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CHEWA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

*An attempt to look at Ancestorship and Inculturation of
Christianity among the Chewa*

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Dedication to My Mother Ida Phiri

My late Father Charles Phiri

and to my three sisters, Susan, Emeldah and Evereen who have helped me to experience
the love and warmth of an authentic Chewa tradition.

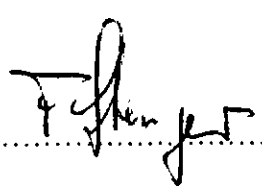
STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work achieved through personal reading, research and reflection. It has never been submitted in academic sphere for credit purpose.

Signed.....

Date.....15-2-05

Banda Lameck Charles. CSSp

Moderator: Signed.....

Date.....15-2-05

Fr Fritz Stenger. M. Afr.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acts: Acts of Apostles.

AFER: Africa Ecclesiastical Review

Cf: Confer

GS: Gaudium et Spes (Vatican II) The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world.

Jn: The gospel according to John.

LG : Lumen Gentium The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church

Lk: The gospel according to Luke

EN: Evangelii Nuntiandi

Rom : A letter of St Paul to the Romans

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Africa is the second largest continent in the world. It has many people with different cultures. The term culture has diverse meaning. In general it refers to people's entire way of looking at life in a given social context. It involves beliefs, art, moral, customs and any other kind of human creativity. African cultures provide us with different African traditional beliefs and practices, which differ from one society to another. In the African context, values are guarded by traditional laws. It is therefore not easy to put together African cultures in order to form one universal culture.

Many writers, scholars, journalists, sociologists and other people in related fields of study, talk of Africa religion. There is nothing like African religion in actual sense of the term. This is because, just as there are many different tribes in Africa, so there are many different religions. Each religion is different from the other and each stresses a certain value of its culture. This is the reason why we cannot have uniformity in inculturation of Christianity in Africa.

In this essay we shall limit ourselves to Chewa Traditional Religion of Malawi's Central region. We will look at ancestorship and inculturation

of Christianity. The essay is divided into four chapters. The first chapter, discusses the origin of the Chewa. where they are found, how they trace their descent and livelihood. the description of Chewa society. Political. socio- economy and their religious stance. The approach we have taken in our work is deductive. inductive. descriptive as well as analytical. Questionnaires will also be used. The topic Chewa Traditional religion will be studied in the light of Christianity as we attempt to look at ancestorship and Christianity. The purpose of our work is to discover how Chewa Traditional Religion becomes a focal point in regards to Chewa belief and Culture.

The Second Chapter examines the ancestral cult of worship. There are many elements, which describe the role of ancestors in the Chewa cosmos. Some of the elements conform very much to the gospel values. They can be applied to daily life of Christians.

Chapter Three discusses the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the inculturation of Christianity among the Chewa. Inculturation, being the issue at hand in the Church especially in Africa special attention will be given to it. We shall begin by looking at the understanding of culture and then relate it to inculturation of Christianity.

Chapter Four underlines the similarities and differences between Christianity and ancestorship. It tries to show the Chewa view of Christianity, the perception of Christ in line with their belief and life after death. The last Chapter also proposes ways in which inculturation can be actualized and become effective among the Chewa. It gives insight to missionaries who wish to be successful in their evangelisation, as it advocates for respect of culture of local people.

CHAPTER ONE: DESCRIPTION OF THE CHEWA

INTRODUCTION

Our aim in this chapter is to look at the present day Chewa society from social, economic, political and religious point of view. The focus of this study will be on the central region where the Chewa still hold their traditional values, and the area of interest includes, Nchinji, Lilongwe, Dowa, Kasungu, Ntchisi, Dedza and Nkhotakota districts. We shall also try to explore exclusively the Chewa cultural identity and some of the beliefs.

1. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHEWA

The Chewa people are a Bantu-speaking group. Their origin is Zaire's Luba Lunda kingdom presently known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The Chewa people belong to a class of Bantu speaking group known as *Malavi*, which literary means flames of fire. They got their name *Malavi* in the 19th century when David Livingstone found them along the Central Coast of Lake Malawi formerly known as Lake Nyasa. He called them the *Malavi* people owing to the fact that they came from a lake region *Nyanja*. The Chewa migrated to the Coast of Lake Nyasa because of tribal war and several succession disputes in the Luba

Lunda kingdom disputes between the 12- 15th century in search for arable land for agro- economy.

Agriculture is the main economic activity of the Chewa. they grow rice, cassava, maize, coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, sorghum, millet among others. They keep livestock including cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry.

For the local industry, they are good at brewing traditional beer for social functions as well as for their income.

1.1 GEOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Geographically the Chewa people are found mainly in the central region of Malawi stretching southwards.

Demographically, Malawi's population is 11 million with an average growth of 1.9%; population of rural to urban is 85/ 15%, population density is 92 per square kilometer and life expectancy is 38 years¹, adult illiteracy male and female is 27/ 57% respectively. According to the census of 2000 the Chewa population was 37% of the total population in Malawi. ²

The total area is 118.484 square kilometer (45,747square miles) and 18% arable land. The country is land locked and its cities are Lilongwe, Zomba, Mzuzu and Blantyre. Blantyre being the largest city. The capital city of Malawi is Lilongwe. The official languages are English and Chewa. Other languages spoken include Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Ngoni and Senga.

¹ New People Magazine, Morfport Press, Balaka Malawi, 2003, 5

² Malawi National statistical Office, Population and Housing Census Report, 2000, 10

The leading religion is Christianity with 75%, Muslims 20% and the rest traditional religions.

1.2 BELIEFS OF THE CHEWA

Most Chewa people are monotheists. They believe in one God. This is part of their ancestral beliefs that has been handed down to them. As for the nature of God, there is no a clear idea. For the Chewa, God is Spirit *Mzimu* and is everything; from God, man has derived all things for he is the possessor of all vital energies and gives them as he wills. Their traditional religion has high theological insights. They regard God as the Supreme Being unapproached by a sinner. Any sinful person is supposed to be cleansed before taking part in worship.

Chewa people use mediations when addressing God. These intermediaries are spirits (*Mzimu Yayikulu*) and all other sprits are called *muzimu yayingono*, lesser spirits³ In order to communicate his divine will to people God uses messengers (angels) to warn the people of His anger.

For the Chewa, God is the master of the universe. He is the cause and sustainer of existence. Because of his work of creation, Chewa people called him *Namalenga* creator; the etymology of this name is *ku-lenga* the one who is capable of bringing forth and nurture new life. He is also called *Mphambe*, one who protects, a word connected with verb *Kupambana* and with the noun *Mphavu*, power and strength.⁴

³ NTHALA S. *Mbiri ya Achewa*, 39-45

⁴ J.W.M. VAN BREUGEL., *Religion Chewa Tradition* 30-31.

There are also several names of God, and the one commonly used is *Mulungu*, the Almighty, and the sole creator of all. The giver of life, to both man and wide life. However, some people argue that the name *Mulungu* is connected to the verb *kulugama*, which means to be straight and *kulunga*, to put together rightly.

Other names that are attributed to God are *Chisumphu*, *Lezi*, *Chiuta* or *Chauta*. Nevertheless, there are certain names of the supernatural beings that are used to invoke God especially when there is calamity or catastrophe in the society. The invocations are presided over by either the priests or the priestesses on behalf of the community through offering of sacrifice. The sacrifice offered is either an animal (goat) or beer.

The Chewa people believe that land is sacred and it is on it that they offer sacrifice to God. Land is not something to be sold, and any abominable act on it is empathetically prohibited.⁵ If this happens, the land has to be purified by either blood sacrifice of a goat or black chicken as a sign of remorse to what has happened.

God is the Creator of everything. He is the only one who can coherently explain the reason of the being for everything. Through him, all things in the universe share the same denomination. That means nothing can be explained without the relationship of the other. The Chewa people well understood that reality is closely inter-related. They describe their God and creation by means of their myths, etiological myth, riddles, wise saying commonly known as *Miyambi ya achewa*. These are highlighted in a rock called *kaphiri- Ntiwa of Dzalanyama*⁶ where we find

⁵ J. CHAKANZA, *On Traditional Life in Malawi* (Presented to New Comboni Missionaries in Malawi 1994, 23-26.

⁶The rock is called 'kipirintwa' which means the soft rock on which trends are left behind. 'Ntiwa' is translated by D.C SCOTT as a place, which has been demised on the pressed flat. (A Cyclopedia Dictionary of the Mang'anga language), 471.

the mythical footsteps and it is said that during this period that God *Chiuta*. men and animals lived together in peace.

This condition was however completely destroyed when man invented fire, which set the grass ablaze and made the animals to flee full of rage against man. *Chiuta* was rescued by the spider who spun a thread along, then He climbed to the sky. Thus driven away by wickedness of man God proclaimed that man would die and join him in the sky where he would have to make rain clouds in order to quench the fires, which he had invented.⁷

The position of God in the Chewa religion is preeminent. God provides answers to their problems especially about their origin, finiteness and finality. They know that no one can be of his own origin. Even the most ignorant person is aware that, the most immediate sources that are known of a human person are parents. Parents are God's proximate cause, which he uses as his instruments of creation. God is ultimate cause in as far as he created them.⁸

1.3 CULTURAL IDENTITY

Chewa people are well known for their community life. The society is hierarchically organized. At the top are paramount chiefs, senior chiefs and the least subordinate chief. Among them a chief is a symbol of unity and is well respected, as he is the representative of the spirits.

⁷ CHAKANZA J DR, *Some Chewa Concept of God*, Religion in Malawi 1 December 1987,15.

⁸ J.M SCHOFFELEERS, *the Religious Sacrifice of Bush fires in Malawi*, in Cahiers des religious africanies (1971) 241.

Chewa people have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In their life there is the spirit of togetherness. This is seen in their day-to-day life activity. For example, when building a house, harvesting, funerals and making future plans: they come together to work and share ideas as a community. This co-operation enables them to communicate and have good relationships with others. Every project belongs to the community. This togetherness is expressed in many different proverbs, but the most commonly used is, *with one thumb one cannot kill a louse*. All the activities are centered towards life. Life among the Chewa is of great value; it is a gift from God mediated to them by the ancestors. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Therefore not participating in community is cutting oneself from the ancestors. Community living life is stressed above individualism.

The Chewa societies are matrilineal. Women have a vital role to play. They are considered to be the center of life and vital force in the society. Due to this their status they can even be elected as religious overseers, senior chiefs or junior chiefs. Women are often referred to as *Enimalo*, (owners of the place). In matrilineal society children belong to the mother and their next of kin is their maternal uncle and the father has a little say over them. After marriage the husband joins her wife into their household. On rare cases does the vice-versa happen, however when it does this situation is called *chitengwa* the person is *mtengwa* this means that the wife has joined the household of her husband's family. In this case the husband is supposed to pay a certain amount of money for going against the customs. This payment is called *chiongo*. This is a form of compensation to the family of the

woman for the loss of their daughter's services and those of her husband. In case of death, the wife does not have the right to claim for property or children for they do not belong to her.

Apart from this, the heart of Chewa identity is *Nyau* and their big dance commonly known as *Gule wamukulu*.⁹ *Nyau* is the most popular dance of the Chewa, it is not an ordinary show, but a ritual dance, with a religious significance, performed exclusively on the occasion of funerals and girls' initiation. The dancers form a secret association, they have special vocabulary, they hide their identity when they dance by using masks, skins, feathers, grass and leaves, or making mysterious structures representing animals: all the constructions are kept secret to the corporation. Any person accused of disclosing anything connected to *Nyau* organization is liable to heavy penalties, this could either be payment of three to four cows or face imprisonment within the cult. Usually *Nyau* dance is performed at night, the alternation of songs are executed by men and women. *Nyau* exists among the Chewa people although some tribes have adopted it. According to the traditional customs of the Chewa, a man who is not initiated is not regarded as, not fully adult and not really a Chewa as many elders have said. A man who does not belong to *Nyau* is like a baby who does not know anything. "*Mwana wa kanda wosaziwa chilichonse, mwana amakula akamaliza maphuziro yamwambo*"¹⁰

⁹ An interview with DICKSON KANUNKA aged 50 on Cultural identity Balaka-Malawi August 2004.

¹⁰ MOSES MWALE aged 47 one of the informant confirmed this at the *Dumbwe*. A person becomes an adult only after initiation.

1.4 TERRITORIAL MEDIUMSHIP AMONG THE CHEWA

To begin with, mediumship among the Chewa is defined as a person who is able by any means of authority to receive and transmit messages thought to emanate directly from the supernatural being.

The people who act as mediums are treated with respect and have a special place in the society. They are different from the diviners since they are believed to communicate directly with the supernatural being. However, this distinction is very important as some of the Chewa try to avoid this office of mediums for their own reasons. The office of mediums demands a lot of sacrifice such as purity, sexual abstinence and sacrifice on behalf of the people. Otherwise, if the conditions mentioned are not fulfilled his territory may face greater calamity.¹¹ These people are treated with respect and have a special place in the society.

Mediums address disasters or pending calamity,¹² Spirit mediumship is normally a form of profession in which the person is conceived as serving as an intermediary between the spirits and people. Furthermore, territorial mediumship operates on behalf of the population of the given geographical area and they are concerned with the matter of general public interest. Therefore, these mediums are able to alert the people whenever they have gone against the traditional values for instance when there is so much misbehavior in the society. Such transgression could result into calamity, misfortunes and sorrows, which may strike the people.

The main duty of mediums is to link the living with the living dead and the spirits. Through them messages are received from God. A medium gives information

¹¹ SCHOFFLEERS, *Matthews, Religion and Dramatization of Life*, 66.

¹² R. FIFTH, *Problems and Assumptions in an Anthropological Study of Religion*, JRAI, vol 89, no 2 (1959), 147.

concerning the nature, causes and treatment of the disease or other forms of misfortune. During this process, the person goes into ecstasy in order to meet with the spirit world. He is led to get and speak according to the wishes of the supernatural beings.

1.4.1 Naming

Just like the territorial mediumship, giving of names among the Chewa people has special significance. It carries with it, the ceremonies of naming and the significance of names. When a child is born, he is given a name few weeks after birth. This is done after a ritual of *cilezi* and *kutenga mwana*¹³ have been performed. These rituals are acts that protect the child from mystical dangers and strengthens it to face the life's difficulties. The two rituals expose the child to the outside world. It is only after these rites that anybody can carry the child. Without the said rituals the child is still regarded as unborn. Therefore, the two rituals confirm to the community that, they have been gifted with a new member and have a reason to celebrate. This is the time when gifts are presented to the child with a special prayer invoking the ancestors to bless and take care of the child.

¹³ Cilezi and kutenga Mwana are rituals, which are performed in order to offer protection to the child against any mystical powers, which can kill it.

Naming in Chewa society is one of the modes through which one's identity is determined. Like in any other African society, it reveals the family or the clan an individual comes from. Names give an identity to the beholder. For example, if a child is born during rainy season, the child may be given a name, which means rain (*mvula*), a child may also be named according to a particular event or occasion.¹⁴ Other names given may come from the living dead who might want to reincarnate in the newborn child especially if the family observes the certain traits, which are common between the child and the living dead. That is why the child is given the name whose origin, essence and connotation is familiar to the same name for continuity. The living dead may make such demand which may be communicated to the parents through the dream, this may also be noticed when the child cries persistently, until the name is changed to appease the living dead. This sometimes happens with the knowledge of the elder who gives such directives.

Naming has also a religious significance in the sense that it bridges the relationship between the living and the dead. It is through this process that the ancestors are remembered and venerated and in turn protect the child.¹⁵ However, this topic will be dealt with in Chapter 2 where a detailed explanation will be given on a whole process of ancestorship.

1.4.2 Concept of Death and the Rituals Involved

In order to fully complete the life cycle of human life, it is worth talking about the Chewa's conception of death. Chewa people believe in immortality of the soul.

¹⁴AN INFORMANT MSILINGA VEDASTUS An interview with the Author, Arusha 2004

¹⁵ INFORMANT IDA PHIRI aged 45 gives her experience of her first born child in an interview with the author Nchinji July 2003

That gives death a religious dimension. To them, death is not absurd but an aspect ordained by God, and he does that with a purpose.

Among the Chewa people, God is good and the source of all goodness. They invoked God during rituals, celebrations, births, deaths, marriages, when farming, during meals and so on. As with John Mbiti's view about the Africans, the Chewa are notoriously religious.¹⁶ Religion permeates all spheres of life. Chewa people credit God with doing good to his people. God does them what is good so they have no reason to complain.

Death is considered proper when it occurs to elderly people who have undergone the fights of life and have already fulfilled their mission in life. These are like those people who have families and are bearing children no more due to old age. The death of a young person was lamented upon for the work of God seemed to have been a scandal and a total failure. According to their belief God does not cause such deaths. Following their traditions a Chewa always says goodbye whenever he leaves. That the deceased young man had no time to do so was a sign for them that there has been something sinister going on.¹⁷ This could mean that the young man might have been bewitched by the *mfiti*¹⁸ (witchcraft).

The concept of death and the funeral rites has a theological significance in human form but beginning of life in a higher level. It is only through death a human person can properly save the greatest number of people without confinement to one

¹⁶ J. MBITI, *African Concept of Religion*, 59

¹⁷ J.W.M VAN BREUGEL, 108

¹⁸ 'Mfiti' is the word used to designate any person who performs extraordinary deeds to effect harm on others, it is inherited from either parents or close relatives. 'Mfiti' is a member of the community who secretly eats human flesh and possesses power of becoming invisible and of performing magical deeds among his relatives especially at night when they are asleep. His speciality is in eating human flesh and causes harm to his relatives and neighbours, by killing them using magical powers.

family. This is possible in the state of ancestral spirits. they are generally considered to be of high status. are venerated and also feared by people.¹⁹ Therefore through death one is divinized. In short, death is a call to a higher service of God though no one can escape it, and the dying people are conscious that they participate in the life of the ancestors. There is no question of despair in the face of death and no sense that one is being deprived of life.

Nevertheless, death has many rituals and these funeral rituals are so costly since it involves a lot of people who take part in the funeral ceremony and this is noted from the process involved: here we shall concentrate on the following aspects:

- a) Clothing of dead body.
- b) Digging of the grave.

1.4.3 Clothing of Dead Body

The Chewa people have a belief that when a person dies, he or she is supposed to meet with his/her ancestors. Hence the body should be cleansed and clothed as a sign of newness. The objective in doing this is that the departed has been accepted in the realm of the ancestors. This is connected to African belief that when one dies, he / she is going to a new home. Therefore, the necessary things pertaining to funeral rites should be put into place. For the chief, the cloth placed outside is red as a symbol of life and responsibility and white cloth for the ordinary person. After covering the coffin with the appropriate material, the issue of the place to bury the dead comes up.

¹⁹ SAMIYA African Development, 79

1.4.5 Digging the grave (kukumba manda)

This usually happens immediately after the person has died. The elders choose the gravesite because they have knowledge where other people have been buried they ensure that the new grave may not disturb the old ones. The young men are the ones to dig the grave since they are energetic.

Then the body is taken to the grave and it is accompanied by *Gulewamukulu* with *Nyau* called *kapoli* and *kamgwingwi* who excute dances in the village as a sign of respect for the dead.²⁰ After the burial, all the people return to the house of the departed where they wash their hands in medicated water called *phundambwi* as a sign of being washed from all bad spirits met at the grave and from *fungo la infa* (the odour of death). However, not everybody leaves the grave, some remain in order to keep vigil in case the *mfiti* (witchcraft) comes to feast on the corpse. After burial there is no beer the only food, which is offered, is *nsima*.²¹

The mourning period lasts for five to six days. This mainly concerns the relatives. It is also during this period that there is shaving of hair *kumeta mpala* this is a sign that the old is gone and new life is now starting. After that there is celebration people drink beer. Some of the beer *mowa wa maliro* is poured over the grave before drinking it, asking the spirits not to come and trouble the people. This confirms to what Van Gennep remarks that, “people for whom rites are not performed are condemned to pitiable existence since they fail to enter into the world

²⁰ M.G. MARWICK, *Sorcery in its Social Setting*, 86

²¹ *Nsima* is hard porridge, which is made out of maize meal. This food is usually offered during funerals.

of the dead hence they return to the living and do harm to the living, they become dangerous."²²

In short, this could imply that those who commit suicide or any miserable deaths may suffer such a fate. However, a second celebration takes place after the death anniversary of one or two years. this makes the end of the final mourning and an entrance into the spiritual world where he/she will reside forever in the realm of the ancestors.

1.5 CONCLUSION

In the Chewa tradition and in most of the African cultures, people do not separate life from death. It is obvious that we cannot talk of funerals if there is no death. And we cannot talk of death if there was no life before. For the Chewa, human life is seen as central and sacred. There is also a belief that life on earth is just transitory. On earth, people are alive at the verge of death. Death is a change or a movement from earthly life to life in the invisible world; the so-called world of spirits. The general background of the Chewa helps us to understand the care of life, customs and culture of the Chewa people. The following chapter discusses the role of ancestorship, who they are, the criteria for ancestorship and their obligation to them and Sacrifice.

²² VAN GENNEP ARNOLD, *The Rite of Passage*, 8-9

CHAPTER TWO. THE ROLE OF ANCESTORSHIP

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we shall examine the ancestral cult of worship among the Chewa people of Central region of Malawi. Among the Chewa, there are many elements which describe the role of ancestors in the Chewa cosmos. These elements very much conform to most of African traditional religions.

2.2 WHO ARE THE ANCESTORS?

Ancestors are the living dead who are considered not far removed from the living community. Therefore, it is right to say that according to Chewa tradition, ancestors are closely connected with humankind whom they were of one blood²³. Ancestors were once fellow human beings who lived with us, but now abode with the Supreme Being in the spiritual world.

Mbiti defines ancestor, as "a person who is physically dead but still remains in the memory of those who knew him or her in life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits"²⁴ Mbiti's definition is in line with the Chewa people's conception of ancestors.

²³ J. AGUNDU, *A New Examination of Ancestors in the Central Region of Malawi*, 39

²⁴ JOHN MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969.

Ancestors are, our dead "who have been elevated to the status which make them ritually eligible for special veneration and cult."²⁵

They still remain an integral part of the society or family and community levels and still remain influential in the day-to-day activities of the living community. The ancestors in the Chewa universe are third in the hierarchy, they come after the Supreme Being and the deities.

The ancestors have a special place in the spiritual world and they are also conceived of as returning to the material world. This is explained through the names given to particular children who have some resemblance with the dead. These names express a belief in the immortality of the dead people.²⁶

²⁵ BRUNO EPIS. *philosophical Anthropology Pamphlet*, 5

²⁶ Name given to a child born after a family member has passed away and might have resemblance with the deceased.

2.3 CRITERIA FOR ANCESTORSHIP

In the Chewa worldview, a person does not become an ancestor simply by passing away from the land of the living to the living dead. Certain criteria must be met for one to qualify as an ancestor. Some personal achievement while living in this world is one of the criteria. One should also fulfil certain obligations.

All the dead are not ancestors, ancestors are those who have realized to a remarkable degree the values and aspirations of their community or groups²⁷.

To be an ancestor, one must have raised up his/her own family according to the norms and values of society. Usually Chiefs, by their status in society, are automatically qualified as ancestors. The young people can only be declared as ancestors, depending on the exemplary achievement for the community against enemies in the battle and then died in that process. Death in old age is also another criterion.

Old age goes with experience, respect and honour for many achievements attained on behalf of the community. Old age is perceived as God's blessing. After death, the community strongly believes that an old person automatically becomes an ancestor and dwells among the deities. Hence, sacrifices and libation is done for such a hero.

²⁷ BRUNO EPIS, 3.

Death is also an essential step towards ancestorhood; "Death is significant not because it is an end of earthly striving and achievement but because it marks the entry to the abode of ancestors"²⁸. Like most Africans, the Chewa people also believe that good death is important for one to be an ancestor. If suicide, accident, leprosy, dropsy, smallpox, epilepsy are to be the causes of death, they may prevent one's entry into the ancestral realm, because they are regarded as a curse from the ancestors. Suffering from such disease meant punishment from the ancestors due to inappropriate behaviour.²⁹ Further, without a good burial rite by the living community one does not enter the ancestral world. A good burial is therefore, very important.

2.3 THE ROLE OF ANCESTORS

Ancestors share a close relationship with both the deities and the living community. They are a link between the two worlds, the living and the spiritual world, thereby contributing greatly to the proper unity and interaction between the spiritual world and human community. In so doing, the ancestors enable the living community to acquire or get blessings and prosperity in many areas.

The ancestors play a major role in mediation. The human community expresses its shortcomings such as illness, sufferings and all their problems to the Supreme Being and deities through the ancestral world. Ancestral mediation is a very significant undertaking through which the living community find a lasting

²⁸BRUNO EPIS, 37

²⁹ W.H.J RANGELEY, *Note on Chewa Tribal Law*, in the *Nyasaland Journal* 1 (1948). No.3, 17-19.

solution to all the difficulties and challenges that confront the human world. Ancestors also help to preserve traditional norms and customs, for example, norms and regulations regarding land which are at the centre of the community. Ancestors also act like shepherds. They intervene whenever a community or individual strays. They, therefore, warn or punish to foster change that is oriented towards unity and peace between the living and living-dead worlds. We can therefore say that ancestors stand as the ground for moral principle. That is, their role on earth, which leads to sharing in the spirit, provides the model for proper human behaviour to us on earth. Ancestors know and have an interest in what is going on in the community – they are guardians in the traditional affairs, ethics and activities. Any offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the ancestors who, in that capacity act as invisible police of the community.

2.4 PEOPLE'S OBLIGATION

People's first obligation to the ancestors among the Chewa as well as the majority of African tribes is the preservation of their memory. This is done by the Chewa through folklore and stories. Furthermore, their memories are kept alive in the community by naming children after them. "*Banda*" for instance, is a name that goes back to my great - great- grand father.³⁰ With that, an ancestor's name and memory can be preserved even up to the fourth and fifth generation.

It is part of the duty of the living community to pray, offer sacrifice and libation to the ancestors. In this way, people maintain regular communication and

³⁰ The author gives his experience on the importance of naming during a discussion with Dr Chembe .Kasungu 4th July 2003.

relationship with ancestors. This regular communication with ancestors keeps people memories of the departed people live and make their presence relevant to their day-to-day experiences.

All these obligations apply in what the Chewa calls *zatsopano* (now) period. *Zatsopano* means that the dying process is still going on. When it reaches this stage, those who physically have passed away usually after the fourth and fifth generations they enter the *zakhale khale* (long ago) period. In the latter period, the memory of the dead is no more kept among the living community members. This marks the dying process. Another form of death is accredited to the witches whom society remembers no more immediately after burial. Bad or wicked people cannot be considered for ancestorship.

2.4.1 Sacrifice

According to Chewa Traditional Religion, sacrifices are acts of worship. These are characterised by the practice of materials or physical things given to God or other spiritual beings in order to meet the invisible world. Sacrifice among the Chewa involves shedding of animal blood. Sacrifices are offered in time of crisis, for instance when there is drought, purification time after an epidemic and when there is good harvest.

They offer sacrifice to God as an ultimate recipient, to ancestors as a symbol of fellowship and recognition as part of the family. Among the Chewa the one who offers sacrifice at the rain shrine is *makewana* a woman prophetess. The Chewa believe in the existence of God who is known by many names which described the

element of weather³¹. Some of the names are *Chiuta* (Rainbow), *Mphambe* (Lightening) and *Chisumphu* (Giver of Rain). God is worshipped communally in the territorial rain shrines hence sacrifice involves the whole village. Animals slaughtered are offered at *kachisi* whilst imploring God in these words, " We give you this community of our forefathers. receive this gift that we offer, drink and eat it with us send us rain the land is dry."³² These words are also used even in the pouring of beer and also when the principle parts are burnt. When smoke moves vertically, this is a sign of God's acceptance of the sacrifice offered and that God is now ready to answer their request. The one who confirms this is *Makewana* who goes into ecstasy during sacrificial worship at *kachisi*³³.

Through sacrifice, the Chewa people bring God's presence in their midst so that they can utilize him. On the other hand sacrifice brings harmony between the living and the spiritual world or rather the living dead.

2.5 2.6 CONCLUSION

The preservation of ancestral cult is seen as propitious. Ancestorship in the Chewa context is a right to whoever lived an untainted life and it is regarded as sacred. No one is allowed to go against the ancestors, because they link the people to the Supreme Being. Ancestors in the Chewa tradition also guide and light the community. They intervene whenever the community strays, their aims being oriented towards peace and unity, between the living and living dead.

³¹ W.H.J. RANGELEY, in his article: "Two Nyasaland Rainshrines; Makewana- the Mother of all People". Nyasaland Journal,2, 1952.

³² J.C. CHAKANZA, in his article on *Some Chewa Concepts Of God in Religion*. 4-8.

³³ 'Kachisi' is a shrine where sacrifice is offered to God and Ancestors by *Makawana* the mother of all people.

Finally, among the Chewa, death is important for one to attain ancestorship; it is the inevitable conclusion of person's earthly existence. Death is not the end of one's existence, because in it, one joins the realm of the ancestors and the living dead. Having dealt so much on descriptive part concerning Chewa Traditional Religion, we shall now in the following two chapters make a comparative study of inculturation of Christianity and mediation of ancestorship.

CHAPTER THREE: INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE CHEWA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the inculturation of Christianity. Incarnation will be used in a broader sense as Jesus' encounter with people in the world and into human lives, as it was revealed to the Jewish people at the time. We shall start by the understanding of Culture and then relate it to the inculturation of Christianity among the Chewa.

Incarnation refers to the mystery of the Second Person of the Trinity becoming man, and living among people. The word incarnation comes from the Latin word (*caro*, flesh), which means the putting on, or the taking on flesh. We read in part, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1;14). Incarnation is also perceived as the union between the divine and the human, especially when we look at the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary, through the Holy Spirit.

3.2 Incarnation of Jesus Christ

According to Christian doctrine, incarnation is defined as eternal Son of God assuming a complete human nature, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery whereby the Second Person of the blessed Trinity,

Jesus Christ, assumed flesh and became man.³⁴ The Word was with God at the very beginning of creation. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word, was God..." Here it is important to note that when we talk of, "the word was made flesh and dwelt among people", (Jn 1:14) it does not necessarily imply that the Word is changed into flesh, neither is his humanity a mere appearance.. This event took place in order to open up for the people the way to divine life. It is a starting point in the history of salvation. This means that the Word is incarnated in Jesus. In the act of God breathing his last word in the world, God becomes all in all in order to humanize the world, and complete it according to his initial design.³⁵ We see Jesus deeply in service; he healed the sick, raised the dead, and went round doing good. In this way, Jesus is seen to perfect the world such that there should be a new earth and new heaven.

The word made flesh further means that Christ becomes a visible person who comes to his people and participates in their day-to-day activities. In the New Testament, we see this Word well enfleshed in the person of Jesus with the same great power of creation. As it is clearly manifested in (cf Mt 8:8, Jn 5; 50-53) the centurion statement "Lord I am not worthy that you enter my house but just say the word and the boy will be healed". This word was actively involved in the creation story, "All things come into existence through him and without him not a single thing" (Jn 1: 3).³⁶ Jesus lives among his people, learns their culture, basically to make them closer to him. This Incarnate Word comes to perfect human nature by taking away all that is sin. Sin is darkness and the word is light which shines in

³⁴ WEIS, E.A, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol.7 Palatine III "Incarnation," 413.

³⁵ BUJO BENEZET, *Christian God becomes Man in Black Africa*, 26

³⁶ All Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, unless stated otherwise.

darkness. I am the light of the world. The word becomes flesh is our light and we no longer have fear.

3.3 Significance of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in General

The importance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ resides very much in the depth of the involvement of the divine love. This reached the highest point in the Son when the Father sent his only Son to be the Saviour and Redeemer. His self-giving was consummated in the action of the Son who became present to his people as one among them and bridged the gap that separated God from mankind. The notion of Incarnation is ordained for salvation of mankind. Jesus Christ by becoming the pre-eminent Word, invites people to communicate with him by his own teachings. Incarnation of Jesus Christ has familiarized him to the people.

3.3.1 Culture

Since we are going to discuss inculturation of Christianity, which involves the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture, it is very important to clarify what we mean by culture. Human beings are said to be cultural beings. They conceive life according to the culture in which they have been brought up. Human beings do possess culture but remain at descriptive level. This is

because it is very difficult to give a definition of culture which is accepted by all.³⁷ Culture can be seen at many levels as Shorter puts it.

He points out the practical level as the material aspect of culture which includes all that has to do with material life, technology and behaviour and notes that this is proper to the science of technology. The symbolic level relates to the realm of ideas. It is the realm that governs the practical order and orients behaviour. The third is the cognitive level. It is the level of underlying meaning and values. So in dealing with religion and the theological concept of inculturation, we have to deal very much with this inner level (cognitive).³⁸ Here we see there is external manifestations of culture which are the sum total of the physical and mental reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of human beings. There is an aspect of inner formation of human mind, formed by the traditions peculiar to a particular radical group. Culture of the society influences very much its members to perceive the world in terms of cultural model in which they have been brought up. People understand well what is filtered in their culture. Hence when we talk about inculturation of Christianity we have to understand that the Gospel has been shaped through the cultural set up of the people and reach them where and as they are.

³⁷ The concept of culture is very complex. KROBER AND KLUCKHOLN bring together not less than 164 different definitions and about 300 definitions are used in their book. *A critical review on the concepts and definitions*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of America Archeology, Vol. XLVII, No 1 Cambridge 1959. 38-40

³⁸ SHORTER AYLWARD, *Towards Theology of Inculturation*, 35

3.3.2. The meaning of Inculturation.

In this section we are going to take inculturation of Christianity as an insertion of the Christian faith in people's culture.³⁹ Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality.⁴⁰ It means a reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought, patterns of each people. Inculturation is a challenge in every culture. It aims at making Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people's religion and away of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening it. Inculturation makes people to feel at home with Christianity once it is properly understood.

3.3.3 Inculturating Christianity with Chewa Tradition.

Inculturation of Christianity makes Chewa people to understand the message of Christ in their own setting. So the process of inculturation of Christianity helps to form the Chewa people in their own cultures. God was nearer to his people, he was actively participating in their daily life. Consequently they related to him in all circumstances. From this, we can tell that God does not act in a vacuum, he needs a medium, which in this case is a person in his own natural setting. God encounters and saves man in his being as a man. He does not relate to man outside his context that is the reason why Jesus came to render service to the whole humanity and not part of it.⁴¹ Inculturation makes Christianity to enter into the blood and veins of Chewa people.

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesis Tradendae* 16th October 1979, 53: Ass 71. (1979). 1319. As quoted in *Ecclesia in Africa* 59, 44.

⁴⁰ JOHN M. WALIGGO, *Making a Church truly African*, 12.

⁴¹ DOMINGUES FERNANDO, *Christology*. Class Notes TANGAZA COLLEGE, 2002

The Early Church proclaimed the Gospel in different cultural set up and situations. As the Gospel passed from Hebrews to others cultures it underwent massive inculturation. Even today this process still continues. On this matter, Pope Paul VI affirmed that,

evangelisation will lose much of its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration the people to whom it is addressed, if it does not make of language, their signs and symbols. If does not answer the question which are relevant to them, in word it does not reach and influence their way of life.⁴²

Bishop Kalilombe, a former Bishop of Lilongwe also asserts that the risk of pagan inculturation happens when inculturation is done only by specialists and people outside tradition. But if it is done by the indigenous themselves, then they are able to discern what is good and what is not good.⁴³

The danger that the Bishop sees in the process of inculturation is that there is a tendency to think that, this can only be done by specialists within the Church; forgetting that it is our duty to participate in this process. In fact, we have been inculturating all along without realising it. Inculturation is the dialogue with all sections of the community. This implies that in order to have an authentic belief in Christ, African Christianity must be achieved by the Africans themselves with the help of anthropologists conversant with African culture. The Chewa for example should be protagonists of their own faith through active evangelisation. Such evangelisation will bring about transformation of culture. In other words, if Christianity is to be rooted in Africa, it must first transform the African culture. Otherwise, it will remain like a tree, which is blossoming on top, but lacks deep roots and most likely it will eventually wither. Christian faith must become part and

⁴² PAUL VI, *Evangelisation in the Modern World, Apostolic Exaltation "Evangelii Nuntiandi"* no.44.

⁴³ P. GAMBA, *My Church, My faith, My country, In the lamp* (Malawi) no 10, 1997, 23

parcel of people's daily existence, of their total being, culture and way of thinking because it is impossible to inculturate without knowing people's culture.⁴⁴ Aylward Shorter's point. "Inculturation therefore is an inseparable aspect of evangelisation. It means the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in the forms and terms proper to a culture – process that result in the re-interpretation of both, without being unfaithful to either".⁴⁵ This gives us the reason why the first missionaries who came to Malawi were not so much successful; they never went deeper into the people's culture. They believed their religion was the only true religion. With this kind of mentality, they saw the Traditional Africa Religion as magical and superstitions. This in a way prevented them from seeing the good values of our religion and culture objectively. To a certain degree, we agree with the Malawian bishops when they note that our Christianity was taught and we received it through the European and American missionaries, many of whom found little to admire in the Malawian cultures.⁴⁶ They could not see our cultures as medium for Christianity hence their preaching involved condemning Africa values.

We cannot judge the missionaries to be all wrong. These people just acted according to the philosophical dictates of their time. For instance, planting of the western church was more important than studying people's culture. At first, they equated our Supreme Being *Mulungu*, *Mphambe*, *Chauta* to their God, the only difference was the manner in which they were venerated. It seemed to have ancestral

⁴⁴ The special Assembly for Africa of the synod of Bishop in Rome (10 April – 8 May, 1994)

⁴⁵ WALTER VON HOLREN AND SEAN FAGAN, eds, *Africa: The Kakiros of a synod, Sedos Symposium on Africa* (Rome: April – May 1994), 10

⁴⁶ An interview with MAI MARIETTA, aged 45 on the subject of inculturation of Malawi – 2nd of August, 2004 Lumbazi

cult. Hence the early missionaries saw such kind of practise as inappropriate to the occult.

Today, the situation has changed as it is generally accepted that the concept of God as Supreme Being and Creator, is practically universal in Africa belief. This is not so different to Christian belief which is so much on transcendent, omnipresent, almighty, supreme and omniscient.

However, through inculturation the European have come to understand the African culture and they have done away with their old mentality. For example in Mua at Kungoni Art Cultural Centre in Dedza Diocese, the missionaries of Africa, through Fr. Claude Boucher have proved that there is need to know and appreciate one's culture before inculturating the Gospel message into it because without culture and tradition, one cannot profoundly comprehend the concept of God. In this part, a missionaries of African priest, who is a German national, has tried to preserve, the Chewa culture through respecting its customs myths, symbols, and proverbs. Above all, he has kept the Chewa secrecy of *Nyau* cult, by not allowing any discrediting information which might expose its secrecy. Fr. Boucher does not allow getting photographs in his museum. In line with Christianity he has made necessary effort to inculturate Chewa culture with Christianity by showing their point of convergence in his artistic work, for instance the localisation of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and African crucifix. This is a positive step towards evangelisation. The gospel should transform the culture it assumes. According to LG 13, 2, "The Church fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of people. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them." Transforming the culture of one people means also the transformation of all

other areas of their lives at a deeper level. This was the intuition led by Mao Tse Tung to attempt the transformation of the whole Chinese society (Including politics, social structures, the role of religion) this was precisely done by a cultural revolution.⁴⁷ This could also apply to Christianity.

3.3.4 Significance of Incarnation of Christianity Among the Chewa

Inculturation of Christianity challenges the bad and uplifts the good of each culture. It shapes the Chewa people's interpretation of the Christian message, and it has brought new dimensions in the understanding of the Gospel. The basis of inculturation of Christianity is the incarnation of Jesus. He became one of us and preached his message in a given culture. People flocked to Jesus because they were able to understand him; they discovered their deepest selves in his words. Today, the Chewa people have also Christianised their culture by selecting traditional practises and cultural values that are not in conformity with the Christian message, getting as well rid of superstitious things e.g. magic. Previously the Chewa used to go to the native doctor whenever somebody was sick or faced calamity, but today the Chewa people have lost hope and faith in the diviners. This is because the *N'ganga* theory is no longer accurate but all it brings is superstition and hatred among family members, since most of them are liars and after money.

The only concoction that has proved workable among them is no other than Christianity. From the Gospel Jesus healed many sick people of all kinds of diseases. Among the Chewa, Jesus is often referred to as *Msinganga Wamkulu* meaning the Chief Doctor. As it has always been the case, Chewa people have often

⁴⁷ FERNANDO DOMINGUES in one of his lectures, Mission Theology April 2004.

reverted to traditional values many of them going back to ancestral worship. To avoid this, they have put Christ as the proto- ancestors who supersedes all ancestors. The reason for this is that, he is the only one who returned from the living dead to life; He is the only ancestor who is not confined to a clan but serves the interests of all humankind. That is the reason why Chewa the people find it worthy to give due respect to Christ as their ancestor than any person who has gone before us. In short Christ is the king of the ancestors. This subject will be discussed extensively in Chapter four, which looks at comparative study between Christianity and the Chewa regarding ancestorship.

3.3.5 Conclusion

“The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (Jn 1; 14) This is the incarnation of Jesus Christ where the love of God is fully incarnated. God sent his Son Jesus to live among his people, so that they could understand his message in their own setting of culture.

Inculturation makes Christianity to be more meaningful. It sustains culture and makes it to become meaningful when it incorporates faith. It is for this reason why the faith has survived; it has become culture and in turn culture has survived it, becoming faith.⁴⁸ Finally, the Church today promotes religious and human values of local culture in the light of the gospel.

⁴⁸ AYWARD SHORTER. *Evangelisation and Culture*, 106.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND MEDIATION OF ANCESTORSHIP AMONG THE CHEWA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the role of ancestorship in a Christian context. We shall try to show the relationship between the Chewa and Christianity, Chewa spirit world and Christ's ancestorship, finally we will also discuss the perception of Christ in line with their belief and life after death. Their differences and Similarities will hopefully help us to understand Christianity and Chewa tradition in their point of convergence.

4.2 Relationship between Chewa Tradition Religion and Christianity

When the early missionaries came to Central region of Malawi they did not deal with the problems dealt with by traditional religion. Some of these problems include diseases, death, drought and barrenness. They dealt with the concepts of Christian religion, like the origin of man, destiny and the ultimate meaning of life. People therefore reverted to their old religion for answers to their immediate needs. At some stage the Chewa people behaved like the people of Israel, who saw God's miraculous signs, but yet turned to Idol worship. This problem was the result of lack of a holistic evangelisation. The only way to prove that God intervened in their life and that he brought salvation to them was through a power, that would defeat

malevolent powers (witchcraft, sorcery and magic) commonly known as *Matsenga*. Hence the gospel must be presented in such a way that it addresses their belief, and this Christianity needs to be deeply rooted in their culture. Once it is so, the Chewa people shall be able to stop practicing rituals that are not compatible with Christianity and this will in turn bring new Christian belief in their old cultural roots.

Among the Chewa, Christianity has posed a challenge to them, since most of them believed in mysterious powers as a way of protection from any adversaries or witchcraft. Their customs and practices are primarily motivated by the fear of the Spirit world. The only person that is noted for bringing about the elimination of this physical and malevolent power is Christ. He restores and brings Spiritual wholeness. Indeed it is from this that the salvific actions of Christ are seen as an avenue or instrument of liberation. (cf Lk 4: 18-19). Therefore those who accept and believe the gospel of Christ are the ones to be liberated from any dehumanising situation and they will live a life of faith anticipating the kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, though the Chewa people are well known for their communal living, it requires an individual participation to convert the rest.

To conclude, God's salvation is open for all, who have faith in God's message. Its up to an individual to adhere to gospel demands. (Mk 1:15)

4.2.1 The Chewa Spiritual World and Christ's Ancestorship

Most of African theology talks of the living dead. In the Chewa Traditional Religion; the living dead are the benevolent ancestral spirits who are links between us the living and the Supreme Being. Through this experience we realise that there is a greater interdependence between the living and the dead. Communication between

the living and the ancestors is constant. Ancestors are people who lived a natural life among the people and now are enjoying a quasi-supernatural or supersensible mediatorial status. The interdependence therefore comes as a result of their role in the people's life. As we said in chapter two, those who become ancestors are people who lived exemplary lives (in this case not every person who dies becomes an ancestor). In the next life there is neither pain nor sufferings nor death, instead there is only happiness, peace, comfort and love. An informant, Leonce Rambau, CSSp maintains that, "The ancestors are in close contact with the living."⁴⁹ He stresses that they need honour, reverence, prayers, invocation and sacrifices from the living. They protect the living from danger. They appear to the living through dreams warning them about the impending danger of being bewitched, or of a jealous neighbour. On the other hand, they also demand for respect from the living if the latter ignore them. Thus they possess immense powers. Any achievements, success and prosperity depend on the good communication with the ancestors and when this communication is not good the impending disaster becomes imminent.

The spiritual world among the Chewa is very important when it comes to intermediary. Reflecting on the Chewa Traditional Religion in Central Malawi, Kalilombe states, that

the special understanding of God and God's way of communicating with people is found in the 'Spiritology.' Theologically the belief in Spirit is very important. This served as a practical way of handling the problem of transcendence and immanence. God's transcendence was safeguarded through the respect of the distance between God and the living. Contact with God was mainly through the mediation of the Spirits. In a way the spirits rendered the Transcendent Immanent.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ An interview with LEONCE RAMBAU with the author Spiritan House, Nairobi 16th September 2004

⁵⁰ PATRICK KALILOMBE, "Living Word and Africa's On-going Oral Tradition:", 20

Having given a concise discussion on the spiritual world among the Chewa, the question still remains unanswered when it comes to Christianity. Can Christ be qualified as an ancestor? To avoid the discrepancy of the concept of ancestor, African theologians have called Christ by different names. For instance, Benezet Bujo⁵¹ of Congo prefers to call Christ, the proto-ancestor. Charles Nyamiti⁵² of Tanzania, who has written on the topic of Christ as ancestor, refers to Christ as both brother and ancestor.

To begin with, the historical Jesus lived an exemplary life, from this perspective we could say 'Yes', because Jesus manifested those qualities which Africans attribute to their ancestors. The term ancestors can be applied analogically to Jesus. Jesus is not just an ancestor among many, but an ancestor par excellence. Bujo argues that, the title of proto-ancestor signifies that Jesus did not only realise the authentic Ideal of the God fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to new completion. Jesus after his death was accorded a decent burial, indeed it is through his death and resurrection that he emerges as the proto-ancestor.

Jesus Christ's proto-ancestor is rooted in his incarnation. This is the meeting point between God and human kind. Therefore with the coming of Jesus, we discover the ideal principle that his ancestorship makes us to be, one family, one tribe and one community. From this statement we are inclined to say that, Christ's ancestorship corrects the mentality of ethnocentrism, among the people. (cf Act 4:32-34).

⁵¹ B. Bujo.. *African Theology in its Social Context*, 77

⁵² C. Nyamiti, *Christ Our Ancestor*, 27-28

In John Chapter 15:1-10, we get the insight that Christianity focuses so much on life. According to Christianity, Jesus Christ is the source of true life. This means that there is no life without Jesus. This also implies that no human being has realised the ideal of the ancestor as much as Jesus Christ, despite the fact that he was unmarried and childless. Jesus did not present his mercy, love and kindness to be imitated, but as life that must continue with his disciples. Therefore by observing this kind of life, Christianity led its members to recognise that Jesus is present among them.

Today the Chewa Traditional religion affirms what Nyamiti says that Christ, is our ancestor, indeed is not just one of the ancestor but an ancestor per excellence. The title "Jesus our ancestor" inculturates Jesus within the Chewa Culture. It inserts Jesus into the African soil; it also incarnates Jesus as God's word in an African context. (See Chapter three for comparison where the prologue of John's gospel was put into focus when dealing with inculturation.) This ancestor Christology, which we have just explained enhances the development of Christology that will be both African and Christian. However, this discovery should not be an end in itself but a starting point towards the development of African Theology, which will find meaning in the Chewa culture.

4.2.2 Who is Christ to the Chewa in line with their belief?

As we said above, Christ has a lot of names which are attributed to him, but out of these names, the Chewa people have chosen those which bear special significance in their society. Jesus is often referred to as, the founder of great family, Great ancestor, and Chief intermediary. Jesus is seen as the intermediary spirit between God and people. In the Central Region of Malawi, there is a formulated

prayer of the Christian faith entitled *Kumvera Kwa Apostoli* the Apostles' Creed. In this prayer we find two aspects that are essential to the belief of the Chewa, (i) belief in God and his son, (ii) The aspect of sitting at the right hand of the father and life everlasting.

4.2.2.1 Belief in God and his son

According to Chewa Christ is the great ancestor. When we talk of Christ as the great ancestor we do not mean that, he is greater than God his father, his father is the greatest '*Mulungu wa mphavu Zoonse*' (God almighty). The son only participates in the work of the father, that's all he does, to take care of human creation. By so doing he creates a bond between the people and God his Father. It is in this respect that Christ as an ancestor is referred to as *Muchimwene*, meaning brother. Therefore through this brotherhood of Christ the Chewa people see themselves as the sons and daughters of God. This is the analogous understanding of the relationship between the father and the son in the Chewa family.

4.2.2.2 The aspect of Sitting at the right hand of the father

Christ our brother ancestor does not sit idle, but his sitting on the right hand of the father represents an office of high responsibility. His office is that of mediation between people and God. Apart from this he intercedes for the people to His father. Through this intermediary, Christ is seen as the way to God, and no one comes to the father except through him (cf John 14: 6-7). In a religious sense, Christ is the mediator and revealer of who the father is to us. The image that we get from a translated prayer *Kamvera kwa apostoli*, of the Father and Son give us the idea of communion. The Chewa people equate Christ to their ancestor in terms of functions as explained above.

To conclude the Chewa perception of Christ in line with their belief, helps us to understand who Christ is to them, and it also gives us the reason why they qualify themselves as God's adopted children. Through belief in Jesus they enter into intimacy with God. The aspect of sitting at the right hand of the father symbolise that Jesus brings to the Chewa, the new image of God. A God who is always with them.

E.J Penoukou⁵³ observes that,

Christ is 'l'ancetre – Joto' namely an ancestor who is the source of life, the ancestor who generates and re-generates life. He adds that, Christ as a host invites us to the fullness of life, which is the fulfilment of the promises of God, and he welcomes us to the banquet of life.

4.2.3 The Chewa perception of life after death

For the Chewa, there is a continuation of life after death. (see the concept of death in Chapter one pg 10-11). There is a belief that death is a passage leading to the life beyond. In many of the communities, death implies that the person has been called by his ancestors and he has gone to join them in the Spirit- world. That is why in many African communities at the end of every season, food is offered to the dead. For the Chewa, this food is the continuation of their daily libations, which the family offers. The offering of food to the dead is a sign that, in the after life, the Chewa can still share the things they shared while they were on earth.

Death then becomes the passage to the new life. It brings the person to the company of his ancestors.⁵⁴ That is what is referred to as the after life. The Chewa believes that death is the gateway, which opens to greater fulfillment.

⁵³ E.J PENOU'KOU, *Realite Africaine et salut en Jesus Christi, Spiritus*, 23(1982), 374-392

⁵⁴ J.W.M VAN BREUGEL, *Chewa Tradition Religion*, 97

Death is never perceived as the end, but rather the beginning. Life never comes to an end, but it only changes. This is because: the moment one dies the person starts a new and transformed life in a new world. For this reason death is viewed as a separation and at the same time a transition.⁵⁵

Having noted the explanation above concerning life after death, the question remains unanswered.

4.2.3.1 Do Chewa People believe in the resurrection?

For them, the resurrection of the dead does not happen, the dead are remembered in the names of children born from the living relatives. In this way they do not die in the minds of the living, in other words they are alive in the mind of the living.⁵⁶ The people who lived an exemplary life become their moral point of reference, since their good qualities are still present among them. The Chewa people are remembered in terms of achievement and contribution rendered to the community.

4.2.3.2 Another aspect that is important lies in the power of the name.

A name becomes an embodiment of Person, total reality, contribution, and his activities. This means that people's contribution are crucial to society, since their deeds are central. That is why on the burial day people read the biography of a dead person and this is more important than a sermon. People are more interested on what a person has left behind. Hence the power lies in what people have done or can do, for others. Therefore their resurrection depends on their faith. This is quite similar to Christianity; Christ is valued according to his deeds and achievements for humanity.

⁵⁵ VAN GENNEP ARNOLD, *Summary of the rite of passage*, 8

⁵⁶ An interview with MR. SAMITA on 15th October, 2004

Our own resurrection will depend on the good things we have done as the result of our faith, we have in Christ. In a more simplistic way (Mt 25: 31-45) Judgement day focus on the good that we have done, which brings rewards while damnation. is a result of misdeeds.

The difference between the Chewa Tradition and Christianity is that the Chewa resurrection, is anthro-centric, its manifested in “ ancestor- orientated” pattern of thought which is central for inculturating Christianity in Africa, while Christian resurrection is Christo-centric. Jesus Christ is the sole attraction of all humanity, he draws all things to himself (Cfr Jn 12: 32), and through his cross, brought salvation to all humanity and what African ancestors yearned for, to completion. They also differ in terms of belief (refer to Chewa belief page 40). Christian belief is centred on the Trinity the three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one God. It stresses the unity and equality between the persons. God the father communicates himself to us through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. A clear distinction is drawn from the way in which the three divine persons operate.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ NICHOLAS FOGLIACCO, Dogma of Trinity, Class notes 2002. Nicholas Fogliacco Notes: The Father: is not directly involved with us, as he does everything through the mediation of the Son and the Spirit. The Son: is sent by the Father, becomes incarnate, and appears in history. He therefore enters the sphere of human experience and situates himself “ in front of us,” as someone we can “ see, hear, and touch with our own hands”(cf. 1Jn 1:1). “In front of us,” the Son is therefore external to us. The Holy Spirit: sent by the father through the Son, the Spirit situates himself, not outside of us but inside of inside of us. Acting first (actual grace) and then dwelling (uncreated grace) in the deepest sphere of our personal being, he becomes the inner principle of our spiritual life. By his power we accept God’s self-communication (faith), and his presence in us is the core of this self-communication (revelation and grace). Hence, in Rahner’s words, he is “God as given in love and powerful in us in love.”

4.3 How can Inculturation be actualised in the development of African Christology?

For proper Evangelization to take place it is essential that peoples cultures be studied carefully. This will open one to a tremendous value that lay behind the people's belief. For instance, the study of Ancestral cult could help the Missionaries in their mode of evangelization. Once people's traditions are understood, inculturation of Christianity will take hold and its message will be deeply rooted and transmit the means that will be well known to them.

The interconnection between Ancestral cult and Christianity will be possible, if the wisdom culture and history of the people is understood. Gs 44 affirm this by its statement.

“The Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and language of different peoples and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophies: It was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all men and the requirements of the learned in so far as this could be done. Indeed, this kind of adaptation and preaching of the revealed word must ever be the law of all evangelization. In this way, it is possible to create in every country the possibility of expressing the message of Christ in suitable terms and to foster vital contact and exchange between the church and different cultures.”

The above quotation says a lot as far as evangelization is concerned, for instance when missionaries came to Africa, they had a preconceived notion that there was no religion in Africa and that it was “entirely evil”. At most they did not understand our ancestral cult nor the theology behind it. Instead what was important for them was transplanting a western Church that was meant to replace ancestral cult. As a result of this, many missionaries faced a lot of resistance and were frustrated thinking that Africans are stubborn and very hard to embrace the gospel values. The fact is that they had not understood the African way of life. They

hurriedly imposed Christian values at the expense of traditional values. Again, we wish to repeat the above statement. that preaching of the gospel will be more effective in Africa if only we understand African beliefs and custom. Therefore, there is need to develop a theology of African tradition in order to explain better the dictates of Christianity in our modern times: without overlooking the past. Besides that, the local Church also needs to provides and train agents of evangelisation through suitable centres and schools of biblical and pastoral formation who will help in the proclamation of the Good news to the people. Among them they should include the local people.(Cfr Rom 10:14-15). The prolaimation of the gospel can be fully carried out only through the contribution of all believers at every level of the universal and local Church. For this to be possible respectful dialogue with other cultures is necessary.

A genuine evangelisation entails respectful dialogue with the culture of the people. The missionaries of African Priest's life and work in the Central Region of Malawi Shows that evangelisation cannot be an imposition of the Gospel from outside, but a rediscovery of it from within the culture of people. Mission entails that a missionary encounters the Gospel twice, first in the context of his or her own culture, and then in the context of the culture of the people, whom he or she is a missionary. Missionaries of Africa discovered the Gospel first as Europeans, but to discover it a second time in the Chewa Culture. Mission also entails conversion not just of the people to the Gospel, but also of the missionary succeed in showing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly Good News. This is a vital need of inculturation in the work of evangelisation.

4.4 People's Concept of belief in Ancestors today

People have a strong belief that ancestors occupy a significant place in traditional religion and that they possess supernatural powers. Many theologians support the view that ancestors remain spiritual superintendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like 'father' or 'mother'.⁵⁸

For the African, Christian worship will only make sense when it emphasizes a spiritual dimension. (in this line ancestrology takes precedence) Africans believe that the ancestor provides a link with the life-giving spirit world. In this modern world, the significant role of an ancestor is to hold the community together, to be custodians of the morality of the community and to determine Ethical conduct among their own folk. Among the Chewa, ancestors are seen as agents whom God chooses to relate and save a particular people. The ancestors even though venerated by many people who believe in traditional religion, they do not act according to their own accord but instead according to the dictates of God whose aim is to preserve life in the community. Pope John Paul II affirmed the veneration of ancestors in his statement during the opening of the African Synod in 1994, when he said,

The Church of Rome salute these African peoples, especially their traditions, in which is expressed the ardent quest for the one God through veneration of their ancestors. These traditions are still the heritage of the majority of the inhabitants of Africa. They are traditions, which are open to the gospel, open to the truth.... They believe instinctively that, the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in same way a preparation for belief in the communion of the saints.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Phiri, Paladio H.G. (ed), *Nsemble ndi Miyambi ya Achewa*, Kachebere Major Seminary, 1972, 45 ff. An outline of the customs and traditions of the Chewa.

⁵⁹ JOHN PAUL II. "Homily at opening Mass." *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15, 1336 (April, 1994):1

What John Paul II is saying is that, if the gospel is properly integrated with traditional customs it will have a precious contribution to the well being of African Christians. It is in this line, that Claude Boucher, has tried to integrate Christianity with Chewa Traditional religion (see chapter Three Pg 30) For instance, there has been a development of inculturation in the *Nyau* cult in the sense that some of the practices which were considered evil are seen to be in line with Christianity for instance the rite of passage has some characteristics as that Christian's baptism. *Gulewamkulu* prepares the initiates into adulthood though its often connected with the spiritual world. *Gulewamkulu* from a theological point of view represents the ancestral spirit and these are interpreted as God's advisors. in short they belong to the family of *Chauta* and the communion of saints. "The reason for integrating Christian theology to ancestral veneration is to arrive at the concept of mystical Church which at the same time is concrete and meaningful to the people."⁶⁰

To conclude, if various aspects about African Traditional culture are properly studied and preserved, they can be "raw material" of new and original expressions of Christian life and worship in Africa.⁶¹

In this Chapter, we tried to show the significance of ancestrology and give reasons why people show much reverence to it. Lastly, we tried to show how inculturation of Christianity could be possible in the African traditional religion. Preaching of the gospel can only be possible if we start from the traditional culture. Start from what people already know, and then move on to integrate with the gospel

⁶⁰ MARTIN OTT, *African Theology in Images*, claim. 455.

⁶¹ A.T SANON, *Limination Villageoise. In Enraciner l'evangile. Initiations africaines et pedagogie de la foi*, 86.

values. In this way the gospel message will penetrate people's culture with less resistance. Besides that, we need not forget that, "Inculturation of Christ in the Jewish context remains an obligatory point of reference for all other inculturations of the risen Lord in the cultures of humanity." Hence the transition of African theology to Christianity will be actualised if Christ becomes the central point of focus.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Having looked at the Chewa Traditional Religion and the attempt to look at ancestorship and inculturation of Christianity, we discovered that culture and faith form a special component in a person. They enable a person to define the situation, make concrete decisions and give the person an identity, whether Christian or not. Each person receives and manifests faith in his/her culture. Christians also receive and profess Christian faith in their own cultures after they encounter Christ in the word of God.

Therefore, it is important to have an ongoing encounter between Chewa Traditional religion and Christianity in order for the Church to grow and mature. For this encounter to be successful the gospel should be rooted in the people's culture and people need to be enriched by it. Both religions should benefit from each other. When this process is understood, the Chewa beliefs and customs will become the agent of evangelisation. The people in turn will understand this new culture of Christianity in the light of their beliefs and it will be meaningful. Therefore, some important aspects of traditional religion such as the veneration of ancestorship should never be discarded because doing so might mean cutting one from his /her roots. Ancestors are very important, as they are the unifying factor of the Chewa community. The only way to be successful is to study their cultural belief, which includes ancestrology. Once this is done missionaries will be able to preach to people with less resistance and this in turn will provide the platform for the development of African Christology, which will give meaning to African Christians.

We wish to end our general conclusion with quotation from Paul VI's⁶² encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In his encyclical he observes that;

For the church, to evangelise is to bring the good news into all strata of the human race so that by its power it may permeate the depths of humanity and make it new.... The various strata of humanity are to be transformed. This is not simply a matter of the church preaching the gospel in ever-expanding geographical areas or to ever-increasing numbers.

It also means affecting the standards by which people make judgments, their prevailing values, their interests and thought-patterns, the things that move them to action, and their models of human living; in so far as any or all of these are inconsistent with the power of the Gospel.

Indeed inculturation and evangelisation are the only viable tools that the Church can use to win people for Christ. Evangelisation can achieve its purpose through inculturation. Bringing the word of God alone will not change people's life unless it befits their local cultures.

⁶² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18-19.

Appendix 2 Questionnaire

Research Questionnaire for Chewa Traditional Religion. with specific reference on Ancestorship and Inculturation of Christianity among the Chewa.

I am Banda Lameck Charles a student at Tangaza College, a Constituent college of Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Studying theology and Mission studies.

I am carrying a research on Ancestorship and Inculturation of Christianity in order to develop an African understanding of Christianity. My aim is to see if Chewa Traditional Religion is still relevant to today. The question below will be of great help for my research. Your contribution and co-operation will be of benefit, for my requirement for Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religious Studies. I promise to hold your information in confidence and use it only for the said academic purpose.

Formal Questions for the Informant

(1) Name (optional) _____

Sex: Female___ Male__ .

Age group: 18- 25 years old ____, 26- 35years ____, 36- 35years old ____, 46- 55years__ , 56- 65years ____, above 75years__

(2) Who is an Ancestor according to the Chewa

(3) What do we mean when we say that Ancestors are our guardians

(4) Is there any difference between Ancestor and the living dead

(5) Do Chewa People worship Ancestors or Venerate them if Yes or No give reason of your answer

(6) How does one become an ancestor

(7) Does death open away to Ancestorship? Yes or No explain your answer

(8) Name some of the ways in which a person becomes an ancestor

(9) Is there any guarantee that anybody who dies becomes an ancestor

(10) A point of shift, to Christianity can Christ be qualified to be an ancestor?

(11) What are the qualities that are needed?

(12) If we say that Christ is an ancestor can he be confine to one territory like those of Chewa Traditional and other cultures

(13) Apart from all we have said do Chewa believe in life after Yes or No explain your answer

(14) How can Chewa Tradition and Inculturation of Christianity be actualized

Thanks in advance for your co-operation and participation.

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