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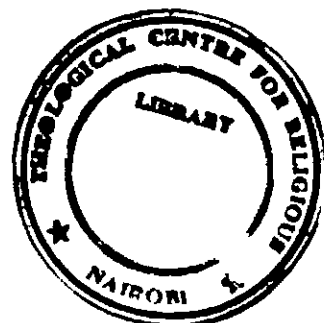
**TANGAZA COLLEGE.  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA.**

**TITLE: THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AMONG THE GOGO SOCIETY  
OF CENTRAL TANZANIA.**

**BY, CHILALA, E. MLABU. REG.NO.95012T.**

**TUTOR; Dr. MARY GETUI.**

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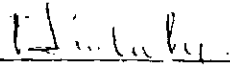
**Long Essay submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for Bachelor of Arts, (Religious studies)**

**February 12, 1999.  
Nairobi.**

**Student's Declaration.**

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit  
to any other Institution.

All sources have been cited in full.

  
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**Signed:** Chilala, E. Mlabu.

## DEDICATION.

Dedicated to my most beloved parents, P.Chilala and I.R.Msonjela who tried their best to bring me up the way I am today. Also to Mdala Chando Msonjela who contributed a lot to my essay, and Moraa who has shown a great concern to me. And finally to all those who assisted me in one way or another.

Chilala E.Mlabu.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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And a number of people have contributed to the success of this work. I would like to thank Tangaza College for acknowledgment of the importance of African studies as a pivot to a successful evangelization in Africa.

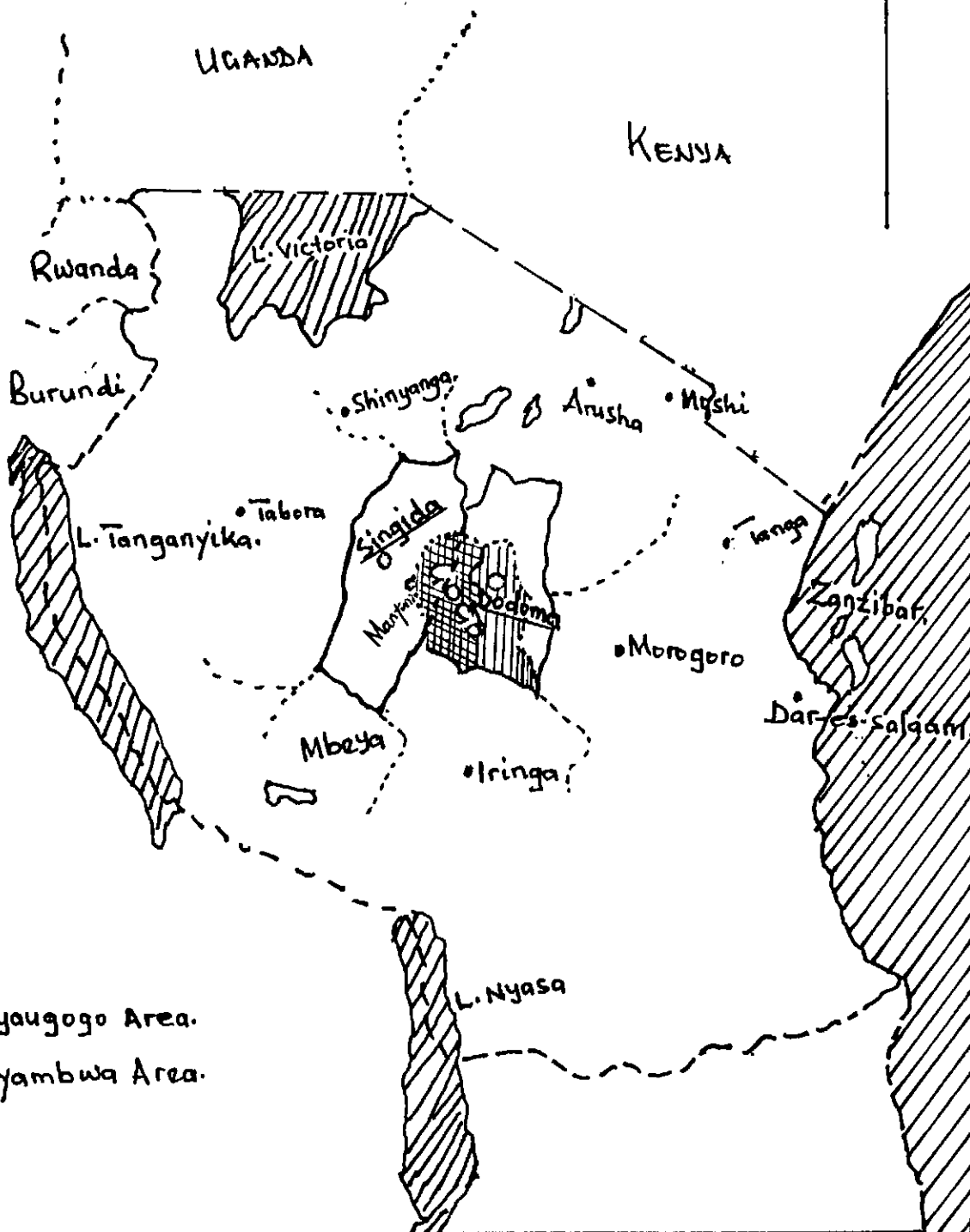
My greatest thanks goes to the Passionist Community of the Tanzanian Vecariate, for supporting me throughout my studies, and for the inspiration into what I am today.

I also thank Dr. Mary Getui for guiding me through this essay. My special thanks goes to Mama Chando Msonjela who tried her best to reveal to me the knowledge about the traditional religious leaders of the Gogo society. I also thank Fr. A.Lacomara C.P. for his encouragement, moral guidance and as a friend, during my last year in Tangaza College. I also thank Brother Phina, J.M.(OSB), he has proved to be a brother and a friend to me. I can not fail to mention my brothers, D.J.Chilala and L.Masigazwa, for being patient, understanding and for whatever help they have rendered to me.

Lastly I thank the whole Tangaza family for the experience I have had during the last four years.

*Chilala, E.M.*

# TANZANIA



## Key:-



Nyangogo Area.

Nyambwa Area.

**CONTENTS:****PAGES.**

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE;.....	3
The Traditional Religious Leader in the Gogo Society.....	3
i. <i>The mentality of the Missionaries towards African         Traditional Religious Leaders</i> .....	5
ii. <i>The actual place of African Traditional         Religious Leaders</i> .....	7
CHAPTER TWO:.....	9
Types of Traditional Religious Leaders in the Gogo Society.	
i. <i>Medicine Men and Women</i> .....	9
ii. <i>Diviners</i> .....	12
iii. <i>Seers</i> .....	16
iv. <i>Mediums</i> .....	18
v. <i>Rain Makers</i> .....	23
vi. <i>Traditional Rulers</i> .....	30
CHAPTER THREE.....	34
The Roles of the Traditional Religious Leaders.....	34
CHAPTER FOUR;.....	43
The Place of the Traditional Religious Leaders in the Contemporary Society.....	43

CHAPTER FIVE;.....	47
Comparative Aspects of African Traditional Religious Leaders and the Roman Catholic Priests.....	47
<i>i. Differences</i> .....	47
<i>ii. Similarities</i> .....	51
CONCLUSION.....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	56

## INTRODUCTION.

“My son; for the contemporary generation and this religion of yours, it is very difficult to understand and appreciate what has been done and what is being done by the real traditional diviners”. It is a statement by an old lady, about eighty years old, called Chando Msonjela

When I was interviewing her, in detail about the traditional religious leaders in the Nyambwa community she was not comfortable, because it is her belief that the world we are living is quite different from the world she lived; we are living in a chaotic world. The reasons being that, there is no respect for the traditional customs, traditional religious leaders are becoming fewer and fewer and most of those who are calling themselves traditional religious leaders are not true diviners but liars. Her world view is just in a small village called Sanza and other neighbouring villages in the Eastern part of Singida region in Tanzania.

Mama Chando, was trying to express how it is becoming so difficult for the new generation to value and appreciate the traditional religious leaders in the Nyambwa community; this community is part of the Gogo society in central part of Tanzania. The Gogo society is divided into two main communities, the Nyaugogo community in the eastern and central part of Dodoma, and the Nyambwa community which is in the western part of Dodoma and the eastern part of Singida region, situated in the Central Rift Valley . These two communities speak the same language but they differ in accent and some few expressions of words.

As a result of my interviews from experienced elders of the Nyambwa community and going through different books, I hope that this paper will be helpful for us to understand about the traditional religious leaders in Africa, using the Gogo society specially the Nyambwa sub-group, as a case study.

In this paper I will try to explain the reality of the African traditional religious leaders, their existence, role and how the African communities looked at them. Explaining the past about these religious leaders it will not be enough without trying to see , what is the attitude of the contemporary society toward them.

Having an idea of who are these religious leaders and their importance to the African societies it will not help us, unless we pick something from them that could help our Christian priests and the whole Christian community at large in their Missionary work. The song of inculturation will not click to any mind, unless the wisdom and knowledge of the African traditional religious leaders is consulted,since their wisdom is the foundation of the African beliefs.

It is my hope that, something positive and educative from the African traditions will come out. With open and critical mind we will be able to understand the African traditions, which later on is going to be very helpful for our missions in Africa.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADER IN THE NYAMBWA COMMUNITY:**

Traditional religious leaders in Nyambwa society are the moral analysts, the charismatic leaders, the functionary priest of the traditional religions. They know the Gogo traditions regarding God, the ancestral spirits, the world and life after death. When a person dies, he/she is not lost but is still with the family members, and that is why the family ancestors have great role in the Gogo society. In fact the Nyambwa traditional religious leaders, their very authority as religious leaders is derived from traumatic, supernatural encounters with the spirit world that has turned them into mediums of the ancestral spirits.

Traditional religious leaders stand as salvific mediators between the living and the dead. And since they are present to both realities, they are able to make known the desires, requests and demands of the ancestral spirits.

It is because of them, their ministry of service to people that the traditional African religious in the Nyambwa community have continued to exist. However, the role and the function of the religious leaders are seen as real and understandable only because the people continue to believe in the underlying world view and ideology of the traditional religions. As long as that belief is intact, the ministry of the traditional religions leaders will be perceived as necessary and desirable.

The continuing power and influence of the traditional religious leaders in Nyambwa community is a clear sign that Christianity despite a full century of preaching

the gospel and establishing church bureaucracies, has barely touched on the central beliefs, values, ideas and visions rooted in the hearts of the Gogo people in general.

The religious knowledge of the traditional religious leaders in the Nyambwa community and in most of the African cultures is not written in books. The wisdom of religious leaders is passed from generation to generation by story telling, songs, initiation rituals, celebrations of all types from birth to death, through hours of listening to the elders discussing the major life issues and mainly by training and inheritance from their parents or clans.

Those who seek to be trained, go to a known traditional religious leader to stay and work with him or her. Training might take three years or more, all this time the pupil will be learning different kind of herbs, how to come in touch with the ancestral spirits, how to use the religious object during divination and how to diagnose different diseases through the ancestral spirits and also to predict or prophesize the future events.

For those who become religious leaders through inheritance, it might be direct from their parents that is, it flows direct from the clan, and a person happens to practice without being trained.

The other way of inheriting is that a boy or a girl of 15-18 years, is told by his/her ancestors that your vocation in life is to be a medium in a specific field or career, therefore you have to leave what you are doing now and do what you will be told by the ancestral spirits. And in that case, the medium is directed to go to a specific place, sometimes in the thick forest where there is a pool of deep water, where the religious leader to be, enters in.

It is said that the person disappeared into the deep water for months, later on he/she could appear to the family members, and in fact immediately he/she starts practising the divination. In the water, in caves and in a thick forest a pupil encounters the ancestral spirits and it is the time for him/her to be taught the divination.

### **I. The Mentality of the Missionaries towards African traditional Religious Leaders.**

To meet the people one should be among the people. To do work with and for the people one should undertake it from amidst the people to whom it is related and with their co-operation. But if for the work an extended area is to be covered, there should be great mobility, with small centres where one can stay among the people and work in contact with them. The aim be not so much to work on behalf of the people, but to work with the people.

“Obviously, you cannot bring complete conversion to people, unless you understand their ways of thinking and doing things”<sup>1</sup>. This applies even to Christianity and the missionaries.

From the beginning Christianity took a strong stand against the traditional African religions, especially the diviners and their rituals, divination was often equated with devil worship. “The new Christians were to renounce all forms of divination, and any lapse was seen as serious breach of faith on a par with practising polygamy”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>P. Van Pelt, Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania, Kipalapala 1971 pg. 14

<sup>2</sup>Michael C. Kirwen, The Missionary and the Diviner, Maryknoll, New York 1987 p xxii.

Everything related to divination and the spirit world was often publicly burned as condition for baptism. Also severe sanctions were imposed by the churches on those who participated in divination after their baptism.

However, as with polygamy, many of the new African Christians ignored the church's prohibitions on divination. They continued to seek out the services of the diviners whenever they were confronted with evil in their lives.

It seemed that Christianity did not materialise its teachings, and the ideas did not appeal to the people. And that is why during the period of evangelization and the evangelization which is taking place nowadays: the traditional religious leaders of the African people continue to perform their rituals and minister to the general population, including those who were/are now Christians.

Most of these foreigners did not take time with the Africans to understand them and not even realise where their real needs are; one should know about mythopoeic mentality and about education, about family relations, structures and obligations, about concept of hierarchy and authority. There are obligations and other rules of social conduct which are to be respected and to be reckoned with.

Missionaries had and some still have a problem of understanding between medicine man/woman and witch doctors. There should be understanding of these differences. The African traditional religions have the concept of the Supreme being, the Creator of us all and everything that exists, but they did not have the idea of the Son of God; there were/are intermediaries, the ancestors and other divinities. As a result the missionaries wiped away everything in African traditional religions, that it was nothing than practising witchcraft or devilish practices.

Bringing change does not mean to wipe out. One does not come to destroy but to help to make perfect. In order to be accepted, what is brought from outside should be felt and understood as being lacking in the local culture.

Missionaries could start building from what the African already had. God existed in traditional religions, religious leaders through the ancestors worshipped God and presented to him their problems, they gave thanks to God for their harvests and everything they received.

In this way missionaries could respect what they had found and see value in them, in order to communicate with people, it is necessary to get their feeling of mentality and evaluation of things all of which live in, by and through their beliefs and customs. It is perhaps impossible ever to come to a full understanding of a culture which is not one's own. One should try, however to see things from the point of view of those to whose culture they belong. Somehow missionaries did not have that in mind, we have to know that "No custom is odd to the people who practice it".<sup>3</sup>

## **II. The actual place of African Traditional Religious Leaders.**

"But nobody doubted the diviner's power or the cosmic vision underlying it. What he was doing and saying was immediately understood and respected by all. There were few in the crowd who had not benefited from the ministry of diviners even after they had been baptised into the Christian faith".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>I. C. Brown, In understanding other cultures "Prentice Hale, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963, p.p 14-15

<sup>4</sup>M.C. Kirwen, The Missionary and the Diviner, New York, Maryknoll, p.93.

It was a Christian community gathering for their monthly pastoral reflection day. At Ingri Catholic Church, in the North Mara District of Tanzania in 1983, a diviner was invited in order to share with the Christians the traditional ways of healing and how it takes place in the traditional religion.

Despite a century of Christian propaganda against the traditional African religions, some Christians leaders are now realising that African religious practices have not been effectively suppressed.

The values and traditions of African religions have continued to thrive in both urban and rural settings through the ministry of the diviners and elders - the religious leaders of the traditional religions, through the traditional rituals, prayers and ceremonies are the ones that fill the lives of ordinary Africans. The continuing vitality of African religious can be clearly seen in the extraordinary growth of the independent Christian churches. These churches freely interrelate Christian and African doctrines and practices in various combinations without being restricted and scrutinised by Western - trained church leaders who are unsympathetic to indigenization. I think that Christian leaders have to understand, in a systematic way, how traditional religions functions in people's lives and to know the traditional rituals and the official performers of those rituals. Some of the Christian leaders know the values and the importance of the African traditional religious rituals, but in public they condemn them. Integration of the two traditions has to be considered.

## **CHAPTER TWO: TYPES OF THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE NYAMBWA COMMUNITY.**

In looking at the African societies we see that they have many things in common, this is true also in leadership, whether in political matters or religious matters. The traditional religion of the Wanyambwa community has authorities who hold offices as, Medicine Men , Diviners, Mediums, Seers, Rain makers, and Traditional rulers. These Officers are specialists and experts in religious matters, they are the human keepers of the religious heritage.

### **1. MEDICINE MEN AND WOMEN[Wamany]**

Like most of the African communities, the Nyambwa community has medicine men\women. Looking at the interviews I did with different people in the villages of the Wanyambwa community, in central Tanzania; medicine men and women are very important in the Gogo society at large. The medicine expert seems to be the centre of everything concerning religious, political and cultural activities. Healing, putting things right when they go wrong, rescuing individuals in matters of health, general welfare, moral matters in the community, are some of the works of the medicine experts.

Medicine men and women are not available in each homestead, but there is a possibility of having few of them. e.g., none, one or two of them can be available in a village.

All other traditional religious leaders, i.e. Mediums, Diviners, Ritual elders, Rain makers, Seers, and Traditional rulers, perform their duties in association with the medicine man or woman.

Honor, respect and faith to the gods, ancestral spirits and the Giver\Provider and Creator are very essential elements for the better performance in their activities. For the medicine to work properly a client has to fulfill the conditions given by the medicine person.

In the Wanyambwa community and generally in the Gogo Society, both men and women can be medicine experts. And most of the women are widows, the reason is that it is a demand from the ancestral spirits in order to be free to offer sacrifice. They are rich widows, and I think that, it is because of the money and domestic animals given to them by their clients. If somebody is rich in the Gogo Society, it meant that the person has many cows, big farms of maize or sorghum, a big traditional house, many wives if is a man, and having many children.

#### **A. HOW TO BECOMES A MEDICINE MAN OR WOMAN.**

There are two ways of becoming a medicine experts by or through apprenticeship and through inheritance from their parents or clan.

##### ***i. Apprenticeship.***

This person, normally is an assistant or a servant of a medicine man or woman. to be a "shoulder" literary means to be a porter, a person who carries the religious objects of a medicine person, he or she is a helper, and should be always with the medicine man\woman during the ritual performance. This person is the one to be sent, when the medicine expert wants herbs, cloth, animal or any other thing for different purposes.

He or she assists the patients to express themselves to the medicine experts and sometimes welcoming and asking the clients whom and what kind of assistance they want. In religious activities, she/he is the one to carry out the religious objects and sometimes to carry out the religious rituals, even offering sacrifice.

***ii. Inheritance.***

It is believed by the Gogo society that, good and powerful medicine men and women, are those whose their power is inherited from one generation to another, but in the same clan. "Their is hereditary and God is thought to possess a would-be diviner in his or her adolescence"<sup>5</sup>.

Normally a child would inherit from the parents who are medicine experts. This child is always close to his or her parents and has got particular and special character within the family. Sometimes he or she can help the medicine expert in his or her activities, in this way he or she can be experiencing the career, though there is a difference with the apprentice or a pupil. This hereditary character, is within that family or clan, it is not for everybody in the society, but in a particular clan or family.

As I have pointed out, that their call starts at their adolescent age, it comes in the form of dreams.

As the child is growing up, also his or her knowledge of medicine and religious rituals grows up. It reaches a time when the parents or the medicine experts leaves some activities for this child but not very serious activities, but simple medicine and rituals.

It is obvious that in most cases a servant is not greater than the Master; Is true also for them; The Son or daughter will be able to take fully responsibilities only when,

the medicine experts has retired or died, otherwise the one to inherit will not be able to take fully the responsibilities.

"The medicine men and women are the greatest friends of the African societies, and each community has one or more of them"<sup>6</sup>. Through their title, one can think that, they are concerned with medicine only, in fact it is not, in the Gogo society they perform religious functions in addition. Even in other African societies, medicine experts also perform religious functions. Their medicine and medical skills are God-given, is an advice and a gift from God. Therefore God is very important in their activities, because without Him they can do nothing. In this case they are in the category of Religious Leader's group, who are believed to derive their power from God through their ancestors.

## **2. DIVINER,(MNYACHISANGU).**

In African Society any events such as sickness, death, or any type of disaster should have a cause, and normally is a person. Once it was said that, if somebody died, the Africans ask "*who caused that death,*" while the Europeans ask, "*what caused that death*".

Therefore it is the work of diviners to find out who or what caused a certain calamity in the society or in the family. As I have already said the medicine person is the centre of all traditional religious leaders in the Wanyambwa community; this means that, the diviner can't work independently, if he or she wants to find out hidden secrets or knowledge, why something has gone wrong, to tell who may have worked evil magic, sorcery or witchcraft against the sick or barren. After finding "*the who*" or "*the what*" has worked on

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<sup>6</sup>P.van Pelt, Bantu customs In Mainland Tanzania, Kipalapala, 1977, p.39.

something, that this is the cause of this problem, the diviner has to go to the medicine man or woman to get herbs or any other way of dealing with that problem.

Divination is a specialized profession which serves the interests of the society. "Diviners foretell the future, reveal the unknown and find out the wish of the gods, ancestral spirits, etc."<sup>7</sup> Diviners are consulted when something is lost, when barren women wants children, when there is an inexplicable disease, when one had a strange dream which required interpretation or during any crisis in life.

When the child is born diviners are consulted in order to foretell the child's future. "Diviners though sometimes refer you to the medicine man or woman, are basically spiritual counselors and physicians<sup>8</sup>".

People will bring a wide variety of requests to these '*priests*' as we can name them. Perhaps people or a person wants to go for a journey and wishes to know if a particular time is proper for the journey.

Perhaps they have been unsuccessful in farming or trade and wish to know why and what they can do about it. Perhaps there is sickness bothering them, may be fear that their enemies are planning to work magic against them and wish to seek spiritual protection.

They may have had an unsettling dream that requires interpretation. These are realities in the Gogo society and in most of African societies, there are uncertain situations, of course, and in such situation, the individuals feel uncomfortable, for that reason, they feel that there is a need to call upon the spiritual resources of the

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<sup>6</sup>J. s. Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa; London, 1970,p.224.

<sup>7</sup>Osags Odaka, Kemeticism, New York, 1995, p.70.

<sup>8</sup>Mitchell, R. C, African Primal Religions, USA, 1977,p.39.

'diviner-healer.' These are real human needs which are recognized as legitimate in African cultures at large and which the diviner is believed to be able to help.

"*Mnyachisangu or mtovi'latu*" in the Gogo society is a diviner, literary means that, the one who uses sandals or dice to find the problem, (*'ilatu' means sandal*) normally, they use sandals which are made of a cow skin. Individuals will bring their problems to a diviner, whose reputation they respect. Without even asking about the nature of the problem the diviner will perform the ritual of divination which will reveal the nature of the problem, its cause, and its cure.

In addition to their activities, diviners are also herbalists; clients may come to them just for their herbal remedies without divination.

#### **A. RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF DIVINATION.**

Divination is very much connected to religious aspect, "diviner's principle behind divination is to permit spiritual powers to give guidance through the outcomes of operations which involve chance".<sup>9</sup>

By the chance of sandals, often the answer is simply '*Yes*' or '*No*'. Holding a pair of sandals joined together on his hands, the diviner ,spits some saliva on them, utters some words, he throws them on the ground or on a small skin of a wild animal several times and their final position are noted. If both sandals face the same position the answer is '*Yes*' and if one faces up wards and the other downward the answer is '*No*'. There is no absolute way to predict the final position, which is purely the result of chance. There is a possibility of repeating the ritual of finding the problem.

But the belief is that when this form of divination is performed in the context of invoking a certain god or spirit, the final position is caused by that god or spirit and is a divine message. There are numerous methods of divination practiced by African peoples. The method cited above, if the problem is complicated the divination has to be repeated as many as it could reveal the truth. In their work spiritual power is much involved, than using any method. It is believed that their inspiration comes from the identified gods or ancestral spirits.

## **B. HOW ONE BECOMES A DIVINER;**

### ***i. Natural;***

There are clans whereby this gift of divination is inborn, it is experienced through dreams. When the person is young, it is not easy to believe, what the young person is experiencing through his or her dreams. It is said that, some times the ancestors visit, and tell him\her to do or to be what he/she has been dreaming. If the diviner to be is not responding to his\her dreams, the ancestors will give him\her a warning; that if he or she is not responding to that call something bad might happen to him or her.

The instructions about what to do and where to be done are given by the ancestors in a very miraculous way. A voice might come from nowhere, and command the diviner to- be to move from where he\she is and go a place where the spirits will direct him\her. After the diviner to be has fulfilled the requirements, the ancestors will continue to assist the person till he\she will be in control of the given vocation.

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<sup>9</sup>ibid. 40.

## ***ii. Apprenticeship.***

Most of them start as helpers or servants of the diviner. After a long time of working with the diviner, he/she they acquires the accumulated wisdom of their people. These helpers can be relatives, or one of the children of the diviner, or any other person whom the Gogo society name *mwivisa*.

Mwivisa means a person who is not your relative or an adopted child or person. Therefore these people, through long periods of apprenticeship acquire this knowledge of diviners. In that way they become diviner-healers themselves.

## **3. SEERS;(Wawizi).**

Among the Gogo society there are two types of Seers. The first type are those who are *possessed by spirits or divinities* and the second type are the *ritual elders*. These are people who are able to predict what is going to happen in the near future, e.g., the coming rain season, or the coming year. Some of them can suggest what to be done in order to overcome the problem.

### ***1. Those possessed by the divinities or spirits.***

Most of them are women, and people confuse this group with those people who are being possessed by the demons or evil spirits. The Wanyambwa), call them prophetess and they receive advice or are inspired by God, through the ancestors, to tell people what is going to happen in the near future.

Normally they give reasons, why something is going to happen; e.g. famine, droughts, diseases, and other major events. When the person is possessed by the spirits, she/he screams, while making noise and after few minutes she or he will start talking fluently, in a strange language, as we say in charismatic groups, 'speaking in tongues'. Elders are called at that time, so that they can listen to what she is talking and interpret it to the people. People had to hold her strongly till she lies down, and slowly she will be silent, and sometimes she might get asleep. Then the elders will give her water with a special respect and words,

*"May your message be a healing  
for the whole community or Clan".*

The person wakes up, the elders have to buy a black cloth and a lamb is slaughtered, a boiled soup mixed with some herbs is given to her and sacrifice is offered to the ancestors.

The message is taken to the chief of the village and he will decide what should be done. If there is a herb needed, the servants or his assistants/advisers will be sent to look or find it; if they have to see the medicine man or woman they have to do that. Any instruction the seer will give them should be considered as soon as possible, the chief of the village and the medicine expert, should perform rituals invoking the spirit concerned.

## ***2. Ritual Elders.***

Like the Gikuyu, the seers in the Nyambwa community, are supposed to be in direct communication with God.

Their revelation on matters, both small and great is from God. When harvesting time comes, these seers decide the time for agricultural sacrifices; this is done after harvesting when all the harvests are in the houses.

Therefore in order to thank God for what they have harvested, they offer sacrifice to God through their intermediaries, e.g., ancestors, divinities(*milungu*), and the spirits.

This act of the ritual elders-seers, in the Wanyambwa community is known as; "Elders sit together to consult the medicine experts and the chief of the village to examine the year."

Seers and mediums have almost the same role in the Nyambwa community and the Gogo society at large. Mediums also are possessed by the divinities concerned, they are regarded as mouthpieces of the divinities; they are both men and women chosen through being possessed by divinities concerned.

#### **A. HOW TO BECOME A SEER.**

Seers do not undergo any kind of training. It is believed that, the power they have is given by God. It is God's gift to them. Therefore seers have inborn power from God. It is inherited in the family or clan from one generation to the other. In case they do not detect it, the ancestors remind them, they visit them through their dreams that "your" vocation is to be a Seer. In that case they will give the seer to be all that he/she has to do.

#### **4. MEDIUM,(Mtowa Machisi).**

These people are so close to the diviners, and seers; Mediums also do divination, and they are known as "*mediumistic divination*", by the Nyambwa community.

The diviner is the object through whom the oracle is given. The spiritual power speaks through the diviner, who becomes the medium. The mediums are possessed by the spirit, the possession is in the form of a trance in which the behavior patterns of a person are interpreted as evidence of a control of his or her behavior by a spirit external to him or her.

What is proper to this kind of divination is a form of possession in which the person is conceived as serving as an intermediary between spirits and human being; this kind is common to the Wanyambwa community and the Gogo society at large.

The accent here is on communication; the actions and words of mediums must be translatable, which differentiates them from mere spirit possession or madness, which in Nyambwa language those kind of spirits are called "*mpepo*".

The former indicates an increase in one's vital power, and is therefore a blessing. The latter(*mpepo*) indicates a diminishment of life, or will lead you into very strange sickness, even death, and is therefore an affliction to be removed. In mediumistic divination the diviner always goes into a state of possession and becomes an instrument of speech for the possessing spirit.

Yet, at the same time the diviner becomes in a sense, possessor of the spirit because he or she can induce it to speak when there is a need. Wim Van Binsbergen, in his book, "*Religious Change in Zambia; Exploratory studies.*" has distinguished four major states of possession;

i). Possession as an extremely momentary and very intensive state, usually accompanied by drumming, singing, sometimes smoking.

ii). Possession as a permanent condition with diffuse, none-intensive manifestation, but which is at intervals re-activated.

iii). Possession as a permanent condition with diffuse, non-intensive manifestations, a condition reached after a short, unique period of more acute and intensive manifestations.

iv). Possession as a permanent condition throughout life, with only diffuse, non-intensive manifestations.

In the Wanyambwa community number four, that is; "possession as a permanent condition throughout life, with only diffuse, non-intensive manifestation" is very common. Sometimes it can be after a short time depending what events, disaster or calamity the society is going to face, due to lack of fulfillment of certain cultural rituals or immoral behavior in the society.

At the most intensive moment of possession, the possessor goes into a trance, jumps great heights without assistance, twitches his or her body, and foams at the mouth. The possessed person makes strange sounds, in the esoteric language of the diviners. After that the person often shows clear signs of fatigue and great irritability. Sometimes the medium may sing, and move around. At this time, questions are put into the spirit, who may respond. The spirit may also enumerate specific moral irregularities in the community which must be rectified.

The most important thing here is obviously not the symptoms, but what the symptoms reveal to the medium.

The mediumistic diviner's task is bringing into the open what is hidden or unknown, so that people can deal with relevant situations in an appropriate way. e.g.. If it is revealed that an ancestral spirit is causing disease or other kinds of disorders,

the diviner will identify the procedure to achieve health and luck. This may involve a sacrifice or simply a mention of the name of ancestor in question. his book, The Nyambwa belief is that the spirit is aggrieved because it has been forgotten, not only by the victim, but also by many of its other kin. It afflicts its living kinsman\woman sometimes in his or her personal capacity, but more often in his capacity as representative of a kin's group. If it is mentioned and hence remembered, by many people, it will henceforward benefit its victim who becomes a sort of living memorial to it.

#### **A. HOW ONE BECOMES A MEDIUM.**

Mediums belong to the category of the medicine experts both in their training and duties. As we have seen above the main duty of mediums is to link human beings with the ancestral spirits. Through them messages are received from the world of the ancestors to human beings. In the Wa-nyambwa or the Gogo society in general, mediumship is inherited from one generation to the other, it is called a contagious spirit possession in a specific family.

The other way is by apprenticeship, a person stays with a diviner, most of their early lives. It is done at the age of 15 or 16 years. Some are kept in a diviner's special house, so that they can undergo some experience. In some cases, diviners or medicine - men may be possessed and temporarily become mediums.

During the mediumship the person loses his or her own being or senses, and becomes simply an instrument of the spirit in him or her. The spirits which possess the medium are not harmful, they are friendly, are welcomed by people and remain briefly or temporarily in the mediums concerned. Most mediums are women.

The other way of becoming a medium, though is not found in the Wanyambwa community; it is associated with priests and temples or shrines. The mediums are reported in societies of East Africa in Uganda and some parts of Southern Tanzania, but a number of them in West Africa. "In their case, priests are never, subject to possession themselves, but have mediums attached to their temples who enter into trance at will.<sup>10</sup>" Possession, generally occurs for the first time when the person is attending a public religious ceremony.

At the movement of the dance and the example of some inspired devotees, the medium to be falls down in a fit or leaps into the ring and dances in an extravagant fashion. The presiding priests interpret this as a divine call, and persuade the inspired one to begin training for the service of a god. This training may last two or more years, during which the person must observe strict chastity. At the end of the training, sacrifice is offered and the trainee makes vows or promises to God or divinity concerned;

*"Today you have completed marriage with me."*

After which the person may marry or resume his marital position and duties if he/she was already married before going for training.

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<sup>10</sup>Mbiti, J.s, African Religion and Philosophies, New York, Anchor Books, 1970. pp,226ff.

## 5. RAIN MAKERS,(Watonya Mvula).

These are men and women, deeply religious people. They spend a lot of time praying to God to give rain to people, since rain is the source of life for all living things on the land. Their role as rain-makers is associated with other forms of leadership, such as being ruler or medicine man or women; etc. The fundamental aspects of being a rain-maker are;

- To perform the rain-making rituals.
- to observe and interpret weather conditions, and to observe changes in the sky both at night and the day time.
- to observe the movements and habits of insects, birds and certain animals as well as changes in plants and trees.

They have different names in different places; In the Gogo society as well as Wanyambwa community they are known as "*watonya mvula*", or "*wagumbu*", i.e. the one who rains, In Sudan they are called *keepers of rain* and those who pray for rain. In Uganda they are called *askers of rain*, means that those who cause rain to fall. In Kenya they are called *seers* or *watchers of rain* or *followers of rain*.

Therefore rain-makers have a duty to ask rain from God. They do not make rain, but only pray for it, perform rituals for it and as far as possible tell people when, how long it will rain. Among the Nyambwa community there are two major groups of rain-makers;

### *i).Dreamer-Rain makers.*

These are men and women who dream about rain, they are like prophets, this happens at the beginning of the year as they say literary, that means, the beginning of the rainy season.

These people dream, how much rain will they have during that coming rain period. As it is known that, they are rain-makers, people know them and they go to consult them each year before the rain season starts.

Therefore after their dreams, the Chief of the village has to be given the information about the dream, so that it can be examined if it is worthy to be interpreted or not. Then few special elders will be sent to the rain maker to examine if the dream has any significance. They carry with them a black piece of cloth known as "*kaniki*" size of a bed-sheet, a cow or white lamb and one shilling(Tsh) which was known as "*Lobo*" by the indigenous society, will be taken to the rain maker.

These people, who are sent to the rain-makers, normally are two or three elders; either wise men who are advisers of the King or ritual elders. They spend the night at the rain-makers place, then the second day, the rain maker will tell them, when it is going to rain and for how long, "how much rain" they talk in forms of how many "*clouds*", three or four clouds. In knowing that, the rain-maker will tell them, that the seeds have to be blessed by the chief or by any of the religious leaders. When they are supposed to go for sowing and they should have one special day as a "recollection day", i.e. no work journey, abstain from sex, and for the elders fasting is done, as the Gogo society call it; "*Widaha*", literary translation, means that '*stay far from...*' the day has to be well observed, is a sacred day.

After giving all these instructions to the wise men or ritual elders, to take to the chief; and what was brought to the rain-maker, remain with him/her. It is the duty of the rain-maker to perform some rituals with those objects, but they do remain as his or her properties.

What was predicted by these rain-makers became true in most cases; for that reason people were so keen in what was being prophesized.

ii). "*Askers of rain*" in Nyambwa community are called, "*Wagumbu*". I tend to think that, the term, askers of rain is more suitable, because, they do not predict or dream when and for how long is going to rain. These are people who have special power or "Vital Force" to communicate with the spirits as intermediaries between human beings and God. Askers of rain perform their role only when there is drought or when the rain has stopped for a long period. Therefore these people become rescuers of life, they were very few; within the whole community of the Wayambwa, and even the Gogo Society at large, there could exist only one Mgumbu. They used a black stone, (rain stone), *kaniki*, this stone is taken to the shrine, a place for religious rituals, it will be covered by the *kaniki*, *the Mgumbu* gets into the shrine while the rain- stone is covered by a *kaniki*. While he is performing the rituals, people surrounding that shrine, will be singing, dancing and drumming. After sometimes the Mgumbu gets into trance or ecstasy, it is the time when they come in touch with the spirits. The rain may start immediately; at that time the black stone produces water like sweats, when the Mgumbu becomes aware, or into his or her senses sends people home; sometimes it might rain before they reach home. There were two known rain askers in central part of Tanzania, especially in Manyoni District in Singida Region; Their names are *Matebe and Mwaja*.

There are many stories about them; Mwaja was a great Mgumbu, It was during colonial time, when the explorers heard about him (Mwaja), that he could cause rain even out of season. They went to Mwaja, and asked him;

"Mwaja we heard that you can rain or if you ask for rain to fall it will rain, now can you perform that miracle for us?"

He answered them;

"I can do so in case you bring to me a black bed-sheet(kaniki), and a traditional bed."

Mwaja was under watch till those two requirements were brought to him.

After they has bought them, Mwaja laid on the bed, and told them to cover him with the a *kaniki*, and wait for sometimes. After a short time, heavy clouds covered the sky with thunder storms, then it started raining heavily; that was a big surprise for the Europeans, they could not believe.

The explorers continued to interview him;

"Why are you not married?"

Mwaja answered them, "Why should I marry and bear children for a bird? I tell you a red bull will come from the East, and he will rule us and all our children will serve him." By a 'red bull' he meant the colonialists.

As *Matebe* became very famous, people created a lot of imaginary stories about him saying that, *some times in the morning, while warming himself with the soft morning sun-rays, there will be some green grasses on his back*. These were just stories to show how powerful and famous a rain-maker Matebe was.

The Gogo community speaks of the rain-maker as the 'shepherds of the people', this is because, the life of all living things depend on rain, i.e.; people , cattle, and all

other animals, plants and all which depend on rain. Rain-makers address their prayers direct to God, and if rains comes they offer thanks to their most remote forefathers, because they are the intermediaries between man and God.

It is believed that rain makers know the words of God, that is their work. Though most of them are men, there are also women rain makers.

The works of rain makers is not only to make rain, but also to "stop" it when it is too much and destructive, or when it is not particularly welcomed at a given moment or sometimes when there is a torrential rain with lightning and storms that can cause damages in the life of people; e.g. *el nino*.

This el-nino phenomena, happened in 1997/98, there were heavy rains almost all over the World, whereby floods, land slide, costed lives of many people, and even farms with crops were swept away. As in many African societies, the Wanyambwa community, rituals or other ceremonies, accompanying rain making, which is a community affair; Sacrifices, offerings and prayers are made, either directly to God or through the intermediary of the ancestors and spiritual agents . "From many parts of Africa it is reported that both people and rain makers know for certain that only God can make or produce rain."<sup>11</sup> Therefore rain makers play the role of intermediaries, whatever else they might do to enhance their position and activities. Rain makers were thus the focal point of communal need and request for rain.

Rain makers were very powerful in the Wanyambwa community because, most of the central part of Tanzania is an arid area. There was no enough rain and even nowadays it is still a problem of rain. In this case people fixed their eyes on the rainmakers.

The actual practice of the rain maker involves the use of sacred objects especially rain stones, some of which are rare and others are believed to have fallen from the sky; there are two kinds of stones; the first one has got a black colour, this rain stone, is known as the "*cloudy stone*". Secondly is a blue or red stone, this stone is used to stop the rain.

These stones are small with smooth surface, and round known as "*Nkulunjizo*", and the bigger sizes are known as "*Nkomango*", they are also round and have smooth surface.

Rain is regarded by African Societies as a sacred phenomenon; the Wanyambwa community observed days of rest, known as "*Widaha*" to mark the start of the rain season and many greeted the season with ceremonies of thanksgiving and prayers for sufficient rain. If there is a long drought rain-makers invite people, to prepare some local brew, animals, grains for those who still have, to go and offer sacrifice to the ancestral spirits. This ceremony is always accompanied by a dance which the Nyambwa people call it *Katavi*; There is a special place and is believed to be sacred, that is where they could offer their sacrifices. There is a small thatched hut near the forest, and it is believed that there the *Katavi* dwells, it is one of the great ancestral spirit. So people will start dancing and singing from the village to the *Katavi*'s hut and present their offerings, then they will go back home singing; on that day there will be no work to be done, it is a sacred day.

For many rain makers rain is the most explicit expression of the goodness and providence of God. "Thus rain is seen as the eternal and mystical link between past, present and future generations; it is one of the most concrete and endless rhythms of nature as it came, it comes and it will come."<sup>12</sup> Rain is the manifestation of the eternal, on

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<sup>11</sup>Mbiti, J. S, *African Religions and Philosophies*, Anchor Books, New York, 1970. p.236.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.237.

the land here and now. Rain makers not only solicit physical rain, but symbolize man's contact with the blessings of time and eternity.

#### **A. HOW TO BECOME A RAIN MAKER.**

Rain makers have assistants; though the rain maker is the ultimate authority over the making and stopping of rain. After the death of the rain maker who is the ultimate authority these assistants can carry on the responsibility.

Secondly, it is by inheritance; In the Wanyambwa community the knowledge and powers of rain making are handed down from one individual to his or her near relatives. It circulates within a certain family, and is being handed over from one generation to the other.

Thirdly, there was a class or clan which was and is still known as the class of rain makers, in Gogo language or the Wanyambwa community call them "*Wanyamuzula*."

This name came from a certain tiny frog, round and it is always sweating. It used to be found during ploughing time,(rain season) living underground.

These people are versed in weather matters, and may spend long periods acquiring their knowledge.

This sometimes is obtained from other rain makers, from observing the sky, from studying the habits of trees, insect and animals, from a study of astronomy and the use of common sense. They keep their eyes fixed towards the sky; not only to study the weather conditions, but also to pray to God who is both maker and Giver of rain.

## 6. TRADITIONAL RULERS.

There was a very close relationship between politics and religion in the Gogo society. This applied to most of the African societies. Traditional rulers in the Gogo society were known as "*Watemi*".

These were local chiefs, for that responsibility they were automatically connected to divine chieftainship. The relationship is clearly seen when chiefs officiate with high priests at the ceremonies connected with the worship of royal ancestral souls, and at important religious ceremonies; which included rituals relating to ancestor worship and fertility cults. The chief is believed to have divine power; there were sacred, people believed that their land depended on such relation between the chief (*Mtemi*) and the sacred.

Other religious leaders who are under the chief's land, if wanted to perform public rituals, e.g. rain makers, had to inform him, or sometimes the chief had to perform, e.g., blessing the seeds, farms, the first harvests, children who were going for initiation, and animals. In the Gogo society a chief had an elaborate court organization, which includes, advisers(*Wazengitumbi*), normally they were two.

These two advisers acted like representative in different activities. They could be sent to other chiefs in order to deliver messages, and sometimes they could perform rituals in case the chief is not available for whatever reason.

Other people were "*servers*" (*wavanda*), the term meant a slave, but not in a real sense, they were like house-boys or house girls, they could do domestic work, being sent for

casual matters as messengers, taking care of calves and cows, there were elders who could look after the children of the chief during initiation.

Drummer; There were two people or one person who was in charge of drums and a specialist in drumming for different events in the chief's compound, normally the chief's compound was known as "*Ikulu*", this has been adopted also by the government in Tanzania, that the State house is known as "*Ikulu ya Rais*".

Another person was the Medicine man or woman, whose house was in the court yard of the Chief. All these people whom I have mentioned above their homes are in the court Yard of the chief. This medicine expert, was a personal traditional doctor of the chief. Chiefs also, had the knowledge of medicine and other things in relation to their protective character; i.e., in order to protect themselves, they had to be equipped with a lot of traditional medicine. Also they should have knowledge of communicating to the ancestors and other divinities. For this reason a chief had to be connected with all other religious leaders in his land, and even in the far land. This could happen if there is a famous religious leader outside his territory. In the Gogo society there were no queens or women traditional rulers.

## **A. HOW TO BECOME A TRADITIONAL RULER;**

One could become a Traditional Ruler in two ways;

### ***I. INHERITENCE.***

The elder son of the first wife was the most likely person to inherit from his father, so long he had the qualifications to become a chief. This son might be appointed by his father, especially when the chief is dying.

All the children are called for the last and very important words, instructions for their future life. It is the time when the eldest son is being given the responsibility in the presence of other children. Sometimes, when the son is still young, an elder person will be selected to accompany the chief to-be. The uncle is the most likely person, and if not, one of those two advisers(*Mzengitumbi*).

This can be done till the young boy or the chief to-be, will be able or reach the age of exercising his power.

The elders will remain his advisers for life, that is, till their death. He has got also the power to introduce other laws , which he thinks are suitable for his work.

## ***II. ADVISERS(WAZENGITUMBI).***

When the chief does not have a suitable son to inherit the chair for different reason; e.g., he has only female children, he does not have children at all or he has children but, there is no suitable son for that chair; then one of these advisers may become a chief. It is because, they have been working hand in hand with the chief, that they learnt how to operate or to practice as chiefs.

Their works as representative of the Chief for sometimes, people have trust in them. For this reason they are accepted by the society as political and religious leaders.

To conclude, African Traditional religious leaders specialists are very important in African societies; they are in effect the repositories in knowledge, practice and, symbolically, of the religious life of their communities. They are the ones who make history of African traditional societies both Sacred and religious. Religious leaders are the symbolic points of contact between the historical and spiritual worlds. In them are the continuity and essence of African religious thought and life. These are the men, women

and children whose sacred presence in society makes their life and that of their communities a profoundly religious experience. Every village is within reach of one or more of such specialists. They are the concrete symbols and epitome of human participation in and experience of the religious universe. Without them, African societies would lose sight of and contact with this religious phenomenon.

African religiosity demands and appreciates their presence in every community, and at the reason one, specialist might be expected to function in more than one capacity.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLES OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE GOGO SOCIETY.**

"Human life is the battle field for the struggle between life and death, and human beings are combatants who opt for or against life."<sup>13</sup> In this struggle it is the people's rulers, who are also their religious leaders, who are structurally entrusted with the promotion of life.

In general, they are referred to as, 'the elders' they are the ethical experts of and for the people. They are teachers, counselors, and moral guiders. They are expected to lead a visibly ethical life themselves so their leadership will be both credible and acceptable to the people. In the final analysis, people turn to them to learn what is wrong, with a suffering individual or society and what ought to be done in the given circumstances to set things right with the vital forces.

The most important role of every leader is to do whatever is in his/her power to protect and prolong the life of the family and the community, following, "the order of the universe established by the ancestors and transmitted by tradition."<sup>14</sup> Neglect of this duty has consequences to the authority the leader wills.

A traditional ruler, in case of wars, he blessed his warriors and prayed for them far away from the scene of battle. Indeed, the duty of the chief is to do all he can to prevent hostilities that might lead to the shedding of blood. It is said that the most important service of religious leaders in day to day life is to counteract witch-craft.

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<sup>13</sup>T. Vitvliet, A place in the Sun; An introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World, Maryknoll, New York, 1985, pg. 92.

<sup>14</sup>Magesa L. African Religion. The moral traditions of abundant life, Maryknoll, New York, 1997, pg. 97.

Witchcraft in most of the African societies is a greatest wrong and destructive act on earth, of which all other wrongs are but variations, emanations, or manifestations. Most of the time, sufferings, sickness, and death have their origin in witchcraft, that is why if a calamity or any disaster happens in the family, the first question is, "*who has caused it?*"

If religious leaders have any influence on the people, then it consists in counteracting acts, or even intentions, of witchcraft, for witchcraft constitutes the pervasion of everything that is good and desired in human beings, it is the personification or incarnation of all that is anti-life, and therefore the ultimate enemy of life on earth. Religious leaders in African traditions, also advice and give direction to people in questions of worship and veneration; on how to relate to God, the spirits and the ancestors. Reverencing God, honoring the ancestors, and fearing the spirits are directly relevant to human life. They occur within the context of human needs and wants. If living men and women of the Wanyambwa community are the "*axis*" or center around which these activities revolve, the primary purpose of acts of worship and reverence is neither God nor the ancestors, but the well-being of the person or the community concerned.

African Religion is human-centered, even overtly utilitarian in the communal rather than the individualistic sense, and its officials are charged with the responsibility to see to it that this well being endures. It is the responsibility of the religious leaders of the society, as well as the elders in the house hold, to pass on orally and be examples of all the moral codes of the clan and the whole community at large from generation to generation.

Only by properly living life in this world as indicated by tradition, are the individual and the community guaranteed life beyond.

People had a lot of expectations from their leaders that they had unique responsibility to pass on tradition because, by virtue of their being leaders, "they are ontologically in closer union and communication with God and the ancestors than the rest of the population."<sup>15</sup>As the ancestors they possess power over humanity and creation in that they have been endowed with a stronger vital force than the living.

Religious leaders must be in constant touch with the ancestors who are actual members of the community, together with the yet to be born, and enjoy practically the same rights and responsibilities as the living. And may be the ancestors have even slightly more rights and responsibilities on account of vital power they possess. Leaders have to strengthen the bonds of kinship among the living here on earth and are required to strengthen the bonds between the living and the ancestors. The link between the living and their departed ancestors is essential, and it is the living who invariably suffer the consequences for any breakdown of this kinship tie, whether intentional or inadvertent. Again the religious leaders in the community have the responsibility of guarding against this eventuality.

The responsibility of any leader encompasses both aspects of life, i.e.. religious and secular; for this African religion embraces the whole life of the people and there is no distinction. Therefore leader's purpose is always to enhance life. The leader is judged on that single criterion. Leadership is good and acceptable if it enhances life; it is bad and ought to be changed if it results in the diminution or destruction of life.

By birth everyone in the Nyambwa Community belongs to African Religion, therefore it is communal. In this aspect religious leaders are responsible to the entire community and are accountable to it.

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<sup>15</sup>.Magesa, L. op.cit. pg.69.

This applies to the entire social hierarchy, from the father of the family, the head of the lineage or clan, to the tribal chief, as all the various experts in between. The responsibility and accountability of each leader is seen within the context of that hierarchy.

As I have pointed out above, religious leaders have the responsibility to ensure that the bond between the living and the ancestors remains intact so that the community enjoys the "where withal" for the 'preservation and continuation of life.' Leaders are enjoined to see to it that the community enjoys plenty of food, good health, firm security, and numerous offspring. Again the 'religious and civil' aspects are two sides of the same reality.

Therefore religious leaders, were charged with responsibility to see to it that things are right between the visible and the invisible world and in the visible world itself. They have to restore by prayers, sacrifices, and offerings, right relationships, good company, or harmony whenever these are threatened or severed. Religious officials or religious functionaries lead different religious rituals as their duty, e.g.. festivals and rituals, offering sacrifices, invocation of the spirits and ancestors, offering libation to the ancestors , all these are done on different occasions and for different purposes.

### ***1. Festivals and Rituals;***

In most of the African religions people do not worship the Most High God directly. They believe that there are gods, spirits and the ancestors who can reach Him (God) easily, also they are together with the Most High God. These ancestors, gods and spirits are believed to be living among the people and are always in touch with the people.

For that reason, they are good intermediaries who work on God's behalf. One of the prayers, done by ritual elders, for a sick person or person with a problem in the family among the Wanyambwa community is;

*"Hale agwe Baba, koko,  
Minga wamwona umwanayu  
vyono atamice; Mlechelaje  
muwili upole, nanye msole  
imalenga gano, mung'we ne  
nyama ino mulize."*

This prayer is said to the ancestors, so that they can bring healing and health to the sick person. It is presided by a ritual elder. "Nevertheless, there are occasions when people have to worship Him directly."<sup>16</sup> This may happen when a festival is organized in God's honor. It is done mostly after harvesting, where people offer Him their harvests, animals, money, etc. The chief prayed at festivals, for blessing on all the people. In west Africa among the Ijo, they used to hold a three days festival, called 'feast of the creatures, this feast was held every seven, fourteen and twenty one years.

It was directed by the priest, the festival was the occasion for the community to feast, eat, drink and dance. In the Wanyambwa community when a child is going for a long journey, e.g., in foreign countries for studies or to a new life, the parents ask blessings direct from the Most High, and the ancestors to protect him or her.

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<sup>16</sup>Osaga Odaka, Kemetism, The world Religion for black peoples, New York, 1995. pg.58.

Therefore religious leaders have different ways in which worship to deities and ancestors are conducted. These include sacrifices, offering, invocation, prayer and libation.

Besides this, during worship a number of activities are also carried out by religious leaders.

***i.Sacrifice;***

This involves the offering of the life of an animal or some other living objects to the divine power or powers as part of religious ceremony and as a fundamental part of worship. A white lamb, white goat and a white chicken (*ntemba or mpupwe, that is a female chicken which has not yet started laying.*), are very important for offering sacrifices among the Wanyambwa community. Whiteness is a symbol of purity, and for a chicken which has not yet started laying eggs, it symbolizes purity or virginity.

Since the life of an animal sacrificed is symbolized by blood, the latter is seen as the most precious offer to the gods and the ancestors. What is sacrificed depends largely on the taste of the deity which is identified by an oracle. The process includes exposing a small section of the sacrificed animal, in a calabash or on a mat before the shrine or under a sacred tree, sometimes it can be buried besides a tomb of one of the ancestors.

The rest is shared among the community, indicating the link between the living and the ancestors and their God together, and also as a sign of friendship and concern.

"There are seven categories of sacrifices or offerings generally recognized in black African religion"<sup>17</sup>, some are true also for the Wanyambwa community. These are;

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pg,60.

- a). The meal and drink offerings which are done at the household shrines or on sacred days within the communal shrines; among the Wanyambwa sacrificial offering is done besides the tombs of their ancestors or under the sacred trees.
- b). Offerings in appreciation of what the deities and ancestors have done, especially if there is a success in an endeavor, this is done mostly after harvesting; it is a thanks giving sacrifice.
- c). Votive offerings which involve the making of vows while requesting for favors of what the gods and ancestors would get should the request being made be accepted.
- d). Offerings made during request for forgiveness of wrong things done which could have angered the gods and ancestors, it is an expiatory sacrifice.
- e). Substitutionary sacrifices/offerings which take the place of another person whose life is being threatened or about to be terminated.
- f). Sacrifices performed to prevent disaster.
- g). Sacrifices done at the beginning of everything new, e.g.; birth, circumcision, marriage, during passage of life, establishing a new home, etc. All these activities are led by traditional religious officials.

***ii). Offerings;***

It is any gift, including sacrifice, made to an ancestor or to the supernatural being in worship. It can be food, e.g.; porridge, ugali, rice, fruits, or any harvest, it can be drinks, e.g., local brew, or animal sacrifice. The religious official who is leading that ritual, while offering; the supernatural being is requested to accept the gift, e.g., in the Wanyambwa

community normally they offer the local brew and the remains of the intestines of the animal saying that,

*"Ng'weze malenga gano,  
ne nyama ino, yeze  
ilumbo lietu ukwako,  
gwegwe Mulungu Majinya."*

This means;

"Drink this water, and eat this meat, may they be our thanksgiving to you, Almighty God the Giver."

This prayer is said by the ritual elder during the offering of gifts to a Super Natural being.

### **iii). Invocation.**

It is an act of calling upon the Most High God, or ancestors during libation. As officiant (religious official) pours libation on the ground, he or she addresses the Supreme deity, an ancestor by name, attribute or praise and requests whoever is addressed to accept the worship.

### **iv). Libation.**

It is an act of pouring some liquid on the ground to the spirits accompanied with prayers. The liquid which is frequently used is the local brew. The Wanyambwa community uses locally made liquor or tobacco and sometimes they do spit some saliva on the ground.

During worship libation is poured on the ground in front of the shrine, under the sacred tree, before the tomb or in a cave and sometimes on the sacred portable object, e.g., on a traditional stool, a pot or calabash.

In the course of the worship people sing, and dance; this is normally done on communal worship or on festival occasions, as well as during funeral rituals. Therefore it is the role of a religious leader to offer sacrifice, offering gifts as a thanksgiving to God, the gods or ancestors, and offering or pouring libation to the spirits. These acts of worship are very important to the African societies, including the Wanyambwa community. And that is why Traditional religious leaders are the great friends of the African Communities.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE PLACE OF THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.**

It was in 1985 when I went to a minor seminary called Maua Seminary in Moshi which is being run by the Capuchin's Ofm. to start my form one studies. The Sunday after opening the school we had an outing, at least to become familiar with the environment. As we got out of the seminary compound, we met many people on the road, walking to their respective homes. What I discovered from them was that, for those who recognised that we were "seminarians" as they used to call us, made a "sign of the cross". I could not depict what was happening, till I asked one of the senior student. The answer I was given is that , Christians in Moshi, especially in those mountainous areas like Maua, have great respect for the priests, seminarians and religious.

The sign of the cross was only made by the old men and women, they could make it even when they are passing near the church or near the cemetery. One day I asked a young lady, "why don't you make a sign of the cross, when you meet a priest, seminarians or even when you pass near the church!" the answer given to me was that "that is an old fashion, is for the wazee i.e. for the old people.

This means that the young generation do not see any value or meaning on what their parents used to do. Coming back to our African traditional religious leaders, they are really respected by the old people, this is because they see something appealing to them, every event happening in the family, the parents have to interpret it into their own cosmology.

I remember one day a big snake entered into our house in the absence of my parents, through the help of the neighbours and friends we managed to kill it. When my parents came back, I told them of what had happened in their absence, the first remark of my mother was that somebody sent it into our house! We can see my mother's worldview, when the snake came into the house, I saw it as a normal snake, on its way looking for daily bread and that was all for me.

From these two examples, we can see the reality of the contemporary society. Our parents are still in touch with the old traditions, whether they are applicable or not in our world today, but they still hung on them.

Traditional religious leaders in the Nyambwa society still have a place, and even in most of the African societies. People are still consulting them, whether a Christian or a non-Christian, this shows how important these people are.

The slight change of mentality, the Nyambwa community has towards the traditional religious leaders is mostly because of Christianity. As Christianity came and the other kind of civilisation, new mentality was infused among the people, missionaries and colonialists built schools and taught the Africans new ideas. This strategy has continued to our times, there is no way we could escape, all African mentality and practices seemed to be devilish; In that case the missionaries and colonialists had to abolish everything to do with African religions, they demolished the African places for worship and the sacred objects.

But despite of the incursion of foreign religions and the Western system of therapeutics, medicine men/women, diviners in the Nyambwa traditional religion are still

influencing the Gogo contemporary society. Muslims, Christians and others patronise local diviners in Nyambwa land for one problem or the other. The issue of religious difference is not considered important when it comes to solving a problem, physical, mental, spiritual and mystical. Despite of improved medical conditions and accelerating technology progress, beliefs in Gogo diviner and medicine men/women have persisted. Observations have shown that there are many Gogo, literate and non-literate who still hold tenaciously to the beliefs in medicine men/women especially those that are relevant to their present day needs. Although they may rely on the English medicine or spiritual healing, they still augment this by the use of Gogo traditional medicine.

It is interesting to note that many diseases especially related to mental and psychological disorders which cannot be cured in the modern hospitals are being treated in the herbal homes of the Nyambwa traditional healers.

In contemporary Gogo society, there is always the sustained and insatiable demand for traditional healers benefits, the elimination of evil agent, a sense of access to power, protection, the enhancement of status, health , increase in prosperity and relief from both physical and mental anguish in day-to-day life. These are the various worldly activities which require the reassurance of super natural good will and favour.

As long as these activities and functions variously appeared to be fulfilled through the application of Nyambwa traditional religious leaders, and as long as people continue to show anxiety with regard to their future, Nyambwa traditional religious practices, through the agency of its traditional religious leaders will continue to be relevant to the contemporary society.

They embraced Christianity with a full force, but it seems that, it does not sustain their demands. Most of the people in Nyambwa society abandoned their traditional beliefs, when Christianity came. But today they have started consulting their traditional religious leaders, even the Christians, because they believe that it is there that their needs can be met. Therefore traditional religious leaders are still influential they cannot be denied in Nyambwa community and in the Gogo society at large.

# **CHAPTER FIVE: COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS.**

## **I. Differences:-**

The call to traditional religious leadership for the Nyambwa and most of the African traditional religious leaders comes from the ancestral spirits. It is the ancestors who hold the key to health, prosperity and good life. The person seem to be chosen at random by the ancestors to become their spokesperson, the call of the ancestors is very dangerous, dramatic and painful.

Like the Christian priests, some of the African religious leaders especially those who are known as medicine people or herbalists are being trained and also they appeal to the experience of apprenticeship as the source of their power and ability to interpret the needs and desires of the ancestors to the living. This traditional religious call for the Nyambwa community is also open to women; women perform different rituals for healing, offering sacrifices etc.

The lifestyle of the traditional religious leaders in Nyambwa community is very different from the Christian type. A religious leader has to undergo all rituals e.g. circumcision, marriage etc. They live with their families. They are married people with children in normal routines of life, they live a common life with their communities, they have to take care of their families, they do not have benefactors or contributions after a specific time from their communities.

It is only at the performance of rituals they put on a specific dress and sometimes, they do not have official dressing though some have got few bracelet and rings around their hand wrists and around the necks.

Leadership in African tradition has to consider several things; a person after circumcision rituals was considered adult, capable of marriage and leadership in the community, even though he/she has not exercised, but under the guidance of the elders in the community.

The case of celibacy for the Nyambwa traditional religious leaders never existed. It would only make sense if it were due to the demands of some ancestral spirits, the price one pays for the power of becoming a medium of that spirit.

The failure to share one's life through procreation is interpreted by us as a tragic refusal to take full responsibility for the great gift of life given through the creator God.

In the Nyambwa community the unmarried person was seen as unstable, even nowadays the traditionalist people see the unmarried person as unstable, disturbed and not fully mature, is an incomplete person.

For the Nyambwa traditional religious leader, the power to speak for the ancestors is due to a special mystical experience or contact with the dead. Most people may not believe but somehow they know there is something, the healing of people mentally, spiritually and physically, has given and continue to give them their position and power.

The African traditional religious leader divine with dice in finding a problem, or other objects which are believed to be religious objects and ideal for divination.

There are no sacraments on the traditional African priesthood, their functions are structured on the world view, there is no laying hands on them in order to have the power

to heal, but it comes direct from the ancestral spirits. For their service to the people, the divination by the way of contrast, is for the whole community. They do not segregate people, whether is a Christian or any other community, all are given the service needed.

The tune for healing of the Nyambwa traditional religious leaders comes through the spirits of the ancestors, or through the guidance of the spirits of the ancestors

It is believed by the Catholics that the holy spirit gives a young man the desire to serve the Christian community in a special way by dedicating their entire lives to the church, this desire or the inner feeling is called “vocation”. This call starts when they are still very young, nine or ten years of age, others feel this vocation later in life.

These young men apply to a special school where they begin their training to become religious leader of the Christian church, unlike the traditional religious leaders who are called by their ancestral spirits and start serving them directly, Christian religious leaders have to undergo training in their special schools for religious life and priesthood.

While they are undergoing their training, special people called spiritual directors, to guide them on their journey, they also help them individually to discern their inner calling whether it is true or not, and if the individual is a fit candidate, spirituality and physically to undertake the role of a priest.

After completing their training, and if the young man seem to be able to be a priest, the Christian leader called a bishop lays hand on their heads and ordains them to work as his assistants, this rite is called “ordination or holy order”.

In this act of laying hands, the priest is sealed with an indelible mark on the spirit of a person, making him a priest forever. He has the power to serve the church in an official capacity as a teacher, healer of the sick and ritual leader of Christian community under

the direction of the bishop, who is the chief of the Christian community in a particular area.

This ritual, the ordination, most of the time seem to separate the priest from the family members and the Christian community; they are called "clergy". They wear distinctive dress when they perform the special rituals of the church and often outside rituals.

The Roman Catholic church has insisted that those who offer themselves to serve as priests, agree not to marry, not to have a family, therefore celibacy is very important.

The rule of celibacy for the Catholic priest does not come from God but is clearly only a discipline of the Roman Catholic church. It is a rule which is imitated from Jesus Christ, he was not married, therefore the priests who seek to be like Christ as closely as possible should not marry and this seems to be the basic custom.<sup>18</sup>

The special rituals of the church, the sacraments, celebrating the Eucharist, the memorial feast of Jesus which is performed each Sunday or every day and some of the sacraments, they alone priests are the ones to perform the rituals.

Priests have to leave their homes and go to the missionary lands for service, they do not stay with their family. As mediums of Christ, priests attempt to make his words and truth meaningful and present to the living, and every Christian is called to this same ministry not only the priests. That is why they insist that Catholic priests should be unmarried and academically trained by nature; the catholic priesthood is a divinely instituted ministry, it is exercised by priests and bishops, since they share in the function of the apostles in their own degree, " Priests are given the grace by God to be the

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<sup>18</sup>M. C. Kirwen, The missionary and the Diviner, Maryknoll, New York, 1987, p.97

ministers of Jesus Christ among the nations, the very unity of their consecration and mission requires their hierarchical union with the order of bishop.<sup>19</sup>

Priestly life is generally apart from ordinary people some in special institutions some in special religious communities and as missionaries.

The tune for healing for the priest and Christians in general comes through Jesus Christ, this also leads to the ordination of men only and not women, “Only a baptised man can validly receive sacred ordination”, and the minister of sacred ordination is a consecrated bishop.

### ***B. Similarities***

Both African traditional religious leaders and the Catholic priests by their nature are spiritual leaders and mediators between God and human beings, as “diviners” in many ways, officially they interpret the will of God to the living, through their administration of special rituals, healing and counselling.

Their mediation seem not to be direct from God to human beings, because African traditional religious leaders, stand between the living and God through the ancestral spirits, and through Jesus Christ the catholic priests mediate between the Christian and God.

The roots for both priestly ministries is service to the community in order to keep it in touch with its cosmic leader. For the Christians is Jesus and for the traditional religions are the ancestors who hold the key to health, prosperity and the good life. This is conferred through their respective rituals, for the Christians through sacraments, and the traditional religions leaders through divination.

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<sup>19</sup>The Code of Canon Law, Collins, Bangalore, 1983, Canon 1024, p. 183

Priests and traditional religious leaders are the ones who facilitate the smooth order in the society. Their main pre-occupation is to help those who have fallen on evil times.

Some years are needed for preparation of their ministries, though there is a difference in duration and the mode of training.

To become a religious leader is a call, for both the Catholic priests and the Nyambwa religious leaders. The Catholic priests claim that they receive that call through the Holy Spirit, while the Nyambwa traditional religious leader, the call/vocation comes through the ancestral spirits. There are some of the similarities which I have not pointed out, but as we always talk about Inculturation, understanding who are the African traditional religious leaders plus their rituals is very important.

As priests in the Catholic church, link the faithful Christian people to the cosmic person of Jesus through sacraments of salvation, same way the African traditional religious leaders link the people to the ancestors to obtain reconciliation and relief.

In retrospect, the African people had to understand the Christian priests as diviners. There was no other role or model into which the Christian priest could fit,

the more a Christian priest takes on the role of the diviner, the divinely inspired healer the more effective and meaningful he becomes in the lives of the Africans. The fact that the African Christians can find nothing wrong with calling Jesus a diviner, in song, is a clue that the kind of religious leadership that the people know, want and understand is that provided by diviners.

## CONCLUSION:

The fact is that there are forces in human being and in the surrounding world of which we do not yet know the exact nature but which can be used by specially gifted persons; Think of hypnotism, magnetism, telepathy. Even natural phenomena such as the phases of the moon, have their influence on human beings, animals and other things there is magnetic attraction between different materials. Some of these traditional religious leaders who are specially gifted may moreover use all kinds of things in the exercise of their power and also say that they have recourse to ancestral spirits.

It is not easy to explain what happens with the African traditional religious leaders. In my encounter with two of them, one is called Mwaja from Sanza village and another is called Nyau who is very famous in a village called Ikasi and even the neighbouring villages in Eastern part of Singida region.

These two people have been medicine men for more than forty years; with surprise they cannot explain to you exactly how does the divination help them to detect a problem or predict what will be happening in the near future. Their religious objects and the rituals done are visible, but how to read from their rituals, what they have detected is an unexplainable thing, it is a mystery. The fact is that in Nyambwa community and in other African communities there are authentic traditional religious leaders, through their ancestral spirits heal, and restore the lives of the people. These religious leaders have special power given by their ancestral spirits to serve the people.

This fact can not be removed from the Africans even the African Christians priests and religious still have strong belief in the ancestral spirits that-they still have power over the living. They can destroy or restore the lives of the living.

There are also fake ones, who call themselves traditional religious leaders who cheat people, playing magic and witch-crafts, in order to make money for their own benefit.

We should be aware that the African way of thinking might differ greatly with Christianity. It is clear that the world views are the controlling factor in the way religious leadership for the African traditions is structured. For the African traditional religious leaders, with their one-world view, it is the ancestors who hold the key to health, prosperity, and the good life. The problem of course is how to contact them so as to know their wills and desires. Through my interviews, I discovered that the key ideas about African religious doctrines are so basic and so self-evident that everybody just assumes them, they are never argued. They are as natural as seeing things with one's eyes.

Therefore the Christian church must share in African efforts to rationalise and modernise the African ancestors' tradition. In spreading the gospel, missionaries, priests and other religious should have as their pivot the values which are characteristic of the soul of the Africans, and should not disorganise the established order. The African to be christianised is not hanging in the air, he or she is rooted in a psychological and geographical present, in a complex of customs, not taking this into consideration is at least imprudent and could be the surest way of producing apostates on the conveyor belt.

I can thus say that for Christianity to spread in Africa it is necessary to take into account the African's mentality.

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