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GOD AND THE SPIRIT AMONG THE TRADITIONAL LUO SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

The Luo people live around Lake Victoria in the Western part of Kenya. Their main occupation is farming, which is supplemented by fishing as their main hobby. Like many other African societies, these people also have their Traditions and customs and beliefs some of which are still regarded important even today.

This work tries to present first the traditional Luo beliefs and practices in their relationship to God and the spirits. The first three chapters is pure anthropology of the Luo beliefs and practices as far as research carried out and readings reveal to me. What triggers my research and book reading on this issue is the fact that it is widely known that there is a rapid growth of the Church in Africa but this growth rate is very phenomenal because it is not often considered that this Church growth is from among those Africans born in African traditional culture. And these cultures is always assumed to have been erased by the christian culture as this church needs maturity and much discipleship. We should not dismiss the African traditionalists, but it also concerns Christians who seek to relate their Christian faith to their traditional religions.

In reflecting upon this fact, my main aim is to show that there are many traditional Luo beliefs and practices which are useful and advantageous for bridging the Gospel. Usually, the problem is when a person who originally practiced a traditional religion becomes a Christian, there are a number of issues that he must deal with. It's not realistic to tell a new Christian to ignore the spirit world, to stop venerating the ancestors, and to stop going to a diviner for healing unless specific reasons are given to do so and unless the Church offers functional substitutes for these practices. The reflections here therefore are somewhat a call for an African Theology which is basically Christianity which fits Africans and which meets both their spiritual and cultural needs. To do this one needs to know what the Africans beliefs and practices are, and try to make some relevance. Thus, I divided my work into four Chapters whereby the first three chapters talk plainly about the traditional Luo beliefs and practices in God and the

spirits. While, in the fourth Chapter, I tried to relate these Luo traditional beliefs in spirits and the Christian faith. Some of these ideas in this last chapter are my own personal reflections which are also subject to objections from the african theologians. I also thought it wise to explain a bit the term "*Juok*" which I have used to refer to God. My explanation might not satisfy the reader because this is a wide topic that needs its own research and reading to exhaust. Or else, I aimed more about spirits.

The world and the people in it were originally created by one God who is still supreme but who is more or less inaccessible today. Though for the Luos, God could be reached, talked to and in return respond instantly to their needs. However, in addition to creating people this God also created a parallel world of spirits who are active forces for good or evil in men's lives.

This supreme being, call it God, was for the Luos, a very mysterious one whom they could only call "*Juok*". 'Juok' as the word sounds means something mysterious which people do not understand its origin, operations, characters and influence. Juok is like wind or air whose presence may be heard and appreciated or blamed but no one knows from where it is coming and going. For the Luos, any mysterious act among the society whose source is unknown is called Juok. And here is where they invited a diviner "*ajuoga*" to reveal the source of such "*Juok*". 'Juok' could also be a mysterious power in a person which could empower them to harm by bewitching others at night or at day light. Such powers were regarded dangerous because one could not know exactly when he will stick or harm you; Especially when a woman is empowered by this mysterious force, she can become very dangerous to see one who is eating something and strangely enough, you will not know how that power of '*Juok*' affects the food and cause severe stomachache ! That is why it is called '*Juok*' and it is attributed to the Supreme Mysterious being.

This mysterious power or force called '*Juok*' can not be known by the Luo people unless it manifests itself in a concrete way which the people themselves can recognize among them. Thus, the Luos found it easier to give Him a name according to his manifestations and activities. And this was the way they tried to understand and explain

the mysterious force according to what they experienced among them ! After all the names given to God indicates what men think about his character, attributes and activities. Thus God as creator which is the commonest aspects that men have understood was expressed by the Luos as "*Jachwech*" - a molder, creator, giver of breath and God in nature is expressed in titles and activities such as giver of rain (*Wuon Koth*), giver of sunshine, etc. So for the Luos, this mysterious force revealed itself in various activities - some of which they could not still explain even though they could call it by name or by comparison.

Any how, I am not going deep in this question of the Luo god because, my main concern is the spirits among the Luos. And since the spirits are also created by God, I thought it fitting also briefly say something on the Luo God from whom is the source of their traditional religion. My interest of going deep in the question of the spirit belief among the Luos was to try to find if there is any common aspect or idea in relation to the Christian belief in the theology of the spirit as the center of their life. I therefore entrusted the last chapter for such comparison which I hope will make some meaning, but only if were acquainted with the context of the Luo traditional religion and beliefs.

This easy is about the Luos belief in God and their relationship with the spirits (God). Besides the Luos beliefs about God, they also have a common belief surrounding their religious sphere that a part from man and God, there are other beings who populate our universe, and who sometimes are working for the good of the community's welfare. These beings are called "Spirits" and are created by God just as He is the creator of all things. The Luos' belief in the existence of spiritual beings is quite a strong one and it was something with them always, because for them, the living and non-living creatures can contain some spiritual power. Thus, for these people, human beings and animals continue to live in spirit in their world of spirits even after the decomposition of their physical bodies.

The belief in the spirits by the Luos was their a recognition of its role as the intermediary between man and God, and therefore, the spirit determined the destiny of human beings since it was not just a spirit but a spirit of the ancestors. And because of

this kind of closeness to spirits, the Luo's stressed very much, the establishment of a good relationship with them through offering sacrifices and offerings of oblations accompanied with prayers. The reason for all these was a Luo strong belief that any fate that befalls the community be it good or bad, is an influence by the intervention of the spiritual forces which according to them could be either from the evil or good spirits.

The origin of the spirit belief among the Luo is not easy to trace, but I think the spirit-belief of Africa explains the believes of many in this continent that people have experienced themselves in the first place not just as body but as spirits. When one dies, it is believed that he is gone back to another world - the world of the spirits where he continues the same life as if he was physically alive. Again, since their existence is surrounded in a lot of mystery as the beings of heaven, it would not be easy for me to give a definitive explanation of what spirits are or how they look like: But what I know is the belief that spirits sometimes appeared to the Luos communally or to individuals as a shadow or figure of a human being though not of a stranger but of someone familiar to them or to the family. For Example, the shadowy figure would usually be of an elder in the village whose relationship with other members of the community has been good and upright.

The ideas which I have expressed here through out this essay are both from the interview from some few elders in Nyakach of Kisumu District, and from the library readings and research on the Luo people because for them the idea of spirits in particular serve a very important social and psychological purpose in their religious sphere and relationship with God. Man and the world could be important bridge and continuity between Christianity and their religion. It's interesting how today people make a distinction between the two categories of spiritual beings, whereby some are said to be created as such, while others were once of human beings-spirits of our living-dead ! However, this distinction was not with the Luo people. For them, the spirit is a God given gift of force in man which when he dies, goes back to where it belongs (world of spirits). This means that they recognized the spirits as those of the living-dead who were concerned with their progresses and were always fresh in their memories.

By the way, I am going to talk about the two kinds of the spirits, good and bad (evil) as they were understood by the Luos and it is with the profound belief in spirits that we will see how they are distinguished in types and their functions in the lives of the Luo people. Similarly, all these findings and reflections about the Luo traditional beliefs is one way to see which values, beliefs and customs can be embraced by a Christian, which may be changed and which must be discarded. It is only when we understand both fully that we can make decisions and live our faith in an African way. However, as I am writing all these, I remain an African Christian and I am not doing any comparative religion, though it comes obviously that as one reads this work, he or she will be attempted to compare and contrast traditional beliefs, values and practices with those of Christianity. Of course, such an understanding, appreciation and then evaluation should enrich his Christian beliefs, personal commitments and stewardship. Keep your eyes open for any similarity which you might find as you read along the chapters and try to compare them with the Christian religious heritage if you can find them worth doing that.

CHAPTER 1

GOD AND THE SPIRITS

i). The Idea of God among the Traditional Luo Society

For the Luo traditional society, God was called "*Juok*" the mysterious one, who created the world and all it contains. The title '*Juok*' is common through out the Nilotic world, though with a light orthographic variation but for the Luo, he is the high God who is also known under a variety of titles corresponding with its different manifestations and activities. Though actually, '*Juok*' is an invisible entity permeating the universe and this subdivisions of '*Juok's*' activities in no way detracts from his essential oneness. '*Juok*' is like '*Yamo Makudho*'- like moving air or wind, he is Omnipresent; his presence may be heard and appreciated, but he has never been seen by any Luo man. He dwells everywhere: in Rocks, Trees and Hills, Springs, Pools, and vaguely his home is up-above the sky; Somewhere in the air above. He is so mysterious to the Luos, that they could only grasp who he is by his activities which he performed in the society and it became easier for them to call him by those activities and manifestations.

'Juok', the creator '*Jachwech*', created and takes interest in his creations where man is seen as the king of them all. Everything is created for his own use. This God is concerned with man's troubles and joys, he does cares, he does know he is Omniscient to the extent of coming into the world to heed their request.¹ '*Juok*' is the spiritual ruler and governor of the Universe and all the things visible and invisible. He is also the giver of the spiritual force of man which survives death and it is the same power which is responsible for conception as well as for fortunes and misfortunes. Hence, to the Luo, '*Juok*' is not an impartial universal power, but it is the essence of every being, the force which makes everything what it is, and God himself "*the Greatest Juok*" is the life force in itself, and this reminds me about what father Placide Tempels claimed in his book "*La Philosophie Batoue*," that the essence of

¹ Okot P'Bitek, *Religion Of the Central Luo*,(Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1971), Pg.49.

Bantu Philosophy was *'life force'*. I think Tempels here was right to identify a vital force as a necessary element in being and which is inseparable from the definition of being. Therefore, just as for the Bantu the ideal of being is never divorced from the force, so are the Luos of the Western Kenya, because for them all beings has vital force and exists only in that its force. This Tempels' so called Bantus ontology, also explain the belief among the Luo that the *'life force'* is *'Juok'*, who is God above all else. He is Omnipotent.

The Luo high God, *'Juok'*, could also be called by other titles which corresponded with its different manifestations and activities. For example, he is *"Were"*, meaning, One certain to grant requests: Ruoth or King; Nyasaye, is He who is begged pleaded or petitioned; *'Jachwech'*, the creator or more literally, the moulder; *'Jarit'* protector and helper; *'Wuon koth'*, the father of rain or rain giver. Above all, *'Juok'* is *'Nyakalaga'*, the ubiquitous one, the one who flows everywhere. His life-sustaining force, though unseen, is felt throughout the Luo world, among the rich and poor, the good and the bad, the sick and the healthy. He is like the Sun which does not single out the objects of its warmth but shines impartially on all alike. Furthermore, Nyakalaga who streams unseen, is bathing all in the warmth of his affection.² He who was known as *"Obongo Nyakalaga"* meaning the only one God who is Omnipresent and who dwells among the people. *'Obongo'* means only one. And for the Luos, it is even very clear in naming the only child of his parents-Obongo-the only child with no any other who comes after him or her for ever or after a long period of time ! However the subdivisions of Juok's titles of activities does not under any circumstances rule out the Luo belief in his essential oneness and that is why they called him *'Obongo'*. He is one *'Juok'* with many attributes.

Another mysterious way in which *'Juok'* helps his people can be felt in yet another of his titles -*'Kumu'*- that is, he who helps in secret ways. When, after the birth of a child, and before the menstrual cycle has restarted, a woman conceives once more, the second child, when it is born, is given the name *'Okumu'* Since his conception is seen as the secret work of

² Onya'ngo B. Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *Keep my Words*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd., 1974), Pg. 12.

'Juok'. The prayer which follows a neat example of the universal praise-and-petition form of prayer, sums up God's attributes mentioned above:

'Juok, the mysterious one, the ubiquitous one who streams among us - may your help reach

All the horns of the world, 'Ugwe, Imbo, Masawa kod Milambo.

Calm the violent "Jo chiende" (ghosts) who

Roam our land and haunt our homes. Let our prayers reach you.

And your companions, and may you bless our homesteads.

'Juok' of my ancestors descend for us,

You who always heed our prayers,

Save us from the forces of the nether people,

Who would see your home here torn a part

By sickness, war and famine.

Paralyse all magic and foes that

Your seed may multiply like sand

And shine all clean like cowries.

Take this gift, Grandfather and

Eat it with your friends !³

The violent '*Jochiende*' mentioned in the prayer are those spirits, usually hostile or mischievous, who inhabit the bushes of the whole continent and specifically the Western Kenya, like some vast undisciplined army of guerrillas, who by turns rampage and ambush, making life dangerous and uncertain. It is these spirits (who are not gods, but ghosts or bad spirits), against whom a man must protect himself when setting forth on journeys of adventures. They are the weird and unpredicted enemies of all heroes, and are the cause of floods and tornadoes, drought and epidemic. They are, clearly, the '*Nyiseche*' mentioned in another prayer which runs as follows:

Saye, our fathers and all the great ancestral spirits,

Blow your peace on us

³ Onya'ngo B. Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *Op.cit.*, Pg 13.

Drive away the 'Nyiseche'

Who are bent on bringing war and death

To our land.

They are our foes and

Hate to see your children prosper.

'Wuora'(My father) protect us.

And let us not fall their prey

Protect your name from hate, pride and laughter of the foes

And let them (Jochiende) set together with

The sun in "Milambo"(Opodhi gi chieng)⁴

The 'Nyiseche', then contrary to what seems suggested by their name is the plural of 'Nyasaye'. They are not sub-gods, but spirits which are out to wage wars and hate to see children of Saye prosper. When I talked to some elders in Kojwando clan of Kabol village, Mzee Ogony Blasto believe that this form of plural to *Nyasaye-Nyiseche*, came into being after the arrival of Christian missionaries who believed wrongly that, the Luo society worship not *ONE* God, but pantheon and thus used the plural form of 'Nyasaye' accordingly.

In fact the idea of 'Nyiseche' in the Luo worship which is the plural of 'Nyasaye' was the creation of the missionaries who wanted to convince the world that the Luos are polytheists. It seems to me the same as in the Christian religion when we talk of "God" and "gods". However, there is a widespread confusion over certain other words associated with traditional Luo religion, such as 'Jajuok' which does not refer to the high God or someone possessed by the high God but rather to wizards, a loathed and feared group who can magically tame wild beast and even slaughter innocent folk. A 'Jajuok' have power over fire and is seen riding forth at night. Furthermore, the evil in him have seeped up like poison from the underworld, whereas the blessing of the high God flow down from above.

⁴ Paul Mboya, Luokitgi gi Timbegi, *A Hand Book on Luo Customs*, (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd., 1983), Pg.58.

Similarly, the word "*Jojuogi*" doesn't apply to God, but it denotes those people who are possessed by the spirits. 'Ajuoke' are diviners but the name '*Juok*', however, does have legitimate use beyond its reference to the High God, and this when it refers to the great ancestral spirit of a clan. Already we are aware that the ancestors of the Luo play a central and vital role in the spiritual life of the community because they continue to hold their place within the ongoing dance of life, and they are the "*friends*" of '*Nyasaye*' as mentioned in the prayers above. They are a powerful communion of saints, close enough to the throne of God (*Nyasaye*) to make useful intermediaries when the living petition the deity. In fact, when the people are in the middle of a period of drought, the Luo chief prays to the Almighty through the ancestors to deliver them from distress. They made some sacrifices to *Nyasaye* and his company of ancestral spirits as mentioned in their prayer above that: "*Take this gift, grandfather and eat it with your friends....*" For the Luo, the world and the people in it were originally created by one God ('*Obongo*') who is supreme and who in addition to creating the people, also created the world of spirits who are active forces for good or evil in men's lives. When an elder suffers death, or is blown away by the wind as the Luo sometimes say, his spirit, which is the life force within him survives in the world of spirits. Although when I asked Mzee Blasto, what the Luos meant by living a bad life or a good life, he replied that, "most people are bad within the society because if they are strong, they take advantage of the weak. They can do whatever they want with them and they disturb the society. Such men or women are evil in the face of the society even though they had not died, they prosper by wickedness."⁵ This explanation leaves us with the conclusion which Mzee Blasto also agreed with, that the good people are the weak because they are not strong enough to be bad! They are few within the given society and are always striving to please his clan, family and neighbours, in the wider sense of his responsibilities. These are the concerned personalities within the community. However, the spirits of the truly great men are revered for ever. These are men like *Gor Mahia, Lwanda Magere and Ramogi*. Even though, neglect for the Luos is bred by the passing of time, it is also fraught with peril.

⁵ Mzee Blasto Ogony, Interviewed on *Idea of God and Spirit Among the Luo*, (Kisumu: Kabol village, Nyakach, On 12/7/96).

a) **Places of Worship:**

Concerning places of worship, the Luo seem to have no special built shrines or Temples to '*Juok*', instead, elders singled out particular trees and rocks which they declared to be places where '*Juok*' dwells on earth. The "*Yago*" or the sausage tree is one example, the "*Ng'ou*" or fig tree another. In fact, such trees belong to no one, but only God is their owner and the land about them is sacrosanct. Sometimes, the lake and the rivers are chosen as special place of veneration because of their awesome creation and contents. For example, "*Omweri*" the giant python of the Luo society revered as sacred reptile usually emerge from lake victoria and was esteemed, respected and treated well for it is beleived to be the spirit of the Luo great ancestor. May be this practise of the Luo might remind us of some facts in the dawn of history in the Roman Empire, when Handrian was the Emperor, and was present in Athens for the dedication of the Olympeion, he recounts how he sent to India a huge specimen to be specially consecrated. It embodied the spirits of the Earth and was an emblem of association with his youthful favourite Antinous. Furthermore, similar respect and treatment are common throughout Africa and especially it can be seen among the Luo in this particular issue of "*Omweri*",the great python of monstrous proportions which, in keeping with tradition was believed to bring fertility and prosperity to the land and that is why the issue of "*Omweri*" here in Kenya in 1991, raised many questions by the Luo parliamentarians and prominet personalities; leave alone elders back in the village ! *Omweri* has its right place and not in the city animal orphanage !

Among other most revered places in the Luo land are the Rocks, which include '*Kit Mikayi*' or the stone of the first wife in Seme location, and "*Nyakwaka* ", the stone of the embracer. A third one is the stone of "*Lwanda Magere* ", the Luo hero betrayed by his Lango wife during the ethnic boundary war. This stone can still be seen on the Kano plains near Awasi market close to Olik Oliero hills. The forth stone is "*kit Jajuok* " or the divine stone, a frightening place in the Kajulu hills now swarming with snakes and wild animals ! Often the rocks are hollow, admitting diviners for consultations with '*Juok*' on matters such as drought,

famine, or wifely barrenness.⁶ Like the rock in the book of Exodus and the cave at Lourdes, they are usually regarded as spring-bearing. The Luo seemed to have known that worship can hardly be confined to shrines. Instead, It is woven to the ordinary business of the day. For instance, the early morning prayer of the Luo Elder while the Eastern sky is still on fire is " *Rise well for me*". These words are addressed to the Sun and accompanied by his spitting towards the Eastern horizon. At dusk facing West, the old man cries, " *Tho...set well for me*", at the same time spitting once more. Here we can see the striking scenes of outdoor worship and in fact, " *Tho...! Tho...!* ", spitting of the elder towards the Sun was an acknowledgement that although the Sun is setting on them, it was rising on those ancestors whose spirits are alive. However, prayers of this sort is a normal feature of daily worship and in the absence of household shrines, the Sun is seen as a convenient " *gate of God*" or an eye of God looking down at his creatures, and praying through the sun to the Almighty is a legitimate alternative to addressing Him through the ancestors. Generally, the Luos were quite prayerful group of people whose God's name was all the times on their lips. For example, when one was amused and after laughing, he or she would call the name of God the Father - Nyasaye Wuora ! or Ah Nyasaye ! This could also happen when one mourns, surprised by an issue or terrified by a beast and many other such kinds.

b) The Paradise Lost:

Long before, the Luos were very close to Nyakalaga, who frequently came down to talk to them on certain matters concerning their future lives and, who protected them from death for a long period of time he was so good and merciful, until according to their myths of the lost paradise, 'Nyakalaga' sent a servant to earth with the message for all his people that they were to send an offering of fresh, untainted fat which is as clean and sparkling as the moon. This was to be done because of the drought that threatened the lives of the people, animals and plants due to the negligence of the people to offer their sacrifices to God as before. Hearing this, people slaughtered a fat goat removed its pure white fat and placed the meat in a clay dish, overspread with fine fresh leaves put inside a basket. They then

⁶ Onya'ngo B. Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *Op.Cit.*, Pg.20.

summoned *'Ng'ongruok'* or chameleon also known as *'haniafu'* who was by then the messenger of the human being, to take the sacrificial meat to God in heaven and ask Him to forgive his people for their negligence and to send rain for his creatures on earth. *'Ng'ongruok'* was instructed not to eat or make the meat dirty and to take it in time. Likewise, the people also fashioned the ladder that reached upto heaven where Nyasaye-God dwells in his glory, a path which *'Ng'ongruok'* would follow when carrying their offering.⁷ On those days the paradise was very close to the people because they could walk to and from, using the ladder which connected heaven and earth. It also meant that God was very close to the people and He could come down anytime! However, on this very occasion, the people never slept a wink, they stayed awake throughout the night waiting back for the chameleon's message from God.

But, as the chameleon went on climbing the ladder in the scorching heat, the temptation to taste the succulent appetising piece of meat proved too great that he stopped to taste a little of the meat that proved to be tender and juicy; an act very contrary to the instructions he was given. So *'Ng'ongruok'* ended up eating a big chunk of it, leaving the remaining piece that was to be taken to God very dirty, covered with soil since he had no knife. And once the chameleon realised that he was late, he lowered the remaining meat inside the basket down from his back and begun to hurry, dragging it along.⁸ Unfortunately when the chameleon reached the glorious home of God, he found God Himself absent, but the people (spirits) at home welcomed him with great happiness. When God came back home next day, the chameleon began telling Him why he had come. He said, " I have not come of my wish alone, but with the wishes of all the people and animals, plus trees that man rules. A draught has come which will finish everything on the face of the earth. There is famine, the water has disappeared, trees are drying out and animals are also dying. Please, if there is something which we have done to you which does not please you, then we beg for

⁷ *Ibid.*, Pg. 43.

⁸ Asenath Obole Odaga, *Yesterday's Today*, (Kisumu: Lake Publishers & Enterprises Limited, 1984), Pg. 21.

forgiveness".⁹ But God told him, " Yes, I am very angry with the human beings because they have forgotten to worship me through their sacrifices and it is for this reason I am punishing them. But now, I agree to forgive them all plus other creatures, unless they bring clean goat meat on behalf of all creatures as their sacrifices to me".

At this point the chameleon, remembered the gift in the basket and he therefore presented a duty and unsightly offering of meat to God; to which God was so furious with that he rejected it shouting, - " Tell the people of the earth that because of their insult to me, they must now lose the golden opportunity and previlage of enjoying my presence among them, and the riches of my paradise. I must from today on cut off my link (ladder) with them and they must now labour hard in offering their sacrifices to please me, I will never listen to them except only through their great ancestors who obeyed my voice and demands ".¹⁰

God then chased away the chameleon and threw the dirty pices of meat after him. From that day on, the Luo begun praying through the ancestors and called God '*Nyazaye*' meaning he who is begged, Petitioned or pleaded with, because now the people could not enjoy that previlages as before and in order to yield to their needs, God was continually pleased with or asked to accept their plea. This structure puts God now on the peak while the spirits of the Luo ancestors is the mediator between God and the community. Thus, in almost all of their prayers, the ancestors were provoked to interceed for them to God in any kind of problem that affected the community or individuals. Meanwhile, because of the chameleon's clumsiness and disobedient to the instruction of man, he was cursed out of the community; hence he must walk on all fours and his steps must be hesitant and slow because of the fear to meet man and that is why you will always see him carrying one leg raised from the ground as he tries to decide exactly where to tread.

To narrate how long time ago, God used to speak to the people, guide them, visit them and how men and women got their food and satisfied their needs with scarcely any suffering and often with no suffering at all, the Luo people seem to conclude their story with what

⁹ C. Chesaine, *Oral Literature of the Kalenjins*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Limited, 1991), Pg.33.

¹⁰ Blasto Ogony, *Op.Cit.*, 12/7/96.

seemed to me as the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible where Qoheleth tries to explain that there's a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven. These people around the Lake, understand that all that God does is apt. for its time, and even though he has given them awareness of the passage of time, they can grasp either the beginning or the end of what God does. Thus, the Luos believe that once a baby is born, his death is also arranged immediately at that very time and there is nothing they can do. However, for the Luos, men and women got their food and satisfaction of their needs from the land concerned, and they had no suffering at all because 'Nyakalaga' (God) spoke to them and guided them in all their affairs.

Then, one day 'Nyakalaga' spoke to 'Mikayi', a young newly married woman, "take your hoe to the garden, he said. When you get there, cut the ground once and leave the hoe alone. Your garden will then look after itself, digging, weeding and finally, even harvesting itself". But when Mikayi took her hoe to the garden she cut the ground not once but several times, seeing this act of disobedience, 'Nyakalaga' told Mikayi, "You have disobeyed my orders. Now you must dig for the rest of your life and your food will grow only as a result of your sweat. Woe to your children and great-great children ! They must all from now on labour for their food." ¹¹ Thus through Mikayi's foolish behaviour, a Luo always dig for his food, and it is this disobedience that tired farmers, when they curse aloud, lamenting, " *Tho!* Mikayi, the disobedient one. You are the cursed of our sweat, and if only you had obeyed 'Nyakalaga' we would not be suffering like this ". And so after all these disobedience of man to God, man resolved to plead to 'Nyakalaga' that he may continue to manifest himself among the community. The Elders urged people to continue pleading with him in times of troubles and needs. And as they do this tirelessly, "saye" heeded to their plea, thus, many people begun calling God Nyasaye because now he is far from the people and only listens to the people's needs after a long plea. " We must persist in prayers and our request will be granted. Keep on knocking the door and you will be opened to (Lk. 11:9-13,cf.18:1)". These are some of the words we find in the Bible concerning our relationship with God and satisfaction of our needs; Which shows a shift of thought and relationship with God from the time of Adam

¹¹ Onya'ngo B. Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *Op.cit.*, Pg.47.

and Eve before the fall ! or with the people of Israel before the '*Second Covenant*' with God, when He was always in their midst, spoke to them, and guided them in their affairs. Second Covenant used here, is meant to refer to Christ as the one who will now liberate them from all their difficulties.

Despite all these blames and misunderstanding between God and man, the Luo people understood and believed that God has spoken to them and revealed not just some truths about themselves and their world, but about His own way of being personal in relation to them. For Luos, God in the mystery of revelation is revealed as someone, because he comes in their midst and heed to their needs. God as someone, can only be grasped generally by us humanbeings and in particular by the Luos through our own experiences of being human together. This is only possible through our Love and concern for one another, in friendship and in human community where our religious and social ceremonies bind and hold the group in common unity.

ii). What are the Spirits according to the Luo people?

a) Known Spirits:

The Luos, like many other African society, also work in all kinds of ways for the good of others, even to the extent that the living-dead are also considered or believed to be concerned with the people. The Luos believed in the existence of the Spiritual beings and Spiritual World. Thus, for them both the living and non-living creatures, like some objects can contain some form of spiritual powers ! The spirits according to the Luos are also other beings who populate our Universe besides man and God, and whose roles can either be for the good or for the worse of a particular community. Generally, spirits play a very important part in the life of the Luo people and once a person died, he or she enters another place of existence which is regarded as Mysterious because no living man has gone there or is able to explain their experiences. Thus for a Luo, although there is always a cause for one's death, there is no natural death, and so they strongly believe too that the dead person is no longer lost or gone for good! They never use proverbs like, " out of sight, out of mind" because a

dead person continued to live in spirit even after the physical bodies decomposed. The spirits determine the destiny of human beings, hence good relationship is to be established with them. Or else, for example, the Luos believe that any fate that befalls the community be it good or bad, is an influence by the intervention of the Spiritual Forces. They associate any calamity that befalls an individual family or community to some evil done by the party concerned or a mere negligence to appease the spirits of their ancestors.

As I said earlier that spirits are one of the beings that populate our World, they must be created by God who is the creator of all things. So, we can therefore argue that because they are created by God, they are subordinate to him and dependent on him, and some of them whom I call good spirits because of their positive concern, may be used by God to perform certain duties among the people since they have possessive or spiritual power as they will. However, remember that in the Luo creation narrative account, God was very friendly to the people and they enjoyed the paradise atmosphere of God that at any time, one could climb through the ladder into Heaven to have a chat with God. But until the chameleon who one day was sent by the people to God and never followed the instructions, made '*Nyakalaga*'- the God who dwells among the people, to bitterly chase back the chameleon and the people's gifts too and cut off the ladder , thus making the distance between him and the people yet quite far! This changed the thinking of the people because they still longed to recapture that relationship which they enjoyed before. But at the back of their minds, they had known who to mediate their plea to God. The ancestral spirit was alive and concerned, thus he could intercede for the people incases of any calamity or thanksgiving sacrifices to God in times of harvests. The ancestral spirits are simply of those people who were once present on earth in bodily form, but have now shed their bodies and live in a Spiritual existence elsewhere in heaven, perhaps or in the underworld. The spirit is simply the one who lived on earth, transported or changed his place to a new, spiritual world and are the spirits of those regarded by the Luos as having lived a good moral life here on earth and among his community.

The idea of spirits serve an important social and psychological purpose through human possession because spirits are believed by the Luos to be of those people who were once leaders, heroes, warriors, clan leaders and others who lived a good moral life. Such

personalities sometimes continued to be respected, honoured and their memories are brought into the life of the clan, community or nation. A clear example of our times is that of the Luo leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga whose memories can never die within the Luo community. However, the memories of such people were brought into the life of the clan through legends or ceremonies in which they featured, and it is strongly believed that the spirits of such good people may possess human beings voluntarily to their friends or any close family members. In fact, in the paradigmatic case when the memories of such people are held, the now regarded an ancestral spirit is worshipped by name and names are perpetuated in the lineage genealogies and personal pedigrees in an accepted generation sequence. Moreover, these genealogies are equally essential for the correct constitution of congregations of worshippers, for the exact focusing of their ritual service, and for the organization of social relations in all domains of social structure. An ancestor is a named, dead forbearer who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing his continued structural relevance. In ancestral worship, such an ancestor receives ritual service and tendance directed specially to him by the proper class of his descendants. Being identified by name means that, he is invested with attributes distinctive of a kind person. In fact, one thing must always be clear in our minds whenever we talk of ancestors it is that, they are believed to exist somewhere in heaven, in the underworld or on earth, and no doubt they do so in ways that mirror life here in this world, and that is why when one died, he was buried with some items for the life after to continue the active life. It is therefore logical and necessary to account for their immortality by providing a picture of an after-life as is done by the Luos in their mythology and theology of the Spirits.

The Luos also had a belief that the ancestral spirit is not a kind of nebulous being or personified mystical presence, but primarily sometimes as a name attached to objects, animals, standing for ritual validation of lineage ancestry and for mystical intervention in human affairs. In more concrete terms it is thought of as counterpart, in the context of lineage cult, of the matrilineal or patrilineal component of the living person. In fact, people of good reputation were even named after things, cows or bulls and children; though it was not always the case. For example, If there was a man in the village who was quite strong

committed to his work and concerned with the society, he could after his death be named a bull which pulls the yoke strongly. And in fact, that is why I said earlier, that for the Luo of western Kenya, human beings, animals and some non-living things possess some kind of spiritual powers that continue to live even after death or decomposition of their physical bodies.

When we talk of our ancestors, that we do not mean just the dead person, but we talk of the spirit in power of the dead ancestors sent or which come to work, warn, lead or take care of the living. It is a strong belief that the dead are somewhere watching what the living are doing and when they are displeased with the living, they do not come in person to manifest their displeasure, but always sent a power that comes to warn the people. This to some extent is not only with the Luos, but to many Africans, spirit is seen as a power controlled by the dead person, for the good or for the worse. The Luo say, "*Aneno tipo ngane*" or "*Ngane ne obirona e tipone*" meaning, so and so came to me in his true shadow. "Tipo" (shadow) for the Luos could mean a spirit-hostile or responsible. It could be a disturbing "*Tipo*" of a dead person who is never pleased with certain things in the society or who reacts to the cause of his or her death.

To strengthen this point, there is a famous true Luo story of "*Amyango nyar kadem*" who shared one husband with another "*Sumu*" (barren) woman and when she was giving birth to her second child, the barren woman "*Sumu*", because of jealousy of fertility to give birth, cooked for her the child's Umbilical cord as meat to eat. She died there after, but because of her concern and consciousness to her two children, she could come in her own power as a shadow (Tipo) of a mother and prepared for them lunch, sometimes supper, especially when the elder woman went into the garden or to the market or on a journey, and strangely enough, these children could tell their mother that they have already eaten their mothers delicious food. She had already cooked to us and suckled our young baby!

Critically, this dead mother was never a ghost, but a concerned spirit of the dead mother who cares and is concerned. However, two points are clear from this Luo story that: jealousy can lead you to kill the innocent, those whom we love will continue to be with us in spirit after their death. They will come to us as a power of the dead, that will either take care

of us or retaliate certain displeasures met in the society. There is a fundamental thought among the Luos that there is something in human beings which survives the death of the body which they called spirit and which I think is well founded and true because it is manifested in the many cases that while individuals die, the clan persists.

To many, spirits are like God because they are both uniquely attractive and strangely fearsome. Of course, it is quite true to many Africans including the Luo society, that fear entered into their worship of ancestors, but it was a fear of the consequences that will follow any failure in their pious duty. The real feeling here is a mingling of trust and fear which can be compared to how a child regards his Father - with a measure of fear, no doubt, but predominantly with love. But as I said, the ancestral spirit of the Luo people are mostly presented as kindly protectors of the living who, in turn regard their dead ancestors with pious affection. And that is why in a Luo homestead, you will find a fire made from the animal wastes in the middle of the home or at the cow shed. The Luo called it '*Duol*' as a place or coming together around the fire to share food, stories or talks, and the fire which burnt slowly meant to warm the protector of the property at night. When people were asleep, the Luo believed that the ancestral spirit who are the protectors of the living and their wealth, will warm themselves from the cold night as they keep watch of the wealth in a home. Usually, such a fire was never left to die out because it was like a life wire in homes. It was the centre of all interests even to the young boys and girls who learned many things from such gatherings. It is here where sometimes even the elementary sex education could be taught, inform of story telling, legends, proverbs and life riddles.

The gathering at '*Duol*' in the night, helped the Luo youths and even the Elders sometimes to enjoy and wonder the beauty of creation especially through the shining stars at night and the moon. These heavenly powers, especially the stars could be seen having formed certain images experienced in the daily lives of the people. These image formations, could also be seen with the clouds which could even form an image of a familiar home, an animal, human image, or cows grazing! These kind of images according to Mzee Ogony Blasto, who is now ageing 103 years said, they signified to a Luo adult that there is another world that

awaits us after life here on earth¹². This sometimes was told to the children whenever they saw such images in the clouds, and in fact, the notion by now should be clear that for the Luo community, heaven was beyond the clouds. So, something from the clouds was given a certain value of respect and believed to have come from the sacred one.

From '*Duol*', the spirits exercised the guardianship of a particular home and of the social order in general and that's why they protected the wealth of the society and particularly of a home, and they could inspire an Elder to give instructions or warnings to his subjects in a home. And since the individual or groups, generally speaking, is or are happier in an orderly than in a disorderly society, the vigilant role of the spirits brought a number of benefits to the individual members of the community and by enforcing the maintenance of the integrity of the group, the spirits gave each individual a sure sense of '*belonging*' which is a comfort in human life.

The spirits kept the society going and provided the people with a sense of identity, such that a Luo remains a Luo, he is born a Luo and always a Luo. Of course the cultures of Africa as a whole even of the Luos today are changing and are no more what they used to be. Furthermore, some customs remain while others change especially technologically, educationally, politically, culturally and to some extent religiously. However, we find that during times of crisis, especially death, even professing Christians revert to traditional beliefs and practices¹³. The fact here is that superficial customs change easily with the passage of time, while the deep core world view beliefs of a people are very persistent. May I make it clear here that beneath the explicit struggle over traditional values, versus contemporary values today, there is the traditional world view of the Luo which is religious at heart and which many people even in Kenya today have not understood. Others even go to the public press to express their dissatisfaction over some of the Luo practices; not knowing the traditional world view of the Luo and the consequences of the neglect. A well known example that I can cite is the case of a contemporary prominent man in Kenya, Mr. S.M.

¹² Mzee Blasto Ogony, *Op.Cit.*, 12/7/96.

¹³ Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Perspective*, (Kijabe: Kesho Publications, 1989), Pg. 19.

Otieno whose burial plans by his wife was stopped by a counter injunction from the deceased man's brother for five months. Mr. Otieno's brother and the Umira Kager clan in conjunction told the court that if Otieno's body is not buried at home in Kager, then Wambui (the late Mr. Otieno's widow) and her family will have bad luck. Ghosts and bad spirits would haunt the family members, so they contended. Indeed the clan said that if the courts did not grant them authority to bury the body at the ancestral home, they would follow traditional burial rites practised when someone drowns and his body is lost for burial. In such cases, the Luos would take a local fruit tree called '*Yago*', and this is what the Umira Kager clan would use to represent the late lawyer's body. Of course, the traditional prayers and rites would be said before the branch of the tree is buried. And all this is intended to prevent bad luck.

In fact, there is room for raising one's own opinion but it would be scholarly and convincing if the opposer knows as the background of his arguments that the knowledge of the Luo traditional religion helps one to understand the thinking of the Luo clan, because the Luo believe that when a man dies, his '*Chuny*' (soul) continues and being transformed into an ancestral spirits, sometimes called '*Tipo/Juogi*' or '*Jachien*' if it appears like a ghost to haunt. Although the body dies, the Luo person remains very much alive and active among the members of the clan or family. And while the body corrupts in the ground (grave), his spirit continues to interact with the living for good or evil. These ancestral spirits or the "*living dead*" as John Mbithi puts it, can bring benefits to the living or they can produce the problem of ghostly vengeance when they are unhappy with, may be, how they died, the negligence of the burial rites by the living, the general behaviour of the clan ! Specifically, when an ancestor is offended by the living, his aggrieved spirit becomes a menace to the living, haunting the living (in particular) by causing sickness and death. However, there is a general opinion even from our scholars that the Luo ancestral spirit was ghostly and caused problems of vengeance only to the living. And it was referred to as '*Jachien*', a spirit that haunts and to avoid this problem, they say the Luo have the custom of driving away the ancestral spirit at the funerals. This could be a '*Yes*' and '*No*'. *Yes*, because the Luo must keep the traditions laid down by the community of driving away the bad spirits in that home or clan that might prevent the spirit of the ancestor to take over the care of the family or clan, and to break

traditions of the society will surely bring revenge from the ancestral spirit. Such bad spirits were always driven away to where they belong, (as we shall see). The evil spirits were believed by the Luos to be too strong and aggressive in dealing with the living. On the other hand, it is *No*, because the Luo people believed that death was caused by somebody either through medicine, poisoning or beating. And since death of a Luo has somebody behind it, then one who is killed and dies in pain, will not be happy, and obviously his spirit will be unhappy with the living ! So, such unhappy spirits could return and haunt the living. But such spirits were purified or cleansed in a process called '*DHINGO*', literally meaning that, what was mixed up with some dirt is sieved or squeezed out of. *Dhingo* could refer to squeezing the attitude of bad spirit from the ancestral spirit or from the good spirit of that man believed to have lived a good life among the clan even though he is killed by some rebels within the clan. This was performed by the witch-doctor so that, his spirit could be turned to its real stage of what it is supposed to be as far as his life was concerned within the clan. That evil attitude which might influence his goodness, was emanated (*Dhingo*) in a ceremonial rite, and that spirit became polite, concerned and a guardian to the living. Libations and riteful ceremonies were occasionally performed in honour of the ancestral spirit. Moreover, the spirits of the dead in the traditional Luo society were feared, but with love. It was the fear of the separation in space, not sure of how they live in that transcendent world. And yet they were united in love with the living. '*Dhingo*' proposes the idea that a dead person had two spirits in this matter (Bad spirits and good spirits) because death was only caused by someone else. Furthermore, in such cases, the ancestral spirit was honoured with millet beer, and his spirit will only be regarded as evil if the trouble (haunting) persists after the beer has been brewed.

And that is why the Luo used '*Dhingo*' in some cases where there is a great struggle with death by the deceased. Such spirit was cleansed and the attitude of suffering and painful character is driven away through some traditional burial rites like '*Tero Buru*.' This *Tero Buru* is to bring or welcome the spirit of a died person (ancestral) and driving away together those evil spirits around in the home and may be the other fold or character of the sinfulness that the living person might have had or suffered at the time of his death ! So during the

funeral, *'Tero buru'* would start from outside the deceased's home as away of bringing the foot dust of the Elder back home, and a war dance in full regalia (dress), complete with spears and shields was performed accompanied by frenzied (wild emotional excitement) drum beats and other loud noises from various instruments to drive away the harmful spirits to the mourners present and to the family or community to ensure a normal life for the survivors. This also explains why the Luo never despairs to treat - (Dhingo) any person whom they thought was evil in the community. They were sure that however red your sins in the community are, they could be made as white as ice. Thus, man in his two fold character has the capacity and chance to turn to be good or refuses to remain evil. Moreover, on such traditional ceremonial rites, evil spirits were pleaded with to come out of the person and they could refuse to abide with the request, prompting the person to continue in the same state as before.

The custom is widely practised even today. People come to the funeral with their cattle from different places and drums are beaten while emotions are high, they drive the cattle, spear the air and the opposing spirits within that home are driven away. It is not true that the Luo feared the spirits of the dead and by *'Tero Buru'* they drove away the spirits of the deceased, because, then that would rule the fact that while an Elderly person died, a fire was lit in the centre of the home to light up the home and warm it and its people. The spirit of the deceased was warmed and invited to be with the family that night. To lead the family on their arrangements to protect the wealth ! And by wailing and crying, the Luo were very much concerned with that gap created and an end of the physical meeting with the deceased and it was not that by it they drove away the ancestral spirit, No, Secondly, wailing was a kind of warning to the other village of the loss and damage done by death. They valued the presence of a living person, his work and relationship. At the funeral, if you listen to the mourners they usually cry-mentioning and lamenting on the gap created and who will complete that he left undone. To whom will he or she relate with as was with the deceased or how the widow and her children are left without the concerned father, is a great pain to the mourners and family. Similarly, if the dead person had lived a good life within the society, people usually mourned him than when his life in community was bothersome ! And you can always here comments

like (Eh! ngane oyuagi !) so and so has been mourned ! This kind of comments obviously implies how lovely you were to the people and how they appreciated your life among them. Then after two days or so, they accept the situation to send the dead person to the world of the spirits. The Luo said, " *Wadhi kowo ngane*" or "*Wadhi iko ngane*". The former expression brings in the right meaning of what really happens at funerals. 'Kowo' means to escort, thus at the grave site, the spirit of the deceased is escorted with songs and procession to the world of the spirits. And there after, his '*Buru*' (dust) is brought back to stay with the people, while the wild spirits that might refuse the deceased person's spirit entry are driven away in a more wild emotional excitement.

The good spirits which possess people are like guardians of family affairs, traditions, Ethics and activities, and for the Luo society any offence in this matter was ultimately counted as an offence against the forefathers, heroes and the good moral people who, in that capacity in a form of a spirit, acted as the invisible police of the family and community. And since the human relationship with the spirits vary from society to society, the Luo people believe that the spirits of those who died recently sometimes needs performance of various rites especially when there is any offence to the family affairs. This was done to keep their contact with the family and , since they believed that spirits were ever with men, and man would obviously feel uncomfortable if the ontological mode of the spirits were too distant from his own because this would upset the balance of existence and if the balance is upset, then they offered sacrifices¹⁴ . Failure to do this, would result to the annoyance of the spirits, and could come as bad spirits to haunt or cause sickness.

b) Unknown Spirits:

Broadly speaking, the Luo society also believed in ghosts as bad spirits. These ghosts are taken by the Luo as harmful and aggressive towards the living. They are what the Luo call '*Jochiende*' for plural and '*Jachien*' for singular. They haunt and never pleased with whatever good thing you are doing, and when they possess any member of the family, they may drag

¹⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion And Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.,1969), Pg.80.

him out of the family and cause any other illness like madness, epilepsy, small pox and at times '*Jachien*' can appear as wild animal's image ready to attach in dreams or in the image of somebody who was feared in the village. If a person is possessed by a bad spirit '*Jachien*' he may be dictated by that spirit who fears to stay together with human beings and instead lead him or her into the dwelling world of bad spirits. Bad spirits are believed to live on mountains, lakes, trees, rivers or some isolated places like caves. These spirits were feared and the belief was that, there are some people whose death can not permit their spirits into the realm of the ancestral spirit world because of how they died. In fact, these rejected ghost-spirits included people who were not buried properly, those who died an unhappy death by either hanging, drowning, being struck by lightning or in pregnancy. Again, people who were accursed while living among the clan are also rejected and their spirits will wander aimlessly, haunting and causing sickness to the living. Their general aim seems to be waging war against the living by molesting and harming people. The bad spirits are unknown, nameless, mere strangers to the living and unpredictable and frequently dangerous, and that is why the Luo called it '*Jachien*'.

"*Ja*"_ one who, and "*Chien*"_ means behind. So '*Jachien*' would mean " one who comes from behind ". '*Jachien*' is a silent trouble maker who attacks at a time when you least expect it. It comes from behind because it does not like to approach the living face to face since it fears being together with the people. They are those spirits which do not like to be known by names, but are out to molest by attacking from behind without being seen. In the normal life, If your enemy wants to inflict any pain on the opponents, he or she will either attack from behind or hide some place where you can not see him until he attacks or strikes to kill because he knows that if you see him, you will either run away or pluck the courage to face him in defending yourself !

This is exactly what happens with *Jachien* when he wants to cause some harm to the living. However in many instances, these bad (ghosts) or unknown spirits are used in divination and medical practices to help in the diagnosis of diseases and some family problems and their cure or solutions. They are sometimes called back under special ceremonies by the diviners whereby in a mystic conversation (Colloquy), the good spirits of

the diviner and the bad spirits of the mad man come to an agreement and accept appeasement. The subject then undergoes intensive treatment aimed at purification which requires many white goats or sheep and chickens. White for the Luo signified purity. However, when the subject seems to be normal again, the diviner puts on him strips of skin, one on the wrist and one on the middle finger and when the cure is succesiful, the subject ceremoniously joins the family again or sometimes the spirits could beg to remain in him but as good spirits who are concerned with the family affairs. And he could become one of those whose function is to tell the future and cure diseases as diviner or medium do¹⁵.

¹⁵ Onya'ngo B. Ogutu and A.A.Roscoe, *Op.Cit.*, Pg.18.

CHAPTER II

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS (ROLES) OF THE SPIRITS:

i) The Good Spirits:

The good spirits were known as fundamental part of the clan, Whereby any separation between the living and the dead members or their spirits would lead to loss of the sense of belonging to the community. In fact the spirits of the dead relatives whose moral lives were recommended in the society were held in love and respect because they were regarded protective and benevolent. And the Luos being aware of this fact and making their belief(s) part of their daily living always when constructing their houses left a small open round window to let in the spirits, in the house anytime he wants to visit a family, but when the question of insecurity from snakes, dangerous insects and danger of being seen in the house by a prowler arose, they devised another method whereby in the centre of the round house, a pole or pillar was erected touching the roof, and it's here where hunting trophies were hung, spears placed against and from outside on top of the roof was put a straight piece of wood pointing to the sky called '*Osuri*' as an inlet for the spirits to come in through or when God was to visit a family to create. But the Luos, after the paradise lost, strongly believed that God send His spirits (ancestral spirits) as his messengers to attend to his people's needs or plea. Thus, the ancestors automatically became the symbol of prosperity as now a gift brought down to mankind by God, so that man can have an increase of wealth, children, a good life and to have a protection within the community.

This becomes clear that the ancestral spirits of the Luo play a central and vital role in the spiritual life of the community because they continue to hold their place with the ongoing dance of life. They are the "*friends of Nyasaye*" (as mentioned in the prayers above), a powerful communion of saints, close enough to the throne of God to make useful intermediaries when the living petition the deity. For example after the paradise lost, when the people are in the middle of a period of a drought, they pray to the Almighty "*through the*

great ancestors", whose spirits are truly severed for evil, to deliver them from distress. These men whose spirits' influence remain alive within the community and revered, are like *Gor Mahia* - whose spirit has been honoured in Kenya by having a football team from the Luo land dedicated to him; *Ramogi* - also his spirits' influence has been honoured by dedicating many business premises after him, (*eg. Ramogi photography, Ramogi institute of Technology etc.*) and *Lwanda Magere*. In fact, once such clubs or business premises are started, they represent the spirit or Elder after whom it's named. They become symbolic of the powers and dignity of the spirits. Furthermore, in some cases people like to call the ancestral spirits the living dead ! True, these living dead can be physically reborn (incarnation) in a family and the child named after the dead person according to the demand of the spirit. And the Luo people kept this practice of naming after a dead person because they believed that children keep their dead relatives, friends, parents or elders in living memories and in turn name their children after them.

As already been put before, the good spirit belong to a person who contributed positively to the needs and wishes of the community. Such person is obviously remembered by his or her relatives and also by the community as a whole. Like *Gor Mahia*, his spirit remains alive in the stage of the living-dead for a long time within the community because of his good character, personality and active contributions he made to the society in which he lived. Such a person will be remembered by the people in terms of the present and recent past because his memories is alive among them. He automatically becomes a hero of one kind or another.¹⁶ Of course, even such men could be neglected as bred by the passing of time, but neglect is fraught with peril. Again, the ritual possession and the ceremony of brewing beer or libation for the spirit, is the spontaneous thanks for the spirit's care of the family or community and ensuring continued favour or intercession to the Almighty.

Furthermore, the Luos believe that if the spirit is simply asking for beer-libation or for some other ritual to which it has the right to, then it is a good spirit because bad spirits will never demand anything since already what they become after death is what they lived within

¹⁶ Jesse Mugambi and Nicodemus Kirima, *The African Religious Heritage*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1991), Pg. 112.

the community. Their badness is never seen after the the death of a person, but before, when he or she is still living within the community. The badness of their spirits is reflected in their criminality and negative contribution in the society. They are enemies of the Law and Customs. Furthermore, a spirit can only be regarded as evil if the trouble it afflicts persists even after the beer or other rights have been brewed and performed as they request or else a service of a "*Jadil*" is employed to be exorcised and track them down ! "*Dilo*" in Luo is to Keep the harsh spirit cool and discourage it from harming people in the home. sometimes it could be transferred to another person in the distant village ! In English, the concept of "*coolness*" carries overtone of calm, placid peacefulness; the opposite of "cool" is "hot" much as the concept used in the English expression "*hot tempered*". Calm is a benefit and it's essential for the spirits of the ancestors believed to have passed from the life of the living community to the existence in community of the spirits. The Luo regarded the good spirits as *CALM* and beneficial to them. In the same way, an African ancestral spirit can be neglected by the passage of time, though this does not mean forgetting him but he enters another stage in the continuous rhythm of African Traditional life where his name remain in the genealogies of the descendants and his achievements may be mythologized, depending on the impact he made on the relatives and community in general while he was physically alive. His deeds in the society can be made into pedagogical stories or tales, riddles to the youth. The spirits of such ancestors though not frequently mentioned in the Luo daily talking, they are contacted in times of family crisis because they know the family foundation better and in fact, for the Luo people, the living dead or those ancestors whose death memories are still fresh in the mind of the community serve to communicate the wishes of the living relatives or community to the ancestors who died long ago. So, there are some rites which are repeated by the living community(ies) making requests to the ancestors, and reminding them that their living relatives are still on friendly terms with them and that the customs of the community are still maintained. Thus, they are asked to bless the descendants for, abundance in fertility, food and livestock. This does not mean worshipping the ancestors, for the community know how to make a distinction between these kind of requests and their worship of Nyasaye-God. Anyway, the requests to the living dead and to the ancestors may sometimes differ from

community to community, village to village, family to family, and from relatives to relatives, but the worship of God will be more uniform in a particular community.

The living-dead are also requested to pass on (*intercede*) to God the requests of their relatives. The requests here are more general and even the representatives - priests - "*Jodolo*" who perform the rites of worship are expected to communicate to God the will of the whole community. The spirits of the living dead also help to preserve and sustain the traditional standards of the community such that, like the police they help to control the behaviour of those who have been instructed to behave in a particular way by the society. That is, the good spirits are partners in the practical running of the universe. They are believed to be specialists in the functioning of a particular aspect of human life. The explanation above reveals that like any other African society, the Luo have the hierarchy of spirits or beings whereby one being dominates over all. This one being who is at the top of the pyramid, has a supreme power and is responsible for the functioning of the universe. But at the same time, he is helped by the spirits of long ago dead ancestors (Proto-ancestors), then followed by the living-deads' spirits. The ones I called, the spirits of those whose death are still fresh in the memories of the community, and then at the bottom of the pyramid, we find the community. However, without any doubt, the Luos always distinguished between the One supreme sustainer - (Nyakalaga) of the universe and the spirits of the world which also depended on Him. These spirits are ontologically near to God, not ethically, but in terms of communication with Him.

When I talked to some elderly people about the spirits in the Luo land, they said, the spirits are with us, " even now, here we are seated ", This means they are in the same geographical region as men and thus, they are men's contemporaries. Man would feel uncomfortable if the ontological mode of the spirits are too distant from his own. And once there's a distant gap created, the balance of existence is upset, and no sooner the balance is already upset, than men make sacrifices, offerings and prayers, to try to restore it. Further more, in addition to whatever other activities of which men may not know about, the spirits activities are similar to those of human life here on earth because they inquire about family affairs, may warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions and so they are like guardians of the family affairs, traditions, ethics and

activities. In fact, offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the forefathers who, in that capacity, act as the invisible police of the families and communities. The Spirits' other function is to keep the Luos from forgetting that God is spirit from whom all other spirits spring. Of course, this fact reveals that spirits are not limited to time and space. They can be found everywhere any time. And because they are spirits, they are free to relate to other people in any kind, either positively or negatively depending on the relationship that existed while he was still living among the community. But even though man can relate positively with the spirits, he is still not regarded the most powerful being in the universe because there are other beings who are more powerful than him,- One of whom is God. And that is the reason why even in the Luo traditional life, a child learns from infancy to be conscious of the fact of his dependence on God and always try to behave in a manner that will please God, the spirits and the fellow human beings. But on the other level of the community there are some actions which stress the dependence of man on the higher forms of existence.

Among such actions are the sacrifices of slaughtered and roasted domestic animals, such as chickens, sheep, goats and cattle and the offering of foods and drinks in form of libation, to God and the spirits. Anyway, we must be quite aware that carrying out of such rituals, and often the giving of prayer to God, follow laid down-ways whereby people led by '*Jadolo*' (a priest) face places they considered holy during prayers. The Luos will face either the East or West, depending on the Sun whether it is morning or in the evening. usually their rituals was done either in the morning or evening when the Sunshine is mild and polite ! Such prayers, are directed and asked for God's help and protection for the whole community and especially in times of famine or during an epidemic. However, not all the people are able to communicate with the spirits effectively. Sometimes, such communication is under the control of particular individuals in the community - The diviners. They may use different methods to communicate with the spirits, such as:-

(1) *Ecstasy* - is where the person may become emotionally very excited, and shout, sing or dance as an experience of his or her communication with the spirits.

(2) *Visions and dreams* - This is where a person may visualize or see the spirits in his dreams or visions, and have conversations with them. Then after that he may report his conversation to the people to help him or her interpret the message.

(3) *Prophetic advice* - Is where some individuals may be accepted as having a special relationship with God and spirits and those physically alive. These can be priests or mediums who are consulted to give advice on personal as well as social matters, after he retires to an isolated place to communicate with the spirits. Such individuals who play these roles in the community are of upright character and their deeds and sayings are regarded seriously because the community depend on them on such matters between human beings and the spirits world. The character of one possessed by the good spirits is different from the one having the bad spirits in their way of behaviour towards the fellow living human. The former shows concerned, helping or hindering the living if her or she goes against the community norms, while the latter is careless, aggressive and rejoices over the misfortunes of the community. They are jealous about any small process of the community, a family or individuals !

The important element which we can draw from flow of thoughts here is that there is the inter-dependence of the living and the spirits of their ancestors. They live in intimate association, and are inter-dependent, each communicating with the other, even though a veil of two worlds does separate the two. But it's not an iron curtain which can prevent each to communicate with the other. In fact, each communicates with the other and each is dependent upon the other. But more than this, he (ancestral spirit) communicates as a senior or a guardian, which is a man's prestige as he grows older. Normally, the seniority of an Elder makes him almost indispensable in the general life of the people. Thus, his presence or advice is sought in all functions and so, the ancestors are then the eldest of the senior elders. And as the youth look to the living elders for direction, so the whole living community looks to their ancestors for guidance. Furthermore, as elders of the senior elders, they are the owners of the land who know the signs of the rainy seasons and predicts the harvest. And so, the Luos like any other African community regard the land as "*Sacred*" because it binds together the living with our ancestors. Thus, the problem of land or any dispute regarding land is usually

resolved as quickly as possible because of its sacredness which must be retained. In resolving such problems, or disputes, a prayer is first said by one elder from each parties.

Furthermore, whenever the living-dead or ancestors seek to help their living kin by forewarning them of future dangers or rebuking them for some transgression of tradition, or rebuking them for some offence, they can communicate through various methods, one of which is possession. To posses, is where the ancestral spirits is thought to enter individuals and use them as mediums of communication with the living. In fact every village in the Luo society is full of vivid accounts of people possessed by the spirits and when they are in this state of possession, they receive special revelation from the spirit world. Therefore, any living Luo man can implore, beg, request or ask his ancestral spirit for any assistance, especially fertility which like many other interests of the spirit, was of the greatest to the living dead because, without a continual reproduction of children, they will lack descendants who can continue to remember them and supply necessary sustenance. A part from other requests to the ancestral spirits, these people often requested for help in bearing and preserving children who were regarded the greatest wealth a man may have ! Furthermore, all these requests were made to the ancestral spirits by the people who are conscious that being close in time to the living, the living dead can best understand their needs because being closer to God, their spirits have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly. We approach them first and then they lay our affairs before God. However, the danger could be with those scholars who approach the ancestral spirits without any knowledge that they are merely intermediaries between God and man. This is what the Luo people believed and practised and not they ought to have believed and practised, because there was and is still today an inner sense of relief for a traditional African, moreover a Luo, when they are assured that their ancestors are continually with them or him.

The attitude of the living towards the living-dead is that of acknowledgement, affection, and respect because the ancestral spirits are their own family members, as they understand them. In fact, they feel a close bond between themselves (the people) and their dead, and as they often come back at night to pay a visit to their old village and friends, they can talk with them though they may not be visible. Thus, the ancestral spirits show a certain

friendly interest in their descendants whereby their powers can smite or bless the living, and that is why it is easier to pray to them to intercede for us-the living to God-the great being. However, on the other side, the living-dead can be scolded, rebuked and reprimanded as one of the features that frequently distinguishes the requests to the ancestors and the prayers made directly to God. The prayers to the departed ancestors may contain an element of scolding such as the following example.

"You are useless, you gods. You only give us trouble.

*You don't come close to us to listen to our needs, despite of
our offerings to you and colleagues !*

You so-and-so are full of hatred. You don't enrich us.

*May your hatred and arrogance be blown away by the wind to the
sea" !*

Such scolding prayers could be used as a means to weigh the interest of the ancestral spirits if they act for the good or for the worse of the community. But such scolding is not frequently found in prayers directed to the supreme being because He knows everything and we belong to him. Usually in the life of the Luos, they believe that there is continuity in the events that compose their community. And this continuity cannot be broken, because breaking it would mean the destruction of the community. In fact, as far as the individual is concerned, this continuity includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, physical death, entry into the community of the living-dead, and gradual entry into the world of spirits.¹⁷ For the Luo, an individual's life does not begin at his birth in the community, but when the child is born in the name of a living-dead grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, father or mother. That is to say, that one living-dead person may be physically reborn in many families within the community.

The living-dead are believed to give instructions to the people to whom they appear and these instructions are usually connected with the religious and social behaviour of his relatives. They may inquire about the family, request to be given something or threaten to punish some members of the family for failing to carry out particular instructions. And as far

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Pg.111.

greeting, '*OYAORE WUOWI MATIN*'- good morning a young one, or '*OIMORE WUOWI MATIN*'- good evening a young one, must in response to the greetings acknowledge to whom the greetings is coming from; thus, he must reply, '*Oyaore ahinya Jaduong*' or '*Oimore ahinya Jaduong*'. Jaduong is a senior Elder whose response to his calling must be '*Antie*' or '*Aan*' - very polite and respectful way to respond to senior Elders. Moreover, a man of fifty years old answers the salutation of an older person in the same way a child or a youth does. This, I think simply reinforces the authority and position of the elder person. In fact, the more one possesses, the more he is able to give and consequently, the more people will become obligated to him. Hence, prestige and honour grows for them (wealthy Elders) for they acquire more power and influence. So, age with the associated experiences, provide the Elders with great influence traditionally.

Therefore, the living-dead or spirits of the living-dead which I having been talking about, are the elders of the senior living Elders because they have more experiences, have seen and known more than any of the most living senior Elders among the clans. And so, such '*Jodongo*' or '*Chuny Jaduong Maduong*', have more power and prestige, being in the spirit world. Hence, proper attention and honour must be given to the living-dead. And since, the ancestral spirits are the guardians of traditions and the senior elders who maintain tight control on the activities of the living, any failure from the living to follow the customs of the fathers, may result in punishment and lead them back to the traditions.¹⁸ Virtually, every crisis that develops, whether it's drought or pestilence, sickness or death, may be caused by the angry ancestors who were either neglected or whose death was as a result of negligence. The ancestors' roles is to serve as the senior Elders who are frequently consulted, regularly appeased and gratefully honoured. They also serve as the social bond among the Luo people and they strengthen ties and to some extent they are the guardians of the family solidarity.

When I talked to my friend, a senior Elder in my village, Mzee Ogony, about some of the roles of the ancestors, he said, "Every kind of blessing is attributed to the ancestors because they are responsible for every good thing that comes to us (Luos) and we must offer gifts and sacrifices to them as thanksgiving. Ancestors can protect people if they are treated

¹⁸ Richard J. Gehman, *Op.Cit.* Pg.150.

well and since they heal our sickness and protect us from sickness. Yes, they do benefit us the living, because they bless us, but with the condition that the living must offer sacrifice to them according to their will". For Mzee Ogony, the living-dead can appear to somebody, communicate to him good news of physical recovery which can lead to the restoration of health and vigour. The ancestors can bless the living if they are given what they ask for, the old man continued and they not only bring wealth, health to the sick, but ancestors also give protection from other dangers. So they are beseeched for safety in the home and safety on a safari. They can also protect the living descendants from unjust neighbour. However, a common benefit from the ancestors is foretelling the future. They can lead the living through Omens. For example if '*Arum Tidi*',(is a big black bird with red beak and large red eyes) is seen in your homestead, the ancestors are thereby informing you of death or bad luck in your duty or if you set out on a journey and a mice crosses a head of you or knock your big toe on a stone as you walk, then the ancestors are passing the message that your journey will be unsuccessful. Usually, when such things happen, a Luo is advised not to proceed with the journey because something greater and disappointing might happen ! These are just some of the few ways in which an ancestor could foretell the future of an individual or group of people, but in another way, the ancestors could appear to some one in the clan either in apparitions or in dreams to pronounce what will happen in the near future eg. Rain or drought might come.

Mzee Ogony concluded his talk with me saying that,even in prayers, we contacted our ancestors who are the bridge (mediators) to God the creator. The Luo pray through the living dead as their mediator, and when I asked him why he or the Luos pray to God through the ancestors, he simply replied that, " Since my or our forefathers prayed through them to God and in return received what they needed, I can not pray directly to God at any time but what I can do is to pray to the ancestors who in turn derive power from God to provide me with my needs. Furthermore, God no longer, in any way speak to the living as our legend informs us, a part from using the dead. The ancestors thus form a chain of communication through whom the living relay their prayers to God. To support his point in this statement of mediation, Mzee Ogony, used this analogy as reflected in the social relations among the Luos. He went

on, "... a daughter would never approach her father directly, but first presents her needs to the mother who then approaches the father. Similarly, a younger son does not normally approach the father directly, but first makes known his needs to an elder brother who then serves as a mediator with the father.

However, the word of the father is final ". This decision is then mediated through the mother or the first born son who then relays message to the child concerned. Again following the Luo protocol of dealing with issues, people are normally afraid to approach the chief of the area directly. They prefer to go through the assistant chief who then passes the request to the chief. God as the chief of the area (world) can not be approached directly without passing through the ancestors who as the assistants pass our grievances to the chief - God. Traditionally, but even today, leave alone the influence we see of individualism and independent attitude in the urban society, whenever a person wants to negotiate with another, he sends an Elder on his behalf. Likewise, if you desire to make right a wrong after some argument, you send another to intercede on your behalf. This is even in the cases of a man seeking a wife, when another goes on his behalf to make those arrangements. Hence, for many Luos if you ask them, they argue that the living approach God whom they know in the same manner through the ancestors who serve as mediators.

ii) The Bad spirits:

Man can be controlled or influenced by either the evil thoughts or by good thoughts ! These two kinds of thoughts are part of our nature as human beings, even though we try always to be good and think good; but still man is also evil and thinks evil ! He becomes a slave and sinful when his spirit yields to the law of his flesh, and on the other hand, man is free when his spirit is free and concerned towards all men. Man therefore has two spirits - good and evil of which, any of the two can take control of him depending on what he has willed to live. The decision we take freely makes us masters of ourselves and our acts are either good or evil.

This process seem to be similar to what one's spirit will be after death

because, what one will be in the future depends on his life in the past and at present as he has freely willed to be. If one's decision of what he or she wants to be don't go with the norm of the society, despite the repeated advice and corrections made to him, he was left for nothing and he became a friend of no one in the society. Thus, it is a strong belief in the Luo society that such men are not permitted into the realm of the ancestral spirits' world when they die. These rejected spirits include also people who were not buried properly, those who died an unhappy death by hanging, drowning, struck by lightning or in pregnancy. Likewise, people who were cursed while living because of their behaviours and decisions to be are also rejected. Their spirits will wander aimlessly, haunting people and retaliating. Their general aim seems to be molesting and harming people. These are what I call bad spirits which are malevolent and cause sickness to people. They are not friendly but enjoy to see a family broken-down by diseases and deaths ! And this means that they never stay very close with the people but choose to live in forests, rivers, bushes, mountains, and rocky ravines. They may also enter certain animals. They are what the Luo call '*Jochiende*' plural and '*Jachien*' is singular meaning an evil spirit. They are nameless, unknown spirits and mere strangers to the living. They are unpredictable and frequently dangerous and so they are feared. Furthermore, because of their characters, the Luos say that "*Tang ne Jachien Mabor*" - the safest thing is to remain far away from evil places of abode.

In fact, such '*Jochiende*' if they possess a person, may result in bad effects. They may cause severe torment on the person whereby the spirit may drive him away from his home so that he lives in the forests, it may also cause him to jump into the fire and get himself burnt, to torture his body with sharp instruments, or even to do harm to other people ! The possessed person may become restless, may fail to sleep properly, and if the possession lasts a long period it results in damage to health. The Luos believe that the evil spirits hide around the homesteads, and are blown by the wind from one homestead to another. For that reason, whirlwinds are thought to be evil spirits assembling to wage an attack on people. Sometimes in the Luo land, these spirits could be heard crying, laughing, driving cattle, calling names or playing music and to drive them away, the community sounded the tins, metals and shouted at them until they kept quiet ! They were called "*Nundu*", meaning Mysterious damage of

health or skin because once they attack you, they stab your skin severally as if by a knife till you die! But instead of blood coming out, only some water was seen flowing from the wounds as of the small-pox ! And since no human person feels comfortable to live with the devil, the Luos troubled with these evil spirits until of late, appeased them through the strong mediums. However, it is not always the same that the Medium's force can drive away the evil Spirits! Sometimes, the Spirits may turn to be stubborn and refuse to leave or go.

The Luos believe that the evil Spirits fear very much a place where there is a lot of loud noise and so, they could be attacked and defeated as an enemy by loud beating of tins and other objects to scare and drive them away, either to the forest, river or to the lake. Sometimes, such Spirits are blamed for forms of illness like madness and epilepsy. They quite disturb and at times, the Luos say that Spirits can call someone by name and on turning around to see who called, you may see nobody ! They may decide to molest somebody in the clan this way until you develop some great fear. But in the other stories, the Luos strongly believe that the Ghost can also cook! Especially in the evening, when one passes through the forest or near the long deserted home called "*Gunda*", you can smell any stuff being cooked. And when we were young Children, we were always reminded not to even swallow any saliva or to ask who is cooking whenever such smell comes your way. It is something of interest in the Luoland that one may still undergo such experiences today when he or she tours the forest or goes to gunda- an old long deserted homes. For this reason, many people feared to pass through such places at night because of the attacks of the bad Spirits but unless otherwise there is great necessity. Sometimes people in the Luoland have narrated how when he or she was walking at night from one place to another, heard the footsteps of someone following from behind, but when he turned around, there was no one! Or how he heard the voices of a group of people talking and walking in front of him or her, but he could not reach or catch-up with them.

These Spirits were very clever because by such behaviours at night, they could threaten the late travellers and instil certain fear in them. And if you are not strong and brave enough, you might begin to run away and as a result and being at night, you might hit yourself on a log, a stone, or fall in a ditch ! Or sometimes people have ran passed their homes

without knowing because of fear that someone is behind intending to kill him or wants to beat him. All the same, I must say that this kind of experiences were very minimal in the lives of the Luo people. It never happened so often, but of course there were few cases here and there. This leaves me with the conclusion that, just as a bigger portion of our lives is coated with the good deeds and smooth occurrences, and only smaller portion of bad and rough spots are found in us occasionally, then we can also say that, the influence of the good Spirits in the Luo society, was more felt than the fear instilled by the bad Spirits which only happened once in a while in a life of someone or even nothing! Many families confess that they have not experienced any kind of embarrassment from the bad spirits, but instead they speak of how the Spirits of their beloved son appeared to them telling them the story about where he has been, or to warn his living brothers and sisters about their movements within the village.

When I asked some of the women groups about any experiences of bad spirits, they admitted... " Yes, there is a bad Spirit in the world, but must we always live with that fear ?, they asked. The work of the bad spirits is only a small percentage compared with the good we do in this world, even though in evaluating a person whom we do not like, we tend to only see more often the bad in him or her than the good! Man is good, he is guided by the good spirits." Through another interview with mama Otecho Oigo, she admitted to the Luo traditional belief that a person who does not behave well towards his relatives and the community, face the danger of being disowned by the community and such people never received a solemn burial. And that meant that their chances of becoming favourable members of the living-dead was minimised because even as they die, they are still regarded as negatively as they were when they were physically alive. She said, criminals and outcasts, were often forgotten very shortly after their physical death, even if some of their spirits may come back to retaliate against the family or community, the people also knew how to drive them away to the mountains, lakes or to the desert where they belong ! So they never bothered people so much. She further asked " Who would like to sustain the memories of a criminal or outcast who had embarrassed them in the face of the community, or which

community would keep in mind a person who had been an enemy of the established law and customs ?”

Mama Otecho, also admits that the bad spirits are there and are still disturbing people here and there, but she says that, it is not so great and something to live with because even the spirits of the strong ancestors never allow them to attack anyhow within the community since they never rejoiced over the loss of any one of their descendants ! She concluded that, " Cases of the attacks by '*Jochiende*' (bad spirits) were and are still very few within the Luo community ". Furthermore, the fear of avenging spirits can also act as a sanction for Ethical behaviour, because during life, a person must never try to do anything that might provoke someone to return as an avenging spirit and this sanction is particularly relevant in the payment of debts and in relation to an improper treatment. Occasionally, a person may threaten to become an avenging spirit in order to obtain what he or she believes to be his or her due right. The Luo then say, "*Anachieni Katho* ! " But these were rare cases.

CHAPTER III

SOURCES AND DWELLING PLACES OF THE SPIRITS

The main dwelling places of the spirits is the underworld. The Luos believe that there are two worlds; an upper world and an underworld. The upper world is the land of the living while the underworld is the land of the spirits. For the Luos, everyone who dies goes to the underworld (*the world of the spirits*) to join the ancestors of the clan. This underworld is believed to be below the waters, or below the earth, and that is the reason why the Luos bury a dead person in a dug-hole on the ground (grave). They never throw in the bush the corpse to be eaten by wild animals as done by other societies, for this simple reason. According to the Luo, the life in the underworld is similar or the carbon copy to that of the upper world. What you live now in the land of the living, is what you will live in the world of spirits. Thus, the spirits of the people do not suffer want but carry on with their favourable activities such as, herding, fishing, hunting, dancing and so on. This means that, the Luos have a strong belief that in the underworld, there are also villages, steppe for grazing, fishing waters, etc. in the bowels of the earth. In fact, many Luo stories of their origin describe how humanbeings came from the underworld through a hole on the earth. So, when a Luo dies, he or she is sent back through the same hole (grave) to where he or she came from. Furthermore, in the Luo burial rite there is a moment when no one is permitted to cry or mourn :- Strict silence is observed when the body of the dead is lowered into the grave (hole) because it is the moment when the link between the upper-world and underworld is observed. At this time, many people come to witness or bade him goodbye at the grave side as he or she goes back home to the underworld." *Wase kowo ngane or Ngane to Osetieko mare, Odok thurgi* ", is what the Luo say after burial, meaning that, " *So and so has finished his term and has been escorted back to his home land* ".

A great number of people hold that the spirits dwell in the woods, bush, forest, rivers and mountains or just around the village. So, the spirits are in the same geographical region as men. This to me, is partly the result of human self-protection and partly because man may not want to imagine himself in an entirely strange environment when he becomes a spirit. In fact, there is a sense in which man is too anthropocentric to get away from himself and his natural, political, social and economic surroundings. This fact, is supported by Mbiti's own words that, " the spirits are ever with men and man would feel uncomfortable if the ontological mode of the spirits were to be distant from his own because if this would upset, then men make sacrifices, offerings and prayers, to try and restore it." ¹⁹ The spirits' world, in another aspect differs radically from the living world because it is invisible to the eyes of men. People only believe that it is there, but do not actually see it with their physical eyes, or have ever experienced it ! In the Luo search for what the spirits world is like, did they come up with some stories of how one time a dead man came back to life to inform them of his experiences there ! But this is a late formulation which was never there in the traditional Luo mythical stories. However, what is more important here is that, even if the spirits may be the depersonalized residue of individual human beings, they are ontologically near to God, not ethically, but in terms of communication with him. They act as intermediaries who convey human sacrifices or prayers to God, and even relay God's reply to men. For this reason, the distance does not hamper their movements, as it used to do before they discarded their tenement of flesh, because now as the spirits, space and time does not limit them. Thus, it seems certain that, without any difficulty, they can be present at two or three places at the same time. In fact, the ancestral spirits are where their descendants are and as they are ever present over the world, they go wherever their relatives go, helping or hindering them.

The spirits as the ancestors and the forces of nature, are the powers behind storm, rain, rivers, lakes, wells, hills and rocks. They are not just the water or the rock, but they are spiritual powers capable of manifesting themselves in many places. The spirits are thus free to choose where they want to stay. The Luo believe that the spirits who came from the underworld through totems want to stay temporarily on the earth. So for these people, the

¹⁹ John S. Mbiti, *Op.Cit.*, Pg.80.

spirit of a person who dies in water is believed to be wanting to stay in the world under the water, hence they practice burying the bodies of those who die in water quite close to the water. It would be a great offence to the spirit of such a person, then to be brought back inland on the earth for burial !

So, the spirits also dwell in rivers, lakes, seas and trees. Water is generally considered sacred, and the Luos believe that it gives life. It is life because when one is unconscious, cold water is poured on his head and he regains his consciousness. Similarly when trees and animals are dying from drought, it is water that every man prays for ! Water is used in many rites, purification is by water and it is also associated with the production of life. For example, the Christian sects make much of baptism by complete immersion, and they usually give water for ritual baths and medicinal drinks. They of course consider, as do pagans, that medicinal water must be from a spring, river, sea or well and not from a tap or boiled, because boiling kills the spirits in water ! ²⁰ The spirit is the owner of the water of life. However, people also believed that the spirits in the streams of rivers, are sometimes very dangerous and unfriendly to those who go to draw water at dusk because they might seize the unwary. Similarly, the Luo regard the lakes, and seas as sacred because they are also the home of powerful spirits. For example, they believe that '*Simbi Nyaima*' or '*Nyangindi*' contains the spirits of the villagers drowned in it (Simbi is a submerged village which turned into a lake a few kilometres from Kendu bay in Karachwonyo. The Luo *snake Omweri* lives in lake Victoria and is frequently associated with water, rivers and even sea. It is believed to reside in the Islands of Misingo and visits the mainland after a certain period of years (about 5 yrs). Remember, snakes, tree and water often figure together in cults, as in Genesis. The sacred snake "*Omweri*" or "*Nyangindi*" usually the Python, is never harmful, non-poisonous whenever it comes out among people. It usually waits to be given goats, chicken, sheep as offerings by the elders, and it only crushes its prey, it never bites or poisons. This snake is often connected with the ancestors and the underworld, and its visit is followed by a bumper harvest and a period of prosperity. Furthermore, because it sheds its skin, it is regarded as

²⁰ E.G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*,
3rd Ed., (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), Pg. 49.

immortal, as in the Genesis myth where a snake claims to know the secret of immortality. So, the Luos believe that this snake is ancestor- incarnate and it is sometimes symbolized by the rainbow. When the sacred snake-Omweri visits the Luo people, they over enjoyed because they knew that a good harvest and prosperity followed.

The Luo people also believed that the spirits dwell in large Rocks, mountains or hills, forests and in trees. For them, the spirits may have their abode in any of these natural objects. And of course, if it were on any high hill or mountain, an outstanding rock would be the sacred place where the spirit survives. Similarly, trees may also be sacred - like "*Ng'ou*" or "*Yago*". It is true that all trees are regarded by the Luos to have souls of their own, but some are regarded as the dwelling places of other powerful spirits which may take temporary abode there. But not all spirits that take their abode under the tree are a good spirits, no. The Luo believe that in the deep bush of the forest, are dangerous spirits or ghosts. These dangerous ghosts may be of men who have been lost, drowned, burnt alive or killed by wild animals in the forest ! For the Luos, the sacred rocks are like that of Lwanda Magere a great Luo war hero who turned into a rock after his death and whose spirit is believed to reside in "*Kano on Olik Oliero hill*", where hunters who sharpen their spears and arrows on it, never miss their target during hunting ! Also famous are the rocks in Seme known as "*Kit Mikayi*", the stone of the first wife, few kilometres from Kisumu on Bondo road, etc. Likewise, they also believed that some spirits of the ancestors reside in certain hills as "*Usenge*" in Yimbo "*Got-Kochola*" in Kadem, "*Gogo*" in Kanyamkago, "*Sikri and Ramogi*" in lake Nyanza (Victoria) and many others that are traceable within Luo land.

Apart from the above mentioned nature dwelling places of the spirits, man was also considered by the Luos as the abode of the spirit. The Luo strongly believed that the spirits also live or dwell in man. It is this kind of spirits which is the man's inner dispositions and which affects his activities. The life in man is the breath or spirit of God. God lends it and takes it back at any moment. This spirit makes man act righteously because it's an inner dispositions which affects his activities. It is in reference to definite acts that man is said to have a great deal of breath. The Act can be physical, spiritual or mixed. But the spirit given to man, or that power like breath given to man is sometimes a warlike spirit for strife and

victory. A warrior is possessed by a strong powerful spirit that can lead him to a battle without fear. He is possessed with the Spirit of victory or Spirit of prophecy.

On the question of provocation and appeasement of the spirits, the Luos believed that any spirit can leave the world of spirits and come to cause trouble within the society depending on how they are treated, or how it is angry about something within the society or with an individual. They say that the spirit of someone who was wronged in life or killed, will refuse to stay in the underworld and instead come to punish those who wronged it. Likewise the spirit of someone who dies with bitterness will come back to punish or revenge the one responsible. Sometimes the Luo please the angry spirits by naming a child after the dead person. This rite of naming (*Incarnation*) is performed not until the spirit of the one the child is to be named after sends a dream indicating such a wish. But if this wish is not honoured the child will keep crying until the name is given. Likewise, a person who is wronged in life and commits suicide or even a girl who is forced into marriage and commits suicide will come back in form of a ghost to revenge.

The Luos believe that it's the troublesome ghosts (bad spirits or Jochiende) that are responsible for sickness and misfortunes in families and societies. In fact, cases of long illness in a village or a repeated accident are ascribed to such ghosts. And to appease such '*Jachier*' (ghost), the Luos invited "*Ajuoga*" - Diviner to discover the cause and which suitable sacrifice to be offered. But if it's a more serious case, then an exorciser known as "*Jadil*" is summoned to send away or calm the spirit. Thus for the Luos, if the spirits are to bring any good-Luck to the people and to allow the community to prosper, they are to be appeased through offering of animal sacrifices and libation accompanied with prayers from selected Elders.

CHAPTER IV

RELEVANCE OF TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN SPIRITS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

i) **Christian life and the Spirits:**

When you look at the Luo belief, that even the spirits of the living-dead are concerned with the welfare of the people, you will obviously see a practice in itself which is an excellent preparation for the practice of the Christian charity and love. In fact, the common beliefs in the spirits, can act as one of the uniting factors of a people, who feel that they have a common responsibility and destiny. Such a group whether Christian or traditional Luo society, will feel at home with one another and the result is a united society. This could be a better definition of a Church. Today the effects of individualism seem to overtake the common good of the traditional life of African society where people feel like one big family and not strangers to each other, and in times of calamities, these people stuck together to support each other without ill feelings. Like the early Christians, they shared things together as the spirit moved them and scarcely did the poor people among them go without food. The concern for one another was ever there and this kind of effort was not just a human effort, but an inner power which pushed them for a charitable work and love towards one another !

In the early Christian context, they heard the spirit of God spoken of as "*Someone*" acting in them (Power) and in the midst of them, sanctifying and uniting them to one another. And whatever gifts, are received, whatever services, and the manifestations of power (1 Cor. 12 : 4 - 6) they know that it is everywhere the same Spirit. Luo belief in the spirits which is also the foundation of their prayers, is so rooted in them that some of their fundamental questions which are never answered by Christianity, could be explained in these beliefs. This point can be proved from the fact that even today, with the so called technology, many people still find themselves in situations that can only be handled in the African Traditional

Religious understanding. This could be because Christianity is not yet rooted in the lives of the indigenous peoples. Look at the Church today, it's still faced with a big dilemma in the sense that even Christians still find that some of their troubles can not be handled effectively in the Church and therefore only find effective solutions in their traditional beliefs. It's the sense of the affectivity of these beliefs that makes the people embrace them. In fact, this problem of the Luo Christians or African Christians, need to be critically looked at by the Christian Church which should seek to understand the appeal of the traditional religion and then evaluate their findings in Biblical perspective. I feel that there are some felt-need we can learn which the Church has not yet met with her present approach to ministry and teaching .

The Scripture does not speak of the problems facing the African Christianity, but once the Africans accepted this Gospel, the manner of Expression and communication should vary from people to people, the manner of worship, the expression of praise and gratitude must differ because this Gospel must be communicated in culturally relevant way which people can grasp. It must become alive to the people by clothing the Biblical message in African culture and life-ways. I always believe that the needs and problems of people are essentially the same because mankind is one in nature. The difference is only in their cultures which are in many ways unique and distinctive. So, the teaching of the Scripture should be applied and related to the particular cultural context in which the African Church finds herself. Once the theologians, have known the problems found on the African content, then Africa must take the unchanging truth of scripture and applied it to her particular needs, and in this sense, even develop an African Christian theology, but, for this to happen, there is a need to know the context of Africa Christianity which includes African Traditional Religion. There is need to evaluate it and understand it in the light of God's word and where truth is found, we must preserve it, likewise, where errors exists, we must expose it by the standard of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Today there is a widespread appeal for the Africans to seek their identity after the liberation from colonial rule and in many places, they have rejected the customs and ways of the Europeans, seeking to re-assert their own traditional ways including their religion, yet there is still a great blame that many African Traditional Religious practices are pagan

because they do not comply with the Christian practices and beliefs. However, the Luo belief on their veneration of Ancestral spirits is a similar practice fitting our Christian civilization in the way they commemorate their Saints. For example, the Catholics have cult of Saints and they celebrate masses for named dead; likewise, the Jews commemorates the saints by name in the course of the celebration of their new year and their day of Atonement, as well as on the anniversaries of particular deaths. This prayer for the dead is the *"tender bridge"* which unites the living and the dead with Christ, even though nothing is expressed by the Scriptures. This practice is traced on the Church tradition by Tertullian in AD. 211 when he first mentioned prayers for the dead in public as Christians prayed for their dead on the anniversary of their death. Today, to lead the people to the memory of the dead loved ones, the Christian Church needs to assist the believers in memorializing the dead in some satisfactory way whereby it is done creatively and collectively by the African believers (like the Luos) in ways that are not offensive to the community of believers. However, apart from the Christian Saints being heroes in the life they lived so well like the Luo ancestral spirits, we need to always remember that they were equipped with *"faith in the living God within the community of believers according to the teaching of the Scriptures"*, as the basic truth for the work of building up the Body of Christ.

They become our leaders because they showed us how to defend our faith and courage to go about it following a certain Ethics, which themselves followed well and lived by. Thus, they lived an upright life within the community, just as the Luos also believe that the ancestral spirits which they venerate are of those who lived a good moral life in the society. Obviously like the ancestral spirits there are many Christians found in the Church today who lived a saintly holy life, but are not commemorated or even not known because they are not in the Church calendar of Saints. Such holy Christians are forgotten by the passage of time and are not remembered at all though they lived a witnessed life and followed God's teachings ! As Christians, Saints are alive and enjoy the presence of God in heaven and this is the real traditional Luo belief in the existence of the ancestral spirits. This notion of the existence of the spirit after death in the Luos traditional belief, can be compared with the Christian teaching about the soul or spirit appearing to be detachable spiritual components

which leaves the body on death and enters on a state of existence which must be accounted for. And since spirits reckon to the regime of nature and of deity, they are indestructible components that animate bodies and succeed them in the timeless realm of God, pending resurrection in a corporeal form²¹. This Luo belief in the existence of the ancestral spirits, their concern to the society and their possession to individuals for the good of the community is pastorally not far from the Christian culture when they talk of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the Pentecost. Talk to them about the Spirits's power in our lives and they will automatically grasp your explanation about its possession that the spirits make us an open community to all people and it is the beginning of our mission.

The spirits of the dead are the symbols of human sense in the ultimate truth about existence. This is not a wrong belief because, the area of the ultimate symbolism is also the area of religion, and so the spirit must be regarded as religious as well as philosophical concepts²². And since I have touched about the spirits as the religious symbols, I would briefly say that spirits of our ancestors have a religious significance because they evoke those same sentiments of awe and fascination, and they are connected with a rudimentary numinous consciousness, which to me is the beginning of a sense of the tremendous mystery that lies beneath the surface of things and of human life in particular. Therefore, spirit belief undoubtedly represented something authentic and binding in human life, such as the sense that human beings stand in the presence of a reality greater than themselves, a reality which they can not understand, but to which they are compelled to reach out. In fact, spirits have their function as symbols of the ultimate meaning of human life because they have a sacred quality. The spirit in the Luo understanding, gave each individual a sure sense of '*belonging*', which is a comfort in human life. '*Belonging*' for me, in the Christian use of the word, even today means *responsibility, joy, peace, freedom* and *commitment* to your task or call. In a way we can say that as guardians of the social order, the spirits help to preserve the society by

²¹ Henry A. Owour, *Occasional Paper in African Traditional Religion*, (Kampala: Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, 1971) Pg. 6.

²² John O'Donohue, *Spirits and Magic*, *Spearhead*, no.68, Gaba Publications, (Eldoret: October 1981), Pg. 12.

curbing individualism, thus, they operate as a kind of security force in the observance of the moral and ritual laws in religious ceremonies.

In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel apart from the wind which made possible their passage through the Red Sea, had the wind of the mountain (Ex. 19:16 ff). From the same Chapter of Exodus, it is also clear that when God manifested Himself on Sinai, he did so in a great thunder-storm. The thunder was of course the trumpet which heralded him. But there was also the lightning which called the attention to him, and all the people were in awe of what was to come to pass ; then, "*Morning broke, and all at once thunder was heard, lightning shone out, and the mountain was covered with thick mist; long rang the trumpet blast and the people in the camp were dismayed (Ex.19:16)*". For the people of Israel, this event,- the memory of this theophany was preserved, and throughout the centuries, they referred to its sacredness as the type of the manifestations of God. The wind of Yahweh reside on the mountains. However, this awe-inspiring wind, destined to herald the supreme majesty of him who was to give his law to Israel, was not the only one. The winds of Yahweh, sometimes avenging(Ex.10:13) at others, liberating (Ex.10:19) and life-giving (Num. 11:31), are numerous. In comparison with the Luo belief on the bad and good Spirits of the ancestors, the wind of Yahweh is believed to have given the signal for the eighth plague in Egypt, which Moses announced to Pharaoh, (Ex.10:13). And at the same time it was the wind of Yahweh that freed Egypt from Locust (Ex. 10: 19), and also brought food - *Manna and Quails* to the people of Israel in the desert. The winds or spirits of Yahweh are his instruments for blessing or chastising; a fact which we also find with the Luo belief on the ancestral spirits.

On the opposite side, the Luos also believed that there are the evil spirits which are unfriendly and unconcerned with the welfare of the community. Such spirits were cleansed through the process called "*Dhing'o*". Dhing'o can literally be compared with a Christian confession where a sinner is cleansed of his mistakes and reunited with God and the community as a new person ready to work for the good of that community. But such a man must acknowledge himself as a sinner in order to be cleansed and this acknowledgement of unworthiness and confession with lips have their value from repentance in the heart. People

confess their sins because they want to restore back their relationship with the higher being and the community. Similarly, Dhing'o which literally means to purify through squeezing to get the best out of, is meant to restore back the original nature of the deceased, whereby the evil part is cleansed and only the good remains. This act may support the Luo belief in two kinds of spirits in a dead person. The good and evil spirits are also very much prominent and explicit in the Christian world as far as a living man is concerned. Here, the Christians talk of man as a sinful creature, in that, he bears within himself a two-fold root of death, whereby in his creature-hood, death is seen as an end of his biological process and on the other side, in his sinfulness, death is having the painful character of detaching or breaking ourselves away from the community, family, friends and wealth. Its darkness and suffering with which it is usually connected is a result of sin. We all know that when death knocks at our doors, man's strongest instincts reacts; he clings to life and refuses to die and he naturally revolts before the devastating onslaught of death. This obviously produces generally some form of acute suffering to his spirit. Similarly, one who has lived a Christian life is believed that his soul when he dies is with God. And so, Dhing'o is the answer to the suffering spirits which have had a great struggle during the death of a deceased.

ii) **Shared Life:**

Being with and knowing the needs of the people best grades the spirits as intermediaries between men and God, and at the same time, they have direct communication with God, because of their position in the hierarchy. In fact, this shared life of God through the spirits and to the community is a gift which you might like to call a "*grace*" because the same shared life is what Luos saw as something given by God through the ancestral spirits to the community or to individual in the community. So we can authentically say that the spirits are the mediators of good life - a life of God. However, the many mediators raised up by God between himself and people foreshadowed and prepared the way for the mediation that His people were to exercise between him and all mankind. This mediation of Israel is fulfilled in the mediation of Christ, the sole mediator, alone in the unfathomable grandeur which comes to him from being the Son. But the fact that Christ is the sole mediator

does not put an end to the role of man in the history of salvation. The mediation of Christ in fact makes an appeal to men, who see themselves entrusted by Him with a function with regard to his charge; in a certain way he associates all the members of his Body in his mediation through his Royalty. And although the spirits of our ancestors may not do miracles or extraordinary things to remedy the needs of the people, men and women experience a sense of psychological relief when they pour out their hearts' troubles or desire before their seniors who have a foot in both worlds. Therefore, these seniors like the Angels are spirits destined to serve and be sent on a mission for the good of those who should inherit salvation or those whose prayers or requests are granted or answered. The Christians also have a belief in spirits, which can be a holy Spirit because he comes from God and leads to God or an evil spirit because it comes from God as his creatures but does not lead to God ! In the Christian development of Salvation and of the Church, the Spirits are the Angels destined to serve, sent on missions for the good of those who should inherit Salvation. Originally, angels were attributed with tasks both good and bad. In Exodus 23:20, God sent His good angels to protect Israel, but for a mission of death, He sent angels of evil (Psalms 79:49, Job. 1:6-12 and 2:1-10) !

The Luos did not have a common name (Angels) for the spirits like the Christians do, but for them, all were spirits distinguished by their relationship with the society. The distinction between the Luo belief in the spirit and the Christian belief in the Angels is that for the Luos, the spirits were of the ancestors. Those who have died and have lived a good moral life, while for the Christians, the Angels are created Spirits. They are Spirits from what they are, and they have intelligence and will. And so for Christians, these are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures as the splendour of their glory bears witness.²³ However, I see some similarities in the way the Angels receive their names corresponding to their functions, eg. Raphael means "*God heals*" and Gabriel means "*Hero of God*". This means that like the Luos' spirits, these Angels have a role to watch over

²³ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*,(Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), Pg. 106.

men, preside men's (Saints) prayer to God and preside over the destinies of communities (Nations). They also share in the joy of God's presence.

Angels are mysterious messengers of God as far as Supernatural communication from heaven to earth is concerned. They are helpers of Christ in the work of salvation when they guarantee the protection of men and lead souls of the just to paradise. Similarly, these good or Holy spirits continue with Michael to protect the Church (community) in fighting against Satan (evil spirits) which have existed from the beginning to cause confusion among the people. But there is an intimate bond which links the earthly world with the celestial world, whereby, above, the Angels celebrate a perpetual liturgy to which is united here below the liturgy of the Church (Gloria). They are the Supernatural presences around us which enter the sphere of our Christian faith despite its borrowed presentation from the pagan world. And because whatever may be the nature and structure of the spiritual universe that surrounds God and carries out His designs, it is through this submission to Christ, the mediator of salvation that it is incorporated into the divine plan of creation and salvation. Thus, the Angelic world occupies a place in the thought of Jesus, as expressed by the evangelists when they talk of his intimate dealings with the Angels (Mt. 4:11; Lk.22:43) and He will send them forth to gather the elect (Mt. 24:31) and to reject the damned from the Kingdom (Mt.13:41). It is clear that since his resurrection God made them subject to Him, they who have been created by Him, in Him and for Him. They now acknowledge his dominion and they will form His escort on the last day. Thus, the angelic world is subordinate to Christ, the mystery it has contemplated. Spirits according to Luos are impossible to lay hands on but you can hear their voices or recognize their passing shadows or signs which are often remarkable. No one can know from whence he comes and where he goes because, the spirit can possess an individual for the sake of the community at the time he least expects. The spirit transforms the life of a person for the good of the community and its actions thus proceeds from the interior of the possessed man, whereby he begins to speak on behalf of the man who becomes the instrument through which the messages are carried out. After all, it's from the interior that a man can be able to recognize the spirit, and that is why St. John the evangelist says that, you know him because He dwells within you (Jn 14:17).

In the Biblical language, the possessed person is a prophet because he addresses and uses no argument, appeals to no authority except that of the spirit which inspires him interiorly. He can address his message to a larger group or of local importance and foretelling some future events. This means that one who is possessed does not act on his own personality but on the personality of the spirit. There is a total transformation in his or her life as the spirit takes over and directs his whole life for the good of the community. "Jajuogi" - a possessed person in the Luo traditional society was exactly this. In the book of (Ezekiel 2:1;3:24, and 11:5), we hear how the prophets possessed by the spirits of the Lord, became open to the words of the Lord and the spirit made them stand on their feet, spoke to the people about the need to change their lives and proclaimed the coming judgement or salvation for the people. Thus, so long as the prophet gives testimony to the world, it is because the spirit took hold of him and inspires him for the good of the whole community. This is what can be called discernment of spirits as the power of the spirits takes over control. The Luos also regarded a possessed man (Jajuogi) as a prophet of the community who is the mouth piece of the social and moral life of that particular community but sometimes, they could pronounce a major calamity that will affect the whole Luo society. Contrary to the Luos, the Christian understanding of the spirits of God is that He can not be separated from the Father and the Son.

He reveals Himself with them in Jesus Christ, but he has his own way of revealing Himself because he has his own personality. The spirit of God is a divine force transforming human personalities in order to make them capable of exceptional deeds. These deeds are intended to strengthen the people in their vocation, and to make them the servants and cooperators of the Holy God. Thus, having come from God and leading to God, the spirit is a Holy spirit. And it is the same spirit that sustains union among the brethren; a union which grouped the disciples around Jesus. As disciples of Christ, who follow in his foot steps and have received his spirit, we are strengthened and propelled as a newly born Church on mission even to the ends of the earth. In fact, if the word " *is believed and continued to spread* ", the interior source of this forward thrust in gladness is the spirit. Thus, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the presence in us of the glory of the Lord which transforms us into His

image. So for a Christian, to be in Christ Jesus is to live in the Spirit (Rom. 8:1;5), but then this life in the Spirit is not yet an intuitive possession of the Spirit, but it is a life in faith. However, it is a real experience and concrete certitude because it is through signs, as the experience of a presence.

As a whole, despite the many differences in practice between the traditional Luo beliefs and the Christian faith, I feel, there are as well many similarities as points of contact, which can be used as "*bridges*" for the Gospel. These include: God the creator who can communicate with mankind, man with body and soul, immortality, life after death, the spiritual world, the Supernatural, the sense of right and wrong - the moral ought and the necessity of doing what is right to avoid punishment from the unseen world. So these would be the stepping stone in preaching the Gospel because we will begin with the known and proceed to the unknown. We begin by speaking of the creator God, His power, wisdom and goodness, his activities and revelation among the people, and from these points of departure we can find some a venue to launch the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Africans.

Another area where the Christian Church may use the traditional culture for the glory of God these days is the area of Christian worship. God desires above all else a people who are worshipping him from their heart. Not only has the architectural designs of Cathedrals and Churches been imported from overseas, but our form of worship too have been designed outside the continent. I feel that there must be a health balance between form and freedom, between liturgy and spontaneity. In fact, the development of liturgy can provide people with rich biblical content so that our worship is truly Christian. And spontaneity of praying, sharing and exhorting allows for the freedom of the spirit. Thus, I think, a form of worship that includes opportunities of spontaneous expression of worship is biblical. Looking at the African Traditional church where peoples relationship with others, their roles, their shared life, and relationship with created things (Nature) are handled with respect, then on the other side, there is a real need for a spontaneous sharing within Christian worship where the believers need to become a community which knows and loves one another, shares and prays for one another in the perspective of the African definition of a community. I must say that today, the traditional Church service imported in the name of Christian worship from the

West does not meet this need because in a formal worship service with its one-way communication, from the pulpit to pew, there is little opportunity of encouraging one another and sharing. The writer of Hebrews exhorts, "*not forsaking our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...*" (Heb. 10:25). Generally speaking from experience of many people, Christians do not find in the Sunday morning worship service the time when they are most helped spiritually, but the greatest help is found in the small groups where they pray together and share together. They grow together as a nucleus of God's people. So something should be done to make the Sunday service more worshipful and meaningful which I suggest could be done in part by adapting more to the Traditional patterns and forms of worship. Worship cannot be restricted to the Sunday service and it should describe the whole of the Christian life in which nothing is secular but everything is sacred.

Traditionally, Africans have been extra-ordinarily religious, bringing their religious beliefs into every aspect of life. For example, since singing has been always means ordained by God for worshipping and praising Him; and the Africans love music and find great entertainment through singing and dancing, why not allow them practice this great gift ? Secondly, in the Luo traditional religion, special prayers were said during times of planting, harvesting, hunting, fishing and wars or calamity. It was a periodic acknowledgement of dependence on the spiritual realm and the giving of thanks took place during the high points in the life of a person - that is, during puberty, marriage, child-birth and death. The question is, how has the Christian Church related the Gospel to this african tradition which made them constantly religious? However, whatever effort one makes to answer this question, should exhaust the fact that our faith in the living God through Jesus Christ is experienced in every aspect of our lives.

CONCLUSION

After seeing the beliefs and practices of the Luos with regard to God and the spirits, and their relevance even for today's society, I call upon a better and purified understanding of these beliefs. In fact, modern scientific way of looking at reality should help to bring about a modified view which would ensure that only the effective elements are upheld. The negative aspects should however, be discarded even more so, with the help of our Christian heritage. However, it is also very important to be aware of what the Luos believed upon even as God prepares them through his grace to here the Gospel and belief, because even before Christianity, there seems to me that there are many other evidences of God's prevenient (common) grace operating among such traditional Luo society (Africans) as a preparation to welcome Christianity. When they recognized that God is deserving honor and worship, and when all else have failed, they turned to God wherever they are to seek his help. Secondly, God has written in the consciences of men and women a sense of right and wrong whereby they recognize that any failure to do what is right may lead to retribution from the spiritual world. And they believed that wrong doing requires sacrifices to restore harmony once again.

I therefore feel that the dominant place the Supernatural has played in the Luo traditional religion has opened the door for the people to understand and believe the Gospel. After all, the Bible translators have in these particular cases adopted the Luo names for God in the local translations of Scriptures as a means to constantly reminds them of their responsibility and relationship to God as it was there before. But, it becomes quite evident that the grace of God has penetrated the hearts of the Luos (Africans) with a knowledge about Himself. And this measure of truth may serve as a royal road by which we christians may communicate the gospel to the traditional Luos, if not to the whole Africa. In a thoughtful reflection, it seems that the hearts of Africans in general, but particularly the Luos have been prepared for the Gospel through God's prevenient grace that has been operating among traditional Luos in their beliefs to the spirits prior to the Christian era. In fact, many of the Luo traditional beliefs and practices reveal much in common with the Christian faith if taken as the starting positive values of adaptation to Christianity. Moreover, it is through these beliefs and practices that God prepares the people to hear and receive the Gospel. Or

else, the Gospel will have no impact in their lives if such beliefs which opened their knowledge about God are disregarded as superstitions and devilish.

Pastorally speaking, these beliefs should be our first point of departure in evangelizing whereby the effective Church ministry can be carried on if these beliefs are properly integrated in our Christian faith. And this of course can be proved by the fact that even today, Christians still seek traditional solutions to some of their problems, as an indication that the people really believe in these beliefs. The presence of the ancestral spirits for example, is an experience that at the present time is found with both Christians and non Christians. And Mbiti in his research narrates the experiences of two Christian pastors who experienced the presence of the spirits " *Two pastors friends of mine reported the following experiences with the spirits...* " ²⁴ Trying to look at the reasons why this is happening, I tend to think that, since the spirituality of the African is permeated in all aspects of their lives and was not only a one-day or a week's spirituality, but it was a spirituality that built relationship with God, fellow human beings, their roles, and other created things were all handled with respect. Thus, all beliefs were geared towards a '*moral*' and concerned life. Pastorally however, there is need for change of method of approach whenever we plan to take the Biblical message to the Africans. The Christians need to know and understand the context of African cultural beliefs and integrate those values we find important for our ministry and teachings to the people. Consequently, the Christians can also help the people develop fully some of these values thought to be helpful for their proper understanding of Christianity and which the Africans are neglecting today.

Biblically speaking we know that God has not left any peoples without a witness of Himself. God has not totally abandoned any one but continues to disclose himself through nature and conscience. As such, we find that the Luo traditional beliefs have been used of God to prepare them for the Gospel because at least they know something about which we can call "*Truth*" about God. The problems is the goal of missions which was to preach the Gospel, call people to repent, baptize converts, build Churches and extend the Lordship of Christ over the peoples of the world. Whereas the Christian Church taught the uniqueness of

²⁴ John S. Mbiti, *Op.Cit.*, Pg.86.

Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of biblical revelation. Thus, the emphasis was more on discontinuity than on continuity between Christianity and world religions. But if viewed with some enlightenment, the world religions will be seen as preparatory for and lead to the Christian faith because Christianity in away shares with all other religions something of divine revelation and man's response to that revelation.

In the post Vatican II era, the older Roman Catholic Church taught that, "*there is no salvation outside the Church*", but Vatican II signaled a change from this ecclesiastical exclusivism to an inclusivism which finds continuity and hope in other world religions whereby relative values of each religion is emphasized for each adherent.

A liberal Christian Theologian, Karl Rahner who is the major Roman Catholic proponent of continuity since Vatican II, believes that the supernatural elements in the world religions arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gifts (freely) of Christ even though mixed with error, can enable this world religions to be God's way of salvation. And So adherents of these religions are in fact "*anonymous Christians*".²⁵ Furthermore, if general sacred history can and must be held to be positively willed by God, then non-Christian religions also have to be considered to be willed and sanctioned by God because the social structures represented by the various religions also represent a historically tangible expression of God's universal Salvific will where non-Christian religion form the ordinary way of salvation.²⁶ These arguments seem to bring the point that God is one not many but he reveals himself in different ways to all races and creeds in the way which each understands. And so, all religions are therefore the result of God's loving activity among all the peoples of the world. God's revelation to every people on earth is apprehended according to the degree of their spiritual perception, expressing their knowledge of him, either as trained Philosophers, Educated theologian or certainly as those who have had some practical experience of him. Our ability therefore to comprehend Spiritual reality varies and so it is to

²⁵ Karl Rahner, "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions", *Christianity and Other Religions*, Ed. by John Hick and Brian Hebbleth Waite, (Great Britain: Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1980), Pg.61.

²⁶ Robert Heinz Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religion*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), Pg.78.

each according to his own ability. To the reflective, contemplative or speculative, the method of abstraction may lead to the goal of spiritual satisfaction.

In conclusion, I am not denying Christianity as the universal religion neither elevating the Luo traditional beliefs and practices to the level of Christian's beliefs and practices; No, but it is needful to know the positive relationship of Luo traditional beliefs to Christianity as that of Law and Grace. Just as the law prepares people for the grace of Christ manifest in the New Testament, so has these Luo traditional beliefs prepared men and women to embrace Jesus Christ even though increasing maturity is needed from the recipient as well as from the giver.

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