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TOWARDS AN EMBIAN APPROACH TO GRACE

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for the Bachelor's Degree in Sacred Theology**

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To all Embians and the Missionaries who dedicated their lives
to imparting Christian faith in Embu diocese

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

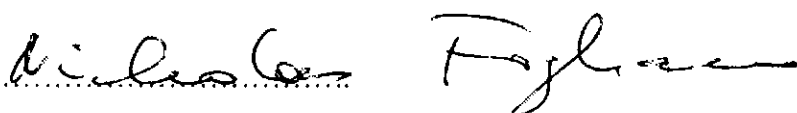
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor's Degree in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:..........

Name of the Student:

Date:.....*31.01.2005*.....

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College Supervisor.

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INTRODUCTION

Lonergan, a well-known theologian and philosopher of the 20th century, asserts that “a theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.”¹ In the process of inculturation two elements are involved – culture and faith. In the case of Africa (and in our case), it is the Christian faith which meets different cultures. It is only when both (faith and culture) enrich each other and a mutual relationship is established that the process of inculturation can be fruitful.

The aim of this short thesis is first to state the current situation of the Embians as pertains to the Christian faith. Second, to reflect on how Christ's presence can enrich and elevate the Embian culture. By doing this, the Embians will be greatly rejuvenated by the new life of grace.

This paper consists of three chapters which do not carry the same weight. In the First Chapter, we shall have an overview of Embu diocese. Here we shall have a glance of the geographical location of Embu in Kenya, the notion of God and worship, and then, in a few words we shall come to know when the seeds of Christian faith were “planted” in Embu diocese.

¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), xi.

The Second Chapter gives the world-view of the Embians. This will help us to get an idea of the general Embian mind-set in the contemporary times. We shall outline some of their virtues and challenges.

Our main Chapter is the Third one. A substantial amount of time of reflection has been given in this chapter. It is an attempt to integrate grace in the Embian world-view. This has been done by analysing the values and challenges already discussed in Chapter Two and trying to show how Christ's presence can enrich, transform and perfect them.

Chapter 1

Embu: An Overview

1.1 The Geographical Background

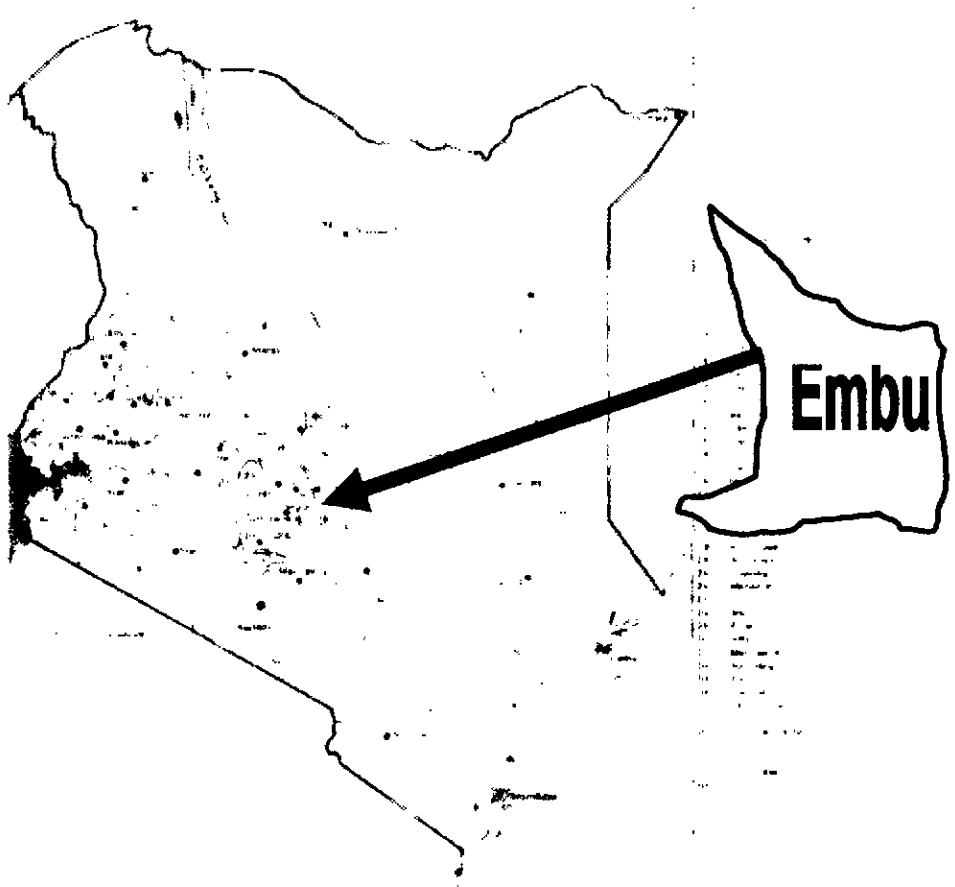
The Embu² people live in the Eastern Province of the Republic of Kenya, to the south-eastern slopes of Mount Kenya, spreading over 800 square miles of land demarcated by natural geographical features.³

To the north are the southern slopes of Mount Kenya and to the northwest is river Kii in the forest, to the west is river Ruingaci downstream to the ford of Njue of Ndia and which separates the Embu from the Agikuyu of Ndia and Gicugu. To the north and east is river Thuci which separates the Embu from Chuka and Meru. The southern border that divides Embu from Mbeere runs from Thuci river to Ireremaari, Riria, Kanyuambora, Giatatha, Karurumo stream down to Ena river, Mukuuri, Kathanje

² The Embu has been erroneously regarded as a splinter group of the Kikuyu ethnic group. Even their language has been dismissed as a "primitive" dialect of the Kikuyu language. However, as oral history testifies, the Embu is a community with a definite history as well as a culture that qualifies it to be recognised as an ethnic group with a definite cultural identity. See Chesaina Ciarunji, *Oral Literature of the Embu and Mbeere* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1997), 3. Henceforth Embu People will be referred to as "Embians".

³ Cf. Ciarunji, 3.

stream, Riithori, Kagera, Ivuro-Ikia, Kiangungi, Gacoka and joined Ria Njue.⁴ The map⁵ below shows the location of Embu district in Kenya.



Embu is about 210 square miles and the main physical feature is Mount Kenya⁶ that stands like a formidable wall to the north and north-west at the altitude of 17, 058 feet above sea level. This is followed by the conical hill of Karue and the forested Kirimiri hill, near Mukuuri. The rest of the Embu land is broken up deeply in places

⁴ Cf. H.S.K. Mwaniki, *The Living History of Embu and Mbeere* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), 1.

⁵ Cf. George Senoga-Zake, *Folk Music of Kenya* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1990), xii.

⁶ Mt. Kenya is not in Embu District (it is in Kikuyu Land), but it is visible from almost all parts of Embu.

except along the Embu/Mbeere border. The altitude of useful land ranges from about 4,000 feet to 7,000 feet. The area is covered mostly by good volcanic soils.⁷

1.2 God and Worship in Embu

Generally, Embians knew God. It was a misconception when the first missionaries came to Embu land and made a hasty conclusion that Embians were pagans and that they never knew God. Embu people worshipped the powerful *Ngai*⁸ popularly known as *Mwenejeru*⁹ or *Mweneiyaga*¹⁰ who had created them, other animals, birds, the mountain of *Kirinyaga*,¹¹ rivers and everything else which existed. They had not seen Him nor did they know the particular place where He was but thought he was everywhere although His favourite spots when He was not in heavens were sacred grooves, *Kirimiri* and Mt. Kenya forests. When people gathered together to ask *Mwenejeru* for wealth, favour etc., they worshipped. Many instances caused people to worship, for example, asking for favours, thanksgiving for favours received, before planting, before harvesting.¹²

⁷ Cf., Mwaniki, 2.

⁸ *Ngai* is the word for God (the creator) in Embu. The word literary means "the one who shares", thus the name *Mugai* for men derives its meaning from *Ngai*. The Embians believe that God is the owner of everything and thus he is the one who distributes them everywhere.

⁹ *Njeru* literary means "white". There is a snowcap at the top of Mt. Kenya. Now Mt. Kenya was believed by Embu people as the dwelling place of God, just like Zion of the Israelites. Therefore *Mwenejeru* meant the owner of the "whiteness".

¹⁰ *Nyaga* is an Embian word for brightness. *Mweneiyaga* means "owner of the brightness." He was believed to be omnipotent and omnipresent. His favorite place of abode was on top of Mt. Kenya. See Ciarunji, 8.

¹¹ This is an Embian-Kikuyu name for Mt. Kenya, meaning the Mountain which has brightness (the snowcap at the top).

¹² Cf., Mwaniki, 149.

1.3 Introduction of Christianity in Embu

After the British conquest of Embu in 1906, Christianity was introduced at Kigari in September, 1909 by the first missionary, Rev. Hooper, who had traveled from Weithaga.¹³

The story of Christianity in Embu is full of trials and setbacks. The first Anglican missionaries to penetrate Embu region came in August 1912, when Dr. E. May Crawford and his wife, Mary, were sent by CMS (Church Mission Society) to spread the gospel and heal the sick. Previously they had served as missionaries at Kigari and Kabare between 1910 and 1913. Primarily, the quest was to explore and then practice evangelism. After their arrival, they were welcomed by chief Rumbia, who greeted them with much enthusiasm. However, difficulties they encountered were endless, including tropical heat, fear of wild animals and attacks by tsetse flies and mosquitoes, harsh geographical conditions such as lack of water, and tedious journeys. All these factors made them retreat and perhaps think that this land had few attractions for outsiders.¹⁴

The first successful missionary was a Canadian, named Rev. John Comedy, who had worked previously in Kigari from 1915. Through the effort of the first converts he was able to expand the mission to Embu region. This expansion was implemented with collaboration with the colonial government by the operating of the school and congregations.

¹³ J.N.K. Mugambi (ed). *A Church Come of Age. Fifty Years of Revival in the CPK Diocese of Embu 1942 - 1992* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1992), 10.

¹⁴ Reley, B. W. Brokensha, D. *The Mbeere in Kenya Changing Rural Economy*. Vol. 1., (London: University Press of America, 1988), 14-16.

In 1925, the colonial government decided to upgrade the standard of education to push further towards “civilization”, and introduced primary schools which were also to be run by CMS missionaries. The native council established in Kenya by 1924 encouraged the schools to attain the highest possible degree of efficiency.¹⁵

1.4 Seeds of the Catholic Faith in Embu

The districts of Embu and Meru were entrusted to the hands of Consolata Missionaries when their mission was elevated to an apostolic vicariate in 1909. However, Meru - Embu territory was not opened to the Europeans until 1911. At this time, the Anglicans had already “occupied” Embu. The Anglicans and Methodists pleaded with the government to have the Catholics excluded from the area for having been given the greater part of the Kikuyu land. But after negotiations, the Catholics were allowed to establish their mission.¹⁶

The reception from the people was rather sceptical. This is because of the hostility which existed between the Meru - Embu people and the British invaders.

The Consolata fathers’ work of Evangelization was buttressed by the Cottolengo sisters in 1915. This coincided with the first 20 baptisms.¹⁷

At long last Embu got its Catholic mission in 1926 at Kyeni near Runyenjes. However, the very first catholic community was in Kevote gathered round a chapel built

¹⁵ IMC. *The Conquest for Christ in Kenya* (Nyeri: Catholic Printing Press, 1902 - 1952), 126.

¹⁶ John Baur, *The Catholic Church in Kenya: A Centenary History* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 89.

¹⁷ Baur, 90.

in 1922.¹⁸ Hence the community lived and grew during 25 years under the leadership of some convinced laymen.

After World War II some people were determined to eradicate the Catholic faith from the Meru Embu territory, but now it is one of the strongest.¹⁹

On June 9, 1986 the new diocese of Embu was erected and the Vicar General, John Njue, chosen to be its first bishop. He was ordained on 20th September 1986. The Catholics of Embu had in fact always felt they lived at the periphery, just a large outpost of Meru.²⁰

¹⁸ Baur, 90.

¹⁹ Baur, 95.

²⁰ Baur, 95.

Chapter 2

An Embian World-View

2.1 Identifying Christ in Embu

We have already seen in chapter one that the Christian faith in Embu is now over ninety years old. Two questions could be asked: has the Christian faith 'percolated' into the hearts of the Christians of Embu? or rather, has Christ made much (or any) impact in Embian society? Secondly, is the Catholic faith well founded in the Catholic population of Embu? The first question is triggered by the fact that despite the Christian faith in Embu, other non-Christian practices are still prevalent. The second one is due to the current trend of the Catholic faithful influx into other Christian denominations.

On Sundays Churches all over the diocese (both Catholics and protestants) are flocked by worshippers. When one walks along the streets of towns like Embu, one is overwhelmed by the 'street preachers'. Loud gospel music is often heard in virtually all the corners of big towns. Now, should we identify Christian faith with the external manifestations such as big numbers during Sunday mass? Has Christ really been identified in the Embian culture? Has he really given answers to the deep-seated problems facing the Embians today? Richard J. Gehman has an interesting remark on

the African culture. He says that during times of crises, especially death, even professing “Christians” revert to traditional beliefs and practices.²¹

Just as is the case with most of the African cultures, we assume²² that Christ has not yet been fully identified in the Embian culture. If our assumption is correct, what then is the source of this unfortunate situation? Could the problem be traced to the early missionaries who imparted Christianity in Embu? Gehman says that “the fact is that superficial customs change easily with the passage of time. But the deep core world – view beliefs of a people are very persistent.”²³

2.2 An Embian World–View: Tacit Assumptions

Embians have a very optimistic world-view. It is a joyful celebration of life. Embians view the cosmic universe as a unified whole coloured by music and dance. In fact, some foreigners say that the Kiembu language is musical by nature. The vigorous traditional dances, songs and ululations during celebrations say a lot about the world-view of the Embians. In a few words we could say that Embian world view is a joyful celebration of life, which is accommodative, and dynamic.

Embians are historically known for their great sense of generosity. Paradoxically, Embu is a small tribe and we would expect people to resist any kind of foreign ‘invasion’. This is not the case. Embians have an open heart to accommodate the visitors and share whatever little they have. They have a common belief that a visitor is a blessing to the family.

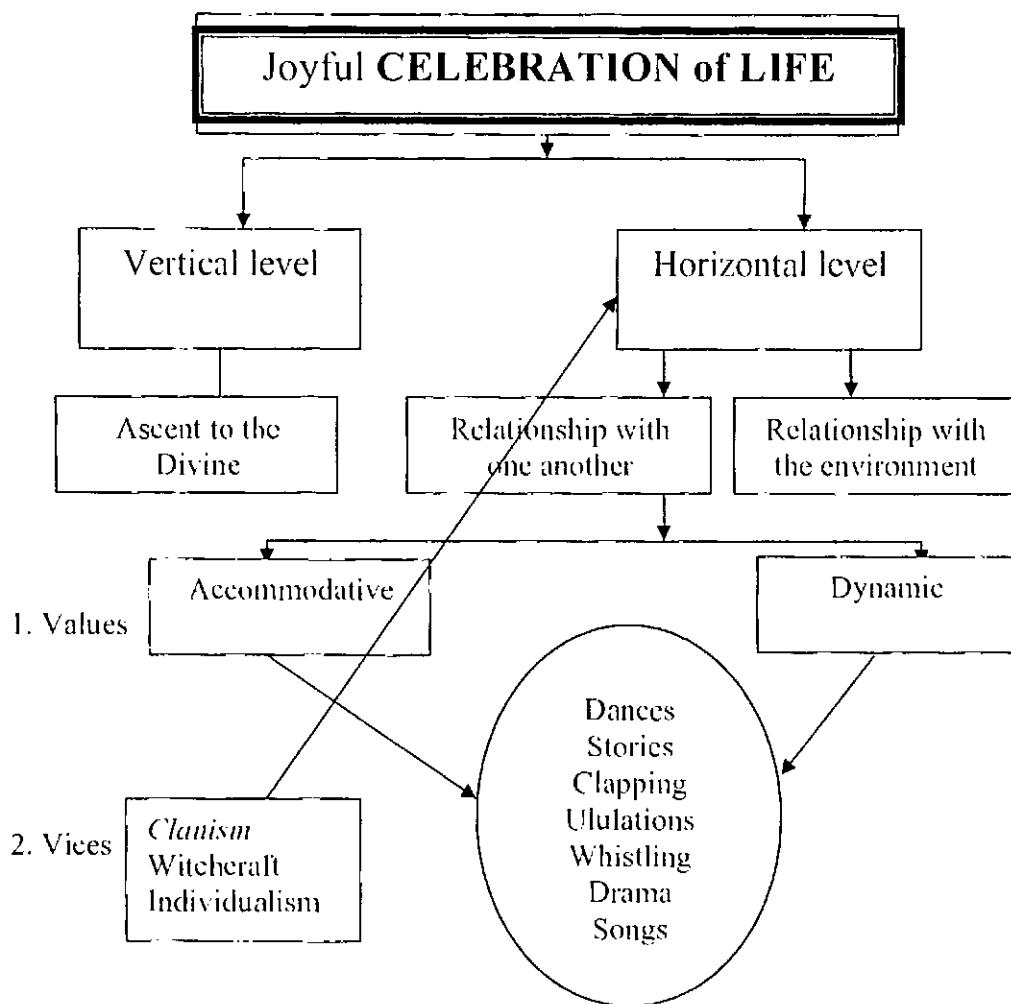
²¹ Richard J. Gehman. *African Traditional Religions: In Biblical Perspective* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 2002), 17.

²² We are making this assumption as a working hypothesis for this thesis.

²³ German, 17.

St Paul says that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). A great sense of humour is portrayed by Embu people especially in social gatherings. Celebrations are coloured by dances, songs, drama, whistling, ululations and clapping of hands. This is experienced today also in liturgical dances.

The following is a graphical presentation of an Embian World-view:



2.3 Embian Values

Every culture has its own values and these values give meaning to their way of life. The *Church in Africa*²⁴ offers an excellent summary of the African values. Most of these values are also found in Embian culture. The values commonly regarded by Embians include the great reverence and thirst for the divine, respect for life, generosity, celebration of rites of passage and other celebrations. We are going to single-out three of these values which are more evident in Embu. These are the generosity, celebration of rites of passage, and religious sense.

2.3.1 Generosity

As we said earlier (see Embian World-view above), Embians are very accommodative. Everyone who happens to visit these people feel welcome. The Embians not only welcome guests, but also make them feel at home and if one desires to stay longer, the idea is welcomed.²⁵

Children are taught how to behave towards their own close blood relatives and towards others at a very early age. They belong to the nation: not only to their parents. They are cared for generously by all grow-ups.²⁶ The virtues of respect and self-discipline formed in the Embian traditional family led to less social hostility and to good neighbourly attitudes and cooperation.

²⁴ John Paul II, *The Church in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa" of the Holy Father John Paul II* (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, 1995), 42-43. Henceforth will be referred to as I. A.

²⁵ Mwaniki, 107.

²⁶ Mwaniki, 107.

2.3.2 Initiation Rites

There are several initiation rites in Embu such as birth, naming, circumcision and wedding. We shall here discuss the circumcision rite which is also referred to as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.

Circumcision is practiced in many parts of the world. Each particular group of people have their own reasons for their practice. There are some religious groups which perform the act as a sign of purification. The following are some of the reasons for the rite in the Embian culture:

Incorporation - the initiate is incorporated into the wider community of the adults.

New life - the initiate embraces a new life into adulthood.

Readiness for responsibilities - when one is circumcised, one can now assume adult responsibilities. It is a sign of maturity hence one is also given permission to marry.

2.3.3 Sense of the Divine

The African Synod fathers acknowledged the deep religious sense in the African people. They affirmed that Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the creator and of a spiritual world (EA, 42).

Much has been written about the religiosity of the African people. Mbiti summarizes this fact with the following words:

Traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he

takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.²⁷

Some elements of Mbiti's research still remain in the Embian culture. But it is unfortunate today that there is a real conflict of life – between the sacred and the profane. The idea of “carrying God wherever you are found” seems to be a matter of the past. However, there are some Christians who still have a deep reverence for the divine in the Embian community. In fact, the primary and most fundamental fact noted by the Synod fathers is the thirst for God felt by the peoples of Africa (EA 47).

We shall now look into some of the challenges which the Embians are facing today.

2.4 Current Challenges

Every epoch in every culture of the world faces a series of challenges. These challenges could be due to the preceding epoch or created by the present reality. There are various challenges currently facing the Embians. These challenges are of social, political, cultural or economic nature. Major challenges include identity crises, *clanism*,²⁸ religious division, individualism, magic and witchcraft, urbanisation, and foreign influence. We shall focus our attention on three of these challenges namely individualism, *clanism*, and magic and witchcraft.

2.4.1 Individualism

African traditional societies have reputation of their communal type of living. In his famous book *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti asserts that the

²⁷ Mbiti, 2.

²⁸ Most of the African ethnic groups are made up of smaller units known as clans. These are comprised of several families which are closely related. By *clanism* we mean a kind of favouritism of the members of related families.

individual actualizes himself in the community. He believes that "I am because we are: and since we are, therefore I am."²⁹ This reality has slowly diverted its course in the contemporary Embian society. Perhaps foreign influence has taken the upper hand. Embians have started to hold to the ideology that says: "everyone for himself and God for us all." This egoism seems to direct the individuals, hence becoming less and less charitable. This individualism is manifested in the family life, for instance, the family ties are becoming loose, no many social gatherings, there are frequent conflicts between people of the same family.

2.4.2 Clanism

To the general community where matters outside the political agenda are concerned, primary functions of the generic clan are still in operation. Some of the activities preserved to the clan include marriages, village activities such as raising school and hospital fees, communal work, funeral arrangements, etc. Unfortunately, as far as the political clan level is concerned, such activities are watched by members of other clans with suspicious eye. They are observed, analyzed and interpolated with a lot of misgivings and mistrust.³⁰

These divisions of clans undoubtedly cloud the real issue and prevent the common citizen from distinguishing between important matters and trivial ones. There is a lot of jealous feelings among the members of different clans. When a particular clan thrives, others start ways of pulling the thriving clan down. This retrogresses the

²⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 2002), 108-109.

³⁰ B.M. Kanyenji, *The Cultural Evolution and Application of the Clan Systems in Management of community affairs Among Mbeeres. In Search of a Solution to Clan Conflict in Mbeere District.* (Nairobi 1988, Unpublished), 48.

economic development of the Embian Society. The interests and needs of the people are overlooked because of the opportunistic and ideologically based politicians. They have to some extent fragmented the society. This has obscured the truth in order to serve the interests of a clique. This is what political philosophers refer to as “ideological obscurantism.”³¹

In the context of *clanism*, it has had many adverse effects, including division in administration, in the Church, schools and in people’s minds. As far as administration is concerned, clan conflict has proved it very difficult, as people do not look beyond the personality of the administrator.³²

2.4.3 Magic and Witchcraft

The reality of magic and witchcraft is common in many cultures of the world. The difference lies in the level of belief and in the degree of practice from place to place. The African Synod fathers are aware of the reality of sin in the consciousness of the African people (CF. EA, 42).

According to Mbiti, magic is generally considered under ‘good magic’ and ‘evil magic’. The use of good magic is accepted and esteemed by society. It is chiefly specialists and particularly the medicine-man, diviner and rain maker, who use their knowledge and manipulation of this magical power for the welfare of their community.³³ There is the other type of magic – the evil one. Evil magic involves the belief in and practice of tapping and using this power to do harm to human beings or to

³¹ Cf. Yoheri Museveni, K. *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democratic Uganda*. (London: Maemullan Publishers, 1997), 31-36.

³² Bishop Gedeon Ileri, 32.

³³ Mbiti, 198.

their property. It is here where we find sorcery at work in addition to other related practices. Here we need to point out that a great deal of belief is based on, or derives from, fear, suspicion, jealousies, ignorance or false accusations.³⁴

It is a widespread belief that African peoples feel and believe that all the various ills, misfortunes, sicknesses, accidents, tragedies, sorrows, dangers and unhappy mysteries which they encounter or experience are caused by this mystical power in the hands of a sorcerer, witch or wizard.³⁵ It is unfortunate that even today, many Embians are controlled by these magical powers. This creates great fear and anxiety among the Embians. Modern science has changed to some extent the 'magical thinking' of most of the new generation. But still a good number of older generation believe that nothing harmful happens by chance. Everything must have a cause either directly or through magical powers. Does Christianity give an alternative for this destructive practice?

³⁴ Mbiti, 199.

³⁵ Mbiti, 200.

Chapter 3

Integrating Grace in the Embian World-View

3.1 Grace and the Basic Embian Values

We have identified three main values in Embu. These are generosity, celebration of initiation rites and the sense of the Divine. We have said that these values³⁶ are at the core of life of a common Embian. We have also seen that everything is centered on the celebration of life. This life is celebrated on two levels, that is, the vertical (relationship with God), and the horizontal (relationship with others). Reflecting from Christian point of view, confidently we can say that these values are given by God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. From the Embian traditional perspective which is on the natural level, these gifts can be earned by doing good works. But from the Christian perspective, no one can claim that they worked for these gifts and that they deserve them. They are given gratuitously, out of God's care and mercy. Here we are talking of how these gifts or values reach us. Secondly, if we look keenly, we shall realize that these gifts are "grace itself", that is, they refer to the nature of the gift we receive from Jesus Christ.

³⁶ We would like to notify the reader that we don't intend to say that the Embian values we have identified were perceived by the Embians as the essence of grace. They were there, but only on the natural level. Now Christ comes to the Embian society to transform and elevate them to supernatural level, and this is the level of Grace.

3.1.1 Celebration of the Initiation Rites

All initiation rites performed in Embu mark the end of one type of life and the beginning of a new life.³⁷ The initiation rite in focus here is the circumcision.³⁸ The rite of circumcision has three main features namely, incorporation, capacitating one to assume important responsibilities, and inaugurating new life in the person. We shall discuss each of these elements separately.

3.1.1.1 Incorporation

Incorporation is the very essence of Grace. When a young adult undergoes this rite of passage, the community recognizes him as a full member of the community. And therefore he is fully incorporated into the community.³⁹

When one accepts Christian baptism, one is incorporated into the divine life of God. The divine life is grace itself. When one is incorporated into the Embian community, they start to feel more the sense of belonging. In the same way, when one embraces the life of grace, they become sharers of the divine Sonship by adoption. Through grace, we are reborn in the image of the Son.⁴⁰

3.1.1.2 Taking Responsibilities

The term “responsibility” is a complex word comprising two words “response” and “ability”. Putting them together gives a meaning that one assumes or is given the ability to respond to different situations, events and circumstances. He is given the

³⁷ Life of grace is the new life given by the Father through his Son.

³⁸ Here we are taking the symbolic meaning of the rite. We are not going into details of the physical act of circumcision.

³⁹ By incorporation we don't intend to say that one starts to become a member of the community by circumcision, but we have qualified the adjective with the adverb “fully”. This means that one becomes a complete member of Embian society by this rite. A parallelism could be drawn with the Christian confirmation.

⁴⁰ Franssen, 34.

responsibility proportionate to his capacity. Now when people embrace Christianity, a certain responsibility is laid upon them. Together with this responsibility, is the grace of Christ which enables them to perform their duties. Fransen puts it that when we follow Christ with all the means at our disposal our work becomes one with his works and are ennobled through grace. And this is precisely how he has redeemed us, not indeed through our works but in his works.⁴¹

3.1.1.3 Inaugurating New Life

Circumcision, as we said earlier, is a rite of passage. The person being initiated moves from childhood to adulthood. It is a transition period in which one is called to embrace a new type of life. This implies a change of attitude, mentality, a change of behaviour. In fact, one's being is transformed. A certain degree of maturity is demanded to the initiates.

Christianity calls for a complete *metanoia*. One is called to put "new wine" into "new wine skins". Christ brings with him new life of grace, a unique kind of life which the Embian society as such is not able to give. It is a mysterious life. The mystery of grace is participation in the life of God in the strict sense of the word.⁴²

It is in this new life that grace is realized by individual persons. Christ gives the gift of the Spirit as first gift from whom all gifts proceed. This gift of the Spirit is uncreated gift. It is the same God himself as the third person of the Trinity who comes and establishes his "indwelling" in us.⁴³

⁴¹ Fransen, 36.

⁴² Nicholas Fogliacco, "Christian Anthropology: Grace" Class Notes (Unpublished), 251. Henceforth will be referred as "Fogliacco".

⁴³ Fogliacco, 251.

Now what happens to individuals when they are given this Spirit? The Spirit infuses to individual love (Rom. 5:5), as created habitual orientation (the fundamental option) who turns us into images of God by reproducing in us the fundamental attitude and constitutive perfection of the Father.⁴⁴ This is the created habitual or healing grace which affects the individual deep down in their hearts. It affects one's being. This is the grace which transforms the person into a new creature. Surely, this grace is necessary not only for the Embians, but also for the entire creation.

It is not enough for this Spirit only to find a dwelling place in the individual hearts. After one's being has been transformed, the Spirit then guides and directs the individual to perform God-like acts of love. This is the third element of grace – the actual grace. This grace is the principle of action. It is the inner drive which dictates the individuals to move out of themselves to reach the other in love as we find in St. Augustine's psychology of grace.⁴⁵

3.1.2 The Divine Sense

As we noted earlier, Embians have a deep sense of the divine. We shall first explain the Embian traditional image of God and then try to show how Christ gives us more of that value that Embians experience as supreme in their lives.

⁴⁴ Fogliacco, 252.

⁴⁵ In his psychology of grace, St. Augustine says that the concupiscence is the root of enslavement and its root is in human selfishness. He goes on to say that this concupiscence is the psychological root of moral and religious slavery. Now it is only grace which sets us free. Grace gives us what is opposite of selfishness – love (*charitas*) for God and neighbour. Hence he concludes that divine grace, precisely as *charitas*, becomes in us the root of Christian freedom. See Fogliacco, 140-141.

3.1.2.1 Embian Concept of God

As we have seen, Embians worshipped a powerful God known as *Ngai*, popularly known as *MweneNyaga* or *Mwenejeru*.⁴⁶ The two popular names were derived from the brightness of the snow cap of Mt. Kenya. The idea of dwelling on the mountain tops is popular all over the world. Israelites too believed that Yahweh had a dwelling place on Mt. Zion.

Whenever an Embian prayed, he had to face Mt. Kenya⁴⁷ where they believed was the favourite place of abode of *Ngai*.

Ngai was believed to be the creator of everything which is on earth. He is also believed to be the creator of heaven and earth. There are several tales in Embu which support this argument. In fact *Ngai* was believed by Embians as *Mumbi wa iguru na Nthi* (creator of heaven and earth). He is also referred to as *Ngai Mutummbi* (God our creator).

The Embians had both immanent and transcendent notions of God. They believed that God was up-there-over-the-sky, beyond the reach of human beings. At the same time they believed that time and time God would pay a visit to his people and would settle in special places like grooves, forests and sacred mountains. Is this not “a good image” which would help the Embians understand the doctrine of incarnation? One thing to note here is that the Embians did not have the notion of God dwelling too close to people (as Christ did).

⁴⁶ These terms are already explained above in Chapter One.

⁴⁷ Could this be compared to facing of tabernacle of the Catholics today?

Embians knew *Ngai* as the God of love. They knew him as the provider and sustainer of life. Whenever they lacked the essential things such as rain, harmony and peace, they would turn to him. Embians believed they would earn divine favours from God. They believed that when one does good works, they are rewarded, and when they offend God, a punishment was bestowed on them. They also believed in collective punishment, for instance, famine was as a result of God's anger on the bad behaviour of the people. Is this concept of God not similar to the retribution theory of Israelite as depicted in the book of Job? Having discussed the Embian view of God we shall now see how Christ gives more of that value.

3.1.2.2 The God of Christianity

The Embians perceived God as God. By this we mean that the Trinitarian concept of God, just like in virtually all tribes of Africa, is foreign to Embians. Now the very fact that Christ is the only mediator between the Father and us and the eschatological revealer alerts us to the fact that without him God cannot be known fully, nor can we enjoy full communion with him, nor do we become his children "by adoption" but only in an improper, metaphorical way.⁴⁸

The scriptures present the Son to us as the visible revelation of the Father as Him in whom the Father created the world. It is true that the Embians know God as the creator of the universe. But this knowledge seems to be rudimentary. It is only Christ who can reveal this clearly through his incarnation.

We read in the Gospel of John that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... all things came into being through Him

⁴⁸ Fogliacco, 250.

and nothing whatever came into being without Him” (Jn. 1:1-3). St. John continues to say that “no one has ever seen God [the Father]; the only begotten God [the Son] who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known” (Jn. 1:18). We also find in the epistle to the Hebrews the son being introduced in similar words: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our Fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb. 1:1-3). He (the Son) reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

Still, we find similar words in St. Paul’s letter to Colossians, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in the heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:15-16).

From the above verses, we come to understand that in creation and in redemption, the Son stands first. He is the image of the invisible Father and in the likeness of this image the Father has created and redeemed all things. This is the pivotal fact in the whole history of our salvation.⁴⁹ Is this not good news to the Embians?

In short we have seen that Christ reveals the Trinitarian God. This is the mystery of uncreated grace, the self giving of God the Father to us through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. As a result of this divine communication, we become God’s “adoptive children” and enter into a life of untold intimacy with God, where the traditional

⁴⁹ Fransen, 28.

African value of “communication” understood primarily as aspiration and longing-for and desire, attains an unexpected degree of fulfillment.⁵⁰

3.1.3 Generosity

We have found that Embians are basically generous.⁵¹ This virtue is cultivated right from the beginning of their lives. Hence it will not be difficult for Embians to accept the God of Christianity whose very essence is generosity. God the Father gives his Son to the world out of His own generosity. He gives His Spirit generously from His abundance. It is out of God’s mercy and love that he communicates to us. We know that everything we receive from Him is a mere gratuitous gift which we need not work for. We don’t merit anything from God. This is something completely new to the Embian culture. And this is the work of God’s grace. God’s generosity precedes our generosity to the point of loving our enemies.

3.2 Re-introducing Trinity in the Embian World-View

We shall here reformulate the Christian conception of grace by connecting the Trinitarian God with elements taken from Embian world-view to show that only as a result of the Trinitarian self-communication of God does the person actually become virtually related to all the other realities.

3.2.1 The Father

We have seen that the Embians had the notion of God (the Father). They knew God as the creator of all human beings. But they did not have the meaning of God the

⁵⁰ Fogliacco, 251.

⁵¹ Here we don’t mean to rule out the fact that there are some elements of selfishness in the contemporary Embian society. But these element do not overshadow the generosity.

Father as in Christianity. The Father in Embu is known in metaphorical sense. It is not difficult for Embians to understand the Christian concept of the Father. This is simply because in all their worship, they knew God as a powerful supreme being who controls the whole universe. Embians, just like many other African ethnic groups, have the notion of a strong Father who is the sole master of the family. He has the power to give all the necessary directives with regards to family matters. The Embian Father is authoritative, powerful and somehow a dictator. Now Christianity brings a different kind of a Father.

In Embian society, the figure of a father is central and forms one of the axes around which society and culture are organized. It is the father who has knowledge and power and makes decisions. Other members of the family are dependent on him. This is a paternalistic model of society. Paternalism makes people object for help, never subjects of autonomous action. God is represented as the almighty Father, supreme judge and absolute Lord of life and death. Besides this God, there is no room for a Son and Holy Spirit with whom he would be in communion. Boff says that a religion of the Father alone is dominant, and relationship is a vertical one.⁵²

Christianity brings a different concept of the Father. This Father has been revealed to us by the Son (he who sees me has seen the Father, Jn. 14:9). Unlike the Embian concept of the Father who is authoritarian, the Father revealed by Christ is a merciful Father (see the story of a prodigal son in Lk. 15:11-32), a loving Father. He is a Father who is in full communion with the Son and the Holy Spirit. This makes a

⁵² Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 13-14. Henceforth it will be referred to as "Boff".

perfect communion of love. It is the Father who respects the freedom and autonomy of every member of society. In a society like Embu where many have not yet recovered fully from the ramifications of slavery and colonialism, this kind of the Father will be of great importance. It is this kind of a Father who will increase joy and enthusiasm in the Embian society which will lead to a qualitative and quantitative sustainable development.

With the coming of Christ everything changes. Now we know that He is the Father, in a true, proper sense of the term because he has a Son in the true, proper sense of the term. And the divine Sonship of Jesus is the bridge through which divine Sonship can travel from heaven to earth. Here is a God who is extremely near to us and concerned, because economic Trinity is God with us, God for us. But now this God takes on the smiling loving features of a Father, whom we know in a new way because Jesus has revealed him to us.⁵³

3.2.2 The Son

Leonardo Boff has a wonderful model of the figure of Jesus we find in a modern democratic society characterized by horizontal relationships. He puts it that the emphasis is put on the figure of the “leader” of political parties or social movements. According to Boff, personal endeavour is highly valued and charismatic figures become source of guidance and inspiration. In this type of society, following Christ means adopting his heroic and humanitarian attitudes, generally dissociated from human conflict and from any deep relationship with transcendence (the Father), from which Jesus in fact derived his commitment to the kingdom and the humble of the earth. Boff

⁵³ Fogliacco, 253.

says that this is religion of the Son alone, and its relationship is horizontal.⁵⁴ The Embians (especially the youth) want the Christ who is a “hero” – a superstar. They want to associate themselves with an enthusiastic Christ. Christ who advocates pain and suffering will not be very popular in the Embian society.

Now in Christianity we find a different type of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. He is the Son of the Father. Christ, not only gives a perfect model of horizontal relationships, but also directs our attention vertically to the Father. This is the Christ who will help the Embians recognise the importance of the other side of the coin – the pain and suffering. He will help Embians realize the positive value of the cross – that life is not just making merry but that “Good Friday comes before Easter.” Will this type of Christ be fully accepted in the Embian society?

3.2.3 The Holy Spirit

Boff is of the opinion that there are large sectors of society in which the dimensions of subjectivity and personal creativity are over-valued. He observes that some people who enjoy the benefits of an individualistic social system working in their favour, tend to find that the Christian charismatic movement, with its inward-looking spirituality, satisfy their religious needs for inner peace, for religious conflicts, for not feeling alone.⁵⁵ Boff continues to say that the poor and oppressed classes, denied any participation in society, find that charismatic sects and religious renewal movements can provide them with means of expressing their needs of freedom, respect and

⁵⁴ Boff, 14.

⁵⁵ Boff, 14.

recognition. This is religion of the Spirit alone and its main relationship is with the inner self.⁵⁶

This charismatic element is very common especially in the contemporary Embian society. As we mentioned earlier, there are many charismatic groups in Embu. There is some exaggeration of the charismatic powers in various sects we find in Embu.

The Spirit of Christ is not the Spirit of confusion. The Spirit is in full communion with the Father and the Son. It is only when the Spirit is understood in relation with the Father and the Son that He can truly be understood and that his effects can be truly felt. It is true that the Spirit helps one to do introspection, but does not end up on that level. It is only when people are transformed internally that they may be able to change their lives and the lives of others. This is the Spirit the Embian society is in need of – the Spirit of authentic transformation. It is the Spirit of unity. It is this Spirit which when well articulated and embraced by Embians of different walks of life, unity and peace will prevail. The various religious sects in Embu could be due to misunderstanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation history.

We shall close this part with the inspiring words of Boff concerning the unity of the Trinity. He asserts that the three persons have “the permanent interpenetration, the eternal co-relatedness, the self-surrender of each person to the others form the Trinitarian union, the union of persons. In order to express this union, theology, from the sixth century embraced the Greek term *perichoresis*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Boff, 15.

⁵⁷ This term means that each person contains the other two, each one penetrates the others and is penetrated by them, one lives in the other and vice-versa. See Boff, 5.

As we saw earlier, pivotal point in the Embian world-view is celebration of life. Embians try to unravel the mystery of life in their own lifestyle. It is here where the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit becomes very relevant in the Embian culture. The Spirit is the “giver of life”, in fact he is life itself. It is life in God because he is the living bond between the Father and the Son; and he is life in us, because when given by the risen Lord, he confers to us a participation in the life of God.⁵⁸

3.3 Grace and the Embian Cultural “Empty Space”

We have seen in Chapter Two above that Christ has not been fully identified by Embians. We made the assumptions that the reason may be attributed to the fact that he is not felt as capable of solving their deep-seated challenges. The challenges are many, but we shall identify three of them namely, magic and witchcraft, clanism, and individualism.

3.3.1 Magic and Witchcraft

According to Aylward Shorter⁵⁹ magic works.⁶⁰ How it works is another issue, and it is not our interest to discuss it here. The fact remains that magic works. Some foreigners have tried to deny this fact by saying that it is just a psychological phenomenon and that it works only to those who put their trust in it.

Does having recourse to witchcraft really solve the problems of the Embians? Contrary to the expectations, many Embians are left more tormented than before. There is a perpetual hatred created among the parties who suspect each other of this evil

⁵⁸ Fogliacco, 254.

⁵⁹ Shorter is renowned professor and prolific writer. He is the former Principal of Tangaza College. He is currently teaching the States.

⁶⁰ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2001), 65.

practice. Unhealthy kind of fear persists in the minds of the Embians. Families are broken, people are separated from their loved ones, children are left orphans while others are left physically or mentally challenged.

It is in this type of situation where the message of the Gospel of Christ comes in full force. Embians need to be liberated from this magical way of existence. They should listen to the voice of Jesus saying, "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

Perhaps the major problem in Embian life is this dualistic kind of life. On the one hand there is a belief in evil powers, on the other, we find a belief in the power of God. Both forces are powerful and influence the lives of the Embians in one way or another.

However, most of the Christians of the contemporary time believe that Christ is more powerful than all other powers. The problem is that they are not fully convinced that everything is possible in Christ. Another problem connected to this is that they do not "let God be God." What I mean by this is that always (or in most cases) when a problem occurs they expect God to act in their favour. They fail to realize that God works in mysterious ways and His will is not necessarily man's will. For instance, when a child gets sick, the Embians expect it to get well by all means. But is this always God's will? Is there any intrinsic good in one's death? Is a Christian death the end of everything? Does life not continue after this earthly life?

3.3.2 *Clanism*

We have seen that *clanism* is a type of evil behavior in which people of the same clan tend to favour their own members. This unfortunate situation pulls the people behind thus leading to retrogression in their economic and social development. A kind of division is brought into the society. A Catholic archbishop of Nyeri (former bishop of Embu) bishop John Njue, is never tired of recalling the importance of eradicating the conflicts from the clan basis and working for the community, and supporting the less gifted people.

The Church should stand as a symbol of unity and reconciliation - an extended family of God where "all are welcome" and "everybody has a sense of belonging."⁶¹ Through the water of Baptism where we are Spiritually reborn, we become members of God's family, we share the same faith and therefore "water becomes thicker than blood."⁶² We need to go beyond the Jewish conception of relationships.⁶³ Christians should realize that they are sons and daughters because they share the same faith in Christ (See Gal. 3:6-9).

3.3.3 *Individualism*

We said earlier that this is a vice which is slowly cropping up in the Embian Society. Since it has not yet taken root, it is high time Christians in Embu started re-thinking of its adverse ramifications and revert to their original sense of community living. Community has been the constitutive structure of the Embian society in which

⁶¹ Cecil McGarry, 41.

⁶² Cecil McGarry, 37.

⁶³ Jews believed that they were the favourites of Yahweh. According to them, no other race was destined for God's salvation. They regarded themselves as the sons of Abraham because of their blood relationship or natural kinship.

each person existed in relation to everybody else, and found fulfillment and joy only by deeper and deeper integration into the living community. In fact, the root of this individualism is human selfishness. What “medicine” does Christ offer to Embians today as the remedy for this “sickness”? It is only grace: justification, conversion, the loving fundamental option which enables people to put the common good above personal interest.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Fogliacco, 257.

CONCLUSION

Most of the Christian theologians and philosophers have taken a position that “grace elevates nature”. Nature signifies the essence of a thing considered as the fundamental principle of every activity and receptivity that belongs to it because of what it is.⁶⁵ God cannot create man without making him a finite intellectual being endowed with all the essential characteristics of human nature.

Now God divinizes the world through His Son, Jesus Christ. And this is grace. In other words, to divinize man means to elevate him to a level of perfection transcending his own nature.⁶⁶

Given the scope and context of this essay, it would surely be too ambitious to aim at totally solving the current challenges facing the Embians. Our sure hope is that this essay has been something more than mere advice. However, we need to acknowledge that there is a lot to be done to show the practical application of the Embian approach to grace. Lack of time and space has prevented such an in-depth approach in this essay.

⁶⁵ C. Regan “Grace and Nature” in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. 6 (Washington D.C.: Heraty & Associates), 683-685.

⁶⁶ Cf., Regan, 683-685.

In conclusion, the following may be asserted: first, Christ has not been fully identified in the Embian society. This is because he does not seem to solve some of the deep-seated problems. Second, despite the current challenges found in Embu diocese, the Embians have maintained an optimistic world-view. Third, we have shown the necessity of Christ's message to complete and perfect the Embian joy.

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