

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
Department of Mission Studies

**MISSION AMONG
THE PASTORALISTS
OF WEST-PÖKOT**

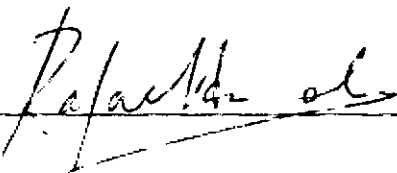
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Nairobi, February 7th , 2001

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

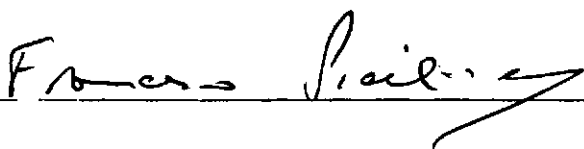
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed  _____

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Date: February, 7th, 2001.

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First of all, I want to express my gratitude towards Fr. Pierli, my tutor, who has accompanied and guided me in the elaboration of this paper and has helped me to grow into a better understanding of the meaning of mission in today's world, as integral development of the human being. Secondly, I also want to state my appreciation for the Pökot people and particularly for those whom I had the chance to meet visiting their land. I want also to manifest my admiration for all missionaries, especially those working in Pökot and whom I had the great opportunity to meet. The fidelity in their work of evangelization, love for the people and witness of life have constituted an example and inspiration for me. Particularly, I want to express my gratitude to each one of the members of the communities of the Comboni Missionaries and Comboni Sisters at Kapenguria and Amakuriat where I spent an enriching time. They also helped me in a generous way in the elaboration of this paper, both with material and sharing of personal experiences. I want to express my gratitude as well to Fr. Mariano Tibaldo who has availed himself to correct and confront the content of this essay. A great thanks to Filipe Resende, member of my community and enthusiast about Pökot who has helped me a lot in technical matters with the computer and in the lay out of this work. Last, but not least, my gratitude goes to each one of the members of my community who have encouraged and supported me during the elaboration of this paper.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I have been living for four years in this country, having come as a Comboni Missionary and student of theology. During this period of time I had the great opportunity of twice briefly visiting Pökot land. Since then I became interested in knowing a different culture, accepting the challenge of crossing boundaries and reflecting upon the missionary activity among the Pökot. Staying there I discovered a very interesting land and people. Their environment, although harsh, appeared to me as beautiful and containing a serene harmony. The vitality, endurance and strength of the Pökot, as well as their sense of their own dignity fascinated me. On the other hand, I encountered an extremely isolated and difficult area, very distant from the rest of the country in most of aspects of life. Their social and economic standards were very much below the levels of the rest of Kenya. The process of evangelization and establishment of the Church, although quite steady, is also at its beginnings. Therefore challenges lie ahead in many aspects. The experience of entering into a different culture and people becomes, thus, a very enriching one. It involves looking at the reality with others' eyes, bringing the novelty of Christ, with its religious and social implications, into a different understanding of life and accepting being enriched by it.

The first chapter of this work is devoted to the understanding of the Pökot people, starting from the environment and history that shape their way of living and beliefs. The second chapter deals with the process of acculturation and the journey of incarnation made by the missionaries in their evangelization, including an evaluation of the main social and religious activities. In the last chapter, I will attempt to bring into concrete reality a methodology of mission based on the principle of incarnation, when faced with a situation of change, both in general in Africa and in Pökot, in particular. Lastly, I will hint at some possible suggestions for new missionary activities or confirmation of the work done so far.

CHAPTER ONE: PASTORALIST PÖKOT - LOOKING AT THEIR IDENTITY.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are going to present the area of our study, its people with their history, way of living, their position within the overall country of Kenya including different areas of development and life. We will proceed in the chapter to look at the main goals in the lives of the people, their social organization and their system of beliefs. Hopefully, this first chapter will give us a picture of who the pastoralist Pökot people are, in order to be able to understand them and address evangelization in a way meaningful for them, so as to promote their integral development. We, therefore, proceed by presenting the area of study.

1.1 The semi-arid Western Pökot region as study area.

There are two groups of West Pökot people with the same origin, united in language and traditions although they have developed two different styles of living and social organizations. They are so-called "hill Pökot" or agricultural Pökot, who inhabit the uplands of West Pökot, and the "plain Pökot", pastoralists, who inhabit the low, dry areas of the District.

We will focus our study on the second group that occupies a territory of approximately 7,500 km².¹ It comprises the Western West Pökot or Kacheliba Division, some parts of Central West Pökot District in Kenya (Chepareria Division) and the Upe County, inhabited by Pökot people in the region of Karamoja in Uganda. (Cf. Map in the Appendix). We have chosen this territory since it is a relatively homogeneous reality in its people and environment. It is a semi-arid zone with a long story of mainly pastoral land use with minor rain-fed cultivation activities. The area forms an economic region with one herd mobility realm during droughts and similar economic history. About 65% of the land of West Pökot District corresponds to this type of environment.² Therefore, we do not include in our study other areas of the District, especially

¹ Historical and socio-economical data in this research generally refer to the overall Pökot people.

² District Development Committee, *West Pökot: District Development Plan 1997-2001*, (Nairobi: Office of the Vice-President and Ministry of Planning and National Development of the Republic of Kenya, 1997), 15.

towards the South and East, where traditional irrigation has been practised and the life and customs of the people differ.

The estimated population of the study area is about 150.000 inhabitants with an average density of 20 inh/km².³ The West pastoralist Pökot have been in contact (not always friendly) with their neighbours, specially Turkana, in the North and East, and Karimojong in the Western border, sometimes sharing grazing lands and cultural practices. They have also established food exchange contacts with the agricultural Pökot or “hill Pökot” of the South. Although nowadays, the territory occupied by Western Pökot belongs to two different countries, the boundaries of their administration have not always been as they are today. ⁴In the next section, we will look at the people, including a brief glimpse at their history.

1.2 The Pökot: Their history.

The Pökot are the most northern branch of Southern Nilo-Hamites. They belong to the linguistic group of the Kalenjin. Their total current population is approximately 300.000 inhabitants. They trace their origin to a “Proto-Kalenjin” group of pastoralists that came from an area near the Sudan-Ethiopia border to settle in the surroundings of Mount Elgon around 1000 AD.⁵The Pökot have their origin in different tribes that eventually came together, similar to the formation of Israel. We can even notice it from their diverse physical features.⁶

Between 1500 and 1650 most of the Proto-Kalenjin were dispersed to the north-east and south-east of Mount Elgon. About 1650 probably a differentiated Pökot tribe came into existence with its own language and habitat around the Cherengani Massif. They moved into the lower plains towards the north and east. During the early part of the XIXth century the Pökot lost most of their cattle to Maasai and Nandi raiding parties. They were forced to put more emphasis on agriculture, especially on the cultivation of sorghum; although they never

³ We have taken the figure of 100.000 inhabitants in 1987 for our study area and we have estimated an average annual population growth of 3%, which gives us a current population of 147.000 inhabitants. (Ton Dietz, *Pastoralists in Dire Straits: Survival Strategies and External Interventions in a Semi-arid Region at the Kenya/Uganda Border: Western Pökot, 1900-1986*, (Amsterdam: Netherlands Geographical Studies, 1987), 21.)

⁴ Western West Pökot was under Ugandan administration until 1970.

⁵ Dietz, *Pastoralists*, p.26.

⁶ J. Visser, *Pokoot Religion*, (Oegstgeest: Hendrik Kraemer Instituut, 1990), 9.

forsook the idea of having a good herd of cattle as a sign of blessing in life. In about 1860 they acquired a large number of cattle from the Samburu who lived in the east.⁷ At the end of the XIXth century, the Pökot expanded their territory to the west and south, taking advantage of the contraction experienced by Maasai and Karimojong due to the effect of sickness upon them. This is the time when the Pökot adopted many Karimojong customs. At the beginning of the XXth century the expansion of their territory continued, especially towards the west. Since their land was partially occupied by white settlers they entered the territory of the Karimojong. However, towards Turkana and Transzoia they were stopped. There was at this time an intensification of their relationships with Turkana and Karimojong even through intermarriages.⁸

About 1930 the Pökot were well identified with a mainly pastoralist way of living and their herds included cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys and some camels. Their mobility was high, following grazing areas. Women, children and elderly people used to stay in the more permanent settlements taking care of some crops and milking cows, as well as doing some home tasks. Instead, adult and young men accompanied the herds to grazing lands. The period between 1930 and 1960 was a relatively calm one for the Pökot. From 1960 onwards, the Turkana as well as Karimojong warriors started threatening the area and the violence crept up and continued with furious attacks from the various sides during the 80's. These attacks, accompanied by droughts, animal diseases and increased population forced the Pökot to look for non-traditional survival strategies.⁹ In the next section, we will make a brief consideration of their life in the socio-economical aspects.

1.3. Socio-economic analysis.

West Pökot has one of the lowest rankings in Kenya in almost all its economic variables. Compared with other semi-arid districts it shares this bottom position with Samburu District.

⁷ Dietz, *Pastoralists*, p.28.

⁸ *Ibid.*,29.

⁹ *Ibid.*,30.

For instance, school attendance is only of 24%, in comparison to 62% as average for the whole country. The percentage of educated people in the District in 1979 was 18% compared to 49% for Kenya.¹⁰ The percentage of wage labor for the whole labor force population is about 5%, compared to 16% in the total of Kenya.¹¹

The rate of annual population growth in the district is 3.5%.¹² The estimated figures of livestock given in 1995 for the District are 209,000 head of cattle and 392,000 of goats and sheep¹³ with 225,000 Stock Units (SU), and 0.8 SU/cap.¹⁴ From a mere pastoralist point of view the physical environment offers a critical estimated density of population in our three sub-areas of study of 11, 7 and 16 inh/km² for Upe, Kacheliba and Central West Pökot respectively. These figures are below the current population densities.¹⁵

With a view to facing these limitations, the Pökot have developed a complicated system of livestock management so as to assure the best utilization of their potential capacities. They leave some of their animals in their homestead with the women, children and old people to provide them with nutrition. They also have to know the right place and moment to move their animals. In order to reduce the possibilities of complete loss of cattle due to epidemics they have also developed a system of cattle loaning called *Tiliantan*. They lend cows to relatives in other parts of the land in exchange for a steer. The cow provides milk for the one who receives it but remains together with its calves, property of the borrower.¹⁶ Agriculture is still a very marginal activity in Western West Pökot. However, it is common for a man to marry several wives settled in different areas with diverse microclimates, so as to have chances of harvesting during different times of the year. In the following section we will have a look at Pökot within the general context of Kenya.

¹⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹¹ District Development Committee, Plan 1997-2001, p.37.

¹² Ibid., 9.

¹³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴ One Stock Unit is equivalent to 300 kg in weight of animal (1 head cattle=0.7 SU and goat/sheep= 0.2 SU).

¹⁵ Dietz, Pastoralists, p.133.

¹⁶ Hubert Hendrix, District Atlas West Pökot, (Kapenguria: Ministry of Planning and National Development of the Republic of Kenya, 1985), 66.

1.4 Pökot in the Kenya of today: Challenges for the Pökot within modern

Kenyan society

When we analyze different parameters of development among pastoralist Pökot and compare them with the rest of Kenya we see a gap existing between both. Kenyanization is taking place among the Pökot and whether they like it or not it will definitely take place. We ask ourselves: Can the Pökot retain their own identity? What kind of advantages and disadvantages will they obtain from this process of integration within the rest of the country? They have now intermingled, not always easily, with non-Pökot who have come to the area. Government officials receive also hardship allowances of 30%. This factor has attracted people from different parts of Kenya to Pökot. Schools and churches have received many non-Pökot among their members. In some parts, these control most of the business and jobs. Some voices, especially from politicians, have complained about the presence of non-Pökot in their land. "Economically they (Pökot) are exploited. They do not have power. Sociologically they are threatened. Politically they have no say. Culturally they are on the verge to be destroyed".¹⁷ How can they face these challenges? One of the answers to it could be education.

1.4.1 Education

When we compare the levels of education in our study area and overall in Kenya we can easily realize the discrepancies among them, as we mentioned above, in our socio-economic analysis. It is only recently and slowly that the pastoralist Pökot have started cooperating with the idea of sending their children to school. Nevertheless, the level of adult illiteracy in 1993 was 90%¹⁸ compared to 22%¹⁹ in 1997, in the overall Kenya. There has been a poor response on the part of the people towards these initiatives of adult education²⁰. It seems that they have not felt the need of the latter and also the government did not pay teachers regularly. These two reasons

¹⁷ J. Visser, Towards a Missionary Approach Among the Pökot, (Zandijk: The Netherlands, 1982), 38.

¹⁸ Diocesan Survey, Catholic Diocese of Eldoret: Parish Profiles, 1993, 108.

¹⁹ World Bank, African Development Indicators, (Washington D.C.: 1997), 341.

²⁰ Comboni Missionary, History of Kacheliba as from the Present, (1998), 10.

contributed to the failure of these initiatives. Thus, adult illiteracy fosters distance and isolation in regard to the rest of the nation.

1.4.2 Roads and communications

One of the obvious handicaps of our study area is the lack of a decent network of roads and communication system. Despite some recent improvements, most of the scheduled money destined to the construction and maintenance of roads has apparently not been used²¹. The program on "food for work" has been a positive initiative fostering community involvement for development and a rational implementation of food aid on the side of missions.

1.4.3 Health

The hygienic and health facilities of the area are also extremely insufficient; dispensaries and mobile clinics run by missionaries are almost the only services given to people. The lack of good communications implies a hindrance in the access to health centres. The nearest hospital in Kapenguria is at times too distant and insufficiently equipped to give a good service. On the side of the Government there does not seem to be enough commitment to the good running of health facilities.²²

1.4.4 Women

If the collectivity of women is underprivileged in Kenyan society compared to that of men, the situation in Pökot is even more acute. Women play the most decisive role in the church and in the society in terms of development and commitment but they are excluded from decision-making and considered the weaker sex²³. They are becoming more and more aware of their rights in the Kenya of today and this trend will continue in the near future. Sooner or later Pökot culture will have to face the challenge of the liberation of women as a result of contact with modernity. It is true that women have been performing traditional tasks within the social

²¹ Recent budget of 5 million Ksh allotted for repairing roads has not been used for that purpose, according to the missionaries of the area.

²² Some centers, which were built, have been hardly utilized (e.g. Kacheliba Health Centre).

²³ Francesco Pierli, "Living with Change in Church and World," in Spirituality for Lay Christians, ed. Terry Charlton (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 135.

structure of Pökot society²⁴, but they were never entitled to have active participation in their decision-making. Another two challenges related to Pökot women facing the encounter with modernity are the issues of circumcision, still practised, and freedom of consent in marriage.

1.4.5. New economic activities.

The exploitation of minerals, especially gold and rubies, and stimulants like mirrah,²⁵ has implied changes in the economy of the Pökot. These activities can be a source of wealth to uplift the economies of the people and link Pökot land with other parts of the country, improving their communication system. However, there are also some disadvantages, such as:

- They are fluctuating activities depending on eventual findings (especially for ruby and gold).
- Their products are underpaid. Others, usually foreigners to the area, benefit from the hard work of the Pökot.
- Since traditionally the Pökot were not used to monetary economy, the sudden incomes have unsettled their ways of life, bringing new problems (money spent on alcohol, prostitution...).
- It has affected their health and security in the workplace.

1.4.6 Challenges from their way of living

When we look at the Pökot style of living and compare it with the non-nomadic people of Kenya, we realize that pastoralism is a completely different understanding of life. Nomadic life fits quite well in this semi-desert environment. However, it does not match too easily with the modern society. Semi-nomadic life implies a great hindrance to the establishment of permanent structures of health and education, since at least a good number of the population migrates with the cattle. The introduction of certain agricultural practices has been a positive thrust for the development of the region and has enabled the area to support a bigger demographic capacity.

²⁴ For instance, the role of women as prophets, in the ceremonies of initiation.

²⁵ Leaves with hallucinogenic effects.

1.4.7 Political situation, raids and reconciliation

One of the main hindrances to development towards modernity is the deficiency in the political administration. The lack of attention from the government in regard to services, the absence of politicians from the region and their mainly electoral interest, as well as mismanagement of funds, are the principal challenges for the administration of the Pökot. The traditional raids among pastoralists have become a bigger problem nowadays. The introduction of guns (which has also been promoted by politicians who are not interested in the real good of their people but in gaining votes from them) has worsened largely the situation of insecurity in the area.

1.4.8 Challenges of becoming a self-reliant Church.

Pökot Church is still on the way to self-reliance. For example, there is not yet a single Pökot priest in active ministry. Their Church is still very much dependent on missionaries in most of its aspects, unlike other parts of the country. The increasing number of catechumens is, however, a hopeful indicator for the future. In the following section we will have a look at the foremost goals pursued by the Pökot in their lives.

1.5 Goal of the Pökot: Harmonious life or "*poghisyo*"

For the pastoralist Pökot the central element of life is the flock.²⁶ From the animals, they always have food and skins for protection. The herd is the source of wealth and prestige that enables them to have a harmonious and socially recognized life.²⁷ This type of life is materialized in the meaning of the word "*poghisyo*". Cattle give access to what becomes vital for their lives, their acquisition of wives through dowry and therefore, the meeting of their sexual and procreation needs as well as labour and domestic aids. Cattle are the basic means of subsistence, the cement of social relationships and the major source of ritual elements. Cattle are essential to

²⁶ "A Pochon (singular voice for an individual of the tribe) without cattle is considered as a dead one". (Visser, *Towards*, p.12.)

²⁷ D.Patterson, "The Pökot of Western Kenya 1910-1963: The Response of a Conservative People to Colonial Rule," *Syracuse Occasional Paper* 53, (1969): 32.

giving identity to a Pökot as people and as individual. The signs of abundance of blessings are good health, long life and numerous cattle.²⁸

The homestead is the centre of their life. Everyone has tasks to perform according, as the head of the homestead distributes them. He also performs the rituals that guarantee peace and stability in the homestead. To be able to stand in life is very important for the Pökot. The hazards in the environment and the subsistence are countered with ceremonies and rituals, which are purifying, protecting and retaliating while positive things are stimulated. Through these actions the Pökot try to safeguard or enhance the powers that bring life and protect themselves from those that provoke harm. The rituals of passage give to the person power to stand in life while he/she is incorporated into the society as well. These ceremonies and rituals are envisaged to enhance a relationship of control, supplication, respect, fear and search of equilibrium with the supernatural powers.²⁹ In the following section, we shall proceed to analyze the main structures that make up their traditional society.

1.6. Socio-structural analysis

The Pökot have different ways of organizing their social life. Their society has a high degree of cohesion and solidarity.³⁰ They establish different types of relationships based on age, homesteads and neighbourhood, cattle exchanges, as well as family ties. From conception to death, diverse rituals mark the different stages in the life of a person. Among the Pökot, there is a peculiar system of social integration, based on revolving age-sets with ever-growing power or authority in its scale of age.³¹ To be an elder means to have more experience and power in life both for blessing and for cursing.

The age-set system is grounded on the Pökot cyclical conception of time and it functions through rituals of passage that integrate the members of the community into wider circles. The first way of integration is achieved through the *Sapana* ritual, which marks the initiation of the

²⁸ Visser, *Towards*, p.13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16ff.

³⁰ H.Schneider, "Pökot Folktales, Humor, and Values," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 4 (1967): 270.

³¹ J.Peristiany, "The Age-set System of the Pastoral Pökot: The *Sapana* initiation ceremony," *Africa* XXI (1951): 188ff.

individual into adulthood. It allows him to enter into the structured society and gives him also access to marriage. In this ritual, the individual acts for the first time as a man; he spears a chosen ox to feed his coevals and seniors. This ceremony stresses the recognition of the initiate's adulthood without submitting him to the long circumcision teaching and tests of other tribes. During *Sapana* there is no ordeal, no pride in sharing an esoteric knowledge from which the non-initiated are excluded.³² The initiate plays a very secondary role in the ceremony. *Sapana* also provides the initiate with a new group of age-mates (those who have celebrated their *Sapana* recently) with whom he establishes bonds of solidarity, loyalty and mutual protection, especially in the first years after its celebration.

After *Sapana* there will be a series of rituals of initiation into progressively senior age-ranks. Unlike *Sapana* the following ceremonies are performed not by individuals but by a whole set of initiated men who pass into another higher age-set and share social activities in a broader sense. The integration of members of the society into the *sapana*-set (later stage of integration) empowers them to act and to command rather than reverence and obey.³³ As we can see, through these age-system rituals an aim of integration and communion is achieved giving to the groups an ever-growing factor of cohesion.

Regarding political organization, elders form a council or *kokwo* where the life of the society is decided (law and order, security, disputes, traditional matters). It includes representatives of different age-sets.³⁴ The Pökot dislike concentration of power. The council of elders might need to consult the prophets or *werkoi*. These can be either men or women. However, in the case of the latter, unlike the men, they cannot have political leadership.³⁵ All these structures strengthen the cohesive factor of the community. People feel responsible for one another. Nobody should separate from the rest of the community and from the mutual

³² *Ibid.*, 204.

³³ The *Sapana*-set is extinct and a new one inaugurated in the *amuro* ritual. It is even remembered that Pökot and Karimojong people performed *amuro* together becoming the "*Sapana* Peoples". (J.Peristiany, "The Age-set System of the Pastoral Pökot: Mechanism, Function and Post-*Sapana* Ceremonies," *Africa* XXI (1951): 299.)

³⁴ In it the *primus inter pares* is the *Kiruokin*, not necessarily the eldest, but a proved trustworthy person. (J.Peristiany, "The Ideal and the Actual: The Role of the Prophets in the Pökot Political System" in *Studies in Social Anthropology* ed. J.Beattie and R.Lienhardt, (1975), 190).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

obligations: "He is bad who eats on his own".³⁶ In the following section we will pay attention to the system of beliefs among the Pökot.

1.7 System of beliefs

1.7.1. God, spirits and ancestors

Religion is present in the life of Pökot people. It has expression in their daily affairs. However, it is difficult to elaborate a systematic and delimited approach to their religious beliefs. We can accept that the Pökot have a vague conception of a Supreme Being, not as a personal god. Nevertheless, we will attempt to highlight the main and most common features of their faith.

In Pökot traditional religion there is one God, *Tororot*, the Above, who dwells on high and far from the people. Among His epithets, He is called the One who hears, listens and understands. He is able to know and notice the requests of the people. His rule has no limits; He is the ultimate cause of everything, both good and bad. He is the Shepherd and Keeper who provides safety to human beings. He holds the pillars of the earth. He is also the moulder of human beings. He is responsible for snatching people to death; especially in the case of infants, people say that *Tororot* took them to Him. At times, He is called Father, in analogy with the role of the father in the homestead, who provides and keeps the lives of the members of the family. Even though He is far distant and is rarely addressed, He can intervene when invoked and is the ultimate cause of blessings and cursing in our lives.³⁷

Some authors proceed with their presentation of the divine in hierarchical order with *Asis*, represented in the sun and considered also either as a god,³⁸ as an aspect of god,³⁹ or as high Spirit of nature.⁴⁰ *Asis* is characterized as the One who sees, the Eye of God. He has the duty of ascertaining that the divine precepts are observed.⁴¹ Although *Asis* is also remote, he is less

³⁶ Visser, *Towards*, p.22.

³⁷ Visser, *Religion*, p. 93.

³⁸ Peristany, *Prophets*, p.168.

³⁹ Visser, *Religion*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Opinion of Mariano Tibaldo M.C.C.J, and others.

⁴¹ Peristany, *Prophets*, p.175.

remote than *Tororot* and the Pökot ascribe more anthropomorphic features to Him than to the Latter.⁴² The third element in the Pökot "theophany" is *Ilat*. He is the Spirit of the rain and He also represents the bridge between *Tororot* and His creation. He fertilizes the soil and causes life to sprout from it.⁴³ He appears in different spirits or *Ilot* that participate in the human world. *Ilat* shares the feelings and behavior of people and these can rebuke Him or benefit from His favours. *Ilat* is vulnerable as well.⁴⁴ Some stories present Him as destroyer and others as promoter of life, but in any case, He is close to the lives of the Pökot. *Ilat* has an acknowledged position within the Pökot social structures.

Two terms in Pökot cosmology refer to spirits in general. The *Onyot* is a spirit that always surrounds the person and leaves him/her only at the moment of death.⁴⁵ *Onyot* is associated with the spirit of a certain ancestor and generally understood as involved in human misbehaviour and provokes negative effects upon the person. Ancestors can also trouble the person through the spirit of *Onyot*; therefore, eventually *Onyot* has to be addressed and appeased in order to restore peace. There is also another term for spirits, which is *Oy*. It is used in different contexts. The spirits deserve respect, lest they harm us. *Oy* also have power to counteract a disease or an evil. Unlike the *Onyot*, which is related to an individual, *Oy* is plural in its meaning and refers to collective ancestral spirits of certain lineages.⁴⁶ They are susceptible to being manipulated. When they are believed to have taken possession of a person, people perform a ritual called *Kilokat* to get rid of the negative consequences produced in the person by *Oy*.⁴⁷ Now we will have a brief look at the Pökot conception of the ancestor world.

The ancestors reside in the underworld. They can appear on this earth under the form of certain animals, such as snakes. Ancestors have to be respected, lest they punish human beings. The ancestors exert influence upon human beings through the revolving age class.⁴⁸ The past recurs through the age set with all its goodness and evil. For the Pökot time is cyclic and all

⁴² Visser, *Religion*, p.93.

⁴³ Peristany, *Prophets*, p.171.

⁴⁴ Visser, *Religion*, p.96.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Comboni Missionary, *Pökot Religiosity*, (1991):2.

⁴⁸ Visser, *Religion*, p. 102.

events except the appearance of the gods are encompassed in that cycle.⁴⁹ The ancestors occupy a less prominent place in the Pökot worldview than the spirits and in general, they are considered as performing good services.⁵⁰ Descending in the hierarchical order of beings, we find the human beings.

1.7.2. View of the person

Tororot has put human beings on earth. They were made out of the clay of anthill. In Pökot understanding, the person must stand in life as a rock or as a mountain; the worst enemy for them is death. People avoid even talking about it. The Pökot have vague ideas about the hereafter. Death's origin lies in human fault.⁵¹ The ideal of fulfillment of the human being for the Pökot is the elderly man surrounded by plenty of cattle and children. In their anthropology, the Pökot consider the heart, the head and the shadow of a person as their most important parts.⁵² The head registers things from outside while the heart feels, gives courage and refuses. Both form the centre of the person. Evil and desire also originate in these parts. The will resides in the chest, especially in the lungs. Emotions dwell in the stomach and belly and people of good nature are referred to as having a good stomach. The shadow of a person is also very important. There are two words for shadow. The shadow projected by any object and the shadow that moves with the person until it leaves them at the moment of their death. The latter connects the body with the outside world.⁵³

Among the Pökot there are some individuals with special powers and consequently with particular roles. They are specialist of rituals and magic. We call them extraordinary people. Some are considered to cause misfortune, while others promote the well-being of the land and the community. Special powers are also attributed to women who have given birth to twins, or children whose birth circumstances were abnormal. There are also people with specific good qualities, with purity of heart (*Chi Nyo Tili*). They are modest, quiet, with exemplary behaviour in the society. They officiate in rituals of purification, pronounce blessings and promote the

⁴⁹ Peristany, *Prophets*, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Schneider, *Folktales*, p. 271.

⁵¹ Visser, *Religion*, p. 103.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

general well-being. The most important figure of this group is the *Parparin*. He performs purifying ceremonies on behalf of those who have committed anti-social or unnatural actions.⁵⁴

There is an important group with special powers in Pökot society, namely the prophets or *werkoi*. They can be either males or females. They communicate with *Ilat*, the Spirit nearest to humans, with the minds of human beings, with the spirits of the deceased and with nature. The prophet decides when an age-set or a war should be initiated or ended, how to perform a raid, when and where people should move with their cattle, the time for planting... The prophet is the most exalted among humans. He also performs the rituals of purification to cleanse warriors, cast out their sins, and throw them towards the enemy. The male prophet has also a political function. He gives unity to a territory since nobody will dare to contravene his decisions in an area of his recognition. The prophet's power is greatest during times of wide-ranging danger, affliction or crisis. At those moments, the Pökot unite themselves under the guidance of the prophet. When the hardships remit, the prophet goes back to his small-scale activity of private practitioner. The mission of the prophet is to lead the people to that world of plenty, health and happiness where human beings may be at peace and in communion with the gods and with all plants, animals and humans, even with the Karimojong and Turkana.⁵⁵ Lastly, we will look at the Pökot concept of evil and uncleanness.

1.7.3. Evil, mistakes and uncleanness

Pökot consider illness a consequence of evil and wrong-doings by human beings. Evil destabilizes the society and opposes the well-being of the community or *poghisyo*. It can be expressed in many forms. However, among the Pökot all consequences of evil can be redeemed, provided a ritual of purification is performed.⁵⁶ The seriousness of an illness correlates with the seriousness of the evil committed. The Pökot distinguish four kinds of evil.⁵⁷ Each of these types of mistakes needs a different type of ritual of cleansing to be performed.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁵ Peristany, *Prophets*, p. 210.

⁵⁶ T.Herreros and D. Partany, *Inside the Beehive of Life. A Descriptive Work of the Most Peculiar Traditions of the Pökot People*, (1991): 27.

⁵⁷ *Ngoki*: This is the effect produced by the transgression of society's codes and entails inevitable destructive consequences. If it is not countered, it becomes an independent force of consuming evil. It is mainly caused by abuse,

However, when we speak of uncleanness we refer to something different from evil and it is a condition undergone by people at certain moments of their lives or derived from specific happenings. In any case, it produces harm. The three main types of uncleanness or pollution have their origin in contact with blood, semen or faeces. People polluted have to be secluded or at least avoid contact with others until they perform the proper rituals of purification. The rituals of purification generally involve the sacrifice of a certain animal.

As we can conclude after this brief survey of Pökot cosmology and anthropology, life stands as the great value for this people. Forces that threaten life are counteracted through different rituals and ways of promoting life in abundance and blessings are pursued. In the next chapter, we shall introduce ourselves to the mission among the Pökot, particularly the work of evangelization done so far.

theft inside their society, adultery (in which both sides contract *ngoki* and if it is not revealed will be transmitted to the next generation) and murder. Lying, however, is acceptable among the Pökot if it does not cause trouble. One person can also transmit *ngoki* to others through cursing. Natural disasters are also understood as a consequence of *ngoki*.

Ptakal is an extraordinary evil due to an unnatural action such as incest. These actions need special purification of the performers.

Lelut is an unintentional mistake that requires an apology lest it provoke harm in the lineage.

Sirrip results from quarrels. Words pronounced or thrown as arrows towards someone who has committed a fault produce bad effects or *sirrip* on them. (Visser, Religion, p. 107).

CHAPTER TWO: EVANGELIZATION OF POKOT - JOURNEY TOWARDS

INCARNATION

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter we have tried to present an overall picture of the pastoralist Western Pökot: their geographic environment, history, economic conditions, their culture, their situation within the Kenya of today and their system of beliefs.

In this second chapter, we want to focus our attention on the evangelisation as such; how this has been done so far, its achievements and mistakes. First of all, we will have a look at the encounter between the world-view and faith of the missionaries and the Pökot culture and beliefs; in other words, the origin of the process of acculturation. Secondly, we will examine several aspects of the religious apostolate exercised by the missionaries. In the third section, we will deal with the social apostolate. In the last part of this chapter we will present some hints about the attempts made on the way towards inculturation. In the various sections we will include some examples taken from Amakuriat Parish⁵⁸ as a sample of the work of evangelisation of the Comboni Missionaries among the Pökot people.

2.1. The process of acculturation: The encounter of two worldviews

Before we analyse the history of the evangelisation among the Pökot, and among the pastoralists in general, we have to take into consideration the process of acculturation that has taken place. According to the definition of acculturation given by Shorter, we mean by it "the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between cultures. Being this perhaps the principal cause of cultural change...it is, of course, an encounter between two different sets of symbols and conceptions, two different interpretations of experience, two different social identities."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ We have chosen one of the parishes of our study area, Amakuriat- Mother of Peace Parish, as sample of the type of mission done among the pastoralist Pökot. The Comboni Missionaries inaugurated the parish in 1984. Previously it was an outstation of Amudat (Uganda) and afterwards of Kacheliba- Holy Cross Parish. The estimated population of its territory in 1993 was 25.000 inhabitants and the number of Catholics was then 1700, being now around 2300. The number of outstations is about 20. Now, there are two priests, one Brother and three Sisters.

⁵⁹ Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 7.

Missionaries have been frequently accused of exercising western influence upon the people.⁶⁰ Among the pastoralists, missions were organised and established with imported means: alien buildings, heavy machinery...They were centres which contrasted with the surrounding environment. Missionaries arriving in Pökot land brought with them their own world-view, as they were heirs of their culture and time. They carried with them a modern outlook of reality. At the same time, they encountered a very different culture and society and a process of acculturation, with both its confrontation and its dialogue, started. It is important, therefore, to compare the world-views that eventually came into contact, the missionary's and the Pökot's.

Visser points out some of the characteristics of the modern mentality, contrasting them with the Pökot world-view.⁶¹ According to him, the former believes in control over nature as opposed to participation with it in the Pökot mentality. Sickness is dealt with from its somatic signs in a secularised mentality, while the Pökot look for supernatural causes. Religion is limited to one's personal life or it permeates all aspects of it, according to the respective approaches. Modern culture believes in evolution, efficiency, productivity and progress and people look towards the future, unlike the Pökot, who pursue stability and are past oriented. Individualism is a highly estimated value in the secularised Western culture in contrast to the communitarian web of the Pökot society. For instance, marriage is a question of individuals or families, in their respective world-views. The contrast between the two conceptions of life refers also to the priorities in it. The Pökot have an economy of subsistence and to enjoy good life they search for basic means, such as honey, milk, meat, vegetables...(as well as harmonious relationships with the non-empirical world). In contrast, the modern economy is based on competition and search for always increasing needs and goods. Regarding the political structure of the society, Western democracies are based upon separation of powers while the Pökot society is an egalitarian one, based on the elders' council. The acquisition of power in the modern world is achieved through money, property or knowledge, while in Pökot it is obtained through rituals and age. In general,

⁶⁰ On one occasion, a visitor asked in a certain place if he had to lock up his things. They answered him: "No need. The mission has just started". This illustrates possible negative consequences from secularisation and modernity that may have been brought about nearly inevitably along with our missions. (Visser, *Towards*, p. 94).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

Western societies are permissive, while the Pökot society is regulated under strict codes of behaviour. In the latter, education is received through the community, unlike the secularised societies where this is implemented mostly through institutions. As we see, the missionaries from the West have brought with them a cultural background, which differs substantially from that of the Pökot. In this confrontation both missionaries and Pökot have experienced transformation. One of the aspects of this process of acculturation is the encounter between Christian faith and Pökot beliefs.

2.1.1. Acculturation of faith: Encounter of Christian faith and Pökot culture

There are different aspects of Christian faith, in which the missionaries have tried to establish dialogue with Pökot traditional religion. For instance, as we considered in the previous chapter, the Pökot see God and the spirits as entities that are to be kept at peace. They are ultimately responsible for sickness and death and when these come it means they have to appease the spirits through different rituals. Therefore, they find unacceptable that God, who the missionaries say is a caring and loving One, may allow sickness and death to occur.

Regarding the concrete ways of addressing the proclamation of faith, some missionaries have attempted to start it from the life and stories of Jesus. However, we must acknowledge that even Christianity had a preparation in Israel, before the coming of Jesus. Should we follow the path of a direct proclamation of Jesus, he becomes a super hero who takes the place of God and is understood more as a spiritual being, far from our reality. There has been another approach, which starts with creation. God is here identified with *Tororot* as Creator of everything. However, even here it is not all so straightforward, since there also exists a clear discontinuity between God, according to Christianity, as universal God of all people, not a tribal one, and the Pökot concept of *Tororot*. In the stress of the universality of God lies an extraordinary and powerful novelty of the Christian message, since it brings about a fundamental unity among human beings through the One Creator. There are also some other differences between the two beliefs about creation. For instance, in Pökot faith there is not a God who made people according

to His image. Nevertheless, there are striking similarities between the stories of Genesis and Exodus and some of those belonging to Pökot cosmology, although also basic dissimilarities in their meaning and teaching. The lives of the Patriarchs resemble that of the Pökot and many of their elements and symbols are just the same.⁶² This is a good point of contact for communication, although it must be taken with precaution since essential differences among their meanings are present.

Missionaries of the area held some meetings in which they tried to show to the Pökot the fragility of some of their beliefs and undermine their false securities. They also tried to challenge their traditional beliefs in areas such as sickness, raids, family-life, and marriage. However, the general impression that we can infer from the minutes of the meetings of the missionaries of the area is that at that time their attitude was rather apologetic.⁶³

Nevertheless, they intended through these meetings to establish communication with the Pökot and to find an attractive and understandable picture of the Christian message. For instance, as an example, it is interesting to consider the dialogue the missionaries attempted in relation to Pökot traditional reconciliation rites. The missionaries saw the difficulties of harmonizing the latter with the Christian celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation, since in the Pökot concept of sin God is not involved. This is a logical outcome of their idea of a distant God, not a personal one, involved in the lives of the people, as Christians believe. Therefore, sin in Pökot understanding, is seen as a transgression of rules with the resulting "disruption of the community's life and laws, which brings about havoc to the person or community".⁶⁴ There is not much room for moral responsibility. Sin is sought for when its consequences such as sickness appear. There is certainly in this area a gap between Christian faith and Pökot belief. However, there are positive aspects of their understanding that could be used in Christian celebrations like:

- Their stress on the communitarian aspect of sin and reconciliation;
- The relation between sin (and ancestor's sins) and sickness;

⁶² Visser, *Towards*, p.71.

⁶³ Comboni Missionaries, "Minutes of Meeting about Pökot Evangelization", (Kacheliba: 11-7-88).

⁶⁴ Herreros Tomas and others, "Minutes of the Meeting on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Pökot Rites of Reconciliation", (Kacheliba: 8-7-1984).

- The existence of the role of mediation;
- Their understanding of reconciliation as a feast.⁶⁵

Women are also given a special role to play in traditional reconciliation ceremonies.⁶⁶ This can be an interesting trend to develop in the incorporation of women in Christian celebrations.

These are mere examples of the challenges that the process towards inculturation presents. The encounter demands dialogue and mutual challenging. In the following Chapter Three we shall propose some methodology of encounter between Christian and Pökot beliefs in view of inculturation. But, before that, let us comment briefly on the process of conversion to Christianity that in general the new convert undergoes. We can usually distinguish diverse stages as Visser acknowledges:⁶⁷

1- Rejection of his/her old ways. Proof of this fact is that, especially for the new converts to Christianity, the old ways (traditional) are considered as pagan and backward.⁶⁸ Questioning ourselves about the reason for this reaction against their traditional backgrounds, we believe that several factors can contribute to it. Although it is true that it may have been a negative appreciation of traditional cultures by missionaries, modernity and Christianity also definitely challenge the "old ways".

2-Accommodation. (Attempts at compromising between the two faiths in some areas of life, especially in moments of crisis).

3-Re-establishment of identity. (Self-awareness and integration of Christian faith and culture). As we know, conversion is a gradual and never-ending journey that has to reach out to the different aspects of our life.

In a similar way, Jerome Skhakhane distinguishes the three stages towards a full-fledged Christianity as:

1. Proclamation

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ When sickness appears because of the profanation of a place dedicated to *Ilat*, women perform a rite of purification called *Kilokat*. Also, when someone is sick but their sins are unknown, a woman with special powers (for instance, someone who has delivered in special circumstances) called *Pitot* will carry out the ceremony.

⁶⁷ Visser, *Towards*, p.86.

⁶⁸ "People wonder very much about a missionary who wants to preserve something from the past as a vehicle for Christianity." (Ibid.,75).

2. Nurturing, with the frequent positions either of total rejection of ATR (African Traditional Religion) as something bad⁶⁹ or the dichotomy stage in which both Christianity and traditional practices are combined. Christianity is seen in this latter position as an overcoat, rather than a living reality.
3. Assimilation (or inculturation), when Christianity is announced in terms which take into consideration the cultural values and people feel that the former does not interfere with their identity.⁷⁰

Now we want to consider some areas of religious apostolate done so far as well as its challenges.

2.2. Religious apostolate

The religious apostolate occupies a great percentage of the time the missionaries invest in their work. For instance, in the mission of Amakuriat the two Comboni Missionary priests dedicate a great amount of their energy to pastoral activities: catechumenate courses, home visitations (generally accompanied by the catechists), baptisms, attention to the people in the parish. Some of the missionaries of the area have also devoted their time to the study of the culture and language, even publishing the first dictionaries, grammars and liturgical texts in Pökot. However, many times due to rotation of personnel there has not been a possibility of sufficient continuity in these initiatives.⁷¹

There are also other challenges that appear in the religious apostolate among the pastoralists. For instance, in the meeting attended at Nairobi in 1979 by twenty-six missionaries working among pastoralists they highlighted the question of polygamy and access to baptism and sacraments. They felt this as a major concern and obstacle in the evangelisation process.⁷²

⁶⁹ This was the opinion expressed by one of the catechumens of Amakuriat when I interviewed her about her expectations of being a Christian capable of keeping also her traditions. Her attitude was rejection of anything related to her old practices.

⁷⁰ Jerome Skhakhane, "African Spirituality," in *Inculturation in the South African Context*, ed. Patrick Ryan and others (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 117-119.

⁷¹ In this regard we cannot remain without mentioning the works of Tomas Herreros and Mariano Tibaldo and their publications such as Pökot Grammar or their studies about the Pökot culture and trends of evangelisation. (Cf. Bibliography).

⁷² E. Hillman CSSp, "The Roman Catholic Apostolate to Nomadic Peoples in Kenya: An Examination and Evaluation," (Brussels: Pro Mundi Vita Dossiers Oct. 1980), 25.

Another issue of pastoral concern was the lack of local clergy. In a culture like the Pökot, the leader must be chosen among the respected elders who have been tested in their lives and faith. It is completely alien to Pökot culture to recruit children, isolate them from their indigenous cultural contexts and send them back to the people as their religious leaders.⁷⁹ This can be one of the reasons that explain the existence of not even a single Pökot priest. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reconsider the requirements for priesthood so that these can be realistic and the service of the people can be guaranteed.

2.2.1 Liturgy

Liturgy in most of our mission stations has an alien character. Western forms, symbols, gestures, styles and practices are used in general. Even though there have been some attempts at inculturation in liturgy, they have not yet been fully implemented. For instance, at different moments in the history of evangelisation in Amakuriat and other parishes of the area, some missionaries have tried to inculturate certain liturgical rites. However, due to changes of personnel these endeavours cannot be followed up. At other times limitations of knowledge of culture and language by the missionaries, as well as not enough preparation on the side of the catechists, have hindered these initiatives. At still other times, the missionaries have not felt it as priority. So far, the innovations have been mainly mere modifications, especially in songs and prayers.

2.2.2. Catechumenate

The catechumenate system is commonly organised through Sunday instructions given by the catechists and several intensive, short-duration courses held in the parish centre throughout the year. They normally follow the history of salvation from creation to the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the Church and sacraments. In Amakuriat these catechumenate courses are given in Swahili and translated into Pökot by the catechists. They follow a rather Western approach and it could be a positive step to attempt a more incarnated presentation.

⁷⁹ Ibid.,26.

The missionaries rely on catechists in their endeavour to evangelise. The latter are generally the main actors in this work, among the pastoralists. They usually receive some economic help or support from the parish. Apart from their school education, they are trained for their ministry in a catechetical centre (i.e. in Kitale), for a period of a few months, and they receive some periodical and limited going on formation. Many of them have, however, a Western outlook. They follow European ways, to which they feel themselves alienated.⁷⁴ The quality of their service varies a lot, as well as their motivations for their ministry and their zeal. On top of that, the profession of catechist is not esteemed as one of high recognition.⁷⁵

In regard to the structures of the parishes, these are usually based on a quite Westernised model, with a geographical division into localities and outstations. The involvement of local elders or local resources in the running of the parish of Amakuriat is practically non-existent. In the following section, we shall have a look at the commitments in the social field, to which the missionaries have been devoted.

2.3. Social Apostolate

2.3.1. Schools and education

As in other missions among the pastoralists, the missionaries in Pökot followed the traditional approach to evangelisation used previously with sedentary peoples in other parts of Kenya. One of the main priorities has been always the schools, which provided also a means of getting people into the Church, since this was the first objective, especially in a pre-Vatican mentality. It is a recognised fact that the educational facilities are to a great extent owed to missions. They have sponsored the construction and maintenance of primary and secondary schools, while the government provided them with teachers, most of the time irregularly present in their jobs.⁷⁶ Missions have supported what otherwise the government would have not done. However, we must admit that some shortcomings were also present in these endeavours: “The

⁷⁴ Visser, *Towards*, p.108.

⁷⁵ Hillman, *Apostolate*, p. 20.

⁷⁶ For instance, the mission of Amakuriat still supports students financially at different levels of education. They have sponsored the construction and maintenance of 11 primary schools and about 20 nursery schools in the area, including the financial support of their teachers, as well as 5 patrons in different primary schools.

school-children, new Christians, uncritically accepted Christian indoctrination and Western socialization. Most of them even internalised the negative perceptions of their pastors and teachers regarding traditional African customs, values, styles and practices."⁷⁷ While entering into modernity through schooling, there was a common loss of appreciation of their cultural identity. The children often learnt to feel ashamed of the traditions of their parents and grandparents.⁷⁸ Moreover, they frequently developed a craving for "accumulating exotic goods which promise prestige and security under the title of modernization".⁷⁹ They have also tried to imitate Western models, since they find these very attractive and tend to copy their ways of thinking and living. However, many of their desires are still unachievable. Their dreams are grounded on false expectations, since what they hope for will not be obtained. Disillusionment and frustration are the outcomes of this process. Many go back home, but there they do not find themselves at ease either, after having undergone an education that makes them alien to their family environment. This is very evident in the case of boarding schools and especially secondary ones, which are also not very accessible to many. It is necessary to offer the students realistic and feasible possibilities of constructing their future as they enter into the educational system. We must find a balance in helping people to enter into new ways of life without feeling ashamed of what they are.

There have been attempts at a curriculum adapted to the local situation, education for life, rather than for a job. But this is unrealistic because a special curriculum will cut the Pökot off from the rest of Kenyans and will hinder their progress. "One Kenya requires one educational system".⁸⁰ Nevertheless, there is need to make education available to as many Pökot as possible and to foster technical schools adapted to local needs. At the same time, education must also enable people to feel satisfied with what they are and with their cultures and backgrounds of origin.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Hillman, *Apostolate*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁰ Visser, *Towards*, p. 103.

⁸¹ Coming back to the case of Amakuriat, apart from the programme of sponsorship of schools and students, the parish has insisted on formal and informal education, including programmes of awareness, health education and

With the income generated by mining and mirrah, some problems like prostitution, AIDS and alcoholism have become acute and the missionaries have made some few attempts to work on education in values. Other problems, such as unemployment among the youth, are very prominent. Most of those few who finish their secondary education go back to herding cattle, a fact which is rather frustrating. We continue looking at other challenges in the areas of social apostolate.

2.3.2 Nomadism

The challenge of nomadism as a hindrance to evangelisation is a real one, especially regarding men, since they move with their cattle. Apart from the difficulties of following the people, nomadism conveys also resistance to entering into the path of modernity and is a major cause of isolation from other communities and of cultural stagnation. The missionary work has inevitably been focused on settled sectors of population, especially women, and it has rarely attempted to reach out to the nomadic groups of the society, namely men. Another reason for the lack of response of men towards Christianity is the fact that these are also regarded as preservers of the culture and the main actors in it. They have seen with mistrust the venture of Christianity into their traditional ways. Only recently, some have shown interest in becoming Christians. The work of development by the missionaries, such as health, development and famine relief, may have touched particularly the hearts of women, the family nurturers, and provoked the positive response to faith in them. Women see also their dignity uplifted with the introduction of Christianity and the ideas about their equal dignity. Women have also formed fellowships among themselves.⁸² Now we comment on other areas of social activities.

2.3.3. Health, water and food. Women development

The missions have also put up many facilities, such as good medical services, which have fostered a great improvement in the health conditions of the population.⁸³ In the area there is also the water development programme, satisfactorily implemented, which includes drilling and

prevention. Much of the work has been laid upon field assistants trained by the missionaries, especially catechists and women development and health staff members.

⁸² Visser, *Towards*, p. 128.

⁸³ The Comboni Sisters, for instance, provide a dispensary in Amakuriat and an outreach programme (mobile clinic).

maintenance of about 30 boreholes and the training of local people in water management.⁸⁴ They have provided water for human and animal consumption. At the beginning of the project, the missionaries found a certain rejection on the part of the people, who took their time in finding this facility relevant for their lives. The contribution of the locals to the total cost of drilling is, although small (approximately 5-10% of the total investment), significant. The main difficulties have lain upon the maintenance of boreholes and the collaboration with other Christian denominations in allowing the projects to be fully implemented.

Another major investment of energy by the missionaries has lain in the field of famine relief and women development. In parishes, such as Amakuriat, they have been involved in the programme "food for work" and have tried through several attempts to implement agricultural small-scale projects. The increase of agricultural practices in the area (especially the cultivation of maize, beans and other newly incorporated crops) has been partly the consequence of these initiatives taken by the missionaries.⁸⁵ In the field of the promotion of women the missionaries have also made an important contribution. For example, the Comboni Sisters of Amakuriat also attend a programme of women development with different groups that meet generally once per week in various locations within the parish. Now we want to consider what image the missionaries have usually manifested to the people.

2.3.4. The image that the missionaries have among the people

Regarding the image the local people have of the missionaries, they have traditionally seen them as agents of progress. Yet, at the same time, a sense of dependency has grown towards them from the side of the people. Missions were seen as the only centre of hope in the midst of an extremely harsh environment. The establishment of settled mission stations has not avoided bringing some negative effects as we see through these words: "The distribution of food draws people to Christian settlements around the mission stations. In some places, the missionaries have provided housing and clothing for their new Christians. Many now see these

⁸⁴ In collaboration with the Comboni Brother, Dario Laurencig, the programme is assisted also by ASAL, a Dutch NGO.

⁸⁵ However, the missionaries have tried to avoid getting directly involved in the distribution of food aid proceeding from the World Food Programme.

establishments as problems created by themselves. As one priest put it: "we have established communities of beggars whose self-respect, dignity and authority over their own children, have been undermined by our misguided charity". However, there is also a growing awareness among the missionaries that there are better ways of helping the people."⁸⁶

Truly socio-economic development has been one the traditional priorities of the mission, especially in the past, although the missionaries usually did not explicitly state it as their main goal of evangelisation.⁸⁷ Currently, a kind of balance between the different aspects of evangelisation is required on the side the missionaries. They have to collaborate in a sustainable development, which may also take into consideration the expectations and the maintenance of harmony in the lives of the people. The thrust for development should be accompanied with the service of proclamation and establishment of autochthonous Christian communities. The situation of violence in the area represents another challenges to our social apostolate.

2.3.5. Violence.

In regard to the problem of cattle raiding and violence in the area, especially the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Kitale has taken some initiatives in favour of peace. For instance, some sports tournaments have been organised in collaboration with the parish of Amakuriat between members of Turkana and Pökot communities. In fact, the relationships between these two peoples have improved. The same work remains to be done between Pökot and Karimojong communities. There are also other areas of civil education, such as the field of civil rights.

2.3.6. Civil rights

Recently, the missionaries have also created awareness among the people. They have invited them to claim their rights and benefit from their resources, which had moreover been allotted for different aid programmes (AIDS, construction of roads...). People responded and addressed the pertinent authorities urging them to use the money, instead of its getting lost in the pockets of some politicians. This is a good sign of a mentality by which missionaries try to

⁸⁶ Hillman, *Apostolate*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

push governments to improve their services so that they can as soon as possible hand over their endeavours to civil officials. In fact, we believe that "the guideline at all times is that the mission should not do the work which the government can do. The mission can act as catalyst, as the spiritual force, which prepares people for the changes which are at hand."⁸⁸ As we shall see in the next section, in the missionary activity there has been a journey of progress towards a more incarnated type of mission.

2.4. From adaptation towards inculturation

As we have mentioned, the encounter between Pökot and Christianity has undergone diverse stages during its process of acculturation. The attitudes of the missionaries towards the traditional cultures have also evolved in the history of their presence. Only twenty years ago the evaluation of the work among pastoralists still portrayed statements like these: "The image of the Church is overwhelmingly institutional and foreign: schools, medical services, various socio-economic development projects; plus exotic religious rites, rules, concepts and practices. Christianity appears as a superior tribal religion, which is destined to displace, substitute for or coexist with the traditional religion of the people. There is almost no real dialogue or integration, much less incarnation".⁸⁹ These words reflect a quite negative picture of what has unfortunately happened in some situations, not only, but especially, before Vatican II. The same report also stated: "Very few (missionaries) specified that the Christian communities should be authentically indigenous in their modes of expressing their new faith. Most agreed that they should express themselves fully through their own local cultural forms and values and structures".⁹⁰ This shows a step forward; but still an attitude of adaptation rather than inculturation, which has been, however, frequent among the missionaries. Nevertheless, we must admit that after Vatican II there has been a growing awareness of the importance of the principles of inculturation and methodologies of incarnation. It is in fact since Vatican II that the

⁸⁸ Visser, *Towards*, p.105.

⁸⁹ Hillman, *Apostolate*, p.24.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

word has become commonly used. Shorter defines it in a short way as: "the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture or cultures."⁹¹

Hence, most of the missionaries have tried to develop a real sense of appreciation for the culture of the people; some have been able to learn their language and patiently walk with them. Some have managed to acquire certain knowledge of anthropology, and a better theological preparation and have even made some attempts at inculturation, as we mentioned before. Many, in fact, have believed in the compatibility of valuable cultural traditions with progress and socio-economic development. They have tried to help the people entering into the trends of modernity, lest this might carry the destruction of values that may leave them in a worse condition than before.⁹² Some others have tried to share as much as possible the lives of the people. They have tried to share even their activities, such as the keeping of livestock. However, this latter type of mission has encountered some difficulties. Among them there is the high investment of energy in the maintenance of this sort of life, with the consequent reduction of possibilities of direct pastoral activities. Nevertheless, one of the most relevant achievements of these attempts at mission has been the enriching understanding of the people and direct contact with them. Other missionaries have tried an intermediate way and have preferred to enter into contact with the people through visiting their homesteads, with very positive results. This method has also been successful in the case of elder catechists, who enjoy respect from the rest of the community when engaged in home visitations.⁹³

Even though there has been a journey towards methodologies of incarnation in the evangelisation, there is still need of continuing it, until we reach a stage at which we are able to see things from the other person's view.

⁹¹ Shorter, Toward, p.11.

⁹² Hillman, Apostolate, p.24.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

CHAPTER THREE: POKOT ON THE EDGE OF TRANSFORMATION

- PERSPECTIVES FOR THE MISSION

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we have evaluated the work of evangelization done among the pastoralists and particularly among the Pökot. We have focused particularly on the past, looking at some of the achievements and shortcomings of the mission. Now, in this last chapter we want to look at the present situation with its challenges as we hint at possible suggestions for the future, in the light of the announcement of the Good News. This proclamation, we believe, must look forward to the improvement of all dimensions of human life, to promote the integral development of the persons and communities. This is the authentic spirit of the Jubilee that we have just celebrated and hopefully we have also just restarted to make it a reality in our world. It is the spirit of a renewed commitment on the part of the community to fight anything that prevents the spreading of God's Rule on earth.⁹⁴ Then, true religion becomes, in fact, motor of social transformation as well as vehicle of genuine relationship with God. Social and religious activities in our missions, both inspired by the principle of incarnation, must go harmoniously together so as to avoid any schizophrenia between religion and daily life. As Fr. Agostoni states: "The new commandment of love cannot be implemented without promoting, in justice and peace, the true and authentic advancement of the human person".⁹⁵ This, we believe, is the ultimate object of the mission and must be also our commitment. We also pay heed to the urge of the African Bishops gathered in the Synod of 1995 when they affirmed "inculturation is a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa's particular Churches...The Synod Fathers interpreted inculturation as a process that includes the whole of Christian existence...In that way the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values."⁹⁶ In order to bring together the goals of integral human development and inculturation we want to look for what is common in both Gospel and Pökot

⁹⁴ Editorial, *New People* 69 (2000): 1.

⁹⁵ Tarcisio Agostoni, *Every Citizen's Handbook*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1997), 85.

⁹⁶ John Paul II, *The Church in Africa*, No78 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995).

culture as we focus on their respective centres and put them together for a deep dialogue and encounter.

Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, we will base our missionary methodology on the principle of incarnation, so as to establish an integral encounter of faith and life between Pökot culture and Christianity. Concretely, we will refer to their common search for plenitude of life with all its dimensions. In the second section, we will draw attention to the situation of change as it is taking place at this moment in Africa and among the Pökot. We will look at some of the areas and components of the society in which change is presumably close at hand. We will also try to figure out how we missionaries can become companions of the people in the midst of this turmoil of change and uncertainty. Bearing this our aim in mind, we will enter into the third section of this chapter, where we will present some guidelines for our social apostolate. The incarnation of our faith in Pökot culture will be the object of our attention in the last section.

3.1. Towards a methodology of incarnation

The spirit of incarnation must inspire all missionary endeavours in our social as well as religious initiatives. Incarnation calls for listening before speaking, for an intense communication and identification of the missionaries with the people in order to span the gap existing between the two.⁹⁷ As Kraemer says: "The point of contact is the disposition and the attitude of the missionary...The way to live up to this rule is to have an untiring and genuine interest in the religion, the ideas, the sentiments, the instructions (in short in the whole range of life of the people among whom one works) for Christ's sake and for the sake of those people."⁹⁸ Therefore, it is indispensable to live and come closer to the people, to "waste" our time with them, to talk with them so that we may be able to understand them better and foster mutual trust. Doing so, we will increase our appreciation towards them and they will more easily open themselves to the announcement of the Gospel, made through words and deeds relevant for

⁹⁷ Visser, *Towards*, p. 50.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65. Visser also adds: "Real communication takes place through participation in the daily life of the people" (*Ibid.*, 52).

them. The closer we may become to the people the greater the possibilities we have of being accepted and understood.

The fruit coming from these efforts of incarnation is the encounter between Christianity and the culture of the people, each other inspiring their lives and the expression of their faith.⁹⁹ Moreover, as we know, the Spirit has been working within the culture before the explicit proclamation takes place. "Inculturation cannot exist without discerning and naming the loving presence of God in a particular culture or groups of cultures",¹⁰⁰ states Fr. Ryan. According also to Dorr, we must be able to put the new cultures that receive the Gospel into contact with all the historical traditions of the plural Church. Doing so they will be inspired by them and ready to choose the elements that can enrich them in their new shaping of the Christian faith in their own style.¹⁰¹

Among the Pökot we need to continue applying in a deeper way the incarnation principle with creativity and courageousness. The challenge will be always in front of us: "The incarnational approach assumes a consciously self-critical stance on the part of the missionaries, much careful research, serious reflection, open discussion, and even debates, among themselves and with the people they are serving".¹⁰² More and more, we now believe that we must be able to pursue the establishment of a really Pökot Christianity, whereby the main issues of concern in the lives of the people are encountered by the Gospel.

This does not mean, however, that both the Gospel and the positive acquisitions of modernity should not challenge the cultures. "Jesus came to redress not only what was wrong in the Jewish culture, but in all the world's cultures," affirms Fr. Agostoni.¹⁰³ Indeed, we believe that mission means challenging and inviting to change what does not foster the culture of life.

⁹⁹ As Kamma also states: "The proclamation of the Gospel is not received in a vacuum but the hearers explain every message with concepts, which are taken from their own culture" (Ibid., 51).

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Ryan. "Developing a Theology of Inculturation" in Inculturation in the South African Context, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 6.

¹⁰¹ Donald Dorr. Mission in Today's World, Dublin: The Columba Press, 2000, 104 ff. He also adds: "The crucial point in relation to the issue of inculturation is that however important the Western church may have become over the past thousand years, it is not in fact the only authentic version of Christianity."

¹⁰² Visser, Towards, p.36.

¹⁰³ Agostoni, Citizen's, p.88.

Being a Christian means to die to certain elements of our traditions and yet at the same time to live Christianity through our own traditions.¹⁰⁴

As we remarked to in the introduction, we want to introduce a proposal of methodology of incarnation of Christianity in Pökot following also Visser's opinion.¹⁰⁵ He proposes to look at the centre of both Christian and Pökot beliefs and tries to see if he can find in both nuclei a point of encounter. When we sought for the kernel of Pökot life, in the first chapter, we identified the Pökot concept of *poghisyo* or harmonious life as their ultimate priority. *Poghisyo* includes not only physical well-being and material goods such as cattle, honey, milk...but also good relations with other members of the community and with the non-empirical world. (Precisely, the role of the spirits and ancestors is to guarantee the harmony with creation, with each other and with the rest of society.)¹⁰⁶

At the same time we can also accept as central in the Gospel the words of Jesus in Jn 10,10: "I have come so that they may have life and life in abundance". This life includes good physical life, but it transcends or surpasses it, as is already hinted even in the tradition of OT (cf. Hab. 3:17-18),¹⁰⁷ even up to immortality. From this perspective, this fullness of life, which entails well-being on earth, reaches its climax in the communion with God the Father through Christ as our Redeemer, Liberator, Way and Lord, in the Spirit. Thus, we can establish the encounter and dialogue between Pökot and Christianity in their similarities and differences, in their respective understandings of the term "plenitude of life". We must be able to offer them the hope, which includes also the faith in the hereafter, being conveyors of the real novelty of the Gospel for them.

Nevertheless, we do not want to restrict this attempt of inculturation to a naked encounter of mere centres of beliefs, as Donovan in his book *Christianity Recovered* proposed in the 60's.¹⁰⁸ We cannot simply disregard what the history of Christianity has meant with its achievements

¹⁰⁴ Skhakhane, *Spirituality*, p.128.

¹⁰⁵ Visser, *Towards*, p.59ff.

¹⁰⁶ Skhakhane, *Spirituality*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁷ "For the fig tree is not going to blossom...the fields afford no food...nor will there be any cattle in the stalls. But I will rejoice in Yahweh, I will exult in God my saviour." Jerusalem Bible.

¹⁰⁸ Dorr, *Mission*, p.96.

and errors. We believe that the dialogue towards inculturation must include the different aspects that faith and construction of the Kingdom entail, not just the pure cores of faiths and cultures. However, we trust in the validity of this approach in so far as the search for life in plenitude becomes the ultimate criterion of discernment in the application of the principle of incarnation. As a kind of conclusion of this section we can quote once more Visser who says: "So the missionaries serving Kenya's nomads today really have the freedom to choose one approach or the other: to continue transplanting the Western experience of Christianity, or to follow the more difficult, and perhaps crucifying, way of incarnation."¹⁰⁹

In the following section, we will look at the situation of general change in Africa and Pökot, as well as some imminent transformations in certain areas of the life of the latter, namely their way of living, political sphere and role of women.

3.2. The Pökot on the threshold of changes coming from modernity

As we have mentioned in Chapter One, the process of Kenyanization or contact with modernity is inevitably at hand for the Pökot. If Africa as continent is facing rapid changes, the situation in Pökot may be even more acute, since their distance from modernity is even bigger.¹¹⁰ Faced with these rapid transformations, different reactions appear. Some people do not want to hear about change and they just want to remain as they are. Others take the opposite stance; anything new is good just because is new. In between both reactions it is common to find uneasiness, disorientation and uncertainty in relation to change.¹¹¹ It is in this turmoil and confusion where compulsive, addictive and violent reactions may spring from the people. Therefore, it is our task as missionaries to accompany this process and bring into this situation the Gospel and its values, which offer harmony and communion among the people.

Africa (and Pökot) is caught between two world-views: "We have not yet succeeded in harmonizing the world values dwelling in us and the novel values which attract us", Fr.

¹⁰⁹ Visser, *Towards*, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ "No other continent has undergone changes of such magnitude in such a short span of time. What in Europe has taken centuries, here in Africa occurs in a few decades", says Fr. Pierli..(Pierli, *Change*, p. 132).

¹¹¹ Ibid., 139. Fr. Pierli also adds: "We should confess that our background has not prepared us for the present world. We were often brought up in a vision of Church and Christian values as eternally unchangeable. We are not equipped for a religious and civil world marked by the logic of change."

Francesco Pierli says.¹¹² There is a kind of conflict in the lives of many people: "It is to be said that ATR remain deeply rooted in hearts, minds and customs, even though the official affiliation is not longer there".¹¹³ As Fr. Agostoni also states: "A given culture should not try to perpetuate obsolete ways of living which have become sterile and open to decadence. On the other hand there is no point in adopting the negative elements of another culture. The mind must remain open to dialogue and debate in order to distinguish between the valid and the erroneous elements of both traditional and new styles of life."¹¹⁴ Therefore, discernment is vital at this precise moment.

Even though, the pastoralist Pökot have tried to remain aside from these influences, major changes are now unavoidable. Today subsistence pastoralism seems to be facing a serious threat to its existence.¹¹⁵ The Pökot are facing a moment of crisis in the sense of living in front of a situation of transformation.¹¹⁶ They cannot make the choice of accepting or not the changes. These are there and they cannot remain isolated anymore. Moreover, the myth of their total resistance to change is also not completely true. "Change is resisted when it is imposed over a way of life already considered optimal",¹¹⁷ but the Pökot have accepted changes in different areas and aspects of their lives when they found them worthwhile. (For instance, they accepted the introduction of some agricultural practices).

We missionaries are called to be aware of the new challenges and contribute to in helping the people to prepare themselves to face those changes in a constructive way, while accompanying them in this process of discernment. By doing so, their best values could be preserved and, on the other hand, they might also be able to join the rest of society. It is crucial,

¹¹² Ibid., 136.

¹¹³ Ibid., 137.

¹¹⁴ Agostoni, *Citizen's*, p.88.

¹¹⁵ G. Dahl also says: "Today there are serious signs that nomadic pastoralism as a system of supplying provisions is breaking down; human impoverishment and land degradation are the most outstanding expressions." (Mariano Tibaldo, "The Challenges of the Survival of Pastoral Peoples: The Case of Patoral Pökot of North-Western Kenya- Which Perspectives for Church Activities?," *African Christian Studies* 14 (March 1998):38).

¹¹⁶ Fr. Mariano Tibaldo also adds: "The culture of the Pökot pastoralists is undergoing profound structural change: the frequent and the continuous exposure to Western ideas and technology are putting into question people's norms, standards, notions, beliefs and symbols. It is the pattern of thought which is coming under scrutiny and changing, the deeper level of culture, the cognitive one, the schools and the missions being two of the most important agents of this change."(Ibid., 43).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

therefore, to discover the signs of the times among the Pökot people, in this particular time, for a sound evangelization;¹¹⁸ to find where God has been actively present, working in their history; to see what changes will lead people towards an increase in love and in the improvement of their lives. These are the areas in which the mission must contribute as a catalyst of a culture of life. Moreover, it is necessary for us to find equilibrium between a sound appreciation and promotion of Pökot values and identity or Pökotness, without falling into tribalism or rejection of the rest who are non-Pökot. The Pökot can enrich other Kenyans with their values, such as their search for fulfilment in life, as well as their example of cohesion and solidarity within their society.

Looking at the major changes that the Pökot may be facing in their near future we may highlight some of them such as:

3.2.1. Transformation in the pastoralist way of living.

This entails the inevitable introduction and expansion of agriculture and practices of animal trading. The subsistence pastoralism cannot cater for the alimentary needs of the current population in the area as we have seen in Chapter One. This change in their means of living will affect one of the main pillars of the culture, which is the traditional rearing of cattle. This latter activity will lose ground to the benefit of other economic entrepreneurs, such as agriculture, mining or even profitable modernized livestock management. This change will definitely shake the core of their culture.¹¹⁹ The Pökot value of searching for a holistic good and harmonious life or *poighsyo* will have to be reconsidered in its meaning. This will probably entail the pursuing of different goals in life, rather than a major desire of having numerous cattle. This change will also imply for them a process of sedentarization with the consequent better access to educational and health facilities. Another presumable consequence from their changes in economic activities might be the reduction in raids and violence if their need for head of cattle and food diminish. In this regard, we may also expect a decrease in the population of the area through migrations towards other centres of economic activities. If they increase their level of agriculture by means

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁹ "When one element, and in this case a fundamental and basic one, in a culture disappears many things associated with it disappear as well." (*Ibid.*, 44).

of a better utilization of their resources, they may be able to face more appropriately the harshness of the environment.

We may also take into account the introduction in trade of animals for grain.¹²⁰ If trade were practised the production of intake food would be sufficient for their population. Therefore, we can state that, nowadays, a combination of agricultural and livestock food income is needed to meet the alimentary demands of the Pökot. For instance, with one hectare of maize 3.8 people can be fed, while only 0.16 persons if the same land is used for livestock.¹²¹ The utilization of mining, while keeping its benefits in their hands, can be also a source of economic improvement for the people.

3.2.2. Citizens of Kenya

The Pökot are claiming more political space and responsibilities. "Beneath the surface of violence, tribal clashes and political squabbles, there is the positive aspect of people coming to the forefront of nation building."¹²² The Pökot need to have a say in the overall country, to join the rest of the nation, so that the current situation, which Nkinyangi assesses may not prevail:

"As for the pastoral peoples, they continue to exist at the periphery of the Kenyan society, impoverished, dominated and underprivileged in all spheres of life."¹²³ The relationships between the Pökot and governments of colonial and post-colonial times have not been very successful, but rather confrontational.¹²⁴ Other area of imminent change is the one related to gender roles.

3.2.3. Gender concerns

The influence of modern society and Christianity has raised women's dignity and highlighted the awareness of their rights. The freedom of the Pökot women to choose their

¹²⁰In that case, the possible critical density of the area as a whole can grow higher, even up to 37 inh/km², considering a moderately dry year and an exchange rate of 30% in goats, instead of the figures of 11,7 and 16 inh/km² given in Chapter One for the different sub-areas.(Dietz, *Pastoralists*, p.135).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,144. Even though, in some areas the arable land is very limited and the risks of crop failure high, the cultivation in the area of study in the 80's represented only 1% of the total land.

¹²² Tibaldo, *Challenges*, p. 47.

¹²³ *Ibid.*,39.

¹²⁴ "On the one side the government's plans to absorb the pastoralists into a non-pastoral economy and integrate the different tribes into one nation clash with these independent-minded people who prize their animals, independence and freedom of movement above anything else. On the other hand, the pastoralists view the government as a foreign body which, more often than not, interferes with and disrupts their life."(*Ibid.*, 41).

husbands, to hold tenancy of properties or to be heard in society or in the Church are values to be fostered, since women play a decisive role in society and in the upbringing of families. They could get involved in leadership, speeding up the rhythm the culture has allowed up to now. Small steps can be taken, starting for instance within Small Christian Communities, as places where they can begin to exercise their new roles. Moreover, they can participate in the leading of prayers, as in fact they have been doing in traditional rituals. Each step ahead will enable them to advance further.

In establishing our priorities of mission, we need to find a correct balance between activities of human promotion and proclamation, guided always by the same stated principle of integral development. In the following section, we shall look at some other suggestions and initiatives in the areas of social apostolate.

3.3 Social Apostolate

Regarding our social apostolate, we have to strive at changing the image (to which we refer in the previous chapter) of a powerful mission and of missionaries placed high above, who cater for the needs of the people. We must try to foster a type of mission where we are seen as companions of the people in their faith and lives. The work of transformation must reflect the horizontal structure of the Christian communities in which we believe.

In terms of initiatives, we consider important that missionaries continue the work of human promotion in areas, which they have already been devoted to. However, their methodology must point more and more towards the empowerment of people. For instance, in the field of health it is important that the community takes the responsibility of the caring for the sick and gets involved in the improvement of their sanitary conditions. Traditional means of healing can be also integrated with modern ones. We must also remember in our approach that health in Africa is not so much the absence of disease as the absence of disorders. Anger, jealousy, greed... make the person unhealthy.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Skhakhane. *Spirituality*, 127.

Apart from the current involvement in schools, we missionaries may need to insist on the importance of creating technical centres adapted to the local needs. The mission must also foster extracurricular activities. Particularly relevant is anything concerned with education in values in the schools and the formation of animators in these fields. These extracurricular activities can be organized to include also the parents of the students so that the whole family benefits from these initiatives. Another relevant area of education in values is related to the current change into a monetary economic system as a consequence of new activities, namely mining and trade. It may be necessary to contribute to creating a new mentality among the people towards a better use of money, as this economic system is foreign to the lives of the Pökot.

The promotion of agriculture and cattle management through courses or samples is also an important initiative. In all these programmes the missions need not be directly involved but, as we have said before, fostering and supporting others' projects. We may become bridges of communication between the people and organizations of human development.

The formation of civil and political leaders who are interested in the betterment of all the inhabitants is a priority in evangelization, as we have already mentioned. The awareness of civil rights is also an essential aim of missionary activity. This must point towards the helping of people in claiming their own rights, rather than the missionaries themselves taking their place and voice. People must realize that they deserve better services from the government in areas such as, communications, health, education, etc...so that they can reach levels closer to the rest of the nation. All this will contribute to the transformation of the image that many Kenyans have of the Pökot since they still see them as underdeveloped and primitive people. Now we will look at some areas of our religious apostolate, especially in terms of the inculturation of faith.

3.4. Religious Apostolate.

The systematic applications of the process of inculturation are outside the scope of this work. Moreover, it would be imprudent to do it. It is the task of the Christian Communities, not

only ours.¹²⁶ As Visser also affirms, it must be the people who decide what elements are compatible and which should be rejected after embracing Christianity.¹²⁷ St Paul already encouraged the same methodology, speaking to the Philippians.¹²⁸ The more we are able to advance in the trends of inculturation the more relevant the message will appear to the people and the more likely they will be ready to make it theirs. Therefore, it must be necessary to foster the conditions in which the people may feel at home in a Church, which is also shaped according to their necessities and their cultural traits. "The cultural patterns of the peoples being evangelized are presumed to be compatible with Christianity. This is a practical rule formulated even before Vatican II by the missiologist, Albert Perbal, who added: Insofar as this proof is not conclusive, the custom holds; it has the force of law: it possesses legal right".¹²⁹ Patrick Ryan holds the same opinion."¹³⁰

Christian communities must be the protagonists of the mission. In this sense, we believe that the formation and strengthening of Small Christian Communities is therefore another priority in the missionary activity. These may be the correct milieu to meet the needs, rights and challenges of the unheard groups. As we have mentioned, women can also play an important role as animators in them, stating the needs of their families and organizing the work of transformation. The initial opposition to their involvement on the part of men may eventually fade away, as has already happened in the case of the catechumenate. Men will realize the benefits brought about by women through these activities.

There are many areas of religious apostolate in which missionaries, together with the Christian Community, can make attempts at inculturation with Pökot culture. In any case, the

¹²⁶"In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has a universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity which is proper to them, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words...to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed." (Pierli, Change, p. 141).

¹²⁷ Visser, Towards, p. 90.

¹²⁸ Phi. 4:8: "Finally brothers fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise." Jerusalem Bible.

¹²⁹ Hillman, Apostolate, p. 36.

¹³⁰ "Since God is present in the history of all peoples, all religions and cultures may be presumed, in theory, to be compatible with Christianity. Accordingly, when expressing Christianity through a local culture, the presumption must always be in favour of the local tradition, not against it". Cf. Ryan, Inculturation, p.10.

dialogue must be sincere and clear. For instance, in regard to the dogmatic encounter between beliefs, we must make a whole Trinitarian presentation of our Christian faith, but avoiding wrong identifications of the three Divine Persons with the Pökot supernatural beings. The idea of the Universal Loving Creator and approachable Father can represent a liberating novelty for the Pökot, since it expands a more particularistic and distant idea of God, such as Tororot has for them. Although the Pökot do not have belief in God becoming human, the figure of Jesus Christ may not be so strange and unacceptable for them. The figure of the prophet sent by God, who in the Pökot tradition leads the people to a better life, can fit with the image of the Good Shepherd, Christ, powerful icon where cattle are still relevant. It is also important to avoid confusion between the Holy Spirit and the traditional idea of Pökot High Spirits or entities that need to be placated. Water and fire are powerful symbols of the Holy Spirit, since in Pökot cosmology they represent regeneration of nature and life.

In regard to anthropology, the idea of the human being as made in the image of God and called to communion with Him is not present among the Pökot. However, their search for fulfilment in life is already a sign of God's presence among them, calling them to plenitude of being, as we have mentioned above. Talking about rituals, for instance, the rite of adulthood or *Sapana* can be the basis for an inculturated way of living the sacraments of initiation. It can also be used as a mean of keeping the cohesion and communion within their society achieved in the traditional set up through this ritual. The unity in Christ is now the guarantee for the new solidarity among coevals of initiation. In this case the structure of age-sets can be maintained. Rituals of blessing and other traditional rites to enhance life and protect them from the consequences of evil and cursing can be also inculturated, especially through the sacraments, Christ being now also the source of healing, conqueror of all anxieties and defender against any kind of evil.

In the implementation of the catechumenate we must also follow the same principle of incarnation, taking into account the life of the people and basing it around the Word of God. It might be necessary to consider the different groups of people in order to elaborate selective

catechesis according to the diverse realities of the lives of the catechumens.¹³¹ The leadership in the SCC as well as in the parish must be fostered, applying traditional models of leadership. For instance, the creation and running of the Parish Council can follow the pattern of the Elder's Council, or *Kokwo*, which we refer to in Chapter One.

These are some few examples of trends that the encounter between Christian and Pökot beliefs can open. There is ample space to advance in this process of inculturation and communication in faith. In any case, it must lead to the betterment of the lives of the people in all aspects of their existences, as we said in the introduction to this chapter. Moreover, this event is first and foremost the work of the Spirit, who shows the ways and opens the hearts of the people to receive the Good News.

¹³¹ Tibaldo, *Challenges*, p. 49.

CONCLUSION

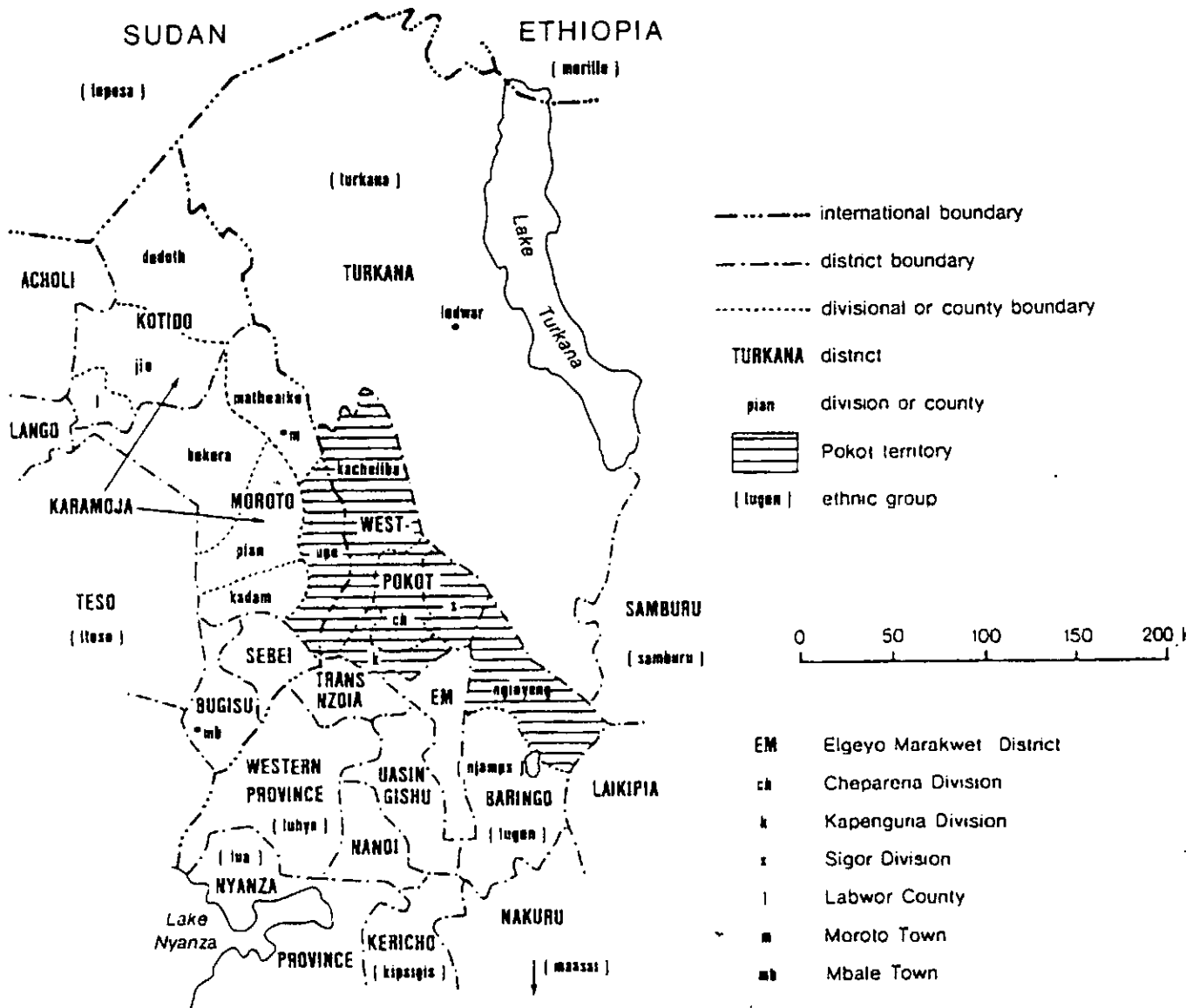
I have reached the end of this work. I have encountered in the Pökot a people on the verge of transformation. Their way of living and world-view are at stake, faced with the influence that modernity brings about. In this situation the missionaries continue to accompany the people. I believe that their presence in the Pökots' midst has been a blessing, despite all their limitations and shortcomings. The appreciation and gratitude towards them has to be expressed. They have tried with their activities to collaborate in the coming of God's Kingdom among the Pökot.

However, now it is necessary to apply the principle of incarnation in a more profound way, bringing a message of fulfilment that comprises the different aspects of the lives of the people. Missionaries have to encounter with the evangelization the deepest desires of plenitude of life already present at the core of people's culture. There is a need to come closer to the people, sharing their lives and being companions during these moments of uncertainty and disorientation as a consequence of the breaking down of their traditional way of living. This is an important moment of discernment of values to maintain and to be changed. It is now essential the creation and strengthening of Christian communities (acting as protagonists in the process of inculturation), with local leadership, that may become models of harmony and peace for the rest of the society. May the Spirit guide each one of us in collaborating for the building up of the Kingdom of God among the Pökot, whereby they may find in Jesus their Liberator and Good Shepherd sent for them by the Loving Father.

APPENDIX

Location of the Study Area

UPE County (Uganda), Kacheliba and Chepareria Divisions (Kenya)



Source: Dietz, Ton. *Pastoralists in Dire Straits*. Amsterdam: Netherlands Geographical Studies, 1987, 20.

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