influence may have adverse effects on the living human members or not, depending on their relationship with the ancestors. For instance, if the living human members have neglected their ancestors such that they no longer share things-food and drinks with them, then they are bound to suffer the ancestors' wrath.¹⁶ This wrath may be manifested through mysterious ailments. The living human members can rid themselves of such suffering by appeasing their ancestors. (more about the ancestors will be discussed in chapter four.)

Therefore, the traditional Akamba cosmology does not entertain the possibility of any worlds other than this one in which we live. It presupposes a monistic universe and a dualistic modal existence. Thus it should be noted that according to the traditional Akamba cosmology, when a person dies, he does not go to 'another

world', and it would be misleading to claim that when a person dies he/she goes to the 'spiritual world', because all ontological entities - God, spirits, ancestors, the present generation, animals, plants and inanimate things exist in this one world, human beings, animals, plants and objects being visible while God, ancestors and spirits are invisible.¹⁷ It follows that according to the traditional Akamba cosmology, there is no better world/life than the one a person lives in the visible mode of existence. This leaves no room for anxiety about the life after death since death prepares one for the next mode of existence (spiritual/invisible) in which one exists as a spirit.

Therefore, according to the traditional Akamba world-view, God is within their universe though He cannot be seen, hence His immanence. Owing to this unique character of God, the traditional Akamba believe that God can and should be worshipped anywhere and anytime as the need arises, for He cannot be restricted to a certain place.

Some issues that are open for philosophical thought in Western culture do not arise at all in the traditional Kamba culture; for instance, the arguments found in Western philosophy between atheists and theists concerning the existence of God. Such issues have never been

debated in traditional Kamba philosophical thought as the existence of God is taken for granted.

According to traditional Akamba world-view, the concept of human destiny is not complicated. it is simple and clear unlike the Christian one which is associated with either hell or heaven. Mugambi summarises the African concept of human destiny as follows:

The rites of passage from birth to death are endorsements of a pattern of change which is immutable. A person is born as a baby, grows up through adolescence to adulthood, after which he becomes an elder and then dies. At death, he changes his mode of existence from the material to the spiritual mode. Thus birth and death are integral to the immutable pattern of change in the world.¹⁸

There is no eschatological anticipation in traditional Akamba world-view since existence of the universe is assumed to be indefinite and the future is taken for granted. within the pattern of this change. Thus changes may occur within the universe for example, there may be floods, earthquakes, droughts and so on, but the universe itself as a whole will never cease to exist.¹⁹ Therefore, there is no end of the world in the traditional African thought and the same applies to the Akamba traditional thought.

3.3 How culture influences worship of God

Every culture has its own acceptable mode of worship that has evolved through time. Such a mode of worship is essentially based on the world-view of that particular culture. In the traditional African culture, religion is intertwined with all other aspects of life so that a traditional African's life could be described as being religious because traditional Africans believe that they should not undertake anything without divine sanction. Thus among the traditional Africans there is a ritual that precedes anything that they do in their own traditional setting. The purpose of such a ritual is to acknowledge the divine lordship over the whole earth. This was well portrayed by Kwame Nkurumah, an African leader who was a stout advocate of the philosophy of "African personality" and introduced the traditional foundation ritual into government affairs. Thus Idowu notes that such a ritual precedes anything to be done by Africans in their own traditional setting and its purpose is always to acknowledge the divine lordship over the whole earth; man is a tenant on God's earth and therefore, must not undertake anything without divine sanction. Therefore, Kwame Nkurumah ruled that instead of the formal opening of parliament with Christian prayers as instituted by the colonial rulers, libation should be poured and the prescribed details of a foundation

ritual, carried out.²⁰ The Christian world-view is centred on the belief that in the beginning, God created the universe including man.²¹

Christians believe that God gave man the responsibility to look after the rest of the creation, always following God's direction as outlined in the book of Genesis in the Bible . However, man rebelled against God by sinning and consequently fell out of God's favour; this was the fall of man. Since this fall man was condemned together with his descendants. Man can extricate himself from this sin by a resoration of the good relationship that existed between him and God before he sinned. This restoration of the lost good relationship can only be achieved through Jesus Christ who is believed to be man's saviour. According to the Bible, John 3:16, God offered his only begotten son, Jesus Christ so that he may die on the cross and save mankind; thus whoever believes in Christ, he/she is saved and is in good relationship with God.²²

The Christian world-view is pluralistic unlike the African one which is monistic. According to Christianity, there are three worlds, namely the physical world where people live before their death (the earth) and two other worlds which will serve as destinations for our souls after death; these are heaven and hell. Heaven is generally associated with happiness, comfort and anything that is good in the

eyes of God. This is the eventual destination of Christians. Hell, on the other hand is associated with suffering, gnashing of teeth and burning in an everlasting lake of fire. This is the destination of pagans. The destiny of one's soul is largely determined by the quality of life that one leads while alive. Some Christians believe that those who uphold traditional African religion are idol worshippers and pagans and will go to hell. All Christians believe that they will go to heaven and they all strive to achieve this goal.

Christianity is denominational; thus within the same religion, there are various denominations among them Africa Inland Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Africa Brotherhood Church and the Catholic Church. Most of these denominations have Sunday as their sabbath day, except the Seventh Day Adventist whose sabbath day is Saturday. All these denominations worship God on their respective sabbath day. The sabbath day is the day on which God is believed to have taken a rest after creation of the universe and all living things within it. There seems to exist an apparent discrepancy with regard to the interpretation given to certain issues in the Bible-the Christian holy book; for instance, the sabbath day. The Seventh Day Adventists believe that God took a rest on a Saturday, and consequently their sabbath day falls on Saturday. The other denominations on the other

hand, believe that God took a rest on a Sunday and so their sabbath day falls on a Sunday. There is strong evidence in the Bible to suggest that sabbath falls on a Saturday. This is well reflected in various books of the Bible among them John 19:31, Matthew 27:45 - 66, 28:10, Mark 15:42-47 and 23:50-56.²³

The eschatological anticipation in Christianity spurs Christians, and even as they go about their religion, their prime goal is to enter the kingdom of God eventually. This is quite contrary to the Akamba traditional religion which does not entertain the concept of other worldliness. To live here and now is the most important concern of the Akamba traditional religious activities and beliefs. This could perhaps be attributed to the Akamba traditional monistic world-view. Thus there is neither paradise to be hoped for, nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. All modes of existence are lived in the physical world (the earth).

The concept of other-worldliness (Heaven and Hell) in Christianity leaves a lot to be desired. This is because these places do not seem to exist objectively, but seem to exist in the minds of those who believe in them. Therefore, these places cannot be visited so that somebody can ascertain whether they are really there. The fact that these places will serve as destinies for souls after the end of the world,

thwarts any human efforts to discover the truth about them since it is only souls that will have access to them. As such, the existence of other-worldliness can only be taken as a matter of belief. Alternatively, it can safely be argued that this other-worldliness exists since nobody has ever proved that it does not exist, just like the existence of God. But this would certainly be committing the fallacy of argumentum ad ignorantiam (literally arguing to ignorance) taking this as true because its falsehood is unverifiable.

A lot seems to have been said and written about liturgical adaptation in Kambaland and African continent as a whole, but adaptation of the message is logically more important. Such adaptation of the message can only be possible through a conducive cultural medium otherwise, bare knowledge of a local language by the missionaries is not enough. There must be more than a verbal adaptation. There is need to have a systematic knowledge of the local culture in order to form correct judgements about the Kamba beliefs and practices and determine their value. Therefore, a cultural medium is necessary for expression and communication of any religion but such a medium seems to lack in Kambaland. It is on the basis of this view that Mugambi's contention is worthy of note that:

*The Christian faith can be effectively expressed and communicated only in "culturally designed" media. If a missionary's work in a culture other than his own is to be effective, he must learn and appreciate the culture of the people whom he wishes to evangelise. He must learn and appreciate their language and appreciate their art, music, dance, architecture, ritual and all other aspects of that culture. Then he must go further and translate his understanding of the Christian faith into the cultural terms familiar and traditional to his prospective converts. He must be willing to be changed. This is a very difficult task, but effective Christian mission demands nothing less.*²⁴

However, this seems to have been disregarded to some extent as the early missionary-anthropologists seem to have merely written about the Akamba traditional religious beliefs and African traditional religions as a whole, in a detached and abstract way instead of endeavouring to build bridges of understanding across the frontiers of our religious and cultural diversity.

The cultural background of most authors of African heritage seem to have played an important role in the authors' interpretation of African religions. Western authors have interpreted some African religions not as they are, but as they appear in the Western culture. A good illustration of such influence is to be found in the interpretation of the Akamba traditional religion by Lindblom and Hopley²⁵ among others. But Mbiti contends that "philosophy of one kind or another is behind the thinking and acting of every people; and a study of

traditional religions brought us into those areas of African life, where through word and action, we might be able to discern the philosophy behind."²⁶ There are certain basic principles that underly the Akamba traditional line of thought and actions. Such principles are the ones that dictate why a decision or an act must follow a certain course and not the other.

That notwithstanding, however, missionary enterprise in Kenya and Africa as a whole is characterized by the presentation of the Christian gospel in the garb of Western Culture. The missionaries felt that converts had to move culturally towards the Western culture and away from local and traditional ways of looking at things. This was more pronounced in those missions that used the comprehensive approach through education, medicine and agriculture as they seem to have sought to replace rather than to see how traditional cultures could be adapted. Consequently, some of their prospective converts thought that becoming a Christian meant taking a conscious step into the Western culture. The export of Western culture was a consequence of the Christian mission wherever the gospel was taken. For instance, going to church in clothes of the British Empire in the 19th Century was reminiscent of the Western culture. This is well reflected in the following example by Hans Ucko:

A friend of mine told me about his visit to a church in the Caribbeans. He came leisurely dressed to church, because of the weather. He was met by men in striped frock-coats and women in Victorian wigs. After church he was invited to the home of one Carribbean couple. Now they were all dressed according to the weather or their own culture. But not in church.²⁷

When the missionaries came to Kambaland, they condemned the Kamba traditional way of life. For instance, they condemned the Akamba traditional religion and instead encouraged the Akamba to embrace the then new Christian religion. Their traditional religion was looked down upon as primitive and they were persuaded to believe that. Their traditional religion was to be replaced with Christianity which was presented to them in the Western culture as most of the missionaries were from West.

Similarly, the Kamba traditional herbal medicine and other traditional healing methods were condemned and Western medicine encouraged. The Kamba traditional informal system of education was also condemned and Western formal system of education encouraged instead. No doubt the Western system of education and medicine have certain advantages over the Kamba traditional medicine and education, but these too have their own advantages over the Western ones. For instance, among the traditional Akamba, there are certain ailments that

cannot be cured by the Western medicine and can only be cured by the Akamba traditional medical means; a good example of such is spirit possession. Thus the wholesale condemnation of everything Kamba was quite inappropriate and encouraging the traditional Akamba to move away from their culture was tantamount to severing their identity for it is culture that gives people their identity.

It seems, the missionary failed to recognise that it is virtually impossible to change the philosophical assumptions so deeply embedded in the thinking of the African particularly those involving the elements of time, ontology and epistemology.²⁸ This is the case with the traditional Akamba as some of them have not been able to change certain assumptions that are so deep in their culture, particularly those about time and ontology. The traditional Akamba conception of time does not accommodate distant future. This has great influence over the Akamba traditional religion for the traditional Akamba do not project a distant future in their conception of time and consequently, do not expect a better future than the present. Their religion is therefore concerned about the present world/life for they believe that this is where everything takes place; even when somebody dies, he/she remains in this same world but in a different form, as a spirit. This conception differs very much from that found in the

Western culture, in which Christianity was presented to the Akamba. Thus the recipient has to abstract the gospel from the Western cultural context in which it comes and grasp the truths of the word in terms of rituals meaningful to the Western culture. Consequently, majority of the Akamba converts obey the church's regulations and attend Mass and sacraments without really understanding what is going on. In fact, many of them misinterpret what they do not understand in their own way, and the result is a juxtaposition of two cultures and two religions.

When the gospel was first presented to the traditional Akamba by missionaries, very little attempt was made to understand the Akamba traditional culture. The Akamba traditional world-view stood besides the Western world-view for the converts. Since these two world-views stood in juxtaposition, a dualism developed. This dualism was and is still well reflected as some converts move from one world-view to another depending on the prevailing circumstance. For instance, when somebody wants to get rid of guilt or prepare for life after death, he/she moves into the Western world-view. But when it comes to problems of sickness, spirit possession or demon related problems, he moves into the traditional culture. That continues to be the case among most of the Akamba to this day and since most Akamba Christians cannot synthesize these two cosmologies, they find

themselves moving in and out of Christianity as the situation dictates. Due to this dualism, it has been difficult for Christianity to touch all of life. The existence of this dualism reflects to a large extent either confusion caused by the two cultures, or lack of religious commitment on the side of the Akamba Christians. Such lack of commitment could perhaps be due to the differences between the Akamba traditional culture and the Western world-view in which Christianity seems to have been presented to the Akamba.

To fight the problem of dualism, the Akamba could probably start their own independent churches. Such churches have come into existence among many African Christians. In these churches, gospel is looked at in a way suitable to the African world-view. Commenting on the African Independent Church, Lester Van Essen asserts that:

*In these independent denominations, the African world-view remains dominant with one significant difference: Jesus Christ is superimposed over all life. They believe in the reality of evil spirits, demons, ancestral influence, witches; but Jesus Christ is much more powerful than any of them. Thus Jesus walks the tribal path with them in every aspect of their life, and he is the answer to all of life's problems. Jesus provides the answer for every mystery that confronts them.*²⁹

Such churches would be more enriching to the Akamba for they would combine some tenets of the Akamba traditional religion with

Christian ones particularly, those that most of the converts find difficult to abandon.

It should also be pointed out that different people find spiritual meaning and fulfilment through different belief systems and rituals of worship. However, this does not seem to have had dawned on the missionaries during the spread of Christianity as the religion was presented as though it was the most fulfilling religion, although this may not necessarily be the case. It is on the basis of the foregoing that Warren's plea is worthy noting that "the christian should have a deep humility when relating to other religions. Thus our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams."³⁰

Therefore, different cultures have different values which may not always be compatible as evidenced by the differences in values between Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion. Thus certain values in the Akamba traditional religion that are laden with insightful meanings may be meaningless in Christianity. One good example of such is the art of maintaining fellowship with the ancestors in the Akamba traditional religion. This fellowship has often been interpreted as ancestor-worship by most of the missionaries.

Culture has strong roots that are not easy to uproot. This religion being a strong aspect of culture, is equally difficult to kill and this explains why the Akamba traditional religion continues to exist inspite of the introduction of Christianity among the Akamba.

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CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THE AKAMBA TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CULTURE

4.1 The traditional Akamba's worship of God

The term "religion" was defined in chapter one as being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern (God). The term "culture" has already been defined in the preceding chapter as "the totality of a people's way of life - the collective heritage of any given society." Although the preceding chapter carries highlights of the relationship between culture and religion, much more on this relationship will be explicated in the present chapter.

The traditional Akamba had no term for religion, but they used and still use the term Kilumi that actually means a ritual dance. But the fact that the traditional Akamba did not have a definite term for religion does not mean that they did not have a religion. On the contrary, the basic elements which constitute religion were and are still present in the Akamba traditional religion. These elements include belief in God, belief in spirits, morality, religious rites and ceremonies

among others. There was no definite term for religion among the traditional Akamba and in the traditional African set up as a whole, because religion did not, and does not exist as a separate institution. Religion among the traditional Akamba and traditional Africa as a whole, is a way of life, a culture that permeates all spheres and levels of living. religion is rather intertwined with all aspects and institutions of life and this could perhaps be the reason why some scholars have described Africans as living religiously. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish between the Akamba traditional religion and their culture.

There were important religious rites and ceremonies that accompanied every individual's stages of life, mainly from the womb to the grave and to the world beyond. These are the rites of passage, and were performed to mark the most significant stages in the life of an individual namely, birth, initiation to adulthood, marriage and death.

The Akamba traditional religion is a unique religion which meets the spiritual needs and realities of the people. Although African traditional religions have been said to be lacking the dimension of universality, this should not apply to the Akamba traditional religion because this religion is universal in so far as it embraces the common belief that unites all religious people; that is, belief in God as the primary principle.

Nevertheless, the early missionary - anthropologists that came to Africa assumed that Africans had no profound religious belief systems. On the basis of this assumption, they argued that it was rather impossible for an African to talk systematically of a Supreme Being or a high god.¹ However, this argument is untenable because Africans are traditionally a very religious people; and in fact, each traditional African family is the centre of religious worship and activities. Mbula notes that "every traditional African is, and becomes, a religious person to the extent that each of his actions is a part of his religious beliefs."² The Akamba are no exception, and the same message is passed by Ndeti when he notes that:

A Mukamba is a homo religiousus to the extent that, in the traditional social order, to be non-religious was inconceivable. The family which provided the training in the practice of religion was a construction of the primordial hierogamy, and anyone in it or proceeding from it was attached by timeless bonds. The observance of family rituals, rites and religious acts of cosmological year are required of every member of musyi (family)....³

The traditional Akamba are thus a very religious people for they believe that profane life could cause Kimaa (curse) to them from Ngai (God) that may lead to annihilation of the entire Kamba people. They have a strong religious consciousness. Religious consciousness is a phenomenon which is organically entrenched in human life and

forms the bond between man's existence and his beginning.⁴ This consciousness is well reflected in the nature of the Akamba traditional religion; that their religion is intertwined with their other aspects of life (culture). For instance, the traditional Akamba believe that before undertaking an activity it should first be sanctioned by God. So they have to worship God first before embarking on any activity for instance during the rains, they must worship God before planting so that He blesses those seeds and their subsequent development.

The traditional Akamba family is a religious institution. Thus most of religious sanctions take place within the family. For, instance, worship is conducted in the family, sacrifices in form of animals such as goats, sheep or chickens are offered within the homestead. Similarly, offerings in form of libations (traditional liquor and drinking water) and foodstuffs are made to God or the ancestors depending on the prevailing circumstances.⁵ These sacrifices and/or offerings are made by the head of the family or a religious official may be called upon to officiate if need be. More will be said about sacrifices and offerings later in the chapter.

The traditional Akamba believe in maintaining sound relationships between the members of the community. This is because they believe that poor relationships amongst themselves could sever

peace and lead to punishment from Ngai (God). The traditional Akamba are social and quite generous for they also believe that meanness or stinginess could make God withdraw all they have, and therefore become poor. Thus they believe in sharing with each other whatever little they may have. In this respect, the traditional Akamba seem to share and cherish the philosophy of loving each other as advocated in Christianity.

The Akamba traditional religion comprises the entire Kamba religious belief system: belief in God, belief in the spirits, witchcraft/sorcery, religious rituals/ceremonies, sacrifices and offerings and taboos among others. The traditional Akamba have a creed that summarises the basis of their religious beliefs. This creed goes as follows in Kikamba:

Nyie ni Mukamba kivindyo ula wisi na wikiia kana ng'ondũ yi mwana. Na ninisi maundu ala matonya kuete mauthuku na ninthembeaa Ngai mbua ikaua. Na wimanya ni Mukamba Kivindyo vya, ninikiaa kana ngungu yatonywa ng'ondũ ni syaa. Ninisi maundu ala me muisyo na ngamanya kana kuvoya Ngai ni kuetae uathimo na muuo.

Translation in English:

I am an absolute Mukamba who knows and believes that purity ritual medicine Ng'ondũ can bring forth a child. And I know the things that can cause misfortune, and I offer sacrifice to God for rain to fall. And to know that I am an absolute mukamba Mukamba kivindyo, I believe that when a barren woman is treated with purifying ritual medicine

emutonye ng'ondū will bring forth a child. I know the thing that may cause evil. and that worshipping God brings blessing and peace to man.

This creed is known to every traditional Kamba person and the traditional Akamba use it for the purpose of self-affirmation. Since it is very central to the traditional Akamba religious beliefs, it is passed on from generation to the next. A slightly different version of this creed has been adopted from Ndeti's work, elements of Akamba life, by Mbula in her work, Our Religious Heritage, p.40 but it more or less carries the same message as the above one.

From the creed, it is clear that the Mukamba Kivindyo an absolute Mukamba (absolute in the sense that he/she is a traditional Kamba person whose religious beliefs have not been contaminated by foreign religions) believes in God Ngai, in sacrificing to God for rain to fall, in purity ritual medicine ng'ondū, and in misfortunes or evil that are brought about either by the evil people in the society or by the wrath of the ancestors when they are neglected by their living family members. Also, reflected in the creed is the Akamba love for children. An absolute mukamba would not hesitate to purify a barren woman using ritual medicine ng'ondū so that the woman may bear children. However, if this fails, then the absolute mukamba opts to marry

another wife who will bear him children. The reason underlying the Akamba strong affection for children is that they perpetuate the family as will be indicated in the next chapter. Further, the mukamba kivindyo believes in and values God's blessings. Therefore, worship of the Supreme Being is central to Akamba life contrary to reports by some of the early missionary-anthropologists.

4.2 The Akamba belief in Ngai (God)

As pointed out in chapter two, belief in God is very central in the Akamba traditional religion. The traditional Akamba are monotheists; they believe in one Supreme God whom they call Ngai, Mumbi, Mwatuangi and Mulungu.

That notwithstanding, some of the early anthropologists portray the traditional Akamba as having a religion which consists of a well developed ancestral cult and a vague conception of a higher power which they call Ngai, Mulungu or Mumbi.⁶ These anthropologists further contend that Ngai or Mulungu may denote simply the supernatural, including the ancestor spirits, and the terms Ngai and ancestor spirits are therefore interchangeable.⁷ Further, they argue that Ngai is in the sky and is held to be well-disposed towards mankind but has little to do with them; and that the traditional Akamba pay little

attention to him in the way of sacrifice, and that prayers, especially for rain, are sometimes addressed to Him.⁸

The above allegations are a distortion of the true picture of the Akamba traditional religion and their belief in God. Extensive works on the Akamba by Mbiti, Ndeti and Mbula among others indicate the said allegations not to be true. These works show that the traditional Akamba believe in one Supreme God whom they worship in various ways. For instance, Mbiti⁹ contends that the Akamba make sacrifices to God on occasions such as at the rites of passage, planting time, before crops ripen, at the harvest of the first fruits and most of all when the rains fail or delay. Similarly, Mbula¹⁰ contends that traditional Akamba have sacrificed by tradition. Besides, the traditional Akamba belief in God is well reflected in their traditional creed which summarises the basis of their beliefs. This creed will be discussed in the next chapter. In part this creed states,and I offer sacrifice to God for rain to fall....and know that worshipping God Ngai restores blessings to man.

The argument by Lindblom, Hopley and C. Dundas¹¹ that Ngai or Mulungu may denote simply the supernatural, including the ancestor spirits, and that the terms Ngai and ancestor spirits are therefore interchangeable creates the false impression that among the

traditional Akamba, there exists no dichotomy between God and the ancestor spirits and that both are the same reality. But this does not and cannot hold because Mbiti's¹² work shows that prayers are addressed to God as He is the highest spiritual reality.

Similarly, Lindblom's contention that the traditional Akamba hold God to be well-disposed towards mankind but to have little to do with them is untenable because the latter do not consider God to be remote or detached from them. On the contrary, the traditional Akamba acknowledge God's immanence and omnipresence,¹³ therefore He is always with them, seeing them through their endeavours. To the traditional Akamba, God is the highest Authority and the ultimate reality and they do not know of any other god that deserves worship, but this one God who is universally acknowledged as Supreme.

4.3 The Akamba belief in spirits

Besides their belief in God, the traditional Akamba also believe in the existence of spirits. They believe that when someone dies, he/she becomes a spirit. Mbiti, a Scholar who has conducted extensive and intensive studies on African religious heritage says the following about the spirits and the destiny of the soul:

As soon as a person dies he becomes a living-dead-he is a 'spirit' in the sense that he is no longer in the body and yet he

retains features which describe him in physical terms. He still retains his personal name so that when he appears to human members of his family, they recognize him as so-and-so. He is counted part of the family in many ways, even though people know and realize that he has forsaken them. Part of his being survives in the memory of those who knew him while he lived, and in the children who survive him. It is primarily his family which "keeps him going", so to speak. When the living-dead appears it is to those within his household or family, and rarely if ever, to people not immediately related to him. But however real the living-dead may seem to those who see him, there is no affectionate warmth such as one witnesses when relatives or friends meet in this life. Socially, therefore, something has happened, something has cooled off, and a real distance between the living-dead and human beings has begun to grow....The personal immortality of the living-dead is for all practical purposes dependent on his progenies. ... Human beings keep the relationship going between them and their living-dead chiefly through libation, offerings of food and other items, prayers and observation of proper rites toward the departed or instructions from them. This process continues on a personal level as long as someone who knew the living-dead is still alive. This may be up to four or five generations. By that time, the living-dead has sunk further and further into the Zamani period, with only loose strings of memory still holding him feebly in the human Sasa period. When the last person who knew him dies, the living-dead is entirely removed from the state of personal immortality and he sinks beyond the horizon of the Sasa period. He is now dead, as far as human beings are concerned, and the process of dying is now completed. The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality. It has "lost" its personal name, as far as human beings are concerned, and with it goes also the human personality. It is now an 'it' and no longer a 'he' or 'she'; it is now one of myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness. This, for all practical purposes, is the final destiny of the human soul.¹⁴

Mbiti's findings concur with the traditional Akamba's belief about the spirits and the destiny of the soul. Thus a cardinal fact of traditional Kamba life and thought is that the living and dead together form one community whose members are mutually dependent upon each other. It is therefore, a common belief among the traditional Akamba that those who have died, are felt to be ever present, and although unseen, they may on occasions particularly in dreams and visions make their appearance in visual and audible form. The living-dead are ancestors to their living human family members. The ancestors are said to be dependent on the living members of their family for their happiness. They like being remembered and due to this, the family lives in constant communion with the ancestors. In fact, the traditional Akamba will not eat or drink something before first sharing it with their ancestors. Thus the household heads put the first morsel of food on the ground for ancestors before eating, or pour a few drops of water or any other drink on the ground for the ancestors before partaking it. These are symbols which reaffirm the belief in the world of spirits as an integral part of cosmological belief. Therefore, according to the traditional Akamba, death does not end kinship ties. The bond of kinship between the dead and the living relatives is therefore believed to persist.

However, whenever the ancestors are neglected, then their wrath has to be experienced by the living family members. This may be in form of mysterious sickness which cannot even be diagnosed in the scientific medical clinics let alone being cured. When this happens, then the ancestors spell out certain demands that must be met in order for them to free the living family members from the mystical ailments. Such demands may include sacrificing to the ancestors a goat of a particular colour, a hen or cock or offering to them certain specified foodstuffs and drinks. At times they may even demand to be bought clothing of a certain colour such as red, black or white depending on their choice. This garment may be in form of a dress, shirt, a pair of trousers or a lessso and is usually worn by the person who they have used as their mouthpiece to communicate their demands. Once their demands have been met, then the sick person gets cured immediately. But, should their demands be ignored, then their victim is bound to continue being sick and may eventually become mentally deranged. The ancestors use their victim as their mouthpiece to make known their demands to the family. Therefore, the ancestors continue influencing the lives of the living members. Owing to this continued influence over the living members, the ancestors are referred to as the living dead.

There has, however, been a misinterpretation of the relationship between the ancestors and the living by certain authors who have written about the Akamba and Africans as a whole. The art of maintaining fellowship with the ancestors has greatly been misunderstood and some of the authors have even gone to the lengths of branding it ancestor-worship. For instance, works by Hobley and Lindblom¹⁵ on the traditional Akamba portray this fellowship as ancestor-worship, but a close examination of the Akamba traditional religious beliefs shows this not to be the case. When the traditional Akamba hold fellowship with their ancestors, they do not actually worship them, but do so to keep them remembered by their living family members, moreover, the traditional Akamba hold their ancestors in reverence for they are at a higher position than man in the community. For this reason, the traditional Akamba use their ancestors as intermediaries between them and God. Thus the traditional Akamba request their ancestors to solicit favours from God on the former's behalf. However, this should not be used to rule that the traditional Akamba do not approach God directly. Besides, the ancestors act as intermediaries between the traditional Akamba and God because mediation enhances the importance of the one addressed. This concurs with Shorter's observation that "in many parts of Africa, chiefs were

not addressed directly, but had to be addressed indirectly through spokesmen or with faces averted. The same idea is applied to God. God is addressed indirectly in the third person or he is approached through mediators."¹⁶ But this does not mean that when the traditional Akamba pray, they address the ancestors. On the contrary, the Supreme Being is mentioned in prayer to ancestors as the ultimate addressee of the prayer.

The ancestors act as intermediaries between the traditional Akamba and God, just like Mary the mother of Jesus does between the Catholics and God. The ancestors are considered to be holy because they are the custodians of community morals and advise the living members of their families accordingly, through their wisdom that is believed by the traditional Akamba to come from God, just like the Biblical Saints are believed to have received their wisdom from God. Another reason why the ancestors mediate between the traditional Akamba and God is that the latter believe that the former are concerned about the well-being of the family and would therefore do anything to ensure that the family prospers. Otherwise, the ancestors are not worshipped as it has been alleged, but are occasionally appeased when they mete out their wrath on the living. The same point is emphasized by Smith when he notes the following:

The ancestors are said to be subject to the same emotions as the living members of the community. Thus their emotions keep changing just like those of the living members. If the ancestors are neglected, they most assuredly will be angry and will seek to demonstrate their feelings by some vindictive action; in such a case offerings are made to placate the offended.¹⁷

The ancestors communicate with the family or community when necessary. To do so, they may use an individual as a medium for communication. For instance, they may give instructions or enquire about the family or make requests to be given something, and may even threaten to punish members of the family for not carrying out particular instructions or for not caring sufficiently for them. Whoever is used as a medium for communication becomes possessed by the spirits.

The possession by the ancestors may be very dangerous to both the victim and the community to the extent that it requires exorcism. This may sound strange to many, but it actually happens to some people. For a long, time, I personally did not believe that these spirits could possess somebody, until I witnessed a case of one of my relatives. In this particular case, a lady was being used by the ancestors of her family as a medium of communicating their demands to the living members. The ancestors comprised some dead relatives of this lady namely: her late uncle, late aunt and late maternal grandmother.

These three ancestors complained through their victim that they had been neglected by the victim's father and that they wanted a goat, a hen, traditional liquor, red garment and a black one. When she spelled out these demands to the people whom she lived with, they could not understand at first because it happened in Nairobi and the people she was telling the ancestral demands to are relatively young and have been influenced by Christianity and as such, would not understand such a thing. So, the problem continued and the victim started saying that she saw these spirits everywhere in the house and that they were constantly pulling her limbs. On the third day of this possession, the victim was taken to a psychiatrist (Professor Ndeti). He examined her and described her condition as stress and that it would go within a short time. He even prescribed some medication which the victim used and there was no change, and the spirits' effect grew stronger instead.

On the fourth day, the victim's mental power started deteriorating and she even stopped recognising the people whom she lived with including her own younger sister. She was taken back to the doctor and he prescribed more medication. Surprisingly, when she was given the drugs, she said that her late grandmother had said that she (the grandmother) should not be played around with as though she was a child and that she should not be given drugs, but what she had

demand. By the fifth day, this victim had spiritually ceased to live in this world and was constantly with the spirits and ate only those foodstuffs that the ancestors asked for. On the seventh day, her people decided to take her to their rural home in the hope that the traditional old people at home would know what to do with her. Immediately she was taken home, the ancestral demands were met ritually and she experienced instant recovery. This happening is difficult to explain and shows that traditional rituals have metaphysical plausibility which is reflected in their psychological value to the people.

This is a clear indication that certain matters can only be satisfactorily handled from the cultural perspective but not from the modern medical point of view. Further, the reason underlying this behaviour of the ancestors is that in the Akamba cultural world, death is not the end of a person, but it is seen as another stage in existence.

Thus the dead continue to exist in form of spirits that are almost as active as the living. Due to this, the dead are considered to be living in the sense that they continue influencing the lives of their living relatives. They are therefore, the living dead.

It should be pointed out that among the Akamba, it is not everyone who dies and becomes an ancestor to his/her living family members. For instance, the spirits of those who die young do not

4.4 Religious Activities that are undertaken in the Akamba

Traditional Religion

4.4.1 Worshipping

Worshipping is reverence and respect paid to God. Worshipping among the traditional Akamba involves praying, giving of sacrifices and offerings among other things. According to Mbiti, the traditional Akamba believe that Ngai (God) is so good to them that He does them no evil and therefore see no reason for sacrificing to him often.¹⁹ Thus the traditional Akamba make sacrifices only on special occasions like during planting time, at harvest, or when they hold a purification ceremony after an epidemic and during droughts/ famine. Therefore, there has to be a good reason to occasion offering of sacrifices among the traditional Akamba.

4.4.2 Giving of sacrifices and offerings

Sacrifices refer to cases where animal or (human life in some cases) is destroyed in order to present the animal to God or ancestors. Offerings involve presentation of foodstuffs and other items to God or ancestors. Sacrifices and offerings are made either to God or to the ancestors depending on the prevailing circumstances. They are offered

to the ancestors to symbolize a fellowship, a recognition that the departed are still members of their families or for the purpose of appeasing them.

However, there are certain occasions when sacrifices and offerings are offered to God. For instance, shortly before the onset of planting period, after harvest, or when celebrating birth of a child, just to mention a few of the occasions. Thus sacrifices and offerings are offered to God when there is a good reason to do so as stated earlier. The following are the traditional Akamba sacrificial animals: oxen, sheep, goats and hens. Their offerings comprise certain foodstuffs such as "ugali" made from finger millet and smeared with a lot of ghee, and drinks such as the traditional beer (liquor) and water. The animal chosen for sacrifice is normally of one colour and should have no blemish.

When sacrifices and offerings are offered to the ancestors, they are offered within the family premises, but when they are directed to God, they are offered at the official sacred places. The sacred places are shrines and groves. A shrine could be defined as a grove at the centre of which is a large tree such as the fig tree mukuyu or muumo - a huge tree similar to the fig tree, or just a rock. These sacred places are regarded with awe and esteem as they are some of the places where

people communicate with their creator, Ngai (God). Thus they are never to be tampered with. If, however, somebody tampers with the shrine either deliberately or out of ignorance, the elders demand either a bull or a goat from the offender to cleanse the sacred ground. Inside the shrine is an altar, the sacred spot where sacrifices and offerings are made. The offered sacrifices and offerings are believed to be symbolically eaten or drank by God and/or ancestors through certain animals such as wild cats and dogs. However, the logic underlying such a belief by the worshippers is highly questionable because God and the ancestors do not actually eat and/or drink the sacrifices and offerings. Thus the worshippers' belief that these are eaten or drunk by God and/or ancestors is sheer deception and therefore, leaves a lot to be desired with regard to the actual recipient(s) of sacrifices and offerings among the traditional Akamba.

Mbiti notes that "the Akamba used to have very many shrines all over their land, but today only a few remain."²⁰ This decrease in their number could perhaps be attributed to the influence of Christianity in the area. It is however, important to note that the official sacred places of worship among the traditional Akamba are used mainly for important occasions particularly those involving the participation of the whole community. Otherwise, the traditional

Akamba do not feel bound to any official spot for worship. They turn to God any place, at any time. Thus families or individuals turn to God in acts of worship anywhere, without being bound to the feeling that God should be worshipped at a particular place. God's omnipresence facilitates this and He can therefore be worshipped at any time, any place, when the need to do so arises since He is everywhere. Similarly, there are no marked days of worship in the Akamba traditional religion like we have Saturdays and Sundays in Christianity.

Besides giving sacrifices and offerings, the Akamba do pray to God though not often. Mbiti portrays the traditional Akamba as people who do not pray often, except in times of great need, particularly for rain and on special occasions.²¹ In their prayers, they either appeal to God or thank Him for received blessings. For instance, they may offer thanksgiving after a good harvest or after birth of a child or cure from barrenness. When they offer thanksgiving offerings at harvest, they offer the first fruits to God. In this respect, the Akamba traditional religion concurs with Christianity as in the latter, the first fruits of harvest are offered to God as thanksgiving offerings.

When the traditional Akamba are offering the first fruits of their harvest, there is a ritual dance that accompanies this. This dance is called kilumi. Kilumi is a seasonal dance for both middle aged and the

elderly people. This dance is characterized by the use of drums that are beaten to a discernible rhythm as the vocalist sings. The drum integrates dancing and singing and thus gets every dancer involved. This dance serves three purposes among the traditional Akamba. Kilumi is believed to mark the ripening of crops. Thus some traditional Akamba believe that this dance is an indication of the people's satisfaction with the good yield. This celebration involves thanksgiving-offering of part of the produce to Ngai (God) for bringing the good yield.

To the traditional Akamba, Kilumi has a therapeutic value. Ndeti notes that 'Kilumi functions as a therapy for those who are under the influence of a disease manifested in various forms of delirium/possessed by the (evil spirits) aiimu.'²² The victim may experience very violent spells and when a medicine specialist is consulted, he/she may prescribe a sacrifice to the ancestors and a vigorous kilumi so that it drives away the devils. Kilumi plays an important role in the socialization of the middle aged and elderly people. The basic principle underlying the therapeutic value of kilumi dance is faith. The traditional Akamba have faith in this remedy and it certainly works. Thus "faith healing" is not only found in Christianity, but also in the Akamba traditional religion.

Religious activities are officiated by elders as in the Akamba traditional religion there are no formal priests. These elders are men only, and officiate in making sacrifices and offerings besides conducting other religious matters. Such elders are not only determined by their age, but also by going through certain Kamba traditional religious rites that are prerequisite to becoming an elder in the Akamba traditional religion. Thus like Christianity, the Akamba traditional religion does not have female religious leaders because the traditional Akamba do not recognise women as being as capable as men in doing things. In fact, women are more often than not, grouped in the same category as children!. Again in this respect, Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion seem to hold a similar prejudice against women. There are, however, traditional regulations that these elders have to abide by for the rituals and ceremonies that they conduct to be a success. Such regulations require them to refrain from sexual intercourse one day before and six days after the ceremony. The officiating elders are the only ones who enter the altar for they are the authorities in religious matters; the reason behind these regulations that the officiating elders have to abide by, is that if the latter have sexual intercourse on the specified days, then the ritual is defiled and fails to achieve its intended purpose. Although there does not seem to be an

effective way of detecting whether the elders have observed these regulations, the worshippers trust that their elders cannot contravene the said regulations for they too respect the religion.

4.4.3 Taboos

One very important aspect of the traditional Akamba is their strong belief in taboos. The term "taboo" means to forbid, and covers a wide range of prohibitions. The concept of taboo presumes that every individual has a ritual value (cleanliness) which should not be allowed to come into contact with certain objects or persons. Thus any physical proximity produces a negative effect/uncleanliness which deprives the individual of his/her ritual status. When this happens, the individual becomes a source of danger to himself and society and has to seek ritual restoration.

The taboos are part and parcel of the Akamba traditional religion. There are certain things that the Akamba traditional religion regards as forbidden. Taboos are thus a kind of prohibitions designed for keeping the family and the society as a whole clean. They help in making members of the society conform to the defined ethical codes. According to Mbula, "there are tabooed acts; for instance within the family, the sacredness of the sexual act is preserved and guarded by a

number of taboos."²³ Breaking any of these could bring such ill-effects as death within the family. Thus there are certain occasions when coition is not allowed in the family for instance, when a member of the family has died. During this occasion, the family is considered to be "closed" (musyi ni muvinge) in the sense that coition is not allowed.²⁴ This is because among the traditional Akamba, it is believed that death brings with it uncleanness to the whole family affected. Thus no coition between all the couples of that particular family, is allowed until the death has been removed ritually. The principle underlying reason behind this taboo is that if coition takes place, then the involved couple become death carriers and therefore dangerous to the community.

A ritual coition is normally performed to "remove" this death from the family. This ritual is called kumya kikwu (meaning to remove death) and it is performed by the eldest member of the family. For instance, when a child dies, his/her parents perform a ritual coition just after the burial of the child.²⁵ This ritual coition "removes" the death for the other members of the family particularly, the married ones.

Mbula notes that in case of the death of one's wife, the husband looks for a woman from outside the family and has coition with her.²⁶

By so doing, it is believed that he removes the uncleanness brought by the death from the family. However, the woman who facilitates this coition becomes unclean and is believed to be a carrier of death. On the basis of this taboo, the traditional Akamba believe that through the act of coition, death moves from one family to another. The same point is emphasized by Mbiti when he contends that women who are not faithful can easily become carriers of death if they have coition with men who have been bereaved.²⁷ This practice is quite strange and contradicts morality. The reason underlying this taboo is questionable because while other religions such as Christianity are keen on promoting morality, the Akamba traditional religion fails in this respect. This is because from the foregoing, it is clear that the Akamba traditional religion sanctions immorality by allowing immoral practices such as the one involved in ritual coition when one's wife has died. Besides, it is common sense knowledge that death cannot be, and is not spread. Diseases may be spread but not death.

The traditional Kamba family is also considered closed when a woman within the family has had a miscarriage.²⁸ A miscarriage is considered as an ill omen to the family. The traditional Akamba believe that miscarriage may occur as a punishment by the ancestors for some wrongs committed by the family members. Like death,

miscarriage brings uncleanness to the affected family and similarly, the family is "closed" until a traditional medicine specialist purifies the woman who has had the miscarriage and the entire family.²⁹ This purification is done ritually and the ritual is called Kuusya meaning to purify. During this ritual, the concerned are purified or cleansed using some traditional ritual herbal medicine called ng'ondū. If however, coition is performed by the members of this family before the purification ritual has taken place, it is believed that the couple that have performed the coition become carriers of miscarriage and can therefore spread it to other people through coition. If the woman who has performed coition ever conceives, then she will have a miscarriage. Or, if this woman performs coition with another man other than her husband, then this man will also become a miscarriage carrier and can spread it. Similarly, if her husband performs coition with another woman, then this woman will become a miscarriage carrier and if ever she conceives, she will have a miscarriage. This miscarriage may continue until the concerned are ritually cleansed of the ill omen.

The reason underlying prohibition of coition when a woman in the homestead has had a miscarriage due to the belief that the involved couple will become carriers of miscarriage and probably spread it to others is not convincing. There seems to lack any profound insightful

reason behind this prohibition considering that there are several causes of miscarriage some of which are natural while others are induced by man.

The traditional Akamba observe a taboo during their daughter's first menstruation³⁰. When a girl gets her first menstruation, she informs her mother who in turn reports to her husband. That night, the girl's parents perform a ritual coition to purify their daughter from the uncleanness that the first menstruation brings. This ritual coition is believed by the traditional Akamba to enhance their daughter's fertility.³¹ The girl has to be extra-careful with her blood (during this time) so that she does not drop it anywhere. This is so because the traditional Akamba believe that, if she leaves any traces of the blood in the open like on a path or road and a stranger accidentally treads on it, and then cohabits before the girl's menstruation is over, she becomes barren.³² However, it is rather difficult to understand how the girl's parents' ritual coition enhances her fertility since what is done during the ritual has got nothing to do with the girl's fertility; for instance, she is not given anything (like herbs) that would be believed to enhance the fertility. Similarly, the argument that if the girl's first menstruation blood is stepped on by a stranger and the latter cohabits before the former's menstruation is over, would make the former barren does not

hold because it would be illogical to argue that the stranger's cohabitation deprives the girl of her fertility. This is a simple belief that seems to have been coined to explain away barrenness among the traditional Akamba.

It is a taboo for close relatives to marry or have a sexual relationship among the traditional Akamba.³³ If close relatives marry, it is believed that their children will either be of poor health and eventually die, or they will just die. Such marriages are believed to displease the living dead who in turn punish the concerned by bringing them misfortunes.³⁴ If close relatives commit incest, or if someone has sexual intercourse with a domestic animal, they become unclean and must of necessity be ritually cleansed. This ritual cleansing is believed to restore their cleanliness. If no ritual cleansing is done, then it is believed that the victims will become weaklings and die. But such restoration of cleanliness is quite questionable because the ritual cleansing does not reverse the initial act that led to the uncleanness.

Among the traditional Akamba, it is a taboo to keep iron or metal articles in the house of an expectant mother when she is giving birth.³⁵ Such articles are believed to attract lightning which could endanger the lives of both the mother and the newborn baby. Therefore, all iron articles are removed from the house of an expectant

mother before the birth takes place. The observance of this taboo by the traditional Akamba is quite plausible and further emphasizes their great love and concern for children. Otherwise, why would they protect the newborn baby from lightning and not all the members of the community whose lives would equally be endangered by the same.

The traditional Akamba consider children to be part and parcel of both social and economic wealth. Thus like cattle, children are never counted.³⁶ Counting persons or cattle is tantamount to inviting death on them, and therefore, it is a taboo. Again, this taboo reflects the strong love that the traditional Akamba attach to children and cattle. This is because of the role that children play in the perpetuation of the chain of humanity as pointed out in the next chapter. With regard to cattle, the traditional Akamba believe according to their myth of origin, that Ngai (God) gave them cattle from which they may derive their means of livelihood. Most of other taboos are prohibitions of not eating certain kinds of foodstuffs for instance, there is a certain clan Asij that does not ever eat the liver. The Asij believe that if they eat liver, their eyes will get sick and the eye sight will eventually become impaired. Thus if one of them eats liver, he/she has to be ritually cleansed.

4.4.4 Magic

Besides taboos, magic is another important aspect of the Akamba traditional religion. While some social ills are believed to be a manifestation of the ancestors' wrath either due to negligence or some committed offence by the living family members, there are others that are believed to be caused by magic. Magic is a strong mystical power that is believed to be granted to some individuals by either God or evil spirits.³⁷ Among the traditional Akamba, magic exists in two categories namely: "good magic " and "evil magic". The use of good magic is accepted and esteemed by the community. Good magic is mainly used by specialists particularly medicine-men and diviners. They use their knowledge and manipulation of this mystical power for the welfare of their community. For instance, good magic is used in the treatment of diseases, in counteracting misfortunes, and witchcraft.

Witchcraft is "evil magic"- the manipulation of mystical power to inflict harm on people. It enables certain people to inflict harm on others. Such powers are believed to have the ability to affect anything which is in the universe of man. Thus witchcraft is capable of causing physical harm to human beings, animals, crops and soils among other things. This harm may be in form of complicated diseases, poverty, misfortunes, barrenness, inability to find a spouse or soils can be

rendered unproductive and animals may be made to die of mysterious causes.³⁸ The people who possess these evil magic/powers are witches and are regarded as bad elements of the community.

To guard against the effects of witchcraft, the traditional Akamba medicine-men or diviners provide amounts of mystical powder to the people in form of charms, amulets, feathers, power and special incantations or cuttings may be made on the body of the person being protected, and some medicine rubbed into them.³⁹ Besides protecting people, the medicine-men protect homesteads, cattle, fields farms and other property against evil that may be caused by evil magic/ witchcraft. To do this, they use various items; for instance, it is common to observe any of the following items in the home compounds of the traditional Akamba: a few lines of ashes strewn across the gate as you enter the homestead, or a forked post standing in the middle of the compound, or a piece of pot on the roof of the house or in the fields. you might spot a horn sticking out of the ground or an old gourd hanging on a tree.⁴⁰ These are some of the articles or visible signs that are actually pointers to the Akamba belief in mystical power. While it would be in the interest of the majority of the traditional Akamba to end this evil practice, it seems that it would be difficult to stamp out these mystical powers completely because according to the traditional

Akamba, witchcraft is transmitted from mother to daughter and it is even believed to be in the blood of the witches. Mbula stresses the same point in the following:

Witchcraft is partly inherited and partly taught from one generation to next. (Some) Africans believe that witchcraft is in the blood of the witches, and, just like genetical inheritance, witchcraft passes from mother to daughter, or from father to son. The outward paraphernalia of witchcraft which is transmitted from generation to generation is a symbol of an inner reality. in order to confirm this inner reality, the older generation of witches officially hand their craft over to the younger generation.⁴¹ (the emphasis is mine).

Among the Akamba, witchcraft is believed to be transmitted to the eldest daughter by the mother. If the mother feels her eldest daughter is not a responsible person, she can transmit it to one of her young daughters provided that she is not too young to understand what witchcraft is. Normally the daughter chosen by mother is her favourite. Witchcraft captures those who possess it and it is never allowed to lie dormant.⁴² Witches must put it into use or else it turns upon them and destroys them. Thus witches possess a sadist feeling of wanting to destroy other people, animals such as cows and goats, soils or anything that benefits another person. For this reason, witches are believed to use either insects or certain small animals or spirits to achieve their ends. For instance, they may send flies, rats, birds and snakes as

magical objects to their victims.⁴³ Alternatively, they may use hair, nail cuttings, traces of urine, clothes or a person's foot prints to cause harm on their victims. Any of these articles may be used in a harmful way to cause infliction on the person from whom they come.

Thus the traditional Akamba fear to leave carelessly anything that may be used by witches. Therefore, when traditional Akamba shave or cut their nails, they ensure that they don't leave any of the hair or nail cuttings exposed for fear that witches might lay their hands on them.⁴⁴ Due to this, witches are bad elements of the community and whenever they are caught red-handed, they face severe punishment and at times death. They are therefore held responsible for certain social ills. The main reason for possessing witchcraft is to inflict suffering and cause wanton destruction to other people. Due to this, there is a tendency among the traditional Akamba when they experience even the smallest of misfortune to blame it on the misuse of this mystical power. To counter this, the traditional Akamba resort to medicinemen for counter-treatment against witchcraft. But such treatment is believed to work so long as the medicine-man's medicine is more powerful than that of the witch.

If, however, a witch manages to get his/her prey simply because the counter-treatment that the latter, may have had is weaker

than the former's magic or probably because the victim had not received any counter-treatment at all, then the resultant ill effects can only be cured or rendered powerless by counter-treatment against this evil magic. Such counter-treatment can be administered by a medicine-man as stated earlier. The medicine-man's magical powers must of necessity be stronger than that of the witch for the counter-treatment to be a success. One very striking characteristic of ailments that are caused by witchcraft is that most of them are as mystical as the power that is believed to be responsible for them; and medical science is unable to diagnose them let alone curing them. But once the traditional counter-treatment is administered, the situation reverts back to normal. This shows that certain aspects of the Akamba traditional religion and culture are surrounded by unfathomable mystery.

Such could perhaps explain the strong attachment of most of the Akamba to their culture, so that even when they get converted to Christianity, they are unable to adapt to the Christian culture and instead, continue to hold the beliefs of the traditional religion since they are unlikely to know how to resolve certain matters in the foreign culture. Thus Christianity has barely touched the core of the life of most Kamba people.

Witchcraft should not, however, be viewed as being unique to the Akamba only, for it is believed to have existed among other communities of other cultures since time immemorial. For instance, as far back the as time when the Israelites were in Egypt, the law-giver commanded that all sorcerers and witches be destroyed. This is well stated in the Holy Bible, (Exodus 22 ;18). Thus the Holy Bible admits the existence of witchcraft and condemns it.

With the coming of Christianity to Kambaland, the missionaries preached that witchcraft was an evil which should be denounced. Christianity condemns the belief in witchcraft; this condemnation is based on the belief that Christ has conquered Satan and all powers of darkness, therefore Christians cannot be harmed by witches.⁴⁵ God disapproves of witchcraft as it seems to go against His fifth commandment "Thou shalt not kill". Thus in the Holy Bible, (Revelation 21.8), a warning is given to witches. By the same token St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, tells them to refrain from such things as adultery, impurity, ...and witchcraft (Galatians 5.20).

While both the traditional Akamba religion and Christianity acknowledge the reality of witchcraft, modern science does not subscribe to it at all. This is because witchcraft is not a fact, it is not empirically verifiable. Notions such as witchcraft seem to be forms of

escapism that human beings resort to during times of distress or failure. Human nature is such that when there is an inability on a person's side to achieve something or when a misfortune befalls someone, people always look for something or someone to blame. It seems people resort to witchcraft as a way of justifying their weaknesses when they have failed to grapple with the realities of life.

Science classifies witchcraft as pseudoscientific because the belief associated with it has been less progressive over a long period of time, and faces many unsolved problems.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the practitioners of this belief make no attempt to develop it towards solutions of the problems and are very selective in considering confirmation and disconfirmations;⁴⁷ for instance, they prefer witchdoctors' explanations to scientific ones. If a mukamba has malaria and it is explained to him/her that he has the malaria because a mosquito carrying malaria parasites has stung him, he will still want to know why that mosquito stung him and not another person.⁴⁸ The only answer that a mukamba finds satisfactory to the question is that someone has 'caused' (or 'sent') the mosquito to sting the sick person by means of magical manipulations.⁴⁹ Thus suffering, misfortunes, and accidents are all caused mystically as far as the traditional Akamba are concerned. But these allegations are not empirically verifiable.

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CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 THE AKAMBA AND CHRISTIANITY

5.1 Christianity

Christianity could be defined as a saviour god religion, incorporating traditions of faith and practice current in Judaism and cults of Graeco-Roman world.¹ Essentially, it is the religion or faith based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity arose in Palestine among Jewish people where Jesus lived and died.² Thus it is believed to have originated as a Jew messianic movement inspired by and centred on Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is believed to be still alive in heaven where he forms one of the three persons of the Trinity.

As pointed out earlier in chapter one (literature review), Mugambi asserts that the meaning of Christianity may be expressed in three complementary aspects: as a way of belief, a way of worship and a way of daily living.³ "As a way of belief, Christianity proclaims a faith which is both a conviction about God, and a trust in the will of God. Its foundation is divine revelation, which is a disclosure of the will of God through the history of "the chosen people of God," namely, the Hebrews and the church, and also particularly Jesus of Nazareth,

whom Christians affirm to be Christ."⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the fundamental beliefs in Christianity. According to this doctrine, God is confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three persons, and yet He is only one God.

As a way of worship, Christianity emphasizes worship. Jesus is believed to have taught his disciples how to pray. He in fact told them to say their prayers according to the following model: "Our Father, who art in heaven , hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."⁵ This hope is expressed in all Christian prayer and worship and it is the core of Christianity as a way of worship.

Christianity as a way of daily living is defined as a way of love and charity.⁶ The fundamental principle in the teaching of Jesus is love, and it was emphasized in the Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 13). Jesus is believed to have given the parable of the Good Samaritan with regard to this, and advised people to go and do likewise.⁷ On the basis of this, Christianity could be said to be not only a belief or conviction, but also a way of worship for it gives guidance as to what principles a person should apply in his daily conduct.

The followers of this religion are called Christians. They claim to find their wholeness and salvation in Jesus for he is their redeemer.

They strongly believe and hope that Jesus will return at the end of the worlds to take with him those who believe in him. They preach and believe in the unity of the Trinity of God, who exists in three equal persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸ The doctrine of the Trinity of God contrasts a lot with the traditional Akamba conception of God according to which, God is conceived of as existing in one (mode of existence) person.

Christians form a community of their religion. Such a community is an essential feature in any religion. Religion is nothing if it is not established in the individual person, and it is equally lacking in substance if it is confined to the isolated individual or the recesses of his consciousness; man is a social animal and the religious dimension of his experience is social as well.⁹ The community principle in religion provides a means of sharing experience and makes it possible for people to distinguish the perennial from the parochial and evanescent, both in thought and action.¹⁰

Christianity is quite personally oriented as the decision to become a Christian is the sole responsibility of the concerned individual. Christianity seems to reflect anxiety with regard to the afterlife according to its teaching that there are two destinies of the soul; namely heaven and hell. Heaven is for the souls of the righteous

ones, while hell is the destiny for sinners. Thus Christians endeavour to lead a morally good life here on earth in anticipation for a better life in heaven after the end of the world. As pointed out earlier in chapter three, the concepts of salvation, heaven and hell do not exist in the Akamba traditional religion. Therefore, there is no redeemer since in the first place, there is nothing to be redeemed or saved from as the concept of the inherent sin does not exist.

While commenting on Christianity, Mbula asserts the following:

Christianity was based on the ethics of a given people. was and is still historical, claims to be universal, monotheistic and redemptive. In it, the relationship between God and man is mediated by the Person and work of Jesus Christ. It is revealed and not a natural religion, concerned primarily with the inner life of man in God. It saves man from sin, and centres on Christ's mediation. In Christianity, God is conceived on the one hand as a moral perfection, and on the other hand, man is regarded not only as morally weak, but also as morally blameworthy.¹¹

Thus Christianity portrays man as being a sinner by his very nature. An account of the fall of man is well given in the Holy Bible (Genesis:3). This account gives the history of man's inherent sin. The concept of the inherent sin is very central to Christian teaching. Christianity strives for resoration of the good relationship that existed between man and God, and was lost when the first parents (Adam and

Eve) sinned. It is believed in Christianity that for God to save man from his sin, He offered his only begotten son (Jesus Christ) to die on the cross so that man may be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Since the death of Jesus Christ, it is strongly believed that those who believe in Him are saved from sin as stated in the Holy Bible (John 3:16). As for those who do not believe in Christ, they continue being sinners, and it is believed that they will perish in hell while Christians will forever rejoice in heaven. From this, it is explicitly indicated that the Christian world-view incorporates the concept of two distinct worlds that are destinies of souls after death. Heaven is associated with happiness and seems to be the highest good for man. On the other hand, is hell which is associated with eternal suffering. On the basis of this dichotomy, Christianity encourages people to live righteous lives so that they may qualify to enter the Kingdom of God (heaven).

Essentially, Christianity aims at spiritual transformation of sinners so that in the future, they may go to heaven and rejoice there forever, instead of remaining sinners and languish in hell after the end of the world. This world-view creates and gives hope to Christians so that while they may sacrifice a lot of worldly pleasures to remain

faithful to God, they feel and believe that God will reward them generously after the end of the world.

Christian beliefs are summarised in a creed which is the self-confirmation of the individual Christian. This creed affirms the individual's relationship with his creator, the son of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, and the Holy spirit.¹² Further, it affirms the close communion of the faithful Christians and their belief in the resurrection of the dead.¹³ This creed is referred to as the Apostles' creed in the Holy Bible.

Christianity is supposed to change its converts spiritually. This spiritual change is well manifested in their behaviour. Christians are also said to be born again-not physically, but spiritually. This spiritual rebirth is the one that facilitates complete transformation of the individual convert for the better. Thus born again Christians display a lot of humility, love for one another, kindness, patience, high moral standards and hope for eternal life. However, the extent to which these virtues are displayed by some supposed Christians is questionable. More often than not, we read or hear about some Christians indulging in immoral practices such as adultery, embezzling church funds and wrangles over leadership among other things. These practices no

doubt cast a lot of doubts as to the authenticity of the salvation of such Christians.

Christians endeavour to achieve their prime objective in life which is to go to heaven eventually. In fact, most of the things that Christians do are geared towards achieving this prime objective. Since Christians believe in eternity of life, they view death as a form of sleep, from which bodies will be resurrected by Jesus Christ after the end of the world. Thus they believe that when one of them dies, there is hope of meeting again in heaven. This Christian interpretation of death is quite consoling and in a way makes the bereaved feel that the dead person has not died as such, but it is the body that has separated from the soul, so that the soul goes where it belongs (heaven) while the body goes back to the soil where it was created from. This interpretation of death is quite philosophical and prepares people particularly, Christians to accept death as an inevitable stage in existence that seems to have been sanctioned by God.

Christianity promises inheritance of better things, not here and now, but in the future in heaven. In view of this, Christianity teaches its followers to concentrate on heaven and not to concern themselves with the material world. Christians are therefore urged to save their riches in heaven, where they can neither be stolen nor destroyed as no

thief nor moth can have access to them. This teaching is well given in the Holy Bible (Matthew 6:19-21). Such a promise is a spur to continued devotion of Christians to their religion. However, Christianity calls for a lot of patience, a virtue that may be difficult to find in most people. For instance, Christianity advocates forgiveness of one's enemies or whoever wrongs another, but there does not seem to be a limit to the number of times that one ought to forgive another, as the Holy Bible puts it in (Luke 17: 1-4).

5.1.1 Christian Approach to Divine Worship (the Liturgy)

Liturgy consists of the pattern and the subject-matter of worship. In Christianity, divine worship may be undertaken by an individual or a group of Christians. This is the time during which the individual or a group of Christians worships God. Christians meet together to pray, sing hymns of praise to God, read the Christian Holy book - the Bible, listen to the Christian teaching, repent their sins, ask for forgiveness from God, share their diverse experiences and meet with God through the communion of the blessed bread and wine (the holy communion and mass).

Mass is the Christian ceremony based on Christ's last supper on earth. It is partaken by Catholics and during this ceremony, bread and

wine are taken to symbolize the body and blood of Christ respectively. The holy communion is a religious service in protestant churches in which bread and wine are shared in a solemn ceremony as a sign of Christ's body and blood in remembrance of His death. Thus the communion of blessed bread and wine is held by Christians in remembrance of Christ, particularly the last supper that He ate with His followers the night before He was crucified. He is believed to have blessed bread and wine and passed them round to His followers to eat and drink. He told them that bread was His body and the wine blood, signs of Himself and commanded them to meet together and eat and drink bread and wine respectively in remembrance of Him (Matthew, 26:26-28). So Christians meet to remember the last supper and to recall Calvary where Christ was crucified so that mankind could be saved from sin. By partaking of the supper, they believe that they are meeting God in Christ through the blessed bread and wine. In the mass, the self-offering of Christ on the cross is re-enacted; the people present, together with the priest, offer to God the sacrifice which was offered by Christ.²⁴

The mass and holy communion are partaken by the "clean" church members. Christians as the name suggests are meant to be Christ-like, to imitate Him, try to live righteous life like Christ did. In

Christianity, it is believed that Jesus never sinned during His life here on earth, and He is believed to have set a good example to Christians. So Christians strive to emulate Him. In view of this, they ought not sin, and when any of the members sins, he/she faces a stern action from the church. In most denominations, the member is suspended from active participation in religious matters for a certain period of time after which he/she confesses and repents the committed sin and he/she is eventually reinstated. This is especially the case with the protestants for instance, African Inland Church. By repenting, the individual is believed to be sorry for the committed sin and he/she believed to have been forgiven in heaven by God through this repentance (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). However, during the period when suspension is in force for a certain member, this particular church member is not allowed to partake of the communion of the blessed bread and wine as such a person is considered unclean.

It is however, difficult sometimes to identify those who have sinned except in cases where the sin manifests itself physically for example, a pregnancy out of wed-lock, or where a Christian may assault a person physically. This is one of the issues that Christianity has to wrestle with. The suspension of members is a way of making Christians adhere to the teachings of Christ.

During the divine worship, Christians are led and taught the teaching of Christ by religious leaders who include pastors, bishops and priests among others. Such leaders are ordained in ceremony after some formal training on how to discharge religious duties in their churches. These religious leaders are believed to be God-chosen and therefore, their teaching is from God. Thus such leaders are believed to have received a divine call towards the church ministry. However, there are a few cases of some religious leaders who seem to have joined the Christian ministry as a means of gaining a livelihood. This is clearly reflected in their anti-Christian conduct. For instance, there is one pastor who used to minister the local AIC church in my home area (Nzau Location) and at one time, he raped a young girl. Similarly, more often than not, we either witness or hear about tussles among certain Christian religious leaders over one thing or another. For instance, the tussle that has been going on in the Eldoret diocese over who should replace the late Bishop Muge. However, such conflicts seem to be more rampant in protestant churches than in catholic ones. Thus people (religious leaders) of questionable character raise doubts about the authenticity of their supposed divine call to the Christian ministry.

Divine worship facilitates communication between the worshipper and the worshipped. Such communication may be either direct or through some intermediary. For instance, most protestants pray to God directly. The prayer serves as the medium of communication in divine worship. Through the prayer, the worshipper repents his/her sins if any, and asks for forgiveness from God. may seek favours from God if need be, and thanks God for whatever He might have done to him/her.

However, some Christians may communicate with God through an intermediary. This is mostly so with the Catholics. They communicate with God through a communion of Saints for example, the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, St. Augustine, St. John and St. Mark among others. Divine worship is grounded on faith. The worshippers must have faith in God for their prayers to be a success. The use of intermediaries by the Catholics to communicate with God is a striking similarity between Christianity and The Akamba traditional religion.

Worship in Christianity is church-centred and the church is believed to be the family of believers. They are a brother and a sister in Christ and are supposed to share things together as such. Thus Christ proclaims a new social order in which all individuals respect and value one another as brothers and sisters for they are all children of God.

According to Mugambi, "in this new social order, for which Jesus applies the code "the kingdom of God", those people who are endowed with material wealth share it freely and willingly with those less wealthy; and those with other non-material endowments also share whatever they have with their fellow men and women. In this way, a new harmonious society is created in which economic, social, cultural, religious and racial distinctions exist but are rendered insignificant by the strong bond of universal brotherhood."¹⁵ However, this new social order sounds too ideal because in reality, the characteristics of such a social order are for the most part not reflected. For instance, we may find in the same church, extremes of social classes marked by some very rich individuals and some very poor ones. If Christians really cherish this philosophy of brotherhood, then why don't the wealthy ones share their riches with the poor ones?. This remains a great challenge to Christians.

5.2 Introduction of Christianity into Kambaland

Christianity was introduced in Machakos District in 1893. This was done by a group of missionaries that was sent to Kenya by the African Inland Mission. This group of missionaries was led by Peter Cameron Scott, and in October, 1895, they settled in Nzau Location of

Machakos District and started their first mission there.¹⁶ This mission was started against a very strong resistance from the local residents of the area. The then area chief was a lady called Syombesa and was so hostile to the missionaries that when they requested her to allow them to erect a church in this area, she told them that she would not let them erect a church in the soils of her territory. But owing to their persistence, she showed them a big rock and told them to build their church right on the rock, as she thought that constructing a building on the rock would be impossible. This notwithstanding, however, they constructed a magnificent church right on the rock to the surprise of the local residents of Nzai Location. It is this rock that forms the floor of this church and the church is still there to this day.

There were many tropical diseases in Kenya and the African continent as a whole, that were a threat to the health of most missionaries and explorers during the era of evangelization and exploration. This condition was more aggravated by lack of adequate medical facilities during this period. Thus owing to these diseases, the missionary Peter Cameron Scott did not live long after starting the first mission in this area. In December, 1896, he became ill and died of tropical diseases, and his remains were buried at Kalamba. One of his colleagues also became ill and died just about the same time and was

buried in the same area. However, even though records show the cause of these missionaries' deaths as having been tropical diseases, the local residents of Nzau Location have a different theory. They strongly believe that the then area chief was a great witch and consequently had amazing magical powers which she displayed through spells of different kinds. She is thus believed to have cast her strong magic spells on the missionaries so that she could eliminate them, for she was against the introduction of Christianity in the area. In fact, Peter Cameron Scott is believed to have fallen from the roof of the church they were constructing and died. However, he might have fallen off the roof of the building due to his frail body health resulting from the effect of the tropical diseases, but the local residents of Nzau location and particularly, those living in Kalamba sub-location believe that these missionaries were bewitched by Syombesa. Further, the local residents of this area believe that this particular area was notorious for witchcraft and this was the major reason why the missionaries chose to establish their first mission there, so that they could enlighten the people on Christianity and eventually denounce their "evil ways."

The two graves where the missionaries were buried are next to each other at Kalamba and they have become a historic site. This site is

often viewed by most people who go to Kalamba particularly, those going there for the first time.

The church that the missionaries built during the establishment of the first mission station at Kalamba in Nzau location belongs to the African Inland Church (A.I.C.) denomination and has since been called Kalamba African Inland Church. Besides the Kalamba A.I.C., there are others of the same denomination within the area for example, Malooi A.I.C., Matiliku A.I.C, Kalaani A.I.C. and Muthyoi A.I.C. which have grown from the Kalamba main church. Besides the A.I.C. churches, there are a number of other churches belonging to other denominations namely; the Catholic, African Brotherhood Church (A.B.C.), the Redeemed church and Anglican church just to name a few. But all these other churches are younger than the Kalamba A.I.C. one. The Kalamba A.I.C.Church is attended by many church-goers and nearly all the other A.I.C. churches in the location are branches that have broken off from the Kalamba church, owing to increased population of Christians. Contrary to the strong resistance that met the introduction of Christianity in the area initially, a lot of people have since decided to have been converted to Christianity, and some of them are still staunch Christians. This is evidenced by the large crowds that are seen at the churches in the area on Sundays.

Other churches are found in various parts of Machakos district for example, in Kangundo at Muisuni, a mission station was established in 1896, at Mumbuni (where there is the famous Scott Theological College) near Machakos town a church was established in 1902, in Mbooni, another was established in 1908 and another in 1909 in Mukaa. Thus there are quite a number of mission stations in Kambaland belonging to various denominations.

Christianity was introduced into Kambaland against a very strong cultural setting. It was introduced among the Akamba as a religion having a different bearing than the Akamba traditional religious beliefs. It came to East Africa as a foreign religion with its own beliefs and values. The Akamba who were converted to this alien religion were expected to adopt new thinking, new values and beliefs¹⁷ hence the conflict between the two religions.

5.2.1 The Akamba response to Christianity

The Akamba responded to the introduction of Christianity into their territory with mixed feelings; some of them were anxious to learn the new religion, while others were opposed to it. Others welcomed the missionaries not because of their quest for the new religion, but because they hoped to benefit from the missionaries' visit materially.

This was particularly so with some of the Akamba leaders, more so the chiefs. Such chiefs were used by the missionaries for easier penetration into Kambaland as these chiefs were very influential. For example, the renowned Kitui chief, the late chief Kivoi served as a good friend, guide and protector to the missionary Dr. Ludwing Kraft.¹⁸

However, some of the chiefs were stubbornly hostile to the missionaries and would not allow them to establish a mission in their territories for instance, the case of Nzaui location in Machakos District. Thus generally, Christianity was introduced into Kambaland against a strong cultural background and it was not easily assimilated into the Akamba culture. Most of the Akamba were opposed to introduction of Christianity into their land, and the missionaries had to entice them into the foreign religion. For instance, the missionaries introduced literacy classes that saw the development of schools in the areas of their influence. They also introduced mission health facilities within the vicinity of their mission centres. In order for Africans to enjoy these facilities, they had to meet certain conditions that the missionaries had set in this regard. One condition was that Africans must of necessity be converts to Christianity.

Since some Africans wanted to get education, they yielded to Christianity as a passport to their education but not out of good faith.

Also, Africans were in dire need of the mission health facilities by then, and there were ailments that traditional herbal medicine could not cure easily. In the circumstances, most Africans pretended to have been converted to Christianity so that they could get these services. This was the case with most of the Akamba. Some of the missionaries were strict on the conditions that they had set for Africans, and would turn away from school non-Christians to ensure that only Christians received education and health services.¹⁹

But the missionaries forgot that they could easily control the African physically but not spiritually. Most Africans were not quite serious when they embraced Christianity for it was presented to them in a form of blackmail. Perhaps this is why most Africans who claim to be converts to Christianity continue to display strong attachment to their traditional religious beliefs. Therefore, even though there are many Akamba who claim to be converts to Christianity, some of them generally lack any serious commitment to the religion as portrayed by their practices.

Available information shows that most of the Akamba who have taken to Christianity were not and even today are not very serious about it.²⁰ The following are generally the reasons that made most of the Akamba people become Christians: first, the Western Missionaries

presented Christianity to the Akamba people as though it was a religion that acknowledged a God that was different from the one acknowledged by the Akamba traditional religion. The Akamba were made to believe that their traditional religion was not authentic, was ancestor-worship and rather primitive. On the basis of this, the Akamba understood that there was a Christian God, who was superior to theirs, and in order to experience this God, they became Christians so that they could believe in Him. Some of the Akamba who were converted to Christianity did so to get education in the literacy classes that had been initiated by the missionaries. It could also be argued that some Akamba saw others going to church and decided to follow them as it was fashionable to some extent to be a Christian. Some were forced into becoming Christians by their parents especially the then young people whose parents had already been converted to Christianity.

These reasons could probably explain why most Akamba Christians have not completely abandoned their traditional religious beliefs as portrayed by their practices. For example, some Akamba Christians still pour libations to their ancestors which is an element of the Akamba traditional religion. Others marry a second wife when the

first fails to bring forth a son - an aspect that is quite crucial in the Akamba traditional culture.

Along similar lines, Mbiti contends that Africans only know how to live within their religious context and that even if Africans are converted to another religion for instance Christianity, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion immediately; it remains with them for several generations and sometimes centuries.²¹ And the Akamba are no exception. Besides, Mbiti's opinion concurs with my own observation of the Akamba, whereby even the ordained Christian leaders of certain denominations may have to consult traditional medicine-men (witchdoctors) in case of mysterious illnesses for example, cancer or when their wives fail to give forth children, and they have consulted medical doctors with no good results being obtained. Also, others who claim to have been converted to Christianity still observe some traditional customs and rituals that are part and parcel of the Akamba traditional religion, for example holding communion with their living dead, being treated traditionally against witchcraft by witch-doctors so that when spells are cast on them by witches, they are not adversely affected. Others have to go through a cleansing ritual when a woman of their family has a miscarriage, and yet they claim to be converts to Christianity.

Then it appears there is a great purpose that the Akamba traditional religion serves in the lives of Akamba or else it would not be so central in their way of life. Probably this religion gives its followers a sense of security in life.²²

Therefore, within their religious way of life, the Akamba know who they are, how to act in different situations and how to solve their problems. In view of this, the Akamba are not willing to abandon their traditional religion quickly and completely for they would feel insecure afterwards unless something else gave them an equal or greater sense of security. Such security may not be completely found in Christianity or any other foreign religion for these are based on cultures that are alien to the Akamba. This could in a way explain why even when some of the Akamba are converted to Christianity, they still have to go back to their traditional religion when some matters arise, for they would not understand how to handle such situations satisfactorily within the foreign religion. Also, this in itself shows the strong faith that the Akamba have in their traditional religion: a faith that cannot completely be wiped out by any other religion superimposed on their traditional one.

Nevertheless, this does not rule out the fact that there are some Akamba (though few) who are staunch Christians and have been so

since they embraced the religion. Such staunch Christians have completely changed their perception of issues particularly those affecting human life, so that their line of thought is superstition free. For instance, they interpret misfortunes as being caused by God to serve a certain purpose. But a mukamba interprets the same with a touch of superstition, so that a misfortune may be associated with manipulations of witchcraft by witches or may be interpreted as a punishment from God due to a contravened taboo.

5.2.2 The Impact of Christianity on the Akamba

Following the advent of Christianity in Kambaland, many changes took place within the individuals who embraced the religion and the structures that supported the individual.²³ Christianity divided the individual's life into two namely: the outer (material) life and the inner (spiritual) life. The inner (spiritual) life was concerned with the last things that the enduring Christians will inherit in heaven and this is the teaching that became of great importance. Christianity urged its converts to fix their gaze on heaven and not to concern themselves with the material world. Commenting on the effects of Christianity, Mbula has the following to say:

Worship was no longer family-centred, but church-centred. The church became the new family of believers. In such a situation the *mukamba* was no longer whole, but divided. He owed allegiance to two conflicting groups, the first and basic was the family, the second and very strong was the missionaries church. The family was also divided into categories of believers. Some became very fervent Christians, others were lukewarm while others never bothered to change from traditional Akamba beliefs.²⁴

This situation continues to prevail to this day and could probably be attributed to the following reasons: those who continue to embrace the Akamba traditional religion might find it more secure for they are well versed in the religious beliefs and the culture. It should also be noted that as mentioned before, some of the Akamba yielded to Christianity so that they could be admitted in the literacy classes, that had been initiated by the missionaries and as such it was seen as a means to education but not as a faith.

The Akamba religious aspect was well reflected in their belief system and their beliefs were largely based on the individual's self awareness, his relationship to others, his environment and above all the world beyond as Mbula notes in the following:

*Each family was the cradle and centre of religious worship and religious activities. The observance of religious rituals and acts was required of every member of the family. Every traditional Kamba was, and became a religious person to the extent that every act was part and parcel of the religious beliefs.*²⁵

Therefore, the traditional mukamba was very religious and his religion was part and parcel of his way of life. But with the coming of Christianity, the traditional set up was interfered with and emphasis moved from the community and environment, to the self. Christ and His church; a Christ whom the Akamba had neither heard of nor experienced. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, the Akamba traditional world-view does not incorporate the concept of Christ, therefore Christ was a totally new phenomenon that confused them.

Although Chrsitianity seems to lay a lot of emphasis on the spiritual life, this does not imply that material life is totally disregarded as Mbula seems to portray, because man must eat therefore, he necessarily practices agriculture, man by his very nature aspires for higher things for example, wisdom and for that matter, he has to learn. Thus there are quite a number of material things that man must/should have to make his life on earth bearable. What Christianity emphasises is the fact that man should not concern himself with the earthly things or achievements and forget about his spiritual life. But this has often been misinterpreted to mean that man should only concern himself with heavenly things and disregard his material life and this is not practical.

Christianity caused a high degree of strain both to the individuals who became Christians and to the indigenous society to which they belong, as there developed a conflict between the Akamba (African) way of doing things and that of Christianity. The missionaries' culture was not willing to accept anything Kamba, and the Akamba were expected to accept everything about Christianity without questioning. This created more confusion on the side of the Akamba for they could not tell or explain the principles or philosophy underlying Christianity. Up to this day, most Akamba Christians are unable to give a critical explanation of Christianity.

Christianity condemned and still condemns various African cultural aspects that are very central to the life of mukamba. For instance, for the Akamba (and African people as a whole) marriage is the focus of existence. In the African culture, the basic principle underlying marriage is procreation; without procreation marriage is considered incomplete. It is procreation that perpetuates the chain of humanity. Thus a person who has no descendants becomes for ever dead after his death since his line of physical continuation is cut off if he does not marry and bear children. The perpetuation of humanity is an extremely important aspect in African societies and the Akamba are no exception. For this reason, the Akamba allow various forms of

marital unions/marriages besides monogamy to ensure that they achieve the perpetuation of humanity especially in cases where monogamy fails to achieve this. These other forms of marital unions include polygyny, ghost marriages, child marriage and maweto (woman to woman) marriages.²⁶

Polygamy, which is totally unacceptable in Christianity enables a man to get children with another wife in case the first one is barren or has borne him girls only. This is so because among the Akamba, girls are not known to perpetuate the chain of humanity of the families where they are born, for they usually lose their identity upon marriage and consequently identify themselves with their husband's family. As such, the children that they give birth to, belong to and identify themselves with the husband's family and in this case, the girl's parents' identity does not feature anywhere in the girl's matrimonial family.

Thus among the Akamba, it is only male children of a family who can perpetuate the chain of humanity for that family and in the absence of sons, then a different form of marital union must be tried to achieve this. Also, among the Akamba, girls (daughters) do not inherit their parents' wealth. Thus when a couple fails to get a son, they feel insecure because there will be no one to inherit their wealth, and also

to look after them in their old age since the girls will move to other families when they get married.

Maweto are women who are socially married to other women for purposes of procreation. Such are married to other married or single women who may be barren or have given birth to daughters only. These maweto are given a genitor to raise children with and their children identify themselves with the elderly woman who has married the iweto (singular for Maweto) The internal logic of marrying Maweto is that they enable women who do not have children (probably because they are barren or their children have died or they have had girls only) to get children who will no doubt perpetuate the chain of humanity for the concerned families.

Child marriages are arranged where an elderly couple gets their only son very late - that is, when they are old such that they are afraid that they may die before they see their son marry or they may feel that they may die before their son comes of age to marry. In such a case, they are anxious to see to it that their son gets a wife however young the son may be. So the boy's father chooses a girl for his young son and she is ceremoniously taken to the boy's house just like in a normal Kamba traditional marriage. Once at home, the bride is given one of the male relatives of the young boy to act as a genitor on his behalf.

When the boy matures, the wife is officially handed over to him, and the children born to his wife before the hand-over ceremony assume his name though they were not his biologically. However, this form of marital union is dying out as people get more enlightened on matters pertaining to marriage; for instance, feelings of the concerned pair in these marriages are not crucial, but things have changed and when it comes to marriage, it is the feelings of the concerned pair that matter whether they like each other or not. In fact, there are some Akamba men who have had to re-marry after disowning their first wives because their marriages were arranged for them by their old parents when these men were young boys. This is quite common with the educated men because if their first marriages were arranged by their parents when they were young boys, then they went to school and probably pursued education to higher levels, then by the time they complete their studies, their "wives" are too old for them and therefore, end up disowning these women and acquire others of their own choice.

Ghost marriages occur when a young man who has attained a marriageable age dies before he is married. The Akamba call this marriage Kungamia (to hold for) meaning that such a marriage holds for real marriage that would have been there had this young man not died. This form of marital union still exists though it is declining. It is

commonly found among the Akamba who are staunch traditionalists. Therefore, if a son dies before he has been married, the parents arrange for him to get married "in absentia" so that the dead man is not cut off from the chain of life. The children born of this union assume the dead man's name, and it is his family that chooses a genitor for the bride.²⁷ All these forms of marital unions are aimed at perpetuation of the chain of humanity.

That notwithstanding though, Christianity interpreted marriage in a totally different manner and the philosophy underlying marriage was for the most part disregarded. Emphasis was placed on the unity between man and his wife, without considering procreation as being important as it is in the Akamba (African) traditional religion. Consequently, the various marital unions found among the Akamba, that are mostly aimed at achieving procreation were declared sinful. This could perhaps be due to the fact that the missionaries came with the assumption that they represented a superior religion, and did not therefore stop to think about, and try to understand the reasons underlying such practices in the traditional Kamba world.

Understanding the philosophy underlying the Akamba traditional religion was a crucial aspect that seems to have completely been disregarded by some Western missionaries. Had this been taken

into consideration, perhaps there would not have been misinterpretation of the Akamba traditional religion and the two religions, Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion, would be seen as religions that are geared towards achieving the same goal, but each in its own style.

While not denying the excellent contributions of missionaries to our understanding of world religions, their accounts seem to have been intended to highlight real or imagined defects in other religions to justify the need for conversion to Christianity which they had brought.

This is well portrayed in the persistent refusal of Christianity to recognise other religions. But religious pluralism is there to stay as evidenced by the existence of various religions among the Akamba. Furthermore, there are no realistic prospects that one day all people of the world will be brought under a single religion. It is in this view that S.W. Ariarajah's observation is worthy of note and recommendation that:

*The confidence that some day the Christian faith would replace all religions, as a historical reality and not only as an eschatological consummation, has been waning. The empires have fallen; so have the ambitions of the religious traditions that went with them.*²⁸

The same point is emphasized by C.M. Warren when he succinctly states:

*We have marched around the alien Jericos the requisite number of times. We have sounded the trumpets. And the walls have not collapsed*²⁹.

Thus religions are firmly rooted in a people's culture and, therefore, difficult to annihilate. This explains why, it has not been possible for Christianity to wipe out the Akamba traditional religion completely.

Christianity should not however, be seen as having only adversely affected the life of the Akamba. As a religion, it has widened spiritual fulfilment so that those who have been converted to Christianity find their spiritual fulfilment there, while the traditionalists continue to find theirs in the Akamba traditional religion. Christianity has helped in eradication of certain repugnant cultural practices such as clitoridectomy and child sacrifice. Before the advent of Christianity in Kambaland, the traditional Akamba used to practice female circumcision; and when there was a prolonged drought/famine, they sacrificed a child to appease God so that He could bring them rain. However, with the coming of Christianity, these practices were shown

to be sinful and therefore, discouraged. In fact, child sacrifice has completely been eradicated.

Christian ethics discourages certain immoral practices that the Akamba traditional religion sanctions. For instance, premarital sex was never forbidden in the Akamba traditional setting and consequently, there was no respect for chastity. In fact, a girl who was found to be a virgin at the time of her marriage was a disgrace to her family. Among the traditional Akamba, sex was used as an expression of hospitality; that is, when a man visited another, the custom was for the host to give his wife to the guest so that the two could sleep together.³⁰ But with the coming of Christianity, such practices have been shown to be adulterous and immoral, thus strengthening the morality of the Akamba. Through Christianity, the Akamba have been exposed to a different world-view that facilitates viewing the primary principle (God), from a different perspective.

Since its advent in Kambaland, Christianity has greatly contributed to the development of education in the area. This is manifested in the introduction of education in areas that were under the influence of the missionaries. Thus many schools have developed out of the missionaries' initiative, and these have no doubt contributed profoundly towards education of the Akamba. In fact, most of the good

schools in Kambaland today are the church-sponsored ones. Prior to the introduction of education in Kambaland by the missionaries, the Akamba were illiterate and had no good way of storing their cultural heritage apart from in peoples memories. Besides the introduction of education in Kambaland, the missionaries initiated medical health services to supplement the Akamba traditional herbal medicine. Such services have been of immense importance to the health of the Akamba.

NOTES

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24. J. Mbula, op.cit., p. 169
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CHAPTER SIX

6.0 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE AKAMBA TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

6.1 Differences and Similarities

From the preceding chapters, it is so far evident that there exist apparent differences and similarities between the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity. These are numerous, but for the purpose of this study, a few of the differences and similarities that form essential aspects of these religions will be considered.

There exist apparent differences and similarities between the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity. These are discernible right in the Akamba traditional myth of origin and the Biblical story of creation among other aspects. The traditional Akamba have a myth that explains their origin. This myth links them with their creator Ngai /Mulungu. This myth goes as follows:

In the beginning, Mulungu (Creator) created the spirits. He then created a man and his wife. Those two people were tossed down by Mulungu from heaven until they landed on a stone on Nzaui mound. These people were then called Mbai ya mulata ivia. After they landed on Nzaui, Mulungu sent them many cows, goats and sheep. These two were the first people, male, and female. They were very happy and filled with the blessings of Mulungu who loved them very much. After a short while, Mulungu sent them plenty of rain. After rains there

were many mithumbi (ant-hills). These ant-hills had no ants, but just the holes. Instead of ants, two people emerged from them, a man and his wife. These people who were tossed from heaven had sons, and the people who came from the anti-hills had daughters. Since the people from heaven had many cows, their sons paid bride-wealth for the daughters of the ant-hills couple. Their children married and all had many children. Their wealth increased and more rain came. They sacrificed to Mulungu at each harvest season, but one year they forgot to sacrifice. Mulungu became very angry and the heavens were closed. A famine followed. The people began to wander from Nzaui and went to other places. Some of them remained in Nzaui, and they constitute the present day Akamba who also retained Kikamba as their language. These are the people called Mbai ya aijimu or Mbai ya Mulata ivia (Ndeti, Elements of Akamba life, p.28).¹

Like in the Akamba traditional religion, Christianity has a myth that explains how man and the world as a whole, came into being. This account is given in the book of Genesis chapter one, and in part goes as follows:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness he called "night". And there was "day", and there was "night" and there was evening, and there was morning- the first day.

...Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let him rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground". So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them,

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground". Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food".

Thus after creating man, God provided him with food. Genesis 2:15-17, explicates this point further; the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work on it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it you will surely die." Then God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, but none of the animals that He had made was fit to be man's helpmate. "So the Lord God caused man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Genesis 2 :21). These two were the first couple, Adam and Eve.

However. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit and consequently fell out of God's favour. An account of the fall of man and his subsequent curse is given in Genesis chapter three.

From the foregoing accounts of the creation of man, it is evident that these two accounts differ in certain aspects. Whereas the Christian Biblical account of creation shows the origin of sin, the Akamba traditional myth of creation does not talk of any sin. Thus to the Mukamba, there is no inherent sin. In fact, they use a softer term when it is said that man forgot to sacrifice to God and He was so angry with man that He with-held rain from him. On the other hand, the Biblical story of creation explains how man lived in harmony with God, until the former disobeyed the latter. This disobedience became the first and inherent sin as man was condemned together with his subsequent descendants. Thus there seems there is an innate sin in everybody at birth according to Christian teaching. This inherent sin could be the reason why Christianity adopts a redemptive approach to redeem its followers from the sin. This is not the case with the Akamba traditional religion because sin is not presupposed. That is, the concept of inherent sin does not exist in the Akamba traditional religion. Thus at birth, a Mukamba is not a sinner. A Mukamba becomes a sinner when he/she contravenes a taboo or does anything that adversely affects the community like bewitching or stealing.

The Christian teaching that man by his very nature (of being a descendant of the first parents, Adam and Eve, and who are believed to

have committed the first sin) is a sinner, raises a philosophical question as to the fairness of such a judgement. Such a judgement is absurd and tantamount to admitting someone else's sin and its subsequent consequences. We certainly would find it illogical to shoulder sins that have been committed by our parents instead of the latter being punished alone for their misdeeds. Why could God not curse Adam and Eve (the first sinners) without necessarily dragging their descendants into an affair which took place even before the latter had come into existence?. It is such things as the concept of inherent sin that still baffle the traditional Akamba when they join Christianity. All the Akamba know according to their myth of origin is that the first Akamba couple used to be obedient to God, used to worship Him through prayers, sacrifices and offerings, until such a time when they forgot to do so and God withdrew His generosity from them. But God did not curse them, He only got annoyed with them and withdrew the good things of nature He used to give them namely: (rain, green pastures) so that they were forced to wander from one place to another for these things. These are some of the issues in Christianity with which the traditional Akamba who venture into Christianity have to wrestle. If the first parents (Adam and Eve) committed the first sin as claimed in the Holy Bible, why then would their descendants be cursed

and they are not the ones who committed the sin?. Is it not unfair to punish a person for the sin of another?.

Although P'Bitek³ contends that myths of origin have no religious significance, the findings of this study do not concur with his contention. When we compare the Biblical story of creation to that of the Akamba traditional religion, we certainly find profound religious significance in them. The Biblical story of creation portrays God as the creator of the very first parents (Adam and Eve) from whom all the other people are believed to have descended. This myth explains the origin of sin, and how sin became inherent in man. The Biblical story of creation has greatly influenced the Christian religious line of thought and generally the world-view. On the other hand, the Akamba traditional myth of origin depicts God as the creator of the first Mukamba and his wife. Further, the myth explains how the first generation of the Akamba lived happily in harmony with Ngai until they forgot to sacrifice to Him. This myth certainly has strong influence on the Akamba traditional religious beliefs. For instance the Akamba traditional myth of origin does not talk of the inherent sin and as a result, the concept of inherent sin is not accommodated in the Akamba traditional religion. Thus these myths have to some extent

influenced the world-views of both Christians and the traditional Akamba and consequently, the religions.

The Akamba traditional religion differs from Christianity with regard to the destiny of the soul after one's death; the traditional Akamba world view is monistic that is, the traditional Akamba know and believe that there is only one world, the one we live in (the earth). There is no other world other than this one and even when one dies, his/her soul becomes a spirit in this same world. There is no better life to be either lived or inherited in the future. Consequently, there is total lack of anticipation for better things or life in the future unlike in Christianity. On the other hand, Christian world-view is pluralistic.

According to Christian teaching, there are three worlds: there is the physical earth-the world which we live in while in human form, and there are other two worlds that will serve as destinies of the soul after one's death. These are the heaven (destiny for souls of Christians) and hell (destiny for souls of pagans). The destiny of one's soul is greatly determined by the kind/quality of life that the individual leads while alive. Thus one can control his/her life so that it suits the kind of destiny he or she chooses.

However, the traditional Akamba's monistic world-view is quite practical and therefore plausible because such a view

accommodates the physical world only, that everybody experiences and there is no doubt about its existence. This is in contrast to the Christian world-view which besides acknowledging the physical world, incorporates the concepts of heaven and hell (worlds/places that nobody has ever visited) whose existence is most unverifiable.

Similarly, whereas Christianity reflects anxiety regarding the afterlife, the Akamba traditional religion reflects no uncertainty regarding the same. To the Mukamba death transforms one from the human mode of existence into the spiritual mode of existence to continue existence in form of a spirit. But this is not the case with Christianity because according to Christianity, death prepares the concerned either to go to heaven or hell depending on his/her destiny which is dictated by the quality of life that one led. Thus there is anxiety because one may not exactly know his/her destiny.

There exists an apparent difference between the traditional Akamba and Christian point of view with regard to salvation. For the Mukamba salvation means help in time of trouble, healing, fertility and success in life's ventures; it is not a salvation of the soul, but happiness and prosperity in life.⁴ The Biblical view in the same token is directed toward the afterlife. It is salvation of the soul as the concerned are saved from the inherent sin. Christianity is more personally oriented

than the Akamba traditional religion; thus whereas in Christianity the decision to become a Christian is the sole responsibility of the concerned individual, in the Akamba traditional religion, the approach is different and there is no time an individual is expected to make such a decision since a Mukamba is born in his/her traditional religion and lives in it, becoming part and parcel of one's way of life. ☺

While the teachings of Christianity are stored in written records for example, the Holy Bible and other relevant written literature, the Akamba traditional religion has no holy scriptures; and all matters about it are stored in people's memories. Thus the Akamba traditional religious leaders/specialists do not use any written records and have to rely on their memories, for what has been passed down to them by those before them. This may have far reaching implications especially for the authenticity of their teaching. For instance, what a certain Kamba traditional religious leader holds cannot be easily challenged because there are no records to counter their teachings even if the religious leaders go wrong. Also, in case during the transmission of religious matters from one religious leader to his successor an error occurs, this error is likely to be carried on and forward for there are no records to counter-check what the leader says. This is not the case with Christianity for there is a holy book-the Bible on which all Christian

teaching is based. The existence of the Holy Bible ensures that preachers do not deviate from what is in the Bible, or create their own things and feed them to the congregation. Thus the Bible safeguards the congregation from errors that may be caused by the preachers.

Recorded information on Christianity facilitates originality of the religion in contrast to the Akamba traditional religion which cannot be said to be original because a lot of information has either been omitted or included or altered in the course of transmission of the religion from one religious elder to another.

Besides, complete reliance on people's memories is quite risky because as age catches up with somebody, a lot of things happen to him/her. For instance, the memory may become impaired thus distorting whatever information this particular person had, thus losing a wealth of religious heritage. Such losses would not occur were the information recorded.

The Christian message as preached is too often an intellectual exercise of limited significance to the Mukamba who listens to it. He not uncommonly fails to understand it or see its validity.⁵ The Akamba traditional religious message is simple and clear to the people and does not really need a lot of interpretation as the traditional Akamba are

born in it and grow in it. To some extent it becomes their way of life, something in them.

These two religions are based on totally different cultures; the Akamba traditional religion is based on the Akamba culture while Christianity is based on a different culture. These two cultures are very different from each other and each has its own different world-view which forms the basis of the religion. Consequently, the two religions are different and cannot be the same due to the cultural differences.

While Christian religious leaders go through some formal training in theological colleges, the Akamba traditional religious leaders do not need such formal training and in fact, such colleges do not exist in the Akamba traditional religion. The Akamba traditional religious leaders only need to be full elders (to have gone through the required traditional rites) and learn from their predecessors the rest of the religious matters. This is very different from the case of Christianity whereby, the religious leaders are believed to be divine-inspired. However, as pointed out in an earlier chapter, it is not easy at times to know the authenticity of such divine-calling.

In Christianity, churches are the official places of worship and there are specific days of worship (Saturdays for Seventh Day Adventists and Sundays for the other denominations) during which the

worshippers congregate together to worship God. In the Akamba traditional religion, it is different. Even though there are official places of worship (shrines and groves), these places are not often used. In fact, they are only used on special occasions for instance, during rituals affecting or involving the whole Kamba community. Otherwise, most of the Akamba traditional religious activities take place within the family premises. Similarly, there are no marked days of worship in the Akamba traditional religion as their worship is spontaneous. Therefore, there is no tendency to associate worship of God with certain days and places like in Christianity.

The Akamba traditional religion requires no missionaries to propagate the religion. It is therefore, non-expansionist. On the other hand, Christianity is an expansionist religion that uses and sends missionaries to spread the religion with a view to winning more followers. Thus one of the main objectives of the Christian mission is to win as many followers as possible. But this is not important in the Akamba traditional religion because to be a follower of the religion is automatic as shown in an earlier chapter. The element of expansion in Christianity is clearly evidenced by the numerous street preachers in urban centres trying to win more followers.

While most of the Christians were, and still are converted into Christianity in order for them to be saved from the inherent sin acknowledged in the Bible, and eventually inherit heaven, the traditional Akamba adhere to their religion in order to maintain good relationship between them and God and their ancestors and experience peace as they live this life since their world-view is monistic. Thus while Christians expect to be either rewarded in heaven or punished in hell after this life, the Kamba traditionalists expect to be rewarded or punished for their deeds in this world. Therefore, when a Mukamba is befallen by a misfortune, it may be interpreted as a punishment from God for some wrong that he/she may have done. Similarly, a Mukamba may be rewarded through a good harvest. Therefore there is no other-worldliness in the Akamba traditional religious thought, and the traditional Kamba ethics is not grounded on a promise or threat by God that the righteous will in the future enjoy life in heaven, while the sinners suffer in hell.

In the Akamba traditional religion, marriage is a must. Not only for companionship, but also for the purpose of procreation. Thus as pointed out in an earlier chapter, various marital unions are allowed among the traditional Akamba to achieve procreation. In Christianity, greater emphasis seems to be placed on companionship than on

procreation. Consequently, the marital unions that are allowed by the traditional Akamba for procreation are condemned by Christianity. Besides, marriage is not a must in Christianity as one may opt for celibacy.

Nevertheless, there exist apparent similarities between Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion. For instance, both religions acknowledge God. In both religions, God is the worshipped Being and He is also acknowledged as the all-powerful creator. This is evident in the traditional Akamba myth of origin and the Biblical story of creation, besides being in the traditional Akamba and Christian conception of God. Both the traditional Akamba myth of origin and the Biblical story of creation depict the hierarchical order in the universe in which God is right at the top above all creation, then the rest of creation follow. God is thus the Lord of everything else in the universe. Both stress the relationship between man and God, and also stress the role of God in caring for His creation.

However, the traditional Akamba myth of origin depicts spirits as being next to God, then man; this is why the traditional Akamba hold spirits with high esteem a fact that has often been misinterpreted as worship of the spirits but this is not the case as stated earlier. It is because the spirits occupy a higher position than man in the

hierarchical order in the Kamba Universe and are therefore, seen to be much closer to God than man is.

Both the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity share various important religious symbols; for instance in both cases, there is ceremonial naming of children or newborns. The traditional Akamba name their newborns ceremoniously and the name chosen is usually of some ancestor who is believed to have been good to the family when he/she was alive or even as a spirit, or it could be a name of a living relative like the child's grandparent. Similarly, in some Christian churches like the Catholic, the baptism of infants is very important and it introduces the child to the family of believers. In both cases, the giving of the name is an act of recognition of a new person.⁶ Thus the basic principle underlying the naming of those being baptised in both cases is full recognition of the same in that particular community, whether of the traditionalists or Christians.

Like in the Akamba traditional religion, the names chosen for baptism in Christianity are mainly of people who are believed to have led unquestionable religious lives, for instance the saints. In both religions, names of people who are believed to have had questionable characters are avoided. For instance the traditional Akamba avoid names of people who are or were believed to be witches or to be mean.

The reason behind this is that the child being named is believed to assume the character of the person after whom he/she is named. The same attitude is portrayed by Christians as they tend to avoid names of people who had questionable characters for example, names like Judas Escariot who betrayed Jesus Christ are avoided. Also, the name Pharaoh is avoided by Christians for similar reasons.

In both religions, water is used symbolically used. In the Akamba traditional religion, water is used before circumcision to wash the initiates and this is comparable to the cleansing of the baptismal water in Christianity.⁷ The reason underlying the washing of initiates with water just before circumcision among the traditional Akamba is that such washing is believed to wash away the childhood and prepare the initiates to enter the world of adulthood. In Christianity, the baptismal water symbolizes cleanliness - that the sins of the person being baptised have been cleaned.

☞ Fire is symbolically used by the traditional Akamba to prepare traditional herbal medicine for the initiates during circumcision. Such medicine is later rubbed into a small incision/cut that is made on the sexual organs to make the Mukamba fertile.⁸ The basic reason behind the use of the traditional medicine is that this medicine is believed to either safeguard, enhance or ensure fertility of the initiates. The fire

symbol during circumcision is important as it symbolizes fertility and the fire of sexual urge and sexual passion.⁹ Fertility among the traditional Akamba is of course quite essential for the purpose of procreation. However, it is highly questionable how this Akamba traditional medicine takes care of fertility because there are known cases of barren men and women among the traditional Akamba. In Christianity, fire is seen as representing the Third person of the Trinity (Holy Spirit) who is symbolised by tongues of fire (Acts 2:3).

Besides, in both religions, alcohol is used symbolically. In Christianity, consecrated wine symbolises the blood of Christ. It is this blood that was shed on the cross at Calvary so that all mankind could be saved from sin. The blood of Christ binds all Christians together. Similarly, in the Akamba traditional religion, liquor or traditional beer uki is a sign of unity and friendship.¹⁰ It is shared with the living dead to maintain fellowship with them; thus it binds the living dead and the living members of the family/community together just like the blood of Christ binds all Christians together.

These two religions advocate more or less the same virtues. In the Akamba traditional religion, selfishness is highly condemned and so is in Christianity as stated in the Bible (Mark 10:33-45). In the Akamba traditional religion, being in harmony with all mankind is

highly encouraged. This is a primary Kamba value which seems to be similar to the Christian teaching about love. Self-pity is against this great value (love) because a person who suffers from it is incapable of loving and encouraging others, and it is an integral part of Christian mission to comfort those who are afflicted with sorrow (Matthew 11:28-30) and (Luke 10: 25-31). Thus self-pity is discouraged in both religions.

In the Akamba traditional religion, one of the central ethical demands is concern for those in need. Thus according to the traditional Kamba ethics, a visit by a stranger is considered a blessing because the stranger might be an ancestor or a messenger of God in disguise, and failure to attend to him/her might cause God's displeasure. But such a belief could be dangerous because the stranger could be a con-man in disguise too!. Similarly, Christian teaching demands that a Christian should be concerned about the welfare of others. Thus the two religions advocate love and concern for others.

Both religions share the belief that life is the greatest gift that God gives man and therefore, should not be destroyed. In view of this, both religions condemn suicide. According to Christian teaching, those who commit suicide will not enter the kingdom of God. Similarly, the traditional Akamba believe that those who commit suicide are

probably cursed for them not to appreciate this great gift from God. Consequently, the traditional Akamba do not mourn those who have committed suicide. A common phrase is used in reference to this; wakwiyita ndaiiawa meaning, he who takes his/her own life should not be mourned.

Both Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion condemn incest. For instance in the book of Leviticus 18, incest is condemned. Similarly, among the traditional Akamba, incest is a taboo and if anyone commits it, he/she becomes ritually unclean and must of necessity be ritually cleansed.

In the Akamba traditional religion only men may be religious elders /leaders. Women do not pass through the religious rites that men have to go through before being declared religious elders. Therefore, women cannot be religious elders. Even when women accompany men to the shrines, the former are not allowed to enter the altar; they just remain outside the altar, but within the shrine. Their major duty is to carry foodstuffs and drinks that will be offered during the ceremony.

Besides, among the traditional Akamba, it is a cultural expectation that women submit themselves to men. Thus if women were to be religious leaders, this would imply rising above men which goes against the cultural expectation. Similarly, Christianity urges

women to submit themselves to men as stated in the Holy Bible,(Ephesians 5:21). By the same token Christianity does not allow or ordain female priests, pastors or Bishops. This discrimination against women in both religions is challengeable because it gives the false impression that God chooses men only to do His work. But this is not the case because we have a lot of women who have received divine calling and therefore preach the gospel just like those men who have received such calling. Both religions therefore disregard the equality of mankind in the eyes of the Lord.

Finally, in the Akamba traditional places of worship, one discovers a phenomenological similarity with what happens in a Christian church thus; in both cases, human beings are coming together to open their minds to a higher reality which is thought of as the personal creator and lord of the universe and as making important moral demands on the lives of people.

Having explored the various aspects in which the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity either differ or are similar, it is important to remark that the differences between the two religions seem to outweigh the similarities. It is only logical to conclude that these differences are the ones that are responsible for the co-existence of the two religions among the Akamba.

6.2 Conclusion and recommendations

From the foregoing analysis, it is evident that both the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity are two different modes of worship directed to the same Supreme Being (God). They are aimed at achieving the same goal; that of establishing and maintaining a good relationship between the worshippers and the worshipped. It would perhaps be erroneous and misleading to predict the demise of the Akamba traditional religion now or in the near future. It is rather unfortunate that some Christians have labelled the Akamba traditional religion as lacking in the aspect of Universality. But our analysis has already demonstrated that this religion is universal in so far as it embraces the common and most vital belief that unites all humanity- the belief in God as the primary principle.

Although the basic attitude of African traditional religion to tolerate and respect other religions seems to have been misinterpreted to mean weakness and disintegration, this is not really the case. In this regard, Nthamburi notes that "On the contrary the strength of African religion lies in the very nature of its non-polemical co-existence with other religions."¹¹ and the Akamba traditional religion is no exception.

The success of Christianity in Kambaland could perhaps be said to be only superficial for the most part, because as indicated in the

foregoing analysis, many supposedly practising and committed Christians hold the two religions in juxtaposition. In view of this, it therefore seems that the Akamba traditional religious practices are only temporarily submerged through pressure (from Christianity) resurfacing as soon as there is a life threatening crisis. For this reason, the Akamba traditional religion is likely to stay until such a time as there will not be a Mukamba living. But there cannot be an in-between identity; either someone is, or is not a Christian or else there will be contradiction and this is what one of the laws of thought (law of the excluded middle) forbids. Therefore, those who have chosen to be Christians should perhaps be so fully, without having to ever turn back to the Akamba traditional religion. Otherwise commitment is a prerequisite in any religion.

Having explored the co-existence of the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity, various lacking aspects are worthy of mention and recommendation. There is need for an appropriate and meaningful encounter between Christianity and the Akamba traditional religion for profound understanding of the latter as this is lacking.

Christianity should recognize religious pluralism as evidenced by the existence of the many world different non-Christian religions. Such recognition would no doubt radically challenge many of our

cherished theological assumptions about ourselves and others. For instance it would challenge the claim that knowledge of God is limited to Christianity. It is in this view that Rambachan observes the following:

*We have come to discover to our surprise and in some cases, disappointment, that God is hardly without witness anywhere. Many who thought that they were taking the creator to visit parts of his creation, for the first time, found him waiting to greet them.*¹²

This was the case with the missionaries who went to Kambaland, for they assumed that they were taking God to the traditional Akamba, but the latter already had knowledge of God.

A better approach of educating the traditional Akamba on Christianity ought to be adopted without necessarily having to sling mud at their religion. This way, Christianity will not be seen as being after achieving triumphalism, conquest and victory over the indigenous religion. This could probably be achieved through interreligious dialogue which would certainly help curb conflicts between the two different religions. Such dialogue would only occur when the people concerned are principally motivated by the desire to learn about other religions. In this regard, Rambachan's observation is worthy of support and recommendation that:

Authentic interreligious encounter can occur only when we are principally motivated by the desire to learn. If we have good reason to believe that the religions of the world contain revelations from God, then we need to be humbly attentive to our partners from these religions. Such attentiveness is not possible if the other is viewed as inferior.¹³

Such has been the relationship between the Akamba traditional religion and Christianity, in which the latter has viewed the former as inferior. Dialogue would enable us to expose our experiences of God and learn new discoveries of God in the lives of others who practice other religions. Dialogue presupposes that God is not captive to any religion. This is an important insight that seems to be lacking in Christianity.

African scholars should endeavour to expose and destroy all false ideas about indigenous African people and culture that have undoubtedly been perpetuated by Western scholarship. There is need for these scholars to present the institutions of the traditional Akamba as they are, without exaggeration. More studies on the Akamba traditional religious heritage should be conducted to facilitate profound understanding of the Akamba traditional religion.

If Christianity must succeed in its mission of converting the traditional Akamba, then it must of necessity change the Akamba traditional world-view on which their religion is based. Equally vital is

the need for Christianity to extricate itself from its past historical association with Western political, economic and cultural aggression. Such association has portrayed the Christian mission to Africa as a whole, as having been double-edged thus questioning the authenticity of the religion.

NOTES

1. K. Ndeti, Elements of Akamba life, (Nairobi: EastAfrican publishing House, 1972), p.28.
2. J. S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, (London: Heinemann, 1987), p.161
3. O. P'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship, (Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1970), p.63
4. J. S. Mbiti op.cit.
5. F. B. Welbourn, East African Christian, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 37
6. J. Mbula, Our Religious Heritage, (Nairobi: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1982), p.86
7. Ibid., p.87
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.83
10. Ibid., p.87
11. Z. Nthamburi, The African Church at the Crossroads, (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991), p.27.
12. A. Rambachan, "Theological literacy: a global perspective and the challenges of religious pluralism" in Current Dialogue No. 22, (Geneva; world council of churches, June 1992), p.26.
13. Ibid., p.28.

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