

Challenges Facing the Understanding the Eucharist as Sacrifice Among the Luo Catholics of Homa Bay Diocese, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

One of the perennial anxieties of human beings is the need for peace, prosperity, and harmony in society, where people can truly accomplish their God-given mission in life. In other words, there is a human yearning for an environment, where life can be honourably celebrated in its fullness even while awaiting its ultimate consummation. Both the African traditional believer and the Christian in their quest for the realization of such a noble aim and desire have often identified sacrifice and appeasement as cardinal instruments of societal transformation. For them to appreciate this full life and total wellbeing, both the African and the Christian know they must keep in close touch with the Supreme Being who is the author of life and the determiner of destiny, by maintaining the various opportunities of regular communication and dialogue with the supernatural world through sacrifices. Sacrifice is the heartbeat of every religious ritual. This study seeks to establish why some Luo Catholics still value their traditional sacrifice instead of fully manifesting their beliefs in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Do they still find something valuable in it which seems to be lacking in the Eucharist sacrifice? When confronted by stressful events, many Luo Catholics often abandon coping strategies and revert to patterns of behaviour used earlier in development, especially the traditional sacrificial system. In doing this, the person ends up practicing two different forms of religion. The study also seeks to bring out the Luo cultural elements which can be inculturated within the Eucharistic sacrifice so that the Luo Catholics may practice their faith fully, consciously and actively, instead of indulging him/herself in syncretistic tendencies.

Key Words: Sacrifice, Inculturation, Catholics, *Nyasaye* (Supreme Being), Luo(s).

INTRODUCTION

One of the most urgent problems within various Christian denominations is how to relate the Christian Gospel to diverse cultures. The importance of culture in the evangelization process cannot be overstated; for culture is the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one's experiences. As a social framework, culture, as collectively created patterns of meaning, forms a basis for understanding why an individual or group behaves or reacts in one manner or another. Consequently, Christian experience or "Christianity" as a religion, like any other religion (be it indigenous or foreign), should be realized within a given culture if it is to be viable and meaningful in any way.

The Christian Gospel message is essentially transcultural in the sense that it is not limited by any one cultural expression. Besides, it can expand beyond the experiences or limits imposed by any cultural modus that precedes it. The continued challenge of all Christians is to discern how a transcultural faith can be practiced faithfully in a viable and meaningful manner. The focus soon turns toward identifying practices, images and themes that are transculturally significant with the designation of essential and non-essential

elements in worship. While true in one level, we need to be careful to realize that non-essential elements, such as, cultural elements, can be used in facilitating “spirit and truth” of worship for the people of the originating context.

Religious and cultural pluralism are prominent features in human societies, and they have been intensified with the impact of modernity. The phenomenon of such pluralistic experience presents opportunities as well as challenges, particularly, for religious traditions and cultures today. One of the most fascinating aspects of our history is the richness and varieties of its religious traditions. According to Brenner (1993) this has great effects on human relations in view of the resurgence of religion and its growing role in both public and private lives. The social and political processes of secularization, which were thought to replace religion and its effects, have, in fact, assisted to reinforce it. In the age of globalization, religious traditions and pre-modern cultural forms, which used to be limited to a small area, have today turn out to be global phenomena.

The celebration of liturgy is one of the most essential experiences and expressions of the faith, and each and every religious community has its own symbolic form for expressing its faith in worship. The fact that Christian liturgy is always celebrated in a specific context draws attention to the dynamics between liturgy and particular culture; moreover, the relationship between liturgy and local cultures can simply be expanded to include the relationship of the Church to the world. In fact, throughout the history of Christianity, the special ways in which the life of faith is practiced has been maintained by several adaptations to local contexts and settings.

According to Dix (1945) the Christian liturgy and the Eucharistic celebration in particular has adapted itself with a most delicate adjustment to the practical conditions and racial temperaments and special gifts of a multitude of particular churches and peoples and generations, while maintaining in essence an immutable rigid framework. The Church has always been steadfast to the inculturation of public worship for the good of the people of God. Despite some opposition encountered in certain areas to the notion of liturgical inculturation, there is a considerable evidence demonstrating to the fact that liturgical inculturation is still, in some way, intrinsic and is a necessary process to keep alive the celebration of the faith within the Catholic Church as this faith community spreads around the world.

a) Statement of the Problem

Why should some Luo Catholics still value their traditional sacrifice? Do they still find something valuable in it which seems to be lacking in the Eucharistic sacrifice? There seems to exist some apparent satisfaction in the practice of the Luo Traditional sacrifice which seem to be lacking in the Catholic Eucharistic sacrifice.

The researcher was one time faced with a great dilemma. One Easter Triduum the researcher was serving in one of the parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Homa Bay. The elders had called upon the whole community to attend a traditional sacrifice at the hilltop due to the severe drought which had affected the region for a long time. The community members highly participated in this traditional sacrifice, including some of the Catholic Church officials, abandoning some celebrations of Easter. This compelled the researcher to ask questions such as: *Why should some Luos, even after embracing Christianity/Catholic Church, still value their traditional sacrifice? Do they still find something valuable in it which seems to be missing in the Eucharist? As Catholics how can we make Luo Catholics understand more deeply the Eucharistic sacrifice so that they can have a full, conscious and active participation? What is the relevance of the Eucharistic sacrifice to the Luo mode of life?* The aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges facing the understanding and relevance of the Eucharist as sacrifice among the Luo Catholics of Homa Bay Diocese. Why shouldn't these Catholics recall that the Eucharist is also a sacrifice which should bring satisfaction to their quests?

THE CONCEPTUAL ISSUES ON SACRIFICE AND ITS RELIGIOUS CONNOTATION

a) “Sacrifice” from Secular Perspective

Awolalu (1981) observes that technically, the word sacrifice is a religious term, but when used in a general sense, it also has a secular meaning. From general or secular perspective, sacrifice means forgoing for a particular cause which is precious; denying oneself certain benefits and advantages for a particular purpose. For example, one can deny himself certain pleasure and comfort in order to be able to actualize a goal or attain knowledge. The person in question have to forgo buying costly clothes and even sell valuable belongings to provide the opportunity of achieving his aim. The person could claim that he has ‘sacrificed’ his comfort and pleasure to have his way. There are series of illuminating examples, during the terror attacks in Kenya the government made appeals to the citizens to make sacrifice by way of donating generously to the terror attack victims. And, in response to this appeal, many people contributed big amounts of money to assist the victims. On the other hand, young men and women volunteered to join the Red Cross to bring relief to the wounded and the sick. All these various gestures can be referred to as sacrifice. This is because since the different donors and volunteers are clearly denying themselves certain things. From the above examples, it is clear that something precious is given away for a definite purpose. Whatever the purpose may be, it is obvious that something is renounced in order that a certain end may be achieved. Whether material or spiritual, sacrifice is often costly. It may be in form of time, clothe, food, money or life which is part of self. However, Awolalu (1981) observes that this general sense of the word sacrifice, as illustrated above, has become so popular that many suppose it to be basic or core meaning of the concept, but this is not so. He argues that the secular sense of the word, as shown above, is only an extension of the core meaning or a metaphorical use of sacrifice. Although, in this metaphorical sense, sacrifice may be defined as the giving up of a thing for sake of another that is higher or more urgent. Also, it may refer to that which is given up for a cause or for something else. However, when the Luo speaks or thinks of sacrifice, it is never in this metaphorical or general sense but always in a religious sense as the paper shall try to shed more lights in our present study.

a) Religious Connotation of the Term “Sacrifice”.

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1962) defines sacrifice as a rite in the course of which something is forfeited or destroyed, its object being to establish relation between a source of spiritual strength and one in need of such strength, for the benefit of the latter. Hastings (1962) defines sacrifice in terms of its purpose, and posits that sacrifice involves the destruction of a victim for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order. Hastings advances that it may effect a bond of union with the divinity to whom it is offered or constitute a particular expiation to cover, wipe out, neutralize or carry away evil guilt contracted wittingly or unwittingly. In one sense, sacrifice can be seen as an act of making an offering of animal or vegetable life, of food, drink or of any objects) to a deity or spiritual being. In another sense, sacrifice can be seen as something consecrated and offered to God or a divinity. In other word, an offering of any kind laid on an altar or otherwise presented to a deity or divinities for definite purposes is a sacrifice. Nevertheless, observation reveals that sacrificial practices among the Luos manifest that sacrifice is a religious act; that it generally takes the form of rendering something to a supernatural being; that the practice varies from religion in details but essentially similar; and that it has various intents and purposes.

We can therefore adopt the definition of sacrifice according to Hubert and Mauss (1981). In their book, *Saggio sulla natura e la funzione del Sacrificio*, they define sacrifice as un atto religioso che, mediante la consacrazione della vittima, modifica lo stato della persona morale che lo compie e lo stato di certi oggetti di cui la persona si interessa (a religious act which, through the consecration of the victim, modifies the state of the moral person who fulfils it and the state of certain objects to which the person is interested). For the Luos, (as for many communities), sacrifice is the visible token of an inward self-dedication to the divinity

(*Nyasaye*) in the shape of a gift meant primarily by its removal from profane use (through an act of consecration) and its transference to the dominion of the divine to bespeak by its blood-stained condition the acknowledgement of their guilt, along with the intention of repairing it in some way and the desire of being pardoned.

b) The Intrinsic Purposes of Sacrifice among the Luo People

Behind the offering of any sacrifice, there is usually a definite purpose. There is no sacrifice without an aim. For the Luo community, no one ever makes a sacrifice without having a goal in view.

While scholars readily agree that sacrifice is an important element in religion, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to agree on the purpose of sacrifice. Taylor (1958) says, sacrifice serves as a means of ‘bribing’ the gods or paying homage to them in the same way as men pay homage to their over-lords. Robertson Smith (1963) sees it as a means of cementing communion between man and the supernatural being or beings. Jevons (1921) and Money-Kyrle (1965), emphasize the communal aspect of sacrifice as this is noticeable in totemic practices. Westermarck (1932) sees sacrifice as a means of providing food for the gods to encourage them to be kind to men, to avert dangers or prevent epidemics, and sees human sacrifice as a method of ‘life insurance’. Edwin O. James (1933) regards sacrifice as a means of giving life to have life.

The various theories propounded by the different scholars attempt to spell out the purposes of sacrifice, but we do not consider it necessary to regard one theory alone as correct. Each theory has an element of truth in it. When we examine the sacrificial practices among the Luos, we discover that we cannot speak of one purpose of sacrifice since the purpose is quite multiple. In order to establish these purposes, we can cite examples of observed sacrificial practices. This purpose can be reflected in the types of sacrifice offered.

A survey of the beliefs of the Luo people will not be complete without examining the people’s belief in what we can call mysterious powers. These mystical, preternatural and esoteric powers are virtually inexplicable, but they cannot escape notice when they are manipulated by those who have access to them. From the foregoing, we can rightly say that sacrifice meets certain basic needs and aspirations of the Luo people, which include the following: manifesting appreciation to the spiritual beings; fulfilling an oath; founding a relationship between man and the spiritual beings; preventing the wrath of the divinities and spiritual beings; prevention from the attack and wicked manipulations of enemies; cleansing a person or a community when a taboo has been violated or iniquity committed; thwarting or expelling epidemics; and strengthening the believers against destructive influences.

SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FACING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HOMA BAY

From our interviews with our respondents, there are many challenges facing the Church in Homa Bay today. Suffice here to mention some of these challenges. It is important in our consideration to identify some of these challenges so that the Church can concretely address these challenges with evangelical charity and apostolic courage by critically examining the signs of the time which her members are concretely experiencing.

a) Christianity has not penetrated sufficiently into Luo Religiosity

From our informants many Luos think of Christianity as a foreign religion. Christianity has been equated with Western education and progression which could be embraced intellectually without existential involvement. In that circumstance, Christianity came to be regarded as a foreign religion that had been transplanted in a foreign soil and did not take root. Consequently, many Luo Christians perceive the “God”

of Christianity as a “Stranger-God” the god of the white man, who is unfamiliar with the local spiritual problems. To these Luos, Christianity is of no practical use in times of existential crisis.

Some Luos who had embraced Christianity at that time have not allowed it to take root in their life, so at best, Christianity has remained a stranger to them. The planting of Christianity is traced to the activities of the Christian missionaries since the nineteenth century. However, many of our informants have pointed out that those early missionaries presented the Christian message to Luos in a European outfit and thought patterns. Thus, despite the huge number of the Luo converts to Christianity, Christianity has not taken root effectively in the Luo soil. Christianity remained a stranger to the Luo person. At best, it remains skin deep in the life of many converts. Thus, on Sundays our Christian churches are packed full with worshippers, the number of Christian church denominations keeps increasing, yet it is apparent that Christianity has not taken root. Therefore, cases abound of many Christians reverting to some Luo traditional religious values and practices they had earlier abandoned at the time of their conversion. Some practice these values alongside their Christianity. These phenomena apparently indicate that the Word of God has not taken proper root in the Luo soil. This point is also emphasized by Archbishop Sarpong (2002) as follows:

The church does not appear to be speaking to the ordinary African. She has not got the same grip on the African that the traditional religion had. She appears to have become a status symbol. In time of crisis many Christians do not hesitate to fall back on their traditional magico-ritualistic devices for assistance. The worst...tribalism manifests itself with alarming frequency. A witchcraft mentality persists and many outmoded customs prevail.

According to some of our informants, mission Christianity has come to mean for many Luos simply a set of rules to be observed, promises to be fulfilled in the next world, rhythmless hymns to be sung, rituals to be followed and a few outward things. It is a Christianity which is locked up six days a week, meeting only for two hours on Sunday and perhaps once more during the week. It is a Christianity which is active in a church building. The rest of the week is empty. Africans and for that matter Luos who traditionally do not know a religious vacuum, feel that they don't get enough fulfillment from this type of Christianity, since it does not fill up their whole life and their understanding of the universe.

b) The Need to feel at Home in the Church

Many of our informants expressed that Luo Christianity would like to be genuinely “at home” in Christianity – a chance to live in it as in a house of their own, which they might remodel on an ongoing basis through the contributions of their particular talents. To make others and ourselves feel at home or inculturated in the Church, the Second Vatican Council proposed to us the model of the Church as the people of God in communion. The people of God in their small communities in all their variety are the core and substance of the church.

Pope John Paul II has used the term inculturation several times to express the need to help people welcome Jesus Christ in their own culture. Inculturation is about feeling at home in one's faith and the culture of our time and place. In the New Jerusalem, everyone will feel at home, and that process has to begin now through the process of inculturation, which can challenge the bad and lift up the good in each culture. The Catholic Church must organize herself in such a way that newcomers feel at home together with the old members. The feeling “at home” is an important metaphor of inculturation. It involves our way of speaking, of singing, of behaving, of celebrating the events of life, of expressing joy or sorrow, of relating to others, and most of all the revered customs handed down to us by our forefathers. Thus in any attempt to establish local churches, cognizance must be taken of a particular society's value system, since this value system influences the members. It is urgent and necessary because, in the ordinary Luo view, the church remains a

replica of the church in the west, and therefore needs to be “Luonized”. This is spelt out in the Message of the AMECEA and IMBISA bishops and reaffirmed by Archbishop Ndingi Mwana’Nzeki (1990) at the close of the African Synod:

We realise that Christians do not always feel at home as a family in the Church, that we do not always accept each other in the way that members of the same family should. We asked ourselves why this is so, and we had to admit that the values of Christ have not yet been integrated with our own African values. Our traditional African values, which still affect us at the deepest levels of our being, in spite of the passing of so many of our traditional ways through the influence of modern life, have not been sufficiently touched by our Christianity nor has our way of being Christians become fully African.

This statement is regarded as an open confession of the real situation: that the Gospel has yet to be rooted firmly on the African soil. In other words, Africa is in transition to inculturated Christianity.

c) **The Dichotomy in the Life of Many Christians**

Many Christians experience a type of moral bankruptcy. Their religiosity has become somehow superficial and no longer touches sufficiently their entire personality. There is a dichotomy between the individual faith and the faith of the community, the church; a dichotomy between faith and practice; and a dichotomy between religion and morality. Many Luo Christians find themselves living between two worlds, namely; the world of Christian beliefs and values and the world of Luo traditions, where they live and express their inner life more deeply. Many Christians after receiving the major sacraments – Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation and Holy Matrimony, which are popularly called Christian titles, lapse into polygamy. This point is also highlighted by Busia:

As one watches the daily lives and practices of the people, and takes account of the rites – that is ceremonies connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvest or installations to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian churches are still alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with social institutions.

The Gospel is often not seen as offering resources for life’s most deeply felt experiences and needs. When faced with death, famine, infertility, many Christians resort to traditional rites and beliefs. There is also the issue of nominal Christians. In many areas, the Christian faith is shallow and needs to become more rooted. Lack of inculturation resulted in either total rejection of Christianity, or it never penetrated in depth the lives of the people, since it was regarded as an imported religion, which for many has turned out to be like a garment which is worn on Sunday and taken off after Sunday church service. In their reflection on Christianity in Africa, the Synod Fathers returned again and again to the dichotomy that is present in many Christians between what they profess to believe and what they live. It is as if religion has been compartmentalized, with prayers, doctrine and worship reserved for Sundays, with the result that daily life in the home, at work, in business, commerce and professional life, civic, public and political life are little or not at all affected by the fact of being a Christian. A disciple of Christ who is engaged in business, a profession or in civic or public life should be characterized by honesty, reliability and integrity. Otherwise what is the meaning of being a Christian? One of our respondents remarks bitterly that a Christian who is dishonest, divisive, marked by ethnic prejudices or corrupt is a Christian only in name, not at all in reality, and destroys the witness of the Christian community to the teaching and values of Jesus Christ. This shows the weakness and formality of much of the work of evangelization. John Paul II (1995) in the African Synod rightly insisted that: “Evangelization must reach individual human beings and society in every aspect of their existence, and the chief means to achieve this was judged to be a profound inculturation of the faith so that it may penetrate deeply into the hearts and minds of people and so influence their way of acting.” The Synod saw this as one of the greatest challenges for the Church in the African continent on the eve of the

third millennium.

d) The Dilemma of some Christians

The Bishops at the African Synod remarked that African Christians, because the faith has not been received into their culture, often live in two separate worlds: the world of traditional religion and customs and the world of Christian faith. Often they feel tension between their culture and their faith and move from one to the other. As McGarry Cecil affirms (1995): “they are like frogs who have two legs on land and two in the water – when there is a disturbance in the water they jump on to dry land and when there is trouble on the land, these rush into the water. Or again, some Christians pray the rosary in the morning and take to witchcraft in the afternoon.” Many Christians find themselves leading double lives, one foot in traditional beliefs and another in the Church. On Sundays, they are Christians when they go to Church to worship and celebrate the Eucharist or take part in a service of the word at which communion is received. During the week, the Gospel message has very little effect on their daily lives, and in moments of difficulties and crisis, they have recourse to traditional beliefs and practices. It is a Christianity which is active in a church building – the rest of the week is empty. Some Christians seem to have a faith that is still fragile. The various currents of the moments seem to leave them perplexed and confused, sometimes looking for salvation elsewhere. Kwesi Dickson (1984:36) in his assessment of the African Christian has this observation to make:

“...many African Christians hold on to traditional religio-cultural ideas and practices while calling on the name of Christ. Several writers, mostly Africans, have called for the working out of a Christian theology that suits the African situation, a theology which would give recognition to the centrality of Christ and at the same time express African appreciation of the Christian faith.”

There is no doubt that in times of crisis, most Christians fall back on traditional religion for answers. Many Christians at “breaking points of life” have recourse to practices of the traditional religion, or to prayer houses, healing homes, prophets, witchcraft or fortune-tellers. Some turn to African Independent churches where they feel certain elements of their culture are more respected. All these movements indicate that the spiritual yearning of these people for an authentic expression of the Luo spirituality is not yet fully satiated. There are some Christians who feel that, as long as no harm is intended for the other person, one can go to a Christian Church, and offer sacrifices in an African Traditional Religion shrine. A dualism and a dichotomy between life and religious faith have developed which is very foreign to Luo culture. In talking about cultural alienation of African Christians, Akwasi Mante (1989:55) has this observation to make:

On the practical level this alienation manifests itself in the form of personal and social conflicts, disappointments and frustrations which combine to produce a pervasive and severe identity crisis among Christians on the continent. As a matter of fact, the life of many Africans is a painful dilemma as regards the observance of church and traditional norms. Their daily experience of life is most often marked by a sharp tension between their Africanness and their Christian commitment. They are often confused about when they are Africans and when they are Christians. This conflicting way of life has seriously affected African attitudes towards the Christian message, attitudes which are unfavourable to the future of the mainstream church. They consist mainly in widespread nominal Christian commitment, the abandonment of the Christian religion to return to traditional roots and practices, the exodus from the mainstream churches into the new African churches and sects and recently introduced fundamentalist sects, and the adoption of foreign agnostic or atheistic ideologies ostensibly as means to personal liberation and meaningful existence.

All these reactions represent the questioning of the value of Christianity on the continent. Fortunately this questioning is not occurring only among persons who either have somewhat become disillusioned with Christianity or have set out to exploit the mistakes of the early missionaries for their own parochial interests. Theologians working within the African milieu are also doing the questioning from a variety of perspectives, and their efforts have yielded much in terms of literature and, to some extent, the

understanding of what being an African Christian means.

This situation has an urgent invitation for the Church in Homa Bay to intensify her efforts at evangelization. This evangelization should make a departure from the past by seeking to translate the Good News into the life of Luos instead of presenting them with doctrinal propositions which, important as they are, have little relevance to daily living. It should seek to touch the core of the Luo person in order to transform him or her into a true Luo and a committed Christian, using the radical religiosity of the Luo as the fundamental point of departure. The need in this regard to search for and adopt new approaches to evangelization among the Luo people which reflect the Luo ethos cannot receive more emphasis than it requires. It is of prime importance, and this means also that the Luo cultural background can no longer be given the little attention it has hitherto received in Christian instruction and preaching. It is the translation of the Christian message into the Luo environment.

e) Proliferation of Sects and New Religious Movements in Luoland

Christianity has witnessed the emergence and proliferation of New Religious Movements all over the world. However, the current proliferation of New Religious Movements in Homa Bay is no doubt, one of the intriguing aspects of Christianity within the diocese today. As a secular and pluralistic diocese, Homa Bay harbours many religious Sects or what some prefer to call New Religious Movements. All over Homa Bay Diocese, these churches exist in exuberant profusion. It is almost impossible to have accurate statistics of the number of Christian churches within the region. This is because by the time one might have finished counting; new ones would already have been formed.

Often they have the most flamboyant names, displayed boldly on billboards, names which are usually said to have been revealed to the founder of the church in a dream or vision. Many preachers concentrate more on advertising their names and the names of their new found churches in the highly competitive church supermarkets than the Good News. In fact the fastest growing churches in Luoland today are those which do not stand in the tradition of the so-called mainline churches. Rather, they are those of Pentecostal or Charismatic nature which were not founded by European missionaries. The rate at which they multiply may qualify Luoland as a home of church industry.

These churches claim that authenticity is vital to their understanding of the Gospel message. They want to think like Africans, worship, sing and live like Africans. They aim at presenting the Gospel to Luos in a way they can understand and interpret it in their own thought forms of worship. Following the same line of thought, these independent churches may be described as having been founded in Africa by Africans to worship God in the African ways and to meet African needs as Africans themselves feel them and not as others think they ought to feel them. This explains their origin. They are new because they are an African response in contradistinction to the old system of European centred Christianity, which is backed by western European culture and civilisation. They are a religious movement within an African perspective and were founded by Africans in protest to some features of Christianity of the missionary churches.

According to some of our informants, various reasons have been brought forward for their birth. These could include politico-religious elements anti-European feelings, colonialism among African Christians, and European superiority. Moreover, the desire to be real Christians cannot be left out. The mission founded churches are still reluctant and very slow in allowing African forms of religious expression. According to Mroso (1995), these churches have their deeper roots in the African religious cultural heritage. In comparison, the mainstream churches are often accused of suffocating their feelings and emotions for not attending to the emotional life of the people. It is stressed that in the New Religious Movements religion and culture are always closely interwoven. Without any intention of despising anybody, a western form of worship may be appreciated by many an African and yet feel at the same time that something important is lacking. So, in the western type of liturgical services they feel dry and the liturgy or service remains foreign

to their religious sentiments. Ndiokwere (1981) argues that:

For most Africans and the members of the Independent churches in particular, the place of worship is a place of free movement and total participation by everyone in the acts of worship. The movement should be vigorous and often spontaneous, able to produce some perspiration and leading to spiritual satisfaction and enjoyment. In such a gathering the singing is loud and is for all present. There is no place for carefully selected groups of “choristers”, for no one has a monopoly of this “joyful noise to the Lord.

The drift of members of the Catholic Church to New Religious Movements is no doubt one of the greatest challenges for the Catholic Church in Homa Bay today. Many of the mainstream Christian churches in the diocese including the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists have been challenged by the fast rate of growth of New Religious Movements and have tried to devise ways and means to counter the drain in their numbers to these Movements. The rise of these New Christian Movements has drawn the attention of the church to enter into dialogue with them. The presence of these churches and movements create a pastoral challenge to the Catholic Church. The Challenge facing the Catholic Church is to understand in what ways these Movements are meeting the needs of the Luo people. The Church has to develop ways and means to address the reality of New Religious Movements in Homa Bay. There is no doubt that these New Religious Movements have responded to the existential needs of the Luo Worldview. They have offered a personal encounter with God through the power of the Holy Spirit, healing from sicknesses and deliverance from evil forces in all its manifestations.

f) Superstitious Beliefs

Almost every part of the world has some element of superstition in its culture. In some places superstition is so extreme that it plays a major role in every aspect of the life of the inhabitants. Whereas some people in some countries have the tendency to become too superstitious but are kept under constraint by the laws of their countries, others just face reality and accept responsibility for whatever mistakes they make in their lives. The Luo nation falls into the category of nations which have extreme superstitious beliefs, which at times result in human rights abuse. In the traditional religion there is a belief that anything that takes place in our daily lives – be it good or bad, has its cause.

The Luo knows very well that there are natural causes of happenings. He knows that there are certain rules of cause and effect which are inevitable. There is no mystery about them. They require no explanation beyond the normal. What is explained by recourse to sorcerers and witches are the particular conditions in a chain of causation which relate an individual to natural happenings. Therefore, the fetish priest and diviners always try to find answers to questions pertaining to mishaps or misfortunes. In their bid to find answers to such questions they usually attribute everything to witchcraft. Barrenness, impotence, accident, poverty, sudden death, alcohol addiction, mental disorder, diseases like epilepsy, aids, blindness, leprosy, irregular menstruation, mongolism, infant mortality and many more others are attributed to witchcraft. This is not a new thing. It has been the tradition since time immemorial. As a result of this, some people also evolved in the course of time as witch-doctors. They claim to have supernatural powers which they use not only to detect if somebody has a witchcraft power but also to ward off evil spirits from the people. People who are suspected or accused of having witchcraft powers are often subjected to all sorts of harassment and inhuman treatment. Unlike the fetish priest or diviners of the traditional religion, the priests of our Christian religion – Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian and Seventh Day Adventist are normally not engaged in the practice of fortune telling or soothsaying, but like the members of traditional religion, most of their members or followers are also superstitious.

Interestingly, there are some members in the above mentioned churches who stealthily consult a fetish priest or witch-doctor to check what the future has in store for them. Some of them go to consult a witch-doctor with a conviction that a member of their family is bewitching them and that is why their business enterprise

is not functioning very well. If the witch-doctor or soothsayer happens to divine that a family member is spiritually the cause of their downfall, the harmonious relations existing between them begin to degenerate into hatred and insinuation immediately.

There is also another variant type of Christian religion which is popularly known in Luoland as “Spiritual Churches”, or “Roho Churches”. Unlike the fetish priests and diviners, the leaders or pastors of these spiritual churches claim to cast out demons. They base their belief on the fact that Jesus Christ spent some of his time casting demons and for that matter they also have the religious responsibility to search for people with demons and cast them out. It has become a common practice in Luoland nowadays to see businessmen and businesswomen, wholesalers and retailers, professors and illiterates, bank managers and levy collectors consulting pastors for some special spiritual protection against witchcraft. People who normally become victim of these superstitious beliefs are children, old and poor women and in some circumstances rich women, women who are by nature very powerful. It is not uncommon to see teenagers being brought before a pastor or a witch-doctor under the accusation that they have witchcraft powers. Superstition has eaten so deep into our moral fibre that the law enforcement body in the country normally ignores the fact that there is uncountable number of perpetrators of human rights abuse. Our aim is to call attention to the existence of such superstitious beliefs. We want to urge that unless it is recognised and dealt with on the conscious level, the commitment of most Christians to Christ will continue to remain superficial. In other words, no religion can be relevant to a people when it neglects any area of their total experience as perceived by them. They will inevitably seek other means to cater for the neglected aspects of their total existence. The New Religious Movements are doing remarkably well in allaying people`s fears and anxieties about evil forces. They organise healing deliverance services. They have succeeded in convincing their converts that Christ is all powerful and able to heal all sickness.

CONCLUSION

The contact of Luo people with Christianity had been plagued by instability, fruitlessness, and eventual failure and collapse of local Christianity. The process of evangelization and Christianization in Luoland had brought Luo and European cultures into contact. Both cultures had experienced reciprocal shocks. The wave of missionary activities and westernization has cast a stifling shadow over some of the cultural values of the Luos. These are now in a hard struggle for survival. However, the voice of those demanding or requesting a thorough-going Africanization of Christianity is becoming audible and appreciably effective. Now the gross cultural disabilities of the early period have been overcome and the Luo culture is sufficiently mature and ready for a systematic and institutional indigenisation of Christianity.

Christianity must recognize the authentic and honest conceptions, customs, institutions and values of Luo culture. The Luo mind, religion, psychology and personality are clearly reconcilable and harmonizable with Christian principles. A realistic fusion of the spirit and basic institutions of Luo culture with Christianity will ensure religious vitality, fruitfulness and stability. Christianity must realistically recognize the Luo personality, its cultural spirit and basic and honest institutions, if the earlier ecclesiastical disasters are to be avoided. It is this Africanization of Christianity that was not sufficiently provided for by the western founders of Christianity in Luoland, owing to their cultural limitations and the social constraints. It has not become an urgent task with which Luo ecclesiastics must grapple with, in order to ensure for the Luo Christian religious sense, stability and fruitfulness.

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