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THE CHEWA CONCEPT OF GOD AND ITS IMPLICATION
FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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of Arts in the University of Malawi.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The interest in the study of the Chewa concept of God arose from my reading Mbiri Ya Achewa by S.J. Ntara which was one of our set reading in what was then called Chinyanja for the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate. What struck me there and then in the book was the application of the designation Chauta to a female guardian of Msinja shrine who was also known as Makewana (Mother-of-all-people).

The opportunity to undertake this study did not occur until 1978 when I started teaching. I undertook the study to save my mind from stagnation, a feature that characterizes many staff-rooms in our schools. The second reason was the need to contribute towards the question of theological relevance of the christian message in the face of traditional religious beliefs. This was made more pertinent by the challenge posed by the "Makolo Movement" in Blantyre a few years ago. On the whole, I found the study very rewarding both intellectually and spiritually.

I would like to thank Dr. J.K. Parratt of the Religious Department, Chancellor College for his initial encouragement and supervision of the work at various stages. My thanks also go to Fr. J.C. Chakanza, Mr. D.S. Bone of the same department and Dr. K.M.G. Phiri of the History Department for reading the initial draft and making useful comments and suggestions on both style and content. Further, I would like to thank Mr. J.E. Moeba of Robert Laws Secondary School who patiently typed the initial draft. Lastly, but not least, my love and gratitude go to my wife Annie for enduring patiently during the many hours I devoted to this study and robbing her of much needed company and companionship; and also to Mr. C.F. Malemia, Secretary for the Law Department, Chancellor College, who typed the final copy with his usual speed and care as presented. To all these people I am gratefully indebted.

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For any flaws or weaknesses in the thesis, I am solely responsible. This thesis is submitted in the hope that it will carry a little further the dialogue between traditional beliefs and the Christian Faith towards relevant and meaningful theologizing in Malawi and the rest of Africa.

To my father Rev. Yoram Musopole and my mother Tupokiwe Nasilumbu this thesis is lovingly dedicated. The study seeks to explore the concept of the *Chewa* traditional belief in the existence of a supreme being, known as *Chikwamba*, and to compare it with the biblical concept of God. The study also seeks to explore the concept of *Chikwamba* in the *Chewa* traditional belief system and to compare it with the biblical concept of God. The study further seeks to explore the concept of *Chikwamba* in the *Chewa* traditional belief system and to compare it with the biblical concept of God. The study makes the following contributions:

1. That man everywhere has an awareness of God as a "mysterious, transcendent reality" (to use Rudolf Otto's description) and that this reality manifests itself in various ways for good or ill and at times seeming indifferent to human existence.
2. That no matter how crude this conception is, it is of paramount significance in the existence of any people, for it is the basis of their moral and spiritual life.
3. That the Bible gives a fuller and the only adequate revelation of this mysterious presence, therefore providing a useful background against which we can study the *Chewa* concept.
4. That it is therefore the task of the Church to understand what constitutes *Chewa* spirituality, if it is to speak relevantly and meaningfully to the *Chewa* and to any other cultural group involved in carrying out the mission of evangelization.

ABSTRACT

To place this study within context, there is first a consideration. The thesis on which this work is based is that the study of African Traditional world views and concepts is essential for the development of a meaningful, relevant and authentic theology for Africa, a theology that takes seriously the existential conditions of the African in his cultural set-up. The concept of God is taken as the key towards the development of such a theology because it is the common factor between African Traditional and biblical religions and that everything else can be explained in terms of it. It is noted that the Chewa concept is not very developed and

This study seeks, therefore, to explore ^{the} Chewa concept of God in order to discover what similarities and differences exist between it and the biblical concepts. It further seeks to draw out whatever implications this concept has for evangelism, theological contextualization and church life. For all practical purposes the Chewa outlook is

The study makes the following assumptions:

1. That man everywhere has an awareness of God as a "mysterium, tremendum et fascinans" (to use Rudolf Otto's description) and that this reality manifests itself in various ways for good or ill and at times seeming indifferent to human existence.
2. That no matter how crude this conception is, it is of paramount significance in the existence of any people.
3. That the Bible gives a fuller and the only adequate revelation of this mysterious presence, therefore providing a useful background against which we can study the Chewa concept.
4. That it is therefore the task of the Church to understand what constitutes Chewa spirituality, if it is to speak relevantly and meaningfully to the Chewa and to any other cultural group in Malawi in carrying out its mission of evangelization.

To place this study within a wider context, there is first a consideration of the need to study African Traditional Religion in order to avoid being parochial. As a result I have liberally made use of works from other parts of Africa to support, clarify or illustrate a point.

In our survey of the history and religious conception of the Chewa, it is noted that their world-view is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. This observation is very significant for theology in Africa especially for the doctrine of God. In comparing the Chewa and biblical concepts, it is noted that the Chewa concept is not very developed and the reason suggested is the cultural limitations on the intellectual development of the Chewa. While God is acknowledged as creator, he remains peripheral to daily human activity and therefore is remote. The place that the biblical tradition gives to God is occupied by the ancestors in the Chewa tradition. For all practical purposes the Chewa outlook is anthropocentric. The question is, how do the two outlooks relate to each other for the sake of relevance and meaning?

Four points emerge and are singled out as significant to the thesis. These are:-

1. The need for a fully developed all-embracing doctrine of God made relevant and meaningful by taking into account the traditional concepts.
2. The ethnological study of the people to be reached by the gospel as a major subject for those in theological training. This will require an interdisciplinary approach.
3. A clear grasp of the gospel message and a comprehensive view of salvation embracing the totality of man in his existential condition (the Chewa) is essential.
4. The traditional world-view to be integrated with the biblical world-view. In practice, it means the reformulation of the doctrine so that

it addresses itself to the existential condition of man as culturally determined.

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CHAPTER ONE

AIM OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is an indisputable fact that African Traditional Religion¹ has established itself firmly either as a discipline in its own right or as part of African studies in institutions of higher education in Africa and overseas. However, the questions of the function, methodology of doing it, the meaning and relevance of the discipline in a modern multi-cultural, multi-religious **C H A P T E R O N E** are not settled. The

interest in the study of African Traditional Religion can be traced to a number of reasons and here **AIM OF THE STUDY** a few.

The first was the rise of nationalism in Africa and with it, the need to recreate African selfhood and personality in and through the various facets of Africa's cultural existential situation. One such attempt has been through the concept of *negritude*. Leopold Sedar Senghor, a leading proponent of the concept of *negritude* has written,

"The whole concept of *negritude* has widened in scope to include the whole complex of civilised values - cultural, economic, social and political - at which characterise black people".²

Kofi Busia, taking up a sentiment that had been felt for a long time, has stated,

"The rejection of colonialism has a positive side in the sense that it has brought the African who has been the object of scorn, his dignity has to be asserted".

Indeed Nationalism increased pride in what is of traditional value and religion was no exception. Speaking of religion Leopold Senghor declared,

"The member of an African society feels and knows that he can only develop his potential, his originality, only in and through *gnosis*. In union with all other men, indeed with all other beings in the universe - God, animals, trees, rocks. This draws our attention to the fact that the social,

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"The reaction to colonialism has a positive side in the desire to uplift the blackman who has been the object of scorn. His dignity has to be asserted".³

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"The member of an African society feels and thinks that he can only develop his potential, his originality, only in and through society, in union with all other men, indeed with all other beings in the universe - God, animals, trees, pebbles. This draws our attention to the fact that the social,

political or economic institutions and aspirations of the African peoples are closely related to their assumptions, propositions and interpretations of the universe - of God, society and nature. In the cultural heritage of Africa, this is pre-eminently within the sphere of religion which cannot be divorced from politics or philosophy or economics".⁴

Religion in Africa can be likened to the nervous system in the body which provides responses to the internal and external stimuli. Through religion man is in touch with the entire universe and responds to its various stimuli - spiritual and physical. Religion is basic to and permeates the whole of culture hence it determines to a large extent African selfhood and personality. This, the nationalists realised and therefore they upheld the significance of religion to the nationalist cause.

Secondly, the surge of interest in the study of African Traditional Religion has been caused by the inadequacy of western theologies for African spirituality on the one hand and a search for an African Christian Theology which is formulated against a background of African culture on the other. There is an amount of disillusionment on the part of African theologians with certain trends in the theologizing process as done in the west. For instance, the death of God school, the demythologization of scripture school, the existentialist theology, the philosophical pre-occupation with meaningful language of the logical positivists, and the demolition of the metaphysical foundation upon which traditional christian theology was erected. All these trends have brought about a confusion and uncertainty on the theological scene to warrant the following remark:

"It seems theologizing is a game without rules. Now most of these western theologies have little relevance to the African situation. All this has led some of those in the forefront of theological thinking to seek alternative theologies for Africa which arise out of their existential situation and find expression in their thought forms which address themselves to their situation".⁵

Bishop Tutu expresses his dissatisfaction with western theology in the following terms,

"We are still too concerned to play the game according to the whiteman's rules when he often is the referee as well. Why should we feel embarrassed if our theology is not systematic? Why should we feel that something is amiss if our theology is too dramatic for verbalization, but can be expressed only adequately in joyous songs, and the scintillating movement of the African dance in the liturgy? Let us develop our insights about the co-operativeness of human existence in the face of excessive western individualism about the wholeness of the person when others are concerned for hellenistic dichotomies of soul and body, about the spiritual when others are made desolate by the poverty of the material. Let African Theology enthuse about the awesomeness of the transcendent when others are embarrassed to speak about the king, high and lifted up, whose train fill the temple. It is only when African theology is true to itself that it can go on to speak relevantly to the contemporary African..."⁶

While appreciating the Bishop's strong sentiments as reflected against his own political environment, the point he is making is a valid one. For Bishop Tutu, African Theology (as the pre-Christian and pre-modern African peoples' experience of God) has to be the basis for Christian theology in the light of the Christ-Event. Another writer, Samuel Kibicho⁷ maintains that what has been accepted as orthodox Christian theology is actually only European-American theology. This theology subscribes to the idea of discontinuity between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. In his view, this is misconception. There is a radical continuity especially through the concept of God. What is needed for the African is a theology of living in the light of the Christ Event which makes sense of his existential situation including the whole of his culture.

The third reason for the rise of the study of ATR is the realization that the African has something to contribute to universal spirituality of the christian message. Father Shorter has said,

"Until there is a place in the world Church for an African theology, for african rites and for church structures of african aspirations, an African christianity will never be a reality. The time will concern for those who lived and died before the gospel and the way no

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draws them into the communion of the saints does not provide an adequate
bridgehead
only come when we have stopped talking about
translating African ideas into western terms.
It is not enough to Africanize Christianity,
African Christianity must discover a catholic
vocation".⁸

Shorter realises that up until now, African Christianity has been enshrined in western theological terms or what Idowu terms "prefabricated theology" and couched in western culture. He also realises that for Christianity to be authentic on the African soil, it must have its roots within the African culture milieu. However being aware of the danger of a parochial theology, he insists that there must be a theological cross fertilization for African Theology to discover its catholicity. Such a cross-fertilization is only possible where there is a common denominator, and culture upon which African Theology is to be based cannot be that denominator.

Writing on African Theology, Sawyer is of the view that African Theology should seek to interpret Christ to the African in such a way that he feels at home in the new faith. He warns that care must be exercised to avoid both syncretistic tendencies as well as a hollow theology.⁹

The idea of an African contribution to universal Christian spirituality has come about as a result of realising the richness of the African culture as a base for the preaching of the gospel. Nowhere, for instance, does the idea of the communion of the saints find a richer home than in Africa with its extended family which embraces the living and the living-dead in a communion of beings. Edward Fashole-Luke sees the doctrine of the communion of saints as a possible basis for establishing a theology that would satisfy the passionate desires of African Christians and non-Christian alike. However, the idea of sainthood and ancestorhood are not interchangeable and they do not refer to the same thing as Fashole-Luke seems to imply. One cannot be substituted for the other without grossly distorting the essence of each. Fashole-Luke's concern for those who lived and died before the gospel and the way he

draws them into the communion of the saints does not provide an adequate bridgehead for the construction of African Theology.

The fourth reason is that of religious pluralism amongst Africans. This means that a person embraces two world views which co-exist. They have a traditional one and a Christian one and each coming into play at different times. The fundamental question is, why is it that after more than a century of missionary work Christians reflect a pluralism in their religious outlook? The study of ATR is one way of seeking to find an answer to this kind of question. It seeks to discover what makes the traditional religious world view persist with such a tenacity.

The fifth reason for the study of ATR is pastoral and social. "To ignore African religious beliefs", Mbiti warns, "Can only lead to a lack of understanding of African behaviour and problems because religion is the strongest element in traditional background and that it exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned".¹⁰

From the reasons that have been discussed above, it is clear that the task of ATR can be very varied depending on the particular perspective from which one views the subject. A few scholars have addressed themselves to this question of the task of ATR. Okot p'Bitek defines the task as follows:-

"... to photograph in as much detail as possible, the way of the African people and then to make comments pointing out the connection and relevance of different parts and their ultimate relation to the whole of life".¹¹

This approach though pointing in the right direction presents two difficulties. The first is that it assumes we know what "the whole of life" consists of so that what remains is to relate the particular aspects to it. The second is that no one individual can accomplish the task for the whole of Africa. However p'Bitek's suggestion promises better results if the facts can determine first the African world view rather

than bending the facts to suit our own presuppositions. p'Bitek rejects the comparative method on the ground that it distorts the facts and the picture.

Mbiti is of the opinion that the task of ATR is to illuminate our understanding of African behaviour and problems because he maintains, religion is fundamental to African way of living. He has attempted to fulfil this in his books,¹² but he has been criticised by p'Bitek¹³ and Setiloane¹⁴ for imposing on his study of ATR a Christian theological framework and categories.

To the present author, the task of ATR is first, to delineate the major features of the African World view as an interpretative framework of peoples' activity and thought. No one method could be adequate for such a task and only a combination of methods can actually lead to its accomplishment. The major source of ATR is the pre-Christian and pre-moslem religions beliefs of the Africans as was practised and is being practised. While such knowledge is important for its own sake, its real significance is in how it contributes to the understanding of the past and the present and how it should be taken into account for the future.

In the present thesis our concern is much narrower than the one we have discussed above. We will consider a concept which is significant in ATR and then using the comparative method to draw the implication of this concept for the christian faith.

1.2. THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

It is the writer's conviction that men everywhere have an awareness of God as a mysterious presence manifesting itself in various ways. This explains the universal prevalence of the religious phenomenon. According to Acts of the Apostles, Paul began with this assumption when he preached the gospel to Greeks in Lystra. He declared to his audience,

"In the past generations the (the living God)

allowed all nations to walk in their own ways, yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rain and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness".¹⁵

To the Roman Christians he wrote,

"For what can be known about God is plain to them (the non-Christians). Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."¹⁶

Paul's point was that God was behind all the physical phenomena and that these were a pointer to his eternal power and divinity. It was this God who had now focused his revelation not in phenomena but in the person of Jesus the incarnate and, therefore, man can no longer continue in his own ways and devices. This message had revolutionary implications for the religions of the world because they had to reckon with the Christ or else face God's condemnation.

Now, no matter how inexplicit the conception of this reality is, it is of paramount importance and significance in the life and culture of any people. The Chewa with whom we are concerned have in their own way apprehended this reality and have responded to it as they felt appropriate. The reality of this Presence has been aptly described by Rudolf Otto as the *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans* (a mystery great and fascinating).¹⁷

In this thesis, our concern is to look at the Chewa concept of God and how it could be used as a theological bridgehead between the African culture and the Christian Faith with a view to developing a relevant and meaningful theology for Africa in general and Malawi in particular.

It has been mentioned that some reasons for the interest in the study of ATR were the need for a relevant theology and the pastoral problem of religious pluralism. From both of these problems, it was realised that a meaningful link had to be established between African culture and the Christian Faith. It is the opinion of the author that one of the significant realities in the establishment of the theological link is that

of God, the mysterious, great and fascinating presence. The other important realities are the human community of the living and the living-dead, and the world of living and non-living things. Since the Chewa trace their origin and that of the world from creation by God, the reality of God is taken to be the most significant of the three, that is, God, human community and the environment.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEMS

A number of problems have been observed in seeking to reconstruct a Chewa traditional theology. To begin with there is the problem of trying to disentangle the Christian influences from the purely Chewa concepts or views. It is nearly a century since the beginning of missionary activity¹⁸ among the Chewa and over three centuries of trade contacts with the Arabs and Europeans of the Portuguese stock. It is very likely that European and Arab religious concepts and practices rubbed off on the Chewa religious outlook as it did on the language.¹⁹ When the first Scottish missionaries arrived they were surprised to hear a canoe song in praise of the Virgin Mary sung on the Shire.²⁰

Secondly, there is the conceptual problem. The Chewa are a practical people and they are not given to speculative theoretical thought as is done in the Western countries. They demonstrate their ideas in actions, symbols and proverbs. The nearest they come to speculative thought is in the creation myth which seeks to give answers to some ultimate questions. The problem that one encounters is that the Chewa religious concepts are not as precise in content as one finds in Western theology where the study of religion has been taking place for a long time. It is not uncommon to find that answers given to specific questions are diffuse in content and general. It is therefore difficult to get to the essence of concepts.

Related to the problem of conceptualization, is the problem of

establishing the meaning of ritual symbolism and myth. The way the Chewa conceive of the universe and their response to it, involves myth and ritual, the origins of which are lost in antiquity. This way of perceiving the world operates at a different plane from the scientific and philosophical approaches practised in the Western countries. Caution is called for in seeking to understand the traditional religious outlook in terms of the scientific approach because there are many elements which defy the scientific method. Instead of searching for specific concepts one has to deal with general impressions existentially perceived/ than through logical deduction of some religious premises. It is therefore common to find contradictory views co-existing side by side as antinomies without any effort being made to reconcile or eliminate them. Life itself is the common denominator in which these are resolved or held in tension.

The fact that the Chewa are not given to philosophical conceptualization does not mean that they are irrational, but rather that they comprehend or perceive the whole of existence and of deity in their manifold manifestations from a different perspective. This perspective Eliade calls "Magico-Religious", and the writer prefers the term "mystical Existentialism". Mystical Existentialism is the conception of the universe as mysterious, that is, beyond human comprehension, full of life force and dynamic. It is in the light of this mystery that they have to make sense of their existence. It is in trying to come to terms with this mystical universe that we find magic, witchcraft, sacrifice, ritual and worship of every kind. The term mystical-existentialism covers both the sacred and the profane.

Thirdly, there is the problem of the lack of written documents. Chewa religion has no scriptures and no traditions of systematic theology or philosophy. Its theology is found in its culture and oral traditions. This being the case, then, the research student relies completely on oral tradition and the observations of religious practices which are becoming

less frequent. Oral tradition, though the only major source, is being influenced by elements from other religions like Christianity and Islam. The problem is further aggravated by the rapid social change taking place so that the new ways are replacing old ways and therefore less and less of the old ways are being passed on. Nevertheless, a core of what is important is always available for study. The writer has not been able to involve himself in observing religious practices to any extent and most of what follows comes from informants who either know some of the traditions or have participated in these ceremonies and rites.

Resulting from the lack of written documents is the problem of interpreting the data that has been collected. How does one avoid being subjective? How can a scholar with religious commitment stand back from his subject in order to be objective in his assessment of the data? Scholars always approach their studies with presuppositions or hypotheses which get modified and even discarded as the research goes on. The best one can do is to let the data itself suggest a path towards a possible interpretation. The problem of interpretation is made more acute by the fact that a lot of religious beliefs are expressed in figurative and symbolic language. Further to this, a major aspect of Chewa religion involves the Nyau cult. What goes on in the Nyau cult and what it means to belong to it is not available to an external observer. Therefore, what is mentioned here in connection with Nyau Societies comes from informants who are themselves initiated into the society. This problem has been amply discussed by Kuthemba-Mwale.²¹

1.4. METHOD OF STUDY

Charles Nyamiti says,

"Traditional religion permeates African life so much that any adequate explanation of it requires complete investigation in all the various spheres of culture, such as social and political organization, education, customs, laws, language art, technology as well as historical situation and the physical environment".²²

In so far as religion can be defined as man's existential response to the dynamic universe, Nyamiti is right in his prescription of the task before the scholar of ATR but practically this is an impossible task for any individual to accomplish. What individuals can do is to study particular aspects of a culture in detail and see how each fits in with the rest to form a cultural mosaic. This study therefore, limits itself to the concept of God.

The data on which this work is based was collected through a questionnaire (see appendix ii) which was used in interviews. The people that were chosen for interviews were determined by the following considerations:

1. Their status in the community. In this connection village headmen were picked. Apart from village headmen, other old people were involved because of their knowledge of the past traditions.
2. Then there are others who play significant roles in the religious life of the community. The sample group included Christians and traditional religionists.

Our approach to the study of the Chewa concept of God will be analytical and synthetic in nature. From the analysis of the names, cults, and rites, theological formulations will be drawn and it is with these that a comparative study will be undertaken against the biblical concept before drawing whatever implication this has for the Christian faith. While acknowledging the significance of a historical study of religious concept we find ourselves severely handicapped on this score because there are no written documents that span a long period as the Old Testament documents do.

1.5. LITERATURE ON CHEWA RELIGION

A lot of literature is available on various aspects of Chewa

culture and which has been written to serve different purposes. We cannot have here an exhaustive list of all the available literature which is in the form of books, theses, monographs and articles, but rather a few works significant to our study will be mentioned.

There^{are} a few works in Chichewa of a general nature covering various aspects of the Chewa culture. Mbiri ya Achewa, Limbe 1965 by J. Ntara presents uncritical popular history of the Chewa without a chronology. This work has been translated into English by J.A. Kandawire with explanatory notes by Langworthy. It has something to say on the religion of the Chewa and most of the information on the Msinja cult is based on this work. Kukula ndi Mwambo, Limbe 1965, by J. Gwengwe is a survey of various aspects of Chewa customs and traditional practices. It has a chapter on worship which gives an insight into the practice of rain calling. Maliro ndi Myambo ya Achewa, Longman, 1975 by A. Makumbi, discusses mostly funeral rites in respect to the deaths of different classes of and condition of men. It describes how these rites are done and their significance.

In the English language few major works have been published.

Rangeley has written several articles on the Chewa mostly in the "Nyasaland Journal (Malawi). These are on the various aspects of Chewa culture.

Relevant to our study is the one on "Makewana, the mother of all people" by Rangeley. Schoffeleers has done much research on the Mang'anja of the Lower Shire, a splinter group of the Chewa, especially on the M' Bona cult and he has written extensively. [See the selected bibliography appended to this work] His work is a significant contribution to our understanding of religion among the Chewa from an anthropological approach. Linden has made some contribution on the Chisumphi cult in the Guardians of the Land, (Mambo Press, Zimbabwe) and in Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, Heinemann, London 1974.

So far there are no major works of a theological nature on the Chewa.

and this work is but such a modest attempt. Bishop P. Kalilombe has an article, "An Outline of Chewa Traditional Religion" in African Theological Journal, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1930. It brings out some major features of the Chewa Religion.

¹ Busia, *ibid.*, p.44.

² Also quoted by Busia in *Africa in Search of Philosophy*, p.44.

³ S. Kato, Theological Pitfalls in African Theology, 1975.

⁴ D. T. Ntseke "Whither African Theology?" in *African Theology* (eds) Christianization in Independent Africa, London 1970, p.10.

⁵ S. Kibona "The necessity of the African theologian" in *African Theology* (eds) through Christianity & African Culture, 1975, p.10. See also others (eds) *Christianity in Africa*, 1975, p.10.

⁶ A. Short, African Christian Theology, Oxford, 1975, p.21.

⁷ S. Sanyal, "What is African Theology?" in *African Theological Journal*, Vol. 4, 1975, pp.1-10.

⁸ J. S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, London 1969 p.1.

⁹ O. P. Olatunji, Western Scholarship and the Study of African Religion, Kampala, East African Literature Bureau, 1970, p.125.

¹⁰ Especially the following: Concepts of God in Africa, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970. African Religion and Philosophy, Heinemann, London, 1968.

¹¹ O. P. Olatunji, *op. cit.*

¹² O. Olatunji, "Where are we in African Theology?" in E. Appiah-Kubi and S. Kibona (eds) African Theology and Philosophy, Mrykuoli, New York, 1979, p.15.

¹³ Acts 16:16-17.

¹⁴ Romans 1:18-20.

¹⁵ Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) was a protestant philosopher and theologian. His vastly influential classic, The Idea of the Holy, London G.W.B., 1936, attempted to show that at the heart of all religion is the subjective experience of the mysterious, awesome or fascinating which is possible for all human beings as such through their possession of an innate feeling for the numinous.

- ¹ I will use the singular rather than the plural form because the major feature of traditional religion are common in many cultures.
- ² Quoted by Busia in Africa in Search of Democracy, London, 1967, p.44.
- ³ Busia, *ibid.*, p.44.
- ⁴ Also quoted by Busia in Africa in Search of Democracy, p.44.
- ⁵ B. Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa, Kisumu-Kenya, 1975
- ⁶ D. Tutu "Whither African Theology?" in Fashole-Luke and others (eds) Christianity in Independent Africa, London 1978, p.369.
- ⁷ S. Kibicho "The continuity of the African conception of God into and through Christianity: A Kikuyu case study", in E. Fashole-Luke and others (eds) Christianity in Independent Africa, pp.370-388.
- ⁸ A. Shorter, African Christian Theology, Geoffrey Chapman, 1975, p.22.
- ⁹ H. Sawyerr, "What is African Theology?" in African Theological Journal, Vol. 4, 1970, pp.7-24.
- ¹⁰ J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, London 1968 p.1.
- ¹¹ O. p'Bitek, Western Scholarship and the study of African Religion, Kampala, East Africa Literature Bureau, 1920, p.125.
- ¹² Especially the following: Concepts of God in Africa, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970. African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, London, 1968.
- ¹³ O. p'Bitek, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁴ G. Setiloane, "Where are we in African theology?" in K. Appiah-Kubi and S. Torres (eds) African Theology en route, Marykuoll, New York, 1979, p.62.
- ¹⁵ Acts 14:16-17.
- ¹⁶ Romans 1:19-20.
- ¹⁷ Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) was a protestant philosopher and theologian. His vastly influential classic, The Idea of the Holy, London O.U.P. 1958, attempted to show that at the heart of all religion is the subjective experience of the *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans* which is possible for all human beings as such through their possession of an innate feeling for the numinous.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHEWA AND THEIR AWARENESS OF GOD

2.1. THE CHEWA¹

As determined by language and culture, we can at present speak of the Chewa as a single group, but this has not always been the case. The area occupied by the Chewa was previously occupied by a pygmy type of people called the Batwa or the Akafula. The name Akafula may have its origin from smelting (*kufula chitaulo*), an activity that the Batwa excelled in. The Batwa had an iron-age kind of civilization and lived in loosely organized communities. Between 1200 and 1400 A.D.,² the area

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by the Batwa received new people who entered it either from the north or from the west.³ These people have been called the

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Proto-Chewa to differentiate them from later immigrants called the Chewa or Maravi.⁴ Ntara and other colonial chroniclers of Chewa history assumed the homogeneity of the Chewa as to their origin and culture. This view has been challenged as too simplistic because it has been observed that the history of these people is varied and complex.⁵

As to the origin of the Chewa we have three traditions. The first one claims that the Chewa came from the Great Lakes area of East Africa led by a female rain caller⁶ by the name of Mangadzi and her brother Cheshe. This group was also known by the name of a Wanda or Kalisanjira and are said to have settled along the lake shore in Kongoland. These are the people we have referred to as the proto-Chewa. Wherever they settled, they organized themselves into chiefdoms under leading families and were ruled by famous rainmakers.⁷

The second tradition concerns another wave of immigrants from the north which entered Malawi from the west between 1400 and 1600 A.D.⁸ These are known as the Maravi. They invaded and occupied the land of the Proto-Chewa on whom they imposed their royal tradition and authority.

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As to the origin of the Chewa we have three traditions. The first one claims that the Chewa came from the Great Lakes area of East Africa led by a female rain caller⁶ by the name of Mangadzi and her brother Chembe. This group was also known by the name of a Wanda or Kalimanjira and are said to have settled along the lake shore in Tongaland. These are the people we have referred to as the proto-Chewa. Wherever they settled, they organized themselves into chiefdoms under leading families and were ruled by famous rainmakers.⁷

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The tradition claims that the Chewa originated from the Luba-Lunda country in present Zaire. Phiri cites some linguistic and cultural similarities between the Chewa and the Luba languages and culture as pointers to this tradition.⁹ This also accords with Guthrie's linguistic theory of Bantu dispersion. The group was led by Chinkhole and his mother Nyangu. Of religious significance in this tradition is the place and role of a rain cult which developed around the female rainmaker called Makewana (Mother of the children or people) who was also known as Chauta. It has been argued by Schoffeleers that the Msinja Shrine of Makewana was inherited from the autochthones. Ntara alludes to this implicitly when he speaks of the sacred drum (mbiriwiri) as having been captured from the Akafula. The Chewa seem to have adopted the shrine and its personages and made it the major religious centre.

The third tradition is a creation myth. According to Schoffeleers, the myth as reconstructed from various traditions appears as follows:

"In the beginning was the earth and Chiuta. The earth was not made by Chiuta. The earth was without water. And Chiuta lived above the sky. He sent a man and a woman down to the earth; With them came down all the animals as well as Chiuta himself and the rains. Men and women alighted on a flat topped hill called Kaporintiwa. After they had come down, the surface hardened and turned into rock, large and flat. Chiuta, men and animals lived together in peace. One day man invented fire which he made with two twirling sticks. In the end the grass was set a light. The dog and the goat fled to man for safety. The other animals were full of rage against man and fled to safety. The chameleon escaped by climbing a tree. Chiuta said, "I cannot climb a tree", He called a spider who span a thread to the sky. Chiuta climbed to the sky, he was driven from the earth by the wickedness of man. When going up he said, "Men should die and after death come up high".¹⁰

The myth is concerned with the universal question of human origin and the harmony that existed between Chiuta, man and animals before the fire was invented. The Chewa saw themselves as sharing in this descent from the sky and after all, Kaporintiwa was in their territory and near

it was the great shrine of Makewana. However this myth is more than an attempt to explain the footprints of Kaporintiwa. It has been suggested that the myth goes back to the Proto-Chewa and that the Chewa adopted it to legitimize their claim on the land. It has also been observed that there are differences in the retelling of the myth between the Phiri and Banda versions. This difference has been explained as reflecting a balance of power that existed between the two peoples. The Chewa represented by the Phiri clan came in as invaders and conquerors, but the relationship that came to exist between them and the Proto-Chewa represented by the Banda took a form of interdependence between the conqueror and the conquered. Marwick¹¹ attributed this interdependence to a division between sacred or spiritual and secular authority. The Banda had the ritual power being the autochthones while the Phiri as conquering newcomers had the political authority. The fact that there were more Banda as religious functionaries seems to bear out this view, but it cannot be absolutized as the situation that obtained at the time.

One of the major factors in the social fabric of any society is marriage arrangements. The Bandas, the dominant Proto-Chewa group provided a wife for Kalonga and she was called Mwali. Thus through the politics of kinship, marriage and military conquests, there was mutual political and cultural assimilation between the Chewa and Proto-Chewa. The marriage between Kalonga and the Mwali is an interesting one. Was Mwali at first the highest prize of their conquest or was she a token in a covenant of friendly co-existence? This marriage arrangement sheds some light on the mutual acceptance of each other's religious and political authority between the Banda and Phiri clans. The move of the Phiris from the plateau in Linthipe to the Lakeshore where the Bandas had firmly established themselves can be understood also in terms of marriage arrangements and not only through conquests. The fact that it became a tradition that the Banda supplied the Kalongas with a wife (Mwali) speaks

against the theory of conquest. Langworthy has mentioned in the case of the Undis that they used marriage alliances and appointed the Bandas to high offices in their kingdom.¹² There is need to look closely at marriage alliances as a means to political stability and control. Marriage contracts between leading families may not have been the only factor at work, but one of the major factors in the social and political dynamics of the time.

2.2. RELIGION AMONG THE CHEWA

For the Chewa, like other African societies, all of life has a religious base and finds expression in various rituals and beliefs that take place daily. In defining what religion is, Eugene Nida says,

"Religion is more than philosophy or a world view. It is not only a belief about the supernatural, but a response to it, charged with emotion and expressed in such features as rites, ceremonies, prayers, sacrifices and observance of taboo".¹³

These rituals and ceremonies are highly symbolic in nature and are attempts at giving expression to that which cannot be adequately articulated in words, but is always experienced. This reality which is always experienced through the many facets of life is what father Placide Tempels¹⁴ calls the "Force Vitale" (The living or vital force or power). Through these rites, man attempts to come to terms with the cosmos as a manifestation of this living force or dynamic spirit.¹⁵ Writing on the function of ritual, Ray says,

"In Africa, as elsewhere, ritual behaviour is a way of communicating with the divine for the purpose of changing the human situation. As such, ritual has two important dimensions: what it "says", and what it "does". What ritual does or is believed to do, is a variety of practical things. Rituals are performed to cure illness, increase fertility, defeat enemies, change peoples social status, remove impurity, and reveal the future. At the same time, ritual words and symbols also important things about the nature of what is being done - for example, how and why man communicates with God, expel illness, settle moral conflict, manipulates sacred power, make children into

adults, control and renew the flow of time".¹⁶

We are belabouring this point of rituals because they are an important dimension of religion and unless we appreciate their religious basis, it will not be apparent that religion is basic to life. In this connection Mircea Eliade has said that myths, rites and beliefs express man's existential predicament.¹⁷ The Chewa have their myth, rituals, ceremonies and taboos and by looking at these in a selective way, we hope to discover the roots of their religious sensibilities in which we shall also find the concept of God.

The Proto-Chewa tradition mentions that the Chewa were led by female rain callers called Mangadzi and Chauwa. Phiri states,

"Wherever they settled in the area stretching from Tongaland in the north to Mankhamba at the southern end of the lake in the south, the Proto-Chewa were organized in small scale chiefdoms ruled by famous rain-callers. Furthermore, all chief rain-callers appear to have been women".¹⁸

These rain-callers were believed to manipulate mystical powers and as a result, they had a lot of authority and influence. This recognition by the community of those who had such powers made it possible for them to carry out public functions in the interest of the whole community. Rain calling was part of their leadership functions and it may not be far fetched to say that their role as leaders on the journeys of migration may have arisen out of their possessing the mystical powers. From what we shall see later in the case of Makewana, these rain-callers had prophetic skills by which they foretold future events or interpreted the signs of the times. From Tongaland the Proto-Chewa established their major shrine at Msinja. Schoffeleers associates the traditions of local creation with these shrines. He asserts that they served as founding myths of these shrines which were dedicated to the cult of the high god Chisumphu.¹⁹

When the Chewa arrived, they found these centres and tried to adopt and incorporate them into their political system. To these religious

centres, they added their own ceremonies. For instance, the Mlira which was an annual ceremony performed at Manthimba in veneration of the spirit of Chinkhole who led them into the area from the north. The spirit was thought to be represented by a snake that was believed to inhabit the surrounding bush. The ceremony ended with the burning of the bush. It has been suggested by both Phiri and Schoffeleers that the Mlira ceremony was politically meant to integrate the kingdom. Of course, it may not be denied that the ceremony had political implications, but it is equally true that the religious motives may have been paramount and these were more likely to keep the ceremony alive than political concerns. It also provided a unique social occasion to meet and renew kinship ties which are very strong and greatly valued in the traditional society.

Of the two shrines, Kapirintiwa and Msinja, it is the latter which became famous. According to Ntara,²⁰ the Msinja shrine was at Kapirintiwa, but due to the threat of wild animals, it was moved not far off, to Msinja. Let us look at how this shrine was organized.

2.3. MAKEWANA AND THE MSINJA CULT

The origins of the Msinja cult are shrouded in the distant past and mythology. Oral history is helpful as far back as the sixteenth century.²¹ The main personality at the shrine was a woman called Makewana (Mother of all people) and she was also known as Chauta. The name Makewana carries with it the connotation of a person upon whom the welfare of the people depends on as much as children depend on their mothers. To be wamasiye (motherless) is to be unfortunate and pitiful. To Makewana this universal motherhood was given on account of her ritual authority over the control of rain. Moreover, she was leader of the people on their way and as a female chief. This title was appropriate because she owned the people she was leading. The title Chauta is enigmatic. In contemporary usage the word Chauta or its variant Chiuta is applied to God. How did

Makewana come to be known by the title of Chauta? Schoffeleers is of the opinion that the two variants are opposites. Chiuta means God and Chauta refers to the spirit wife of Chiuta. Schoffeleers makes much use of sexual symbolism in explaining a number of rituals and physical phenomena. For instance, the sticks that are used in fire making are made to symbolize male and female sexes; the rain and the earth, where the earth represents the female element and the sky the male element. While this is a significant observation, it may be taking it too far as far as the deity is concerned. I suggest that the word Chauta was applied to Makewana because of her role as medium. Makewana was God's spokewoman, who unfolded or interpreted the message of Chauta to the people. This is confirmed by the way the Makewana cult started and how she was succeeded. Rangeley following the Phiris' tradition (though he refers to other traditions too) says that when Undi was on his way to establish a kingdom, he was accompanied by his sister Mangadzi who fell into a trance and began to make utterances (kubwebweta, which means to speak anyhow in an uncontrolled manner) and what she said was interpreted as God speaking.²² It is reasonable therefore to assume that she was called Chauta because God was speaking through her. The word Chauta implies someone associated with uta. More on this subject when we consider the word Chauta as a designation of deity.

Tradition has it that Makewana used a bed of ivory tusks and wore a black cloth. She never cut her hair for to do so would mean symbolically shutting out the rain. A shorn head symbolized or was likened to a brazen rainless sky. She was responsible for initiation rites of Chinamwali (the coming of age ceremonies for girls) and that of Mzinda (for boys). To conclude the initiation ceremonies, Makewana had to perform ritual intercourse with Kamundi Mbewe who was officially designated as Nthunga (snake). The ritual intercourse was thought to have a magical or mystical effect on the initiates, possibly inaugurating them to the

practice of sexual relations in which they could now indulge.

When Makewana died, it was said that she had gone to visit Chauta. A new Makewana was confirmed in that position by her prophesying and following an interview. Whenever one was found, it was said that she had come from Chauta. Makewana's attendants were called Matsano. The word Matsano means graves and the application of the word to the attendants could signify that they stood for the spirits from the graves. They were also referred to as "Wives of Chauta" and as such, they were not allowed to have sexual relationship with anyone. By being called "spirit of the graves" (Matsano), does it imply that they represented the ancestral spirits? If so, did Makewana represent God? If, on Schoffeleers' view, Makewana was the wife of God called Chisumphi, then to whom were the Matsano spirits wives? On the view that Makewana was God's representative or the incarnation of God, the Matsano would be the "spirit wives" on account of their function as servants and not in the sense that they were married to the spirits of the graves.. Whether the relationship that existed between Makewana and her attendants reflected that which existed between God and the ancestral spirits, is hard to say. It is certain that we are here involved with symbolic or figurative language which may be difficult to reduce to plain everyday words.

Makewana was a prophetess, a priestess and a political leader among the Chewa. As a priestess or medium, she spoke for the people to God and as leader she was concerned with their conduct. Schoffeleers, commenting on the nature of mediumship writes,

"In their predicting and interpreting the crucial element is the culturally established relationship between a society and the natural environment on which it is ultimately dependent. This relationship seems to be established on a logic according to which the proper course of the natural depends on the people's management of society. Thus calamities in nature are routinely ascribed to instances of serious misbehaviour in society and it is the job of the territorial medium to provide the authoritative statement on such events".²³

It fell to Makewana to give the authoritative word in time of moral or political crisis. Her religious functions pervaded the very fabric of society and was the society's link in the relationship that Schoffeleers has described between society and the environment.

Territorial cults as religious institutions among the Chewa were concerned with the total good of the community by intervening in times of floods, drought, epidemics, wars and by predicting future events. Organizationally, they had a loose net-work of shrines manned by priests with a seasonal calendar of worship. Theologically, they laid emphasis on the creative and directive power of God rather than the family and nature spirits.²⁴

According to Ntara, the following were the personalities that were associated with the Msinja shrine.

1. Kamundi Mbewe was the chief priest whose job it was to offer sacrifices and was the consort of Makewana. Makewana had no husband and it was the duty of Kamundi to fill that role. In his role as sexual partner, Kamundi was called Nthunga or Nsato (python). If she became pregnant, she was drowned in the Malawi pool near Msinja. As priest, Kamundi made sacrifices and the sacred fire that was used. With the passage of time, Undi became influential in the appointment of Mbewe.
2. Tsang'oma Mwale was the drummer. There was at Msinja a religious drum called Mbiriwiri which, it is claimed, was captured from the Akafula. This drum was dedicated to the spirits of the dead and was used to summon people to Msinja or to announce the demise of a distinguished personality. Tsang'oma was the keeper and guardian of the sacred drum.
3. Tsakambewa Nkhoma was given the task of checking that the sacrifices were without blemish, appropriate and in accordance with the directives of Makewana.

4. Kanthungo Nkhoma slaughtered the animals for sacrifices.
5. Malenya Mwale was the messenger who carried and disseminated Makewana's messages.
6. Kalozyiko Mphadwe kept the tools used in the service.
7. Chiwato Banda welcomed the visitors and provided them with accommodation.
8. Mkwerera Phiri maintained the shrine.
9. Chigala Phiri maintained Makewana's house.
10. Matsimbe Kwenda fetched firewood for the sacrifices.
11. Msokomera Kwenda administered a big village near Msinja and it was the duty of all who lived in the village to put out ritual bush fires whenever the creation myth was re-enacted. This village was also used as a reformatory for offenders who had found refuge in it or were exiled to it.

A cult with such an elaborate organization and with such diverse functions among those who served it, cannot have survived out of personal interest, even if that might have been a factor, without the active support of the whole community especially its leading members. The Makewana cult was an important institution which concerned itself with the well-being of all those in it living or dead. The shrine was dedicated to Chauta and Makewana was the chief religious personality. She presented the people and their welfare before Chauta and interpreted his messages or that from the Azimu to the people.

2.4. THE CHISUMPHI CULT

Another important cult name is that of Chisumphu. According to Schoffeleers in Symbolic and Social Aspects of Spirit Worship among the Mang'anja, Oxford 1968, the name Chisumphu applies to all of the following:

Firstly, it was the name of the high god in Central Malawi but conceived anthropomorphically. He is surrounded by headmen and has a wife. He also makes the rain to fall. All other spirits are subordinate to him. Secondly, he is a wind spirit distinct from Mulungu. He is a territorial spirit who has an earthly wife and he acts as a rain priest, a prophet and finally a chief. Thirdly, Chisumphu is rain as can be deduced from this song:

"Wabwera Chisumphu
(Chisumphu has come)

Chauta wamutaya
(God has cast him off)

Bwerekeni khasu nkumbe mkhonde
(Lend me a hoe to dig a canal around the verandah)

Chauta wamutaya
(God has cast him off)

Madzi angalowere m'nyumba²⁵
(Otherwise the water will enter the house).

This was a song that was sung when the rain was coming. From the song, either Chisumphu was rain or the rain was a manifestation of Chisumphu's presence. The coming of the rain signified the arrival of Chisumphu let loose by God. If it is God who casts off Chisumphu, then it follows that Chisumphu could not be a high god and from both the first and second descriptions of the name, he is portrayed more as a human agent of God who fulfills the role of prophet, priest and chief.

Schoffeleers reports that Makewana was the title for Chisumphu's wives.²⁶ This assertion is based on the assumption that Makewana, also known as Chauta, was the female counterpart of the male Chiuta, an assumption which is questionable. It is suggested here that Chisumphu should be seen in the same light as M'Bona who acquired divine attributes. Therefore, it is around such a personality who exhibited in himself prophetic, priestly and chiefly qualities that a cult developed. The Makewana cult was distinct from Chisumphu, but what the exact relationship was, if there was any, is not clear.

How God came to be referred to as Chisumphi can only be a matter of speculation. Having rejected the assertion that the name initially referred to the High God, it is suggested that the name belonged to this personality that was human, but with spiritual qualities and only through the manifestations of the spiritual qualities was the name transferred to God. There is need for more research to test the hypothesis we have advanced and to see whether the Chisumphi cult complemented or competed against the Makewana cult.

2.5. NYAU SOCIETIES AND THEIR RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

One important Chewa institution which is closely associated with rites of passage is that of the Nyau societies. These societies are important at two critical points in a person's life. They are important when one is being initiated into adulthood and when one dies. The dynamics of the Nyau societies have a religious as well as a social dimension. The religious dimension consists of what is ultimate to man because through the dances they come into a vital communion with the ancestors and the dances form what Schoffeleers terms a liturgical act.²⁷

It has already been mentioned that the Nyau societies are important in the critical stage of puberty when both girls and boys reach the entry qualification into adulthood. They are initiated into adulthood by undergoing certain ritual ceremonies and instructions so as to equip them for adult life. The boys' initiation is done by the Nyau brotherhoods. When going for the ceremony the neophytes are entrusted to aphungu (advisor) who bring them to the place where the ceremony is to take place. The initiate is exposed to ill treatment by being beaten, teased, made a fool of apart from being instructed in the symbolism and passwords of the Nyau and being taught proper behaviour of the adult life he is about to enter. The ill-treatment is aimed at making the initiate alert and intelligent. The girls too have their own form of initiation, but in their case, the

Nyau may come in on the final day when they celebrate their entry into adulthood. Anyone who has not been initiated is looked down upon as a perpetual child who will never mature. These rites of passage have a psychological impact on the initiate who feels that he has been transformed into a new personality. He is regenerated.

The next critical point comes at death. Here again the Nyau societies play a significant role especially when the deceased was a member. They perform ritual dances and they carry the dead body to the grave. There is an animal-like structure called Kasiya-maliro²⁸ which is used to take the corpse to the grave. A decent and honourable burial is that at which the Nyau perform their funeral dance. Through this ritual dance, the living are in touch with the spirits of the dead as they escort the one who has just died. They also provide an occasion for social union and entertainment between the living and the dead.

For the Chewa, life does not end at death. It is believed that physical existence is translated into a spiritual existence whose abode is either in the grave-yard or some spirit world. Physically the abode of the dead is represented by the graves, but the departed form the community of the living-dead so long as they are still in the consciousness of the living. The dead are expected to work for the good and well-being of the living while the living are expected to reciprocate. Kandawire says,

"The worship of an ancestral spirit invariably began during the mourning ceremony. Among the lakeside Tonga, for example, it began as mourners started making the first offerings to the dead as the funeral party was on its way to the graveyard. They continued making offerings until the dead was buried when the main corpse attendant offered a prayer, asking the departed spirit to go away to the living with abundance of the desirable things of life".²⁹

He concludes by saying,

2.6. RITUALS

"Reality of symbolic exchange in African religion is based on the fact that African Religion is rooted in the belief that the dead are like the living in their needs, and that it is the duty of the living to provide for the needs of the dead, and likewise, people believe that in return the dead provide the living with the means of livelihood".³⁰

In our case, the Nyau provide an honourable and decent burial and also entertainment in the hope that the dead will be well predisposed towards them. In this way the spirits are kept happy and at peace with the living. The religious significance of the Nyau lies in its role during these critical points in a person's life. It has also significance in that the dance goes beyond being recreational to becoming a liturgical act. The Nyau dances provide an occasion when the community of the living and the dead are linked in social fellowship.

Schoffeleers, who has made extensive studies on the Nyau societies, links them with the creation myth. He argues that since the seasonal changes, the wet and the dry, are significant in the creation myth and since the dry season is the ritual season, the creation myth gives a charter to the societies. He writes,

"Read against its cultural background, the creation myth turns out to be considerably more than a simple narrative about the beginnings of the world; it expresses and unifies the most vital experiences in the life of the ancient Malawi. It explains the origin and meaning of the seasons and man's quest for food; it provides a charter for rain ceremonies and for rain shrines which functioned as an important unifying agent... and it was a charter for the Nyau societies which supervised the cult of the ancestors and the initiation rites."³¹

The link of the Nyau societies with the creation myth seems tenuous. The exact origin of the Nyau is itself debatable, but possibly goes back to the arrival of the Maravi people. Schoffeleers explains the confusion on the origin of Nyau as due to conflict between the commoners and the aristocracy or male and female.³² While the sexual motif is significant in Schoffeleers' understanding of the Mang'anja culture, he tends to over extend its application.

2.6. RITUALS AND TABOOS

For the Chewa, like other African societies, all of life has a religious base and this religiosity finds expression in various rituals. These rituals are highly symbolic expressing that which cannot be articulated systematically and cannot be objectified and yet it is real and dynamic. Ritual enhances, manipulates or resists the potency, physical or spiritual, which is embedded in the environment. Eugene Nida writing on rituals and religion says,

"It is not enough to believe in spirits, to own sacred medicine bundles, and to want healing. One has to do something in order to attain the desired results. Religion is belief in action. The principal ingredients of ritual are sacred objects, sacred words, sacred ceremonies and sacred persons".³³

Rituals are a manifestation of an authentic spiritual experience in which the human soul finds itself profoundly involved.

The Chewa have positive as well as negative rituals. Negative rituals include all taboos which are in themselves a religious response. According to Shropshire, "the essence and strength of taboo are rooted in the sacredness of life and custom".³⁴ Taboos relate to the sacred as well as the profane. The sacred object or place must be hallowed and protected from defilement otherwise a curse is involved on the offender. Positive rituals have to do with an attempt aimed at securing a desired end.

There are various types of rituals among the Chewa. We find rites of passage, rites of agriculture, rites for hunting, rites for travelling, and rites for food and health. The rites of passage ensure the smooth transition from a lower age group to a higher age group and from one social situation to the next. The major stages in the rites of passage are birth, puberty, marriage, motherhood or fatherhood, advancement to a higher class and death. For everyone of these stages, there are ceremonies which are equally well defined.³⁵ Ely Chinoy states that,

"The sacred quality of ritual on such occasions reminds the participants of the solemnity of the step they are taking, as well as binding them more closely to the group".³⁶

Rituals therefore have a religious as well as a social bearing on the participant and are significant in man's daily response to his environment.

2.7. Among the Chewa, the following are some of the most common taboos.

1. Mdulo.³⁷ This is the belief that one's life can be "cut" or endangered if certain sexual taboos are not observed. For instance, a girl or woman who is menstruating is not supposed to season relish with salt. If she does, she "cuts" her parents or husband. A husband is not supposed to have illicit sexual relations while his wife is pregnant or nursing a baby. If he does, the foetus or baby will either die or become ill. Parents are not expected to have sexual relations while their child is away on a journey for fear of endangering his or her life.

2. A youngman who has undergone initiation is prohibited from entering his parents' bedroom. To do so is to despise them and to be uncultured. Cultural conformity is a sign of maturity, responsibility and of being civilized.

3. It is a taboo for anyone to eat the new crop before the necessary inaugural rituals are done. During these rituals, sacrifices of the new crop are made to ancestors.

4. It is a taboo to engage in sexual relations while preparations for the offering of sacrifices are underway. If it happens, then the sacrifices become unsuitable and unacceptable.

Taboos are prescribed in order to protect society against the violation of its sacred moral foundations and the disturbance of its proper ordering upon which man's well-being depends. To go against what is prescribed as taboo, is a moral violation which endangers not only individual life, but that of the entire society. It is to provoke the displeasure of both the spirits and God.

2.7. THE CHEWA WORLD VIEW

We have so far dealt with some aspects of Chewa religion in a rather general way and these aspects have been considered in the light of their historical and present situation. It has been observed that Chewa religion is an existential response to the "*mysterium, tremendum et fascinans*" as manifested in the world of noumena and phenomena. Let us now sketch out their world-view and see what place the concept of God has in it.

A Chewa religious creed would begin like this,

"In the beginning before God began to create, there was the earth and the sky".

On this earth man lives, dies and is translated into a spiritual being. Therefore the first and most important element in their world-view is the earth (dziko). The earth is the source of his livelihood. He depends on it and the sky provides him with rain and light. Between the earth and the sky there is a dynamism which produces seasons and natural changes. Upon this earth man has made a home for himself, but how does he respond to his environment?

The Chewa religious system is both concentric and hierarchical in nature. It is concentric in the sense that relational structures extend outwards in circles and it is hierarchical in the sense that each succeeding outer relational structure is higher in authority and importance than the preceeding inner one. There is a vertical and a horizontal dimension to these structural relationships which is an important element in any religious system.

At the centre of this concentric and hierarchical system is what we would call the "communal-man". This term describes a person whose identity is known and understood completely only against a background of his community. His selfhood is tied to his community and his individuality is recognized only within the society. The important question in seeking to know his identity is not, "What is your name?", but "whose child are you?"

or "From which village do you come?" The communal-Man finds his fullness within the community which surrounds him. Here he finds his personal and cultural identity. Within this community he fulfills himself as a living member of it and thus he finds the meaning of his existence. This is why even the death of a baby is felt as a great loss to the community. The community needs to perpetuate itself by having children born in it. It is within and from within the community that man relates himself to the outer and higher circles of other beings and forces.

Beyond the communal-Man is the community of all living headed by the Mfumu or Nyakhawa (village headman) and includes all the elders of the village both men and women and also all the young members from sucklings upwards. Members of such a community are usually related variously, through blood-kinship, marriage, subservience to common authority or cultural traditions. This community of the living and the land which it occupies with its vegetation, mountains, valleys, and rivers form a living dynamic physical and spiritual environment which constitutes a vital link with the next circles of the living-dead.

This outer and higher circle of the living-dead consists of the spirits of the departed. Physically speaking, the spirits of the dead are apart from the living and yet connected with them as the guardians of the land. They are much more powerful and feared than any living person. Their function is two-fold. Firstly, it is to provide the protection and livelihood to the living; and secondly, to be intermediaries between man and God who is the creator and sustainer of all and embraces everything in tender care.³⁸

Generally, the ancestral spirits are expected to work for the well-being of the living, but certain factors can change this dispositions temporarily. As guardians of the behaviour of the community, they express displeasure at any form of immoral behaviour. Immorality here includes

any lack of conformity to the proper ordering of life and action. The prescription for proper behaviour consists of the customs and traditions. It is not only bad behaviour that is met with displeasure from the spirits of the dead, but also the way a dead person died or the way he was buried can be a cause of his adopting a bad attitude to the living. This is why much care is taken to escort the dead to their resting place with full honours and all the necessary provisions.

Spirits are of two types. There are good and evil spirits. The evil spirits are called Ziwanda. These spirits are always bent on doing harm and their malicious actions are seen through illnesses of all kinds and social conflicts. It is thought that these are spirits of those evil men who were evil even in their life on this side of the grave or of those who are permanently disgruntled as a result of some misfortune or disaster that happened to them. They cannot be appeased. They go about as restless spirits seeking someone to harm. What the living do is either to banish them with medicine or provide themselves with protective medicine.

It is not clear in the Chewa world-view where exactly the abode of these spirits is. The abode of the spirits is described in three different ways. There is the belief that these spirits inhabit the graveyards. Graveyards are usually located in some grove and are awesome places. Each village has its own graveyard. There is also the belief that these spirits return to wherever their ancestors came from. The third belief is that the spirits of the dead have no particular place, but they inhabit the atmosphere wondering from place to place.

To the Chewa, the universe is filled with a mystery which is spiritual and its basic characteristic is that of power which can be used for good or evil. Edwin Smith designates this characteristic as dynamism and Placide Tempels calls it "force vitale". This power is manifested in the potency of herbal medicine and witchcraft. Parrinder underscores the significance of power in religion when he says,

"It is the importance of power, its increase or diminution, which is a constant concern in prayers and invocation, in spells and magic".³⁹

The verb kukhwima which means to be strong, to be tough or powerful, or to be more than mature, is used of those who practise witchcraft. To say, anakhwima (he has toughened himself) means that the person referred to has acquired either protective or harmful medicine which he uses to defend himself against witchcraft or uses it to attack his enemies. Such medicine is ^mibued with power. A powerful medicine is that which is effective and works within the shortest time either to cure or kill. The medicine can lose its potency (kusuluka) by evaporation, overstaying, by being neutralized or by being rendered ineffective through magic. The use of this medicinal power for good or ill depends entirely on the disposition of the user. Even though the Chewa do not believe that trees and other physical objectives have souls, they believe however that some of these objects or parts thereof contain or act as vehicles of this dynamism. However this dynamism is not an active force in its own right, but always in association with man or God who are its purposive agents. For the Chewa, a major part of living is a preoccupation with precautionary measures against the capriciousness of the manipulations of this power.

Beyond and over the living-dead circles is Chauta, Mphambe, Chisumphi, Nanalenga as he was known by various Chewa groups. He is creator and sustainer of the universe, the source of all good things. He is remote from man and yet not beyond his reach.

Personal religion in the sense of a personal commitment or loyalty to deity as when Joshua declared,

"... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord..."⁴⁰

is unheard of. Even those who act as mediums and prophets, are not religious recluses, lone mystics or ascetics seeking personal union with the deity, but rather religious functionaries performing for and on behalf

of the community. Religion among the Chewa is a community phenomenon with the village headman or chief at the head. Religious pietism after the manner of 18th century Europe is unheard of among the Chewa. Part of the reason for this state of things is that the secular and the religious are co-extensive and interwoven to form a single cultural mosaic. When individuals suffer personal, physical and spiritual crises, their religious response is a communal one involving the family or the village.

The concentric structure of the Chewa world view is like one large extended family held together by spiritual ties even in all its socio-economic and political aspects. The communal-Man is at the centre and the system extends on through the community of the living to the realm of the living-dead while God encircles and over-arches them all. Even though God and man are related in that man is created by God and is cared by him, God and man are separate and distinct from each other. They do not exist on the same level. Like the great chief who rules over a wide area e.g. one of the early Kalongas, his authority is not immediately felt because he delegates it to lesser chiefs, and that to the common people, he is remote and of no daily significance. Similarly, the social set up has had an effect on the Chewa view of God. Like the great chief, God is remote from the common man and has no immediate personal significance, but only through the community. This does not mean that he is absent because in time of need he is called upon as a present help in the last resort. To go back to our metaphor of the great chief, our common man is less mindful of the chiefs authority as long as nothing big bothers him, but can in times of real crisis, say when his source of livelihood is threatened e.g. land, he seeks redress from the great chief. Rarely does he do this since the community of which he is a member takes care of most of the minor crises.

Ph.D. Thesis, Victoria University 1963, p. 25-26.

A.A. Mide, *Chewa Culture and Christianity*, Cynabla Press (1963), p. 133.

Notes on Chapter Two

- ¹ The Chewa as an ethnic group are spread over a large area and consist of various groups. e.g. Achipeta, Amang'anja, Anyanja.
- ² For these dates see article, "Towards the identification of a Proto-Chewa culture: a preliminary contribution" by Schoffeleers in Journal of Social Science, Vol. 2, 1973 pp.47-60.
- ³ There are two traditions on the direction from which the Chewa entered Malawi. There is the tradition that they came in through the west and the other that they came through the north. The two traditions may be true and that they are reflecting the entry by the same people but under different leaders and times.
- ⁴ For a discussion of the word Maravi see Schoffeleers "The meaning and use of the name 'Malawi' in the Oral traditions and Pre-colonial documents" in Conference on the Early History of Malawi, University of Malawi, Limbe 1970.
- ⁵ K.M.G. Phiri, Chewa History in Central Malawi and the use of Oral Tradition, 1600-1920. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis University of Wisconsin-Madison U.S.A., 1975 pp.40-89
J.M. Schoffeleers *op. cit.*
- ⁶ The term rain-maker is inappropriate and the term rain-caller is to be preferred. The term rainmaker is inappropriate because the Chewa did not make rain, but pleaded with the spirits and God to send them rain. They called for it rather than made it. When there was a drought people speak of kuitana mvula (calling the rain) or kupempha mvula (asking for or praying for rain) or kulira mvula (cry a plead for rain).
- ⁷ K.M.G. Phiri, *op. cit.*, pp.47-51.
K.M.G. Phiri, History Seminar Paper presented to a conference of secondary school teachers of history, 1979 "The Maravi state system and Chewa political development to C.1840", p.2.
- ⁸ Schoffeleers, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ Phiri, Chewa history in Central Africa and the Oral Tradition, p.44.
- ¹⁰ Schoffeleers Symbolic and Social aspects of spirit worship among the Mang'anja, D. Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1968, pp.196-198.
- ¹¹ M.C. Marwick, "History and Tradition in Central Africa", Journal of African History Vol. 3 (1969) p.378.
- ¹² H.W. Langworthy, "A history of Undi's Kingdom in East-Central Africa to 1890" Ph.D. Thesis, Boston University 1969, pp.27-30.
- ¹³ E.A. Nida, Customs, Culture and Christianity, Tyndale Press (1963), p.135.

- 14 P. Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, Presence Africaine, 1959 p.30. of Malawi,
- 15 For the Chewa "force" is impersonal and always originates from a person. Spirit is personal living and can originate force or power. Therefore, Tempels "force vitale" could better be understood and rendered as "living spirit" and not a Tempels pits it as "living force".
- 16 B.C. Ray, African Religious Symbols: Ritual and Community New York, p.78.
- *17 M. Eliade, Myths, dreams and mysteries, Fontana p.88.
- 18 Phiri, K.M.G., "The Maravi state system and Chewa political development to 1840", p.2.
- 19 J.M. Schoffeleers, Symbolic and Social aspects of Spirit Worship, p.50.
- 20 Ntara, *op. cit.*, p.13.
- 21 This is maintained by Phiri in his Chewa History in Central Malawi, Schoffeleers' "Towards the identification of the Proto-Chewa" and Rangeley's "Nyasaland Rain shrine: Makewana: Mother of all people".
- 22 Rangeley, "Nyasaland Rain shrines: Makewana, Mother of all people", Nyasaland Journal Vol. 5 No. 2 pp.31-50.
- 23 J.M. Schoffeleers, "Crisis Criticisms and critique" in Journal of Social Science, Vol. 3, 1974 pp.74-77.
- 24 J.M. Schoffeleers "The interaction of the M'Bona cult and Christianity 1859-1963" in Weller, J. and Rangen T.O. (eds) Themes in the Christian history of Central Africa, London, Heinemann, 1975, pp.14-29.
- 25 Kachebere Seminary, Bantu Names for God The African way of life club. Entry on Chisumphi, Song quoted from "Notes on Chewa" by Fr. Salaun, January 1969 p.7.
- 26 J.M. Schoffeleers, "Chisumphi and M'Bona cult in Malawi, in The Guardians of the land, Schoffeleers (ed) Mambo Press p.147. t
- 27 J.M. Schoffeleers, Symbolic and Social aspects of spirit worship pp.312-214, 412-415.
- 28 A.J. Makumbi, Maliro ndi Miyambo ya Achewa, Longman (Malawi) Ltd., 1975 p.51.
- 29 J.K. Kandawire, "Reality and symbolic exchange in African Religion", Journal of Social Science, Vol. 5 1976 pp.57-64.
- 30 J.K. Kandawire, *ibid.*

- ³¹ J.M. Schoffeleers, "Myths and legends of creation" in Vision of Malawi, December 1972 pp.13-17.
- ³² J.M. Schoffeleers, "Nyau societies: our present understanding" in Society of Malawi Journal, 29 No. 1, 1976, pp.59-69.
- ³³ E.A. Nida, *op. cit.*, p.157.
- ³⁴ Quoted by G.C. Oosthuizen in Post Christianity in Africa, London 1968 p.172.
- *³⁵ Van Gennep The rites of Passage.
- ³⁶ E. Chinoy Society (second edition) Random House, New York 1967 p.356.
- ³⁷ Mdulo is the cutting in a mysterious way someones life or undermining his potency by ignoring sexual taboos.
- ³⁸ The God of the Chewa is not the same as the God of the Deists. He is remote, but not an absentee landlord. He can be called upon and his goodness is taken for granted.
- ³⁹ G. Paninder, Religion in Africa, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, London 1969, p.4.
- ⁴⁰ Joshua 24:15.

*Failed to trace all bibliographical information in the library due to the re-catalogueing exercise and end of year disorder of books.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD IN CHEWA THOUGHT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The refinement of theological concepts is more often than not a result of ideological conflict. Sometimes it is due to a need for clarity. This is how the concept of God in the Bible and Christian theology attained its development. This cannot be said of the Chewa concept of God. This is so either because we are ignorant of any ideological conflicts in the religious history of the Chewa, or because there has been no intellectual development of a philosophical nature. C H A P T E R T H R E E leads along that path that could lead to the conceptual development as has happened in Christian thought. This being the case then, our GOD IN CHEWA THOUGHT is limited to the etymology and meaning of the various names.

In this chapter, we shall look at the various names used to designate God in order to see if they can yield something about what the Chewa thought of God. Secondly, we shall consider each reference of God used in popular speech and worship. Lastly, we shall look at some pertinent questions about God whether he is a deified ancestor or creature, a projection of social relationship or a religious person or a reality of independent existence, and whether the Chewa concept of God is compatible with the concept of the high God or not.

3.2 THE NAMES OF GOD

There are several names used to designate God among the Chewa. Like Hebrew names, discussed in chapter five, these Chewa names are descriptive but not really tags for identification. Descriptive names tell something about the person so designated. Among the Chewa some of these names begin as nicknames. By this we mean that the individual has been so named because of some

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characteristic which he portrays or some activity with which he is involved. For instance, the name KAMOWA could be given because one is fond of beer. It is very likely that such a name started as a nickname. The name KAMPINI could be given to anyone engaged in making hoe or axe handles as a profession. There are other names which are given as a result of important historical events and as reminders of such events. What is true of the names designating human beings is also true of names designating God.

(a) CHAUTA

This name designating God, has Chiuta as a variant. The variant Chiuta is used more among the Tumbuka than among the Chewa. Schoffeleers is of the opinion that Chiuta refers to the male God while Chauta is Chiuta's female counterpart.¹ Chimombo takes up this distinction and uses it in his play, "The Rainmaker".² Schoffeleers bases his distinction between Chiuta and Chauta on the reference made to Makewana, the prophetess-medium of Msinja as Chauta. Rangeley says that the name Chauta was attracted to deity from Makewana. In other words, the name was Makewana's before it was used of deity and yet, in the same article, he refers to the servants of Makewana, Matsano as wives of Chauta. This makes no sense of the former claim. Surely, it was not a form of lesbianism. It is the opinion of the present author that both Chiuta and Chauta refer to the same reality and that by association, it was extended to Makewana.

The variant Chiuta is composed of prefix chi- and noun stem-uta. Uta means bow. The prefix chi-adds the connotation of enormity, of bigness often in a derogatory sense even though in certain cases it implies admiration depending upon the circumstances in which it is used. As a prefix of enormity, when combined with -Uta, it means big bow (Chiuta cha chikulu). In a derogatory sense it will mean a big ugly bow. The prefix chi- is usually used for things and not for persons, if one means

to be polite. It is used for persons when one wants to be impolite.³ It is a prefix of impersonality. Therefore when the word Chiuta is used, it may have referred to the rainbow in the first place. The rainbow is called Uta-wa-Leza, (The bow of Leza). Only after, was it applied to the power of spiritual personality which manifested itself through the rainbow. (In the Old Testament the rainbow was made a symbol of a covenant by which God promised never again to destroy mankind with water).

The designation of Chauta has two probable explanations. Firstly, it is said to be derived from the verbal root Kuuta meaning to enfold as a chicken enfolds her chicks under her wings in order to provide protection. In prayers, it is said; "Chauta wathu inu amene mumatiutilira tabwera ana anu" (our Chauta, who enfolds us, we your children have come). From the verbal root, the non Chauta would mean someone who enfolds with a view to providing security for man. Therefore, God is seen as someone who enfolds or provides security for man. Alternatively, the thought may be derived from the noun Uta which means bow. The prefix cha- has the import of belonging to or association with something. In the case of Cha-uta, it means someone or something associated with, or belonging to, or possessing the bow. There are several words in which Cha- prefixes form nouns which carry this sense of association with. For instance:-

- (1) Cha-Nkhandwe - A place name in Lilongwe originally associated with foxes. Therefore, a place of foxes.
- (2) Cha-Fisi - another place name in Mzimba originally notorious for hynaes.
- (3) Cha-Ng'ombe - a personal name of someone who might have originally been associated with cattle.
- (4) Cha-Nkhungu - is a place name in Dowa associated with fog (Nkhungu).

The word Chauta more likely falls into this category and cannot be equated with the rainbow as some scholars⁴ have maintained. Chauta is

therefore that reality in association with the rainbow or to which the rainbow belongs. The rainbow is his bow. The Chewa call the rainbow Uta-wa-Leza literally meaning God's bow where Leza is taken to apply to deity rather than to lightening. These two words Chauta and Uta-wa-Leza, provide a distinction between deity manifested in the rainbow and the rainbow itself, the reference is to the spiritual reality behind the rainbow, a reality associated with the sky and the rain. When it is raining, it is not uncommon, to hear people say figuratively and anthropomorphically "Chauta akunya madzi" meaning God is passing water. Here the implication is more on the fact that he is source of the rain than on the act of passing water.

(b) MULUNGU

According to Parrinder,⁵ the name Mulungu or Murungu is found among some twenty-five tribes in Eastern Africa. The word has presented scholars with many difficulties in trying to define or understand it etymologically. Rev. Cullen Young linked the name with the verbal root lunga meaning to join, to put together two separated things or broken pieces. From this, he derived the idea of "thoughtful concern". It is hard to see how the idea of thoughtful concern can arise out of the verbal root-lunga. This verbal root is not restricted to the Chewa language, it is the same root in Tumbuka, Nkhonde, Lambya and Sukwa. The possible Chewa nouns that could be derived from the root-lunga are Mulungitsi and Lungitso.

Alice Werner thinks that the name Mulungu means "the great one" derived from the Yao word Kulungwa which means big or elder. Therefore, God is the great one. Rev. Duff Macdonald was of the opinion that among the Yao, Mulungu was the sum total of the spirits.

Suggestions have been made that the name Mulungu may be linked with the sky. They deduce this from either the Bemba word Mulu which means sky

or heaven and also from the Chewa word Mlenga-lenga which means space. From these, Mulungu would mean the heavenly one or master of the skies. However, all this is not convincing and it is largely speculative.

The word Mulungu is further complicated by the fact that it is not restricted to the deity in its usage, but is also used for rain and the monitor lizard among the Sena.⁷ It is likely that the rain is called Mulungu as a manifestation of his benevolence and presence, but for the monitor lizard we can only speculate. Sacred pools were a major feature in Chewa religion especially in the Makewana and the M'bona cults, Monitor lizards usually inhabit near such pools. By associating the lizard with water, and being found near some sacred pools, it became a symbol or manifestation of deity. These further extensions of the word Mulungu can only be understood in the context of what the word Mulungu signified generally rather than specifically. Perhaps what Duff McDonald said about the Yao conception is nearer to what we are looking for and therefore a pervasive spirit that can take any form.

Schoffeleers, writing on the M'bona cult among the Amang'anja, says:

"The name Mulungu carries two distinct meanings around which cluster a number of secondary notions.

(1) It is the high God who is associated with the sky, rain, thunder and lightning.

(2) His main animal symbol a monitor lizard and his counterpart are also known by this name".⁸

Father Charles Nyamiti says that the name Mulungu may have been derived from Lungu meaning clan and therefore meaning warmth and hence life. It is not made clear by Nyamiti whether from such an explanation, the name implies corporate personality, ancestor or progenitor. He concludes by saying that the name suggests the concept of giving life.⁹

We may never know the true origin and meaning of the term Mulungu and its variants. Can it not be that it is defying definition because its etymology is lost in antiquity due to Bantu dispersal and the perforation

of the Bantu language? All that we can conclude in the light of what has been said is this that the word is a designation of deity. It is the term that has been used in the chichewa Bible.¹⁰ The Hebrew word being Elohim.

(c) MPHAMBE

This term is used of God, but it is derived from the name for thunder. According to Ntara, Mphambe can also mean a bird of prey of the vulture family. Usually, this bird swoops on its prey at a terrific speed. God is therefore called Mphambe because of the way he brings about death in a swift and stealthy manner.¹¹ Others are of the opinion that Mphambe is derived from "Mbamba" meaning lightning. Lightning and thunder are closely associated and therefore it would not be surprising if the word Mphambe is associated with both. However, applied to God the term carries the sense of terrifying power both from the sound of thunder and the speed of lightning.

(d) CHISUMPHI

The name Chisumphu refers to at least four things. Firstly it is used as a name of deity. It is a name that is often mentioned when people are asked about the names of God. Secondly, it refers to the prophet-priest who was in-charge of the Mankhamba Shrine dedicated to God. Thirdly, it refers to the rain as in this song which we have already referred to:-

"Wabwera chisumphu, Chauta wamutaya, Chauta wamutaya. Madzi angalowere Nyumba-"

(Chisumphu has come, God has thrown him away, lend me a hoe so that I dig a small canal in the verandah, God has thrown him away, lest the water enter the house).¹²

Fourthly, Chisumphu is conceived as a wind spirit with an earthly wife. He is a rain priest, a prophet and finally a Chief.¹³

As a supreme being he makes rain fall. He is surrounded by a council of headmen and all other spirits are subordinate to him. He has a wife.

Of all the names of God, this one is the most anthropomorphic and its varied meanings raise interesting questions. We have here the nearest that we can get of a description of a being who is both divine and human. Schoffeleers comments that "Chisumphi" is unique as a divine name in the sense that none of the others has this special range of meanings all expressing in one way or other the idea of male person, either a spirit or a living man, who exercise the function of Chief, prophet priest.¹⁴ It has already been seen that Makewana shared the name Chauta with God and in this case the prophet priest Chisumphi shares the name with God, only that he is male rather than female as could be expected among the Chewa.

The song we have quoted above raises interesting questions. A distinction is made between Chauta and Chisumphi and that Chisumphi arrives in the form of rain because Chauta has thrown him away or abandoned him. It seems that some conflict is assumed. What was the relationship between Chauta and Chisumphi? Why is Chisumphi abandoned? What is the significance of his arrival being associated with the coming of rain? If Chisumphi was man, how is it that his name was given to God? These are difficult questions to answer with the meagre information at our disposal from oral tradition. The conflict assumed may be a struggle for control between the Msinja Shrine and the Mankhamba Shrine, between the Proto-Chewa and the Chewa or the Maravi.

It seems that Chisumphi became a territorial spirit from being rain priest and slowly assumed the role of redeemer and mediator. Schoffeleers comments again on the significance of the name Chisumphi by saying that, "it provides a background to the understanding of individual mediators rising from the category of territorial spirits and adopting redeemer-like qualities."¹⁵

3.3. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

(e) LEZA

The word in its literal sense refers to lightning. In reference to

God, the word is used over a wide area. It is found among the Chewa, Tumbuka and Tonga in Malawi and the Bemba and Ila in Zambia. Etymologically, it is difficult to define the word precisely. Various derivations have been suggested and among them are the following:-

- (i) Ulezya (Ila-Tonga) which means he is coming.
- (ii) Lelezya (Tonga) which means show, direct or instruct.
- (iii) Mlezi (Chewa) which comes from the verb kulela.

While the third one might appear significant, however, it is difficult to see how the word Leza could be derived from it. There is another Chewa verb which has been suggested. This is the verb Kuleza meaning to be gentle or temperate. In this case Leza could be an imperative rather than a noun. For instance, "Leza mtima" would mean "be gentle". or be temperate, or hold your temper. Therefore, the word Leza comes rather from lightning. The Chewa have other more common words for lightning than Leza, for example, Chiphaliwali and Mphenzi. These are used more often and the word Leza is left for deity. It is often used in swearing when someone wants to underline the supposed truth of what he is saying. He will say ("Leza ndithu") which is the equivalent of Mulungudi meaning God is my witness. Generally speaking, even though the word Leza occurs among the Chewa names for God, it is not a word which is frequently heard. Its presence may be due to external influences especially from Zambia¹⁶ and the northern region where the word is used both for lightning and God. Like the names of Chauta and Mphambe, to the present writer, the name Leza was ascribed to deity because lightning was a manifestation of God. Possibly it showed his terribleness and power in the midst of his benevolences as giver of the rain.

3.3. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

From the foregoing discussion of the names of God, there, are certain names associated with certain phenomenon and from this a deduction is made

of what God was thought to be like. Each of these names, while remaining a designation for deity, contains in it certain attributes of God which are emphasized by the phenomenon they are associated with. For instance, the name Mphambe gives us the idea of something terrifying, powerful and dangerous.

The discussion of attributes exposes us to two charges. Firstly, that the term attributes comes from western theology and is a relic of Greek thought form². Secondly, that we are reading into African thought forms what is not there.

However, it is the writer's opinion that we are justified in using some of the categories if only they can serve to clarify what is being put forward. Categories and/or theological frames of reference are a matter of one's preference so long as they serve the purpose the scholar is involved in. In our case the category of attributes is a useful one. The second charge arises out of a lack of appreciating the difficulties associated with picturesque, symbolic and phenomenological language. Western theology has been shaped by the philosophical trends from Greek times to the present. Therefore, its thought form is presented in a particular way which goes along with the philosophical traditions. For the two traditions of thought form to speak meaningfully to each other, they must address each other in terms of the other. Western traditions must be explained in terms of Chewa traditional thought or expression for them to be meaningful and the same is true of Chewa traditional thought form.

There are particular words which properly describe attributes of God but which are used as names of God. These words are intrinsically adjectives which are used as nouns.

(a) NAMALENGA

This name comes from the verb "Kulenga which means to create. From this verb we also get the noun Mulenji (creator). The verb Kulenga

does not carry with it the idea of making out something from something else. The word kupanga is used for that, Man makes and God creates. It is never heard it said among the Chewa that someone has created something.

The prefix Na- connotes in some languages¹⁷ female characteristic, but it is also true that among the Loawe Na- is used also as a male prefix. It has been suggested that the Na- prefix may point to God's being conceived of as female. This is difficult to maintain. Names prefixed with Na- which refer to both sexes are common among the Chewa and the emphasis is on the action or quality associated with the person so called. For instance, Namayenda can refer to a person who travels a lot. Namadetsa, to one who dirties anything and everything she touches. While it is true that proper usage would refer to female person, they can be extended to male persons as well, but this extended use does not make male persons female. Therefore, the word Namalenga does not necessarily refer to a female deity even though the notion of femininity by virtue of prefix Na- is present.

Namalenga therefore, means the one who creates. God has brought into being all that exists. He is the only one known by this attribute. Associated with this attribute is the word Mlenga-lenga which means the sky or space. The word Namalenga would have the idea of the one who inhabits the sky if Mlenga-lenga is anything to go by. However, the primary meaning is creator.

(b) CHANJIRI

This is the name for a warthog. It was used of God in the area around Nyungwi in Mozambique according to Ntara.¹⁸ Possibly God was referred to as Chanjiri to convey the idea of power and terribleness. The warthog was the animal symbol that best represented this aspect of God.¹⁹

(c) MATSAKAMULA

The word comes from the verb kutsakamula meaning to bring down or to drop something from some height. The name was used in the context of rain. Matsakamula is the one who brings down the rain. It is very likely that this name was associated with the rainmaking ceremonies as a praise name. Nthara tells us that it is the name that was used in Dowa.

3.4. THE NATURE OF GOD

In discussing the nature of God, we are interested in looking at what the Chewa have thought God to be like in his being and character as they have experienced him. It might be necessary to use terms which are found in Christian systematic theology. As it has been stated earlier, terminology from Christian theology is used for the sake of logical clarity - (Not that the Chewa conception is not logical, but that it has not been systemitized.) We will therefore consider God's spirituality, personality, goodness and power.

(a) GOD'S SPIRITUALITY

In the questionnaire that was used in field research there was a question that read, "Did your ancestors think of Chauta as man or was he partly man and partly God?" The answers were varied. The following were some of the answers.

1. He is only God and not human (Hunthu).
 2. He is not a man.
 3. He is spirit (Mzimu).
 4. He is God and man and as man he is said to have been living at Msinja.
- Answer number one assumes a distinction between God and what is human. He belongs to his own class as God. He is distinct from man possibly in form. Here, the consideration of God as a deified ancestor is ruled out. Answer number three describes God as Mzimu (spirit). Mzimu is a form of existence

in which the form of the Mzimu may be invisible, but dynamically present. Answer number four links God with the Makewana who was the priestess of Msinja bearing the name of Chauta.

The unanimous opinion is that God is conceived by the Chewa as a Mzimu. It is this that distinguishes God from man (Munthu). Man has a visible body while God is only spirit. It is always said that man has a spirit which can assume its own existence while the body cannot. The spirit is the animating force. A distinction is maintained between God and the spirits of the dead people. Human spirits (mizimu) take a plural while God does not admit of plural form. He is not identified with the spirits of the dead. He is not one of them, but is distinct from them. His spirituality qualitatively surpasses that of the Azimu or Mizimu. He is a creative and dynamic spirit. The spirit of the dead are dependent on him.

(b) GOD'S PERSONALITY

The category of spirituality falls within the African traditional religion. This is how God is conceived, but the category of personality is assumed. Personality and humanity in Chichewa are expressed by the one word Munthu. Munthu is a person, a human being as opposed to Chinthu thing or beast. The noun unthu or unmunthu refers to being human. God is not munthu and we cannot speak of his personality as unthu wa chauta (the humanity of God) without running the danger of reducing him to the level of man. The term munthu which carries the idea of personality cannot be predicated of God in Chichewa, but this does not mean that God is impersonal; rather he is non-personal because he is God. The sentence (God is not a man or human being) 'Mulungu si munthu' is theologically acceptable but the sentence "Mulungu ndi munthu" (God is man or a human being) is theologically an inadequate description of God. This, however does not prevent

God being approached as one would approach another, but dignified human being. Talk about God employs anthropomorphic language and God is addressed as a human being. In prayers the Chewa address God as a personal being as in this prayer:-

"Inu Chauta mvula tipatsenilili,
Inu Leza mvula mutipatseeeee!
Inu Chisumphi tidalakwanjiyeeee!
Inu Namalenga tidyanji ifeeee!"

"(Oh, Chauta give us rain
Oh, Leza give us water
Oh, Chisumphi, what wrong did we do?
Oh, Namalenga, what are we going to eat?"²¹

Price acknowledges that Chauta is a personal God when he says:-

"Rainfall being directed by a power which alone among non-human powers speaks to mankind through prophets, is the only justification for regarding Mulungu a personal God".²²

God is not a personification of thunder, lightning, rain and rainbow, but rather the being behind these phenomena. In an agricultural society, like that of the Chewa, rain is so vital to life that everything associated with it is given a religious significance as a symbol for deity or a manifestation of the divine.

(c) GOD'S GOODNESS

The conception of God as sustainer of the universe and the practice of directing prayers to him through the ancestors leads us to the idea of "thoughtful concern". We came across this idea when we were discussing the possible origins of the word Mulungu. The idea implies that God is concerned with man and takes pity on him by supplying his needs often without his asking, but also as a response to his prayer.

The response to another question shows that it is generally thought that God is good. He takes pity on men and in their worship they ask God to have pity on them. God gives rain, but evil men can prevent its coming or even control it resulting into drought. God is pleased with proper

conduct and punishes misconduct. It is held that God likes all people equally and that it is God who is more concerned for man's well-being than the ancestors, who serve as his messengers. This last point was emphasized more by traditionalists than by Christians a possible pointer that the ancestors do not have the same place among Christians as they do among traditionalists.

The goodness of God in Chewa thought consists in this that he is the source of all good things. Even though he has the right and authority to back that right to deny men their sustenance, he is still inclined to give. When men cry to him he listens and answers their prayers. He is generous and generosity is an important aspect of goodness.

(d) THE POWER OF GOD

The manifestation of God in lightning and thunder is associated with his power. To the question, "If lightning strikes a man's house who has caused it and why?" The following answers were given. "God has caused it, may be because he (the man) was a sinner and that he did not offer sacrifices".²³ Here is a point where God is displeased with sin and is thought to punish the sinner because he did not appease him with sacrifices. "Chauta has caused this."²⁴ The third answer, "They believe it was God and sometimes they believe it was a man because of hatred among other reasons".²⁵ Here an allusion is made to the possibility of man influencing lightning to harm another man. "A witch sends the lightning because he hates the house-holder".²⁶ "Because of being hated by another who sends the lightning".²⁷ "The spirits of the dead get angry and send lightning".²⁸ "It is God to punish the owner because of sin".²⁹ "It is God to show his power".³⁰ "It is Leza to show his power".³¹

From these sample answers, it is clear that God is behind all the lightning that takes place and uses it as an instrument for inflicting punishment on the evil doer. It is a show of power. He is a terrible God.

It is apparent also that the phenomena of lightning is attributed to spirits and evil men. While God remains the source, some disgruntled spirits and evil men manipulate this power and use it to harm others. One often hears people say, "Anamupangila chiphaliwali" (they made lightning for him) when one has been struck by it. Unfortunately, this never occurs during the dry season, but only during the rainy season especially at the beginning.

The impression that one gets is that the Chewa did not think of God as causing evil or being evil at times. Epidemics are seen as punishment for the evil of men. To the question, why does God allow epidemics? The answer was that they express God's displeasure and they act as punishments. "He sends epidemics to punish people",³² one answered. "He uses epidemics to punish"³³ another one said, "To punish the people"³⁴ and "Because God is angry with the people".³⁵ On witches it was the view of many that God does not allow witches.³⁶

All interviewees were unanimous in declaring that God loves all the people equally and that he punishes people to correct evil in their lives and community. Punishment was for their good. Epidemics and drought were used to restore the moral integrity that ensured the continued goodwill of both God and the ancestors. The power the witches use was not given to them by God. There is nothing in Chewa thought comparable to an external evil principle found in the Bible called Satan, even though they acknowledge the presence and reality of evil. To the Chewa evil is in the human heart. They speak of Mtima wolipa, (an evil heart). Associated with an evil heart are evil thoughts which originate from the heart. Therefore to the Chewa, God was all good and concerned with the welfare of the whole community, providing them with all the vital means of living-rain and food. Whenever they cried to him, directly or through the ancestors, he heard them and answered them.

3.5. POLYTHEISM OR MONOTHEISM?

According to Ntara,³⁷ the various names of God that we have described were used in different areas. The most prevalent of the names were that of Mulungu and Chauta. These were used over a wide area. The name Mphamba was common in Chipata District of Zambia. That of Leza came from the people of Kasungu. The name Chisumphi was common in Mchinji District while Makewana was used at Mphobwe and around Msinja and Dzalanyama area. Choma was a name used around the lakeshore, around Lifuu. Matsakamula was common around the area of Ntchisi and Dowa, Mangadzi was a name that came from the Amang'anja. The designation of Mulungu was mostly used among the Yao and the Asenga.

Were these names of different Gods or of the one and same God? If they are of the one and same God, why so many among the same people?

From the interviews, it is clear that all these names stand for the one deity who created all things. What explanation is there then for the different names? It is suggested here that the different designations result from the way the particular group apprehended the mysterious presence. There is need, however, for a historical research into various peoples, for which we do not have the time to go into for the present study. It is further being suggested that some of these designations, for instance, Makewana, Mangadzi and Chisumphi, were names of religious functionaries associated at times with major cultic shrines e.g. Makewana at Msinja, Chisumphi at Makhamba. For Chisumphi, God became that spirit that manifested itself in the prophet Chisumphi. Chisumphi was a possession spirit and was a territorial wind spirit over the area where his influence reached. Chauta was not one of many. Only he is God and none else. He was not the first among many other subordinate Gods or Spirits. Therefore, the Chewa were not polytheists. In polytheism different deities have different functions and sometimes there is the highest of the deities

who is sovereign over all, as we find in many parts of West Africa.

Among the Yoruba, for instance, we have the supreme being called Ol 'odumare and below him are several divinities or spirits who are said to have been with Ol'odumare before the world was made. These include Oba'ta'la' who is the arch-divinity. This divinity is popular for giving children to barren women and making the devotees prosperous. Oru'nmi'la' is reputed as the source of knowledge and wisdom Odirduwa' associated with the creation of the earth and its inhabitants like Oba'ta'la'. There are other divinities besides these e.g. Esu and Ugun. After these we come to deified ancestors before we come to ancestors.³⁸

Such a hierarchy of divinities is not found in Chewa traditions. There is no evidence either that the Chewa believed in Chauta while acknowledging the existence of other deities. They acknowledge only one God who was known by all these designations.

3.6. IS CHAUTA A HIGH GOD?

Polytheism more often than not has in it the idea of a high God. Situations may occur where several divinities are acknowledged, but none is supreme. Do we find a high God in the Chewa belief? Firstly, let us consider the concept of the high God.³⁹ A high God is regarded as the supreme deity, that is, he is head of a pantheon or the greatest among other deities. He is connected with the sky; the heaven is his abode. He is conceived as the creator and sustainer of the universe while being free to delegate the recurring cycles of nature to lesser deities. He is somehow remote from the affairs of men and as a result he has no recognizable worship, cult or priesthood. In spite of his being remote, his attitude towards men is of goodwill. In times of need, prayer can be made to him directly.

The Chewa idea of God has a lot of these conceptions, but Chauta is conceived differently in some respects. Chauta is not one of many, but

the only one. He does not lead a pantheon as Zeus did or Olodumare does, neither has he subordinate divinities that share the rule with him. He is supreme not because he reigns over other divinities and the universe, but because he is directly responsible for existence of the whole universe. His abode is the sky. The Kafirintiwa creation myth speaks of God withdrawing to the sky after people had discovered the making of fire. By moving away, he made himself less approachable by men and yet in times of dire need, he can be approached directly by man. The study of the names for God showed that he manifests himself in and through impersonal objects and as such, he may be considered an impersonal force, but it has been shown that behind all phenomena is a personal being even though his personality transcends human personality, as spiritual existence transcends the physical existence.

On this understanding of the high God, Chauta cannot be called a high God, because he neither leads a pantheon nor is he the first among many other deities. He is the only one in his class of deity. Sometimes the sky motif is used in the concept of high God when the sun is associated with God's dwelling place. If a God is a high God because he is located in the sky and not on a mountain, or source of a big river, then the biblical God qualifies as a high God, but one wonders how many are willing to grant this. On our definition he would not be called a high God.

3.7. IS CHAUTA THE GREAT ANCESTOR?

In the glossary to Chichewa terms, Richard Gray Stuart defines the name Mulungu as "'God' the great ancestor".⁴⁰ Did the Chewa ever think of God as ancestor (Kholo = progenitor)? Would the term be justified theologically?

The word ancestor can be used of God only in analogical sense. Just as the ancestors are the progenitors in the same way God is the source

of everything. He brought everything into being. Analogically therefore God is the great ancestor. But to say that God was first an ancestor before being God or that God is a deified ancestor is not the same as what has been affirmed above.

There is a very clear distinction between mizimu or azimu and God. Even though they share a common existence as spiritual beings, the ancestral spirits are not deities. God is said to have created the world. The word used for creating is kulenga and this is only used of God and not of man. The word used for man's creativity is kupanga meaning to make. The word for procreation is kubala meaning to bear. God can create (kulenga) and make (kupanga) something out of something else, but he does not procreate (kubala). Man makes and procreates. The ancestors bore us, but did not create us. Ancestorship comes through the act of generation and not creation. It is therefore wrong to designate God as the great ancestor in this sense. It is true that people claim to be God's children. Often one hears, Tonsefe tili ana a Mulungu (we are all children of God), but this is in the analogical sense rather than in the generative sense. It is in this same sense that God would be referred to as father. The author knows no designation of deity which was originally applied to ancestors or which applies also to the ancestors.

3.8. IS CHAUTA A REMOTE GOD?

The idea of a remote God implies the opposite thought of a God near at hand. A remote God is that deity whose supremacy is acknowledged, but he is rarely involved, prayed to or sacrifices made to him so long as life is not threatened. He does not involve himself frequently in human affairs. At most, he seems to be indifferent to historical processes.

The Chewa concept of God seems to portray such a being. The only time or times when he is called upon is during a crisis. He is called upon directly or through the mediation of the ancestral spirits. It is

not because he is remote, but that he is not bothered with what man can take care of himself, but whenever the problem goes beyond human capability then they call for his aid and they believe that he will respond.

The creation myth also gives us a picture of a God who withdrew from the people and therefore lives separately from them. God's withdrawal resulted from man's carelessness in setting fire to his environment forcing both God and animals to withdraw to safety. He shows his concern by sending rain and providing plentiful food or by withholding rain and thus causing famine when he is displeased. He intervenes in human affairs even though he seems indifferent at times. He is not indifferent because he sustains the people, but they do not call upon him until their life is threatened.

The seeming remoteness of God can be viewed as his transcendence as against his immanence. On the social hierarchy he is above all that is and therefore less approachable and even when he is approached it is through intermediaries.

3.9. CONCLUSION

Even though the Chewa religion is not a religion of the book and has no systematic theology, it is possible to construct what the Chewa thought of God. He was known by several names, some of which were associated with natural phenomena. He is the creator of all things and at first lived with man, but later withdrew. He manifests himself through persons e.g. Makewana, Chisumphi and through thunder, lightning and the rainbow. He is awesome and terrible. He gives rain and food, but can withhold these when he is displeased with the behaviour of the people. He is a spiritual being who is addressed in personal terms. He is thought of as Good and all people are his children. He is the only one in his class and though apart from man he is concerned with man's well-being.

The word of His Excellency, the Life President of the Republic of Malawi will form a fitting conclusion to this chapter. He says:-

"We never use plural form of Mulungu at all, for the simple reason that we did not think there were more such beings than one -- none of my parents or grandparents used the plural form of Mulungu or Chauta. They always used the singular form. And they used the word many times within my hearing especially when we were about to begin eating the new crop of beans or maize or when there was drought in the country or when there was death or illness in the family. The fact that we used the plural of mizimu, but never of Mulungu, makes it plain that we never thought that spirits were gods, as some are inclined to think. The spirits of one's ancestors had to be prayed to, not because they were themselves deities, but as means of approaching the deity who was above everything else including the spirits themselves."⁴¹

Notes on Chapter Three

- ¹ Dr. J.M. Schoffeleers has made a substantial contribution to the study of Chewa history and religion in particular. His written works include the following: M'bona the guardian spirit of the Mang'anja B. Litt. thesis, Oxford 1966. Symbolic and social aspects of spirit worship among the Mang'anja, D. Phil. thesis Oxford, 1968. "The Nyau societies: Our present understanding" Society of Malawi Journal 29(1) 1976, pp.59-68.
- ² Chimombo, The Rainmaker Popular Publications, Limbe 1978 p.50. Since his play depended on Schoffeleers' research material, it is not surprising that he adopts his distinction between Chiuta and Chauta. God besides the expression we have given is not clear to this writer.
- ³ In the sentence "wona khope yake" meaning see his face, Chi- can be added to nkhope (face) to give it a pejorative sense e.g. "Wona chinkhope chake" meaning "See his ugly face". In Chichewa slang chi prefix can be used in a good sense e.g. "Ndi chimunthu kwambiri" (He is quite a man). Here it carries the sense of admiration.
- ⁴ C. Nyamiti, African Tradition and the Christian God, Gaba, Kenya, p.1. J.S. Mbiti Concepts of God in African New York, Praeger, Publishers, 1970.
- ⁵ E.G. Parrinder, African Traditional Religion. London 1962, p.35.
- ⁶ E.W. Smith African Idea of God, London, Edinburg House Press, 1950 p.58.
- ⁷ Schoffeleers Symbolic and Social Aspects of Spirit Worship Among the Mang'anja pp.183ff.
- ⁸ Schoffeleers M'bona the guardian Spirit of the Amang'anja
- ⁹ Nyamiti, *op. cit.*, p.1.
- ¹⁰ Buku Lopatulika, Bible Societies in Central Africa, 1974.
- ¹¹ This was told to me during a personal interview in April, 1977 at his home.
- ¹² African way of life club Bantu names for God, Kachebele Major Seminary, 1969. The English Translation is mine.
- ¹³ Cf. Schoffeleers Symbolic and social aspects of spirit-worship, p.192.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.192.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.193.

- 35 Bambo Mwase, T.A. Chadza.
- 36 Andreyo of Zeze Village, J. Nthuluka of T.A. Chadza and Mwase of T.A. Chadza.
- 37 Ntara Mbiri ya Achewa pp.58-59.
- 38 For information on West Africa, Yoruba Religion see J. Omosade Awolalu Yoruba beliefs and Sacrificial rites, Longman 1979 pp.10-12, 21-31.. Also E.B. Idowu Oludumare London 1962.
- 39 The characteristics are adopted from J.K. Parratt's discussion of the concept in the Ghana Bulletin of Theology "Olofin, another high God pattern. Parratt relies substantially inter alia, on E. Dannmann. Die Religionen Afrikas (1962).
- 40 R.G. Stuart Christianity and the Chewa Ph. D. thesis London University, 1974.
- 41 T.C. Young and H.K. Banda Our African Way of Life Lutterworth, 1946

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD AND MAN IN CHEWA THOUGHT

INTRODUCTION

Religion narrowly meant only acts of worship or sacrifice, then the Chewa religion could be described as a religion of crisis, but as it is the product of a culture that gives it meaning, stability and direction, it is not a religion of crisis. A religion of crisis would be the kind that operates in times of crisis—during drought, epidemics, floods, etc.

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In this chapter, we will explore what response the belief in God has produced among the Chewa, in other words, how they worship God and for what reasons; how they order their conduct; how they view evil and what is their attitude to death.

We have already sketched the theoretical relationship between God and man in chapter two. Here, we have seen how access to those of a higher status is by mediation of those who are socially near to them and that these two factors, mediation and social proximity partly explain the religious dynamics in the Chewa world-view. Let us now turn to some practical outworking of these religious beliefs paying particular attention to the belief in God.

4.2. GOD WHO DWELT WITH MEN

The Chewa acknowledge the existence of a greater God. From the designation of Nkhoswe, we saw a God who creates and is associated with

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4.2. GOD WHO DWELT WITH MEN

The Chewa acknowledge the existence of a creator God. From the designation of Namalenga, we saw a God who creates and is associated with

the sky. This God is in-charge of all things visible and invisible. The Chewa believe in certain things which are invisible, but very potent. The spirits are invisible, but are powerful. Witches can make themselves invisible, and their power can be quite effective. God is invisible but powerful and man is entirely dependent on him. Man, therefore, owes his existence to God.

We have already come across the creation myth and how according to the myth, the man and all animals together with God descended from the sky in a shower of rain to a place called Kapirintiwa. This place is located on the boundary between Central Malawi and the Tete district of Mozambique. God lived with the people happily in unity and fellowship until someone invented fire and started a bush fire. The smoke caused Chauta to withdraw into the sky and men and animals dispersed into different directions. Such myths that describe how God and man separated are found in many parts of Africa.¹ Upon withdrawing to the sky, God declared that man should die and after death should join him up in the sky.

From this creation myth, we can deduce a number of things about what the Chewa thought about the relationship between God and man. Firstly, the harmony between God on one hand and man and the animals on the other is striking. They all come down together in a shower and live together on earth. Secondly, it is man's action that causes God to withdraw. Thirdly, consequent to this, disunity, enmity and death become the order of the day. There were now domesticated and wild animals and enmity between man and the wild animals which were enraged by man's actions. God withdraws into the sky and decrees that man must follow him by dying. Some parallels could be drawn with the Genesis story in that man's action brings about disharmony to an otherwise harmonious relationship. In the Genesis story, however, God drives man out of the garden instead of withdrawing.

4.3. THE WORSHIP OF GOD

Worship can be defined as the acknowledgement of God's authority and power as sovereign ruler leading to an attitude of submission and dependence which manifests itself symbolically in some concrete way. The concretization of worship may take the form of singing, dance, sacrifice or all these in a complex liturgy. Liturgies as means of communications and communion with the divine in spiritual realities tend to be highly symbolic in nature. In defining symbol, Macquarrie says that it is anything which is presented to the mind as standing for something else. He continues to say, "In this broad sense, symbolism is all-pervasive of life".²

The Chewa worship was determined by the agricultural cycle of events and around major crises that occurred. It was determined by the agricultural cycle in that offerings and sacrifices were made when they sought for rain, after the new crops were ready for eating, and when going for hunting. Worship was a communal affair. The whole community participated in ceremonies for seeking rain and in ceremonies concerned with the new crops. Each person was supposed to observe all the laws attached to such ceremonies.

The ceremony to pray for rain or an epidemic to stop followed after this pattern.³ The village headman calls for a meeting of all the people in his village and expresses to them his concern about the drought or epidemic and how the very life of the community is being threatened. He suggests that the spirits and God have neglected them either because there is evil in the village or the spirits have been neglected. The village headman then summons all those present to get ready for a day when they would make sacrifices and libations. The people are asked to prepare flour, beer and to abstain from sexual relations.

On the appointed day, the village headman leads in the solemn procession to the grave yard accompanied either by an old woman who has passed

child bearing age or a young virgin who has not yet started menstruating. Usually there would be a shrine in the graveyard grove called Kachisi. It was a small thatched hut made of poles and daubed or covered with grass-- in it was placed a pot.

Upon approaching the graveyard, the village headman begs the attention of the spirits by saying "Odi", and announces to them that he and his people have come to visit them in order to seek help against the drought or epidemic. He says to them,

"Ife tabwera kuti mutipatse mvula chifukwa kudziko kuno kwauma, ife ana anu tingafe ndi njala."

(We have come that you may give us rain because the land is dry and we your children may die of hunger).

Then the old woman who usually is the village headman's sister or the young girl takes some beer and pours it in the pot and some flour is put on the ground. More words of pleading are uttered. In the case of a drought ritual dancing takes place as water is thrown into the air symbolizing the anticipated rain. It is said that more often than not rain fell even before they reached home.

In their prayer they called upon both God and the ancestor spirits to come to their aid. It was not always necessary to have a kachisi. Offerings could be made at the base of a tree or by a big pool, especially sacred pools. The offerings were primarily for the ancestral spirits. They symbolized communion as part of hospitality and the reciprocal relationship by which good relations and social well-being were maintained.⁴ The sacrifices and offerings were made to the ancestors primarily because they occupied a mediatorial role between the living and God. The worshippers summoned the spirits to speak on their behalf to Chauta. The spirits acted as spokesmen. Secondly, sacrifices, prayers and offerings were made to the ancestors because they were known by the living. The next morning after the ceremony they would come to see if the offerings had been accepted.

If they found the beer drunk, they concluded that the spirits had drunk it. Thirdly, the ancestors were called upon because they were thought to have achieved a new and higher status which was endowed with power with which they could do good or harm. Being thus feared, they had to be propitiated in order to maintain their goodwill. Fourthly, they were approached because they were thought to be nearer to God while the living were far from him.

From the fact that the ancestors occupy such a central place in the worship of the Chewa, as is the case in many African societies, it was thought that they worshipped the ancestors. This is not so. In the African societies elders are revered as the depository of knowledge, wisdom and custodians of mwambo. Therefore reverence for them does not end at death, but continues beyond the grave. Even in death they are consulted and relied upon.⁴

The way of worship reflected some aspects of the social structure. A young girl was used or an old woman who was past child-bearing age. This happened because ritual purity had to be observed. Women still having monthly periods or having sexual attachments were considered unsuitable because their ritual purity was in doubt. Sexual abstinence was enforced during the period just prior to the offering of the sacrifices otherwise mdulo (ritual death) would occur. There are a lot of rituals and taboos having to do with monthly periods and sexual relationships and these taboos extend to worship as well. It is further suggested that sexual abstinence was enforced as a sign of consecration, self-denial and humility. It was not time for play, but a solemn time for the whole community. It was believed that the violation of sexual rules could contribute to natural disasters and render the act of worship powerless.

The other social aspect which is found in worship is that of offering food and drink to the spirits. It is a noble Chewa custom and of many Bantu groups that one does not visit empty-handed. One usually carries

something for the person he goes to visit. These gifts are symbols of good-will and friendship. When visiting the ancestral spirits, gifts of food and drink are taken to them. It was commonly believed that the dead required food and drink from time to time and in turn they maintained their goodwill towards the community. These gifts of food and drink were meant to feed the spirits, but at the same time to placate their displeasure if they felt any. They were given as an expression of communion and friendship. Food and drink were also means of restoring broken relationships. It was common knowledge that the spirits did not physically eat the offerings, but rather accepted the essence of the act. Often the wild animals or those who had no sense of the sacred, helped themselves to the offerings at night. They believed the spirits accepted their offerings when they received what they were asking for e.g. rain.

4.4. CHEWA ETHICS

Religion cannot be separated from culture. We cannot remove the one without destroying the other. The two are interwoven in such a way that religion is to culture what the nervous system is to the body. Culture is based on religious beliefs which in turn are shaped by culture. The area in which these religious beliefs show clearly is that of ethics.

There is nothing among the Chewa like the ten commandments, but they are aware of wrong doing. This awareness of what is proper and improper comes from their traditions, the way they do things, called Mwambo. Mwambo may be defined as the "Socialization principles." Proper and improper conduct is judged by this and every child must be brought up according to this mwanbo. During initiation ceremonies, the major part is taken by teaching the mwanbo--such that to be grown up is to know the mwanbo as it is related to every situation. To be without mwanbo is to be less than human. The mwanbo is what the law of Moses (Torah) was to the Hebrews. Where the Decalogue starts, "And the Lord God spake all

these words and said ..." for the mwambo we would have to say, "For the ancestors spake all these words saying." It is referred to as Mwambo wa makolo athu (the traditions of our fathers). It is their mwambo to worship God, to give sacrifices to the ancestors, not to commit adultery, to impose a fine on an offender, to practice matrilineal marriages etc. This mwambo has been handed down to them from time immemorial and this gives the Chewa their identity, meaning to life and action and a sense of direction.

It is Chewa belief that improper conduct, which might mean going against certain prescription e.g. breaking a taboo or ignoring a ritual, can bring upon a whole community disastrous results. Many times drought, famine, epidemics are attributed to some evil within the community. The well being of a community depends on the members conforming to the mwambo. Therefore man's responsibility is to the traditions of the fathers of which the elders act as custodians. It is not to God that he is accountable, but to fellow man or the spirits of the ancestors. Just as in worship, in his conduct the Chewa is not immediately aware of God's demands. God may be involved indirectly by involving the ancestral spirits who act as messengers.

4.5. THE CHEWA AND EVIL

It has been stated that never at any time did the Chewa attribute evil to God. Evil was localized in man even though in the final analysis it affected man's relationship with God.

There are three words in Chichewa used to describe evil. The word Chimo from the verb kuchimwa means a wrong action, an action contrary to good order, conduct or ones well-being. It means to deviate from the right and normal course i.e. transgression. The second word choipa (plural zoipa) signifies something bad. It is an adjective describing a bad thing or person. The third word is cholakwa (zolakwa) and it means a mistake, but mistakes are not necessarily evil. Cholakwa, however, can carry with

it a sense of evil deed. Evil was seen as destructive and disruptive of society and they traced it to the human heart. A bad man is said to have an evil heart. Evil is not inherited according to the Chewa, but is generated from the heart by intention. There is some determinism when they speak of an evil heart as having been made that way. It is inclined towards evil. They say that is how God made him. Therefore either a man was born good or bad or he chooses to be one or the other.

Evil took various forms, and it includes sorcery (ufiti), disease (matenda), misfortunes (tsoka), malice (chiwembu) and insulting speech (kutukwana). All these originated with man and were directed against man and had nothing to do with God. Evil was feared more for its external effects than internal effects.

In order to fight these evils and evil men a number of methods are used. The first is the use of mankhwala (medicine) to cure the disease or to act as an antidote if witchcraft is suspected as the source of the illness. Some medicine was used as protective mechanism to give immunity against the attacks of the wizards. If a man wanted protective medicine, he went to a sing'anga who would give him a tiny ^{pill} cushion inside of which was put the medicine. Either it has to be tied to the body or carried in a pocket. This cushion is called chithunwa. Some sing'anga make slight cuts in certain parts of the body with a razor blade and rub in the medicine as the blood flows out. This protective medicine can be applied to a house or a garden. The word used for applying protective medicine is kusilika.

The second method is that of discovering who committed the evil by means of divinations (Ula) if he is not forthcoming.

The third method was trial by ordeal whereby the suspect was given a poisonous mixture. The belief was that the poison would not hurt the innocent while the guilty one would die. More often people died due to the potency of the mixture and not because they were guilty. The poisonous mixture was called mwabvi.⁵

The fourth method was to take the offender before judges where if found guilty a fine was imposed. Evils that were dealt with in this way were those of theft, adultery, responsibility for pregnancy, domestic animals destroying another person's goods. Payment of a fine settled the matter.

Now where does God come in all this? Practically God does not come in. For daily practical living man looks to himself and he does not involve God unnecessarily. Evil is done against fellow man even though it may affect the ancestors, but it is primarily against man and contrary to the mwambo. The ethical basis for the Chewa is more anthropocentric than theocentric.

4.6. CONCLUSION

In cosmic terms, God is related to man through creation and is believed to be the sustainer of the universe giving to man rain and food. While this is so, God is not in direct contact with man. In worship, God is mentioned along with the ancestral spirits and it is the latter who loom large. It is the ancestors who are concerned with the ethical issues in society and not God. They left the Mwambo to the living and they in turn must conform to it. God is left out and evil is seen in terms of man and not in terms of God. To the Chewa, man is not accountable to God, but to his fellowman and the ancestors. He has no future judgement to fear from God. He is left to himself.

Notes on Chapter Four

- ¹ See Ulli Beier, ed. The origins of life and death. Heinemann London 1966 p.1.
- ² Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, (study edition) SCM Press. London 1966 pp.161-173.
- ³ The pattern was given by informants. They all agreed on the broad outlines inspite of differences in details. The main features are reproduced by Gwengwe in "Kukula ndi Mwambo."
- ⁴ In discussing the place of the ancestors in the christian faith, Fashole'-Luke rejects the view that ancestors are worshipped. He says, "The basic axions of the christian faith is that worship should be offered to God alone; but throughout the history of the church they have been rituals and prayers offered to saints which sometimes come very close to worship, critics of the cult of saints and martyrs have often described these rituals as "Saint-worship", but their practitioners have replied that it is neither christian worship in a debased form, nor does it contradict the basic christian premise that God alone is worshipful." In New Testament christianity for Africa and the World SPCK. London 1974, p.211.
- ⁵ The Mwabvi ordeal was quite prevalent among the Chewa. Laws mentions it as a common practice in Reminiscence of Livingstonia. Sometimes the Mwabvi was cleverly administered. The administrator had advanced knowledge of who was suspected, gave an overdose to him and a weak mixture to others. The Mwabvi ordeal is no longer practised.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF GOD

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part is concerned with some methodological considerations as they impinge on the idea of God. The second part takes from the first and considers the idea of God according to the testimonies of the Old Testament. The third part takes up the idea of God in the New Testament and the final part tries to draw up a comprehensive picture of the God of the Bible. No pretension is made of being exhaustive in CHAPTER FIVE but an attempt is made to get a picture adequate enough to undertake a comparative exercise with the three ideas.

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF GOD

5.2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the major tasks in Old Testament studies is that of identifying the content of Old Testament theology. What was known as Old Testament theology is undergoing a crisis because it has been found out that fundamental issues which were thought to have been settled are not yet resolved. The issues concern the nature, function, method and shape of Old Testament theology. Here we will concern ourselves with the methods.

There is no agreement among Old Testament scholars on the major issue of the method that should be used in doing Old Testament theology. There are five methods, which are mutually not exclusive, available for the task. It is possible for a theologian to use more than one method if they complement each other in fulfilling his task. It is also true that the results of any theology depend on the presuppositions and methods employed. The issue of methods therefore is crucial to the task of Old Testament Theology.¹

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The following five methods are being used currently: The descriptive method, the confessional method, the cross-section method, the diachronic method and the New Biblical theology method.

(a) THE DESCRIPTIVE METHOD

By this method the theologian simply describes what the text says and what it meant within its historical context. He is not concerned with its message for today. Several scholars² of repute have opted for this method. They base their theological work squarely on the history of the O.T. religion. Since it is impossible to enter into the historical experience of Israel, the theologians can only describe that experience as recorded.

This method has been criticised as being narrow because it fails to recognize that the testimonies of the Old Testament point beyond themselves to a God who acts in history. It has been further criticized for seeking to separate what belongs together viz. what it meant in its historical context and what it means in the present for it to be even preserved. Mere historical considerations can never lead to the reality of Old Testament religion. There is much more to Old Testament theology than just describing what the text means. In other words, it would be an inadequate task of Old Testament theology just to describe events in their historical context. Old Testament theology should not restrict itself to what people have said and done, but rather what God has done in and through the history of a people.

(b) THE CONFESSIONAL METHOD

This method views the Old Testament from faith. What the Old Testament declares is a confession of faith in God who has acted in history. This method is based largely on Eissfeldt's³ sharp methodological distinctions between history of religion and Old Testament theology.

The former is a neutral discipline while the latter can only be approached from a stand point of faith. Vriezen⁴ sees Old Testament theology as a "christian theological science." G. Knight states that "a theology of the Old Testament is written with the express presupposition-- that the Old Testament is nothing less than the christian scripture."⁵ The question to be asked is, Is it necessary to separate the history of religion and biblical theology? Could the two not complement each other? We must be wary of extreme positions which polarize one element against another.

(c) THE CROSS-SECTION METHOD

The thrust of this method is to maintain the unity of the Old Testament while looking at the historical significance of each tradition. "The great systematic task consists of making a cross-section through the historical process, laying bare the inner structure of religion--"the aim of the theologian being to understand the realm of Old Testament beliefs in its structural unity and to illuminate its profoundest meaning", writes Eichrodt.⁶ He uses this method and has found that the thread that holds together the various traditions is the covenant concept.

The insistence on the systematizing of the Old Testament has come under some criticism. It is seen to be artificial since the Old Testament is less amenable to systematization than Eichrodt seems to suggest. The comprehensibility of the concept of covenant in relation to Old Testament traditions is also questionable. Systematization of the Old Testament theology may be a far cry from the traditio-historical assessment and yet a thematic consideration of its testimonies is bound to yield a fairly recognizable view of Old Testament beliefs as major features in construction of Old Testament theology. Indeed, the richness of the diversified nature of the biblical testimony requires an approach that is commensurate with the material it is dealing with. Single unifying concepts will not do. The traditions of the Old Testament show that revelation was

not seen as static, but as something developing towards a fulfilment in the Day of the Lord. Von Rad claims that to look at the Old Testament traditions alone is not enough. The question of promise and fulfilment must be taken seriously and beyond the literary confines of Old Testament into the New Testament before a truly Old Testament theology and Biblical theology can emerge. Confinement to Old Testament will only lead to a history of the religion of the Old Testament.⁷

(d) THE DIACHRONIC METHOD

This takes its cue from the chronological sequence of tradition. For this method, what gives theological significance to the biblical testimonies is the history in which faith acts. It is the historical experience which speaks or is recorded in the Bible. The greatest proponent of this method is Gerhard Von Rad. Von Rad says,

"The theological task proper to the Old Testament is not simply identical with the general religious one (religion of Israel) and it is much more restricted. The subject matter which concerns the theologian is Israel's own explicit assertions about Yahweh -- The Old Testament writings confine themselves to representing Yahweh's relationship to Israel and the world in one aspect only, namely as a continuing divine activity in history. This implies that in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history".⁸

Von Rad maintains that all that the theologian can do is to retell these testimonies and traditions. He is concerned neither with confession as such nor history as such but a combination of the two--salvation history -- its meaning and its goal. In an attempt to remain true to the Old Testament presentation of its content, Von Rad sticks to the retelling as the only legitimate way.

The problem with this method is with the idea of retelling. Baumgartel⁹ has asked how one can speak in a theologically legitimate way about Hosea 1-3 when one only retells what is stated there? He sees this

method and the emphasis on salvation history are too arbitrary. But that as it may, the idea of salvation history is a significant contribution to the study of Old Testament theology.

(e) NEW BIBLICAL THEOLOGY METHOD

This is the method which takes the whole Bible and then theologizes from its content. It seeks to free the Bible from its historical past and its message is made normative and not history. B.S. Childs¹⁰ is the leading proponent of this method. It is the entire scripture which is normative while he maintains that both the Old Testament and New Testament are descriptive and not normative. It is hard to see how history can be ignored and how both testaments can be descriptive and not normative while together as scriptures they be normative.

All the methods outlined above have their merits and demerits. The fact that many methods have been proposed is perhaps an argument against seeking a single method that will do justice to the varied testimonies to the Old Testament historical experience of God. To work out any complicated machinery, one requires an assortment of tools. Similarly, in dealing with the Old Testament which is a complicated task, an assortment of methods is necessary to deal with varied situations. We must know the whole machine in order to deal with the parts and to ensure the good order of the whole. Certain parts are less vital than the others and the machine can do without them, but it remains incomplete. Without the biblical concept of God the theological machinery is impaired greatly. It is this concept that we now turn to with all the methods at our disposal, but the tradition-historical method will be our major tool.

5.3. THE NAMES OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In many of the cultures of the world, names tell something about the character of their bearers. The Hebrews, like the Chewa, were no exception.

Davidson has said,

"among the Hebrews the name was never a mere sign whereby one person could be distinguished from another. It always remained descriptive; it expressed the meaning of the person or thing designated."¹¹

Von Rad writes,

"According to ancient ideas, a name was not just 'noise and smoke,' instead, there was a close and essential relationship between it and the subject. The subject is in the name, and on that account the name carries with it a statement about the nature of its subjects or at least the power appertaining to it, for the cultic life of the ancient East this idea was of quite fundamental importance."¹²

The names designating of deity also followed this practice. They expressed some revelation of his being and character or at least what the people conceived it to be.

(a) EL

The name EL or the plural Elohim may have been derived from a word or words whose root means "to be strong or powerful or someone with a binding force." When applied to God, it depicted him as a mighty leader or governor. It stressed the distance between him and man. God was seen as standing behind nature as the binding and sustaining force, but he was not identified with nature. Even though the name stressed the distance, it did not mean that God was like an absentee landlord. Eichrodt says,

"The semitic use of EL demonstrates a strong link between the divine activity and the social life of the community. Such names¹³ as "God is merciful", "God is judge", "God helps" are extraordinarily frequent and show that we are dealing not merely with a spiritual being of little positive account, but with a deity who draws into the sphere of his concerns the moral and social needs of a people or tribe."¹⁴

The distinctive feature in the conception of Elohim is his exaltedness.

This is also borne out by the Elohist theology.¹⁵

The following designation is an attribute which confirms what has

has been said about Elohim. El Elyon means "God most High".¹⁶ It carries the connotation of God who is over and above all gods and which with the passage of time came to stand for the transcendence and omnipotence of God. It makes explicit what is implicit in the name El. God is conceived as sublime and omnipotent in every way such that nothing could be conceived as over and above him.

A further attribute which further undergirds the name El is that of "El Olam" meaning "the God of ancient days or God of eternity". In either case the name signifies the permanence of God who is exalted over the changes and chances of time. This attribute distinguishes the Hebrew God from other rising-dying nature deities who were captive to the cycles of nature. The Psalmist echoed this thought when he said "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God".¹⁷

(b) YAHWEH

This name is still surrounded by controversy over its root and meaning and therefore its theological significance is not clear. However, it is generally agreed that the word Yahweh is a personal name of the God of Israel. This is the name whose meaning is implicitly given in what Moses was told, "I am that I am".¹⁸ Four possible meanings of this divine name have been suggested.

(a) That the original meaning of the root letters is to fall or to blow.

Therefore, God would be he who causes (lightning) to fall or the wind to blow. Even though God is associated with natural phenomena in the Old Testament and is conceived as Lord over nature, he is not as a nature God. This explanation is not convincing according to the context in which the name occurs.

(b) The second suggestion is that the name has to do with God as creator.

It means "he who causes to be". God is the source of all that is not by means of emanation, but actively bringing them to be.

(c) It has been suggested that the name is linked to God's eternity meaning "He who will be." The living God who will guide history and who will reveal himself to his people continuously in their ever changing experience.

(d) Some hold to the view that the name arose out of an exclamation used in the cult. This suggestion may serve the speculative spirit better than the meaning or origin of a name of the God of Israel.

Both Eichrodt and Von Rad agree that the name is not primarily concerned with the idea of existence or absolute being in the metaphysical sense, but rather with the revelation and declaration of the divine will. This does not mean that concern with being is absent; only that it is not primary. Von Rad places emphasis on the implied promise or assurance of God's presence. He takes it that God is declaring, "I will be present on your behalf, I will be with you in the way that you will learn".¹⁹ It may be asked, Is the promise not based on God's own ontological nature which is implicit in the 'I am'? The second and third points of view need not be mutually exclusive. They are actually complementary, giving the meaning "He who is" referring both to his being and presence.²⁰

From what has been said as far as the names of God go, we can begin to build a picture of how the Israelites conceived of God. For them, it does not matter whether the tradition belonged to a group or to all or has been assimilated from other nationalities, God was seen as a mighty leader or governor who, though far above man, was interested in the community of man. He was further conceived of as being separate from what he has created and that he was not limited or controlled by time or cycles of nature. He was over nature. In the mosaic religion, God revealed himself as one who was always present and active among his people and that he is absolutely trustworthy.

5.4. THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD IN OLD TESTAMENT

We now move on to the descriptions of God. These amplify what the names tell us. They tell us more about how God was conceived in their practical living situation.

The first description is that of God as king.²¹ The consideration of the historical development in the application of this title to Yahweh is peripheral to our line of study. Here we are concerned with the meaning and its significance to our understanding of the biblical idea of God. The title "king" was given to Yahweh in recognition of Yahweh's dominion of the world by creating and maintaining it. This is a key concept in bringing together the idea of creation and preservation under a common concept. It has been argued that this description of God only applied to him after the introduction of kingship in Israel. There is evidence²² that this suggestion is not true. It may be true that the title king came from Canaanite religion and that it was not popular in the earlier literature because it was foreign and that with the introduction of kingship in Israel the title came into favour. It was Deutero-Isaiah who rehabilitated the word king as applied to Yahweh.²³ Yahweh proves himself king of Israel in that by liberating his own people, he also affects salvation for all the nations.²⁴ God was considered king over the whole world and this led to the thought of the kingdom of Yahweh subsisting from the beginning of time and already established at the creation.²⁵

Often times God was referred to as Baal. This was a common term in Canaanite religion and was applied to any conceivable deity. The term meant owner or master. The devotees saw themselves as possessed by the deity. When it was assimilated by Israel and applied to Yahweh, it meant that Yahweh was the possessor of heaven and earth because he was creator. Even though he was recognized as master over all the people and that he owned them, this understanding was greatly enhanced by the covenant relationship.

Adon was another important and common title and designation for Yahweh. The word Adon meant Lord. It refers to a master or person in his capacity as ruler. It combines the meaning of the titles kings and baal. Yahweh was conceived as ruler of the whole earth. As the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan, Joshua said, "Behold, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is to pass over before you into Jordan".²⁷ Yahweh rules the whole earth and his word is law.

These descriptions of Yahweh have further helped to clarify the Israelite conception of God. Yahweh was not (and is not) a tribal king but king of the whole earth. His rule and power are manifested in his creation and maintenance of the whole universe. He owns and directs its operations.²⁸ Only his will which is sovereign, being Lord of the earth, has any consequence. The implications of this theological conception of Yahweh are far reaching for any people or religion.

5.5. THE NATURE OF GOD IN OLD TESTAMENT

Apart from referring to divine presence and creativity, the name Yahweh speaks of his personality and identity. Before the burning bush, Yahweh defined himself in personal terms, but in so doing, he also identified^{and distinguished} himself from every so-called deity. Furthermore, he entered into a personal relationship with the Israelites through the establishment of the covenant which took place in the same area where the revelation of the divine name took place. Eichrodt writes;

"The divine being in connection with a covenant must acquire an explicitly personal character. By the act of giving himself a name, God chooses to be the definable, the distinctive and the individual."²⁹

The personality of God is one of the three characteristics of God's nature, the other two are his spirituality and oneness. By the term "nature of God", we refer to the being of God as revealed to us. (It must be admitted that what can be known is what is revealed).³⁰

In asserting the personal character of God, we reject both the intellectualistic (rational) and mystical understanding of God. By intellectualistic is meant the treatment of God as a mere idea or a mere proposition. Against this idea Blaise Pascal once said,

"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is not the God of philosophers".

The mystical understanding of God is the view where the devotee aims to be swallowed up into God. The God of Israel is not a God of philosophical speculations nor is he a diffused spiritual reality. He was God with a personality, a character of his own which becomes the standard for his people to emulate. To the worshippers of Yahweh, the divine name constituted a guarantee of Yahweh's presence and that in it they encountered him in person and experienced his active involvement in their lives and history.

Now the concept of God's personality, while avoiding the danger of regarding God as an impersonal, brute, mechanical force, lays itself to the danger of reducing God to the human level, but upon closer examination, the danger is a superficial one. The anthropomorphism of the Bible attests to the personality of God. The danger arises out of two misunderstandings. Firstly, there is a failure to realise that human personality is derived from God by virtue of the fact that man is made in God's image and not vice versa. Secondly, by failure to appreciate the literal value of anthropomorphic expressions.

Edmond Jacob has said,

"From a literary point of view, faith in the living God attained its best expression in anthropomorphic language".³¹

In Israel steps were taken to place limits on anthropomorphism as Jacob further writes,

"Finally, a last limit to anthropomorphism and one which clearly shows that anthropomorphism was unsuitable for expressing the divine personality in

its fullness, is the prohibition of making a visual representation of Yahweh".³²

Since it is human tendency to be naive and superficial in matters of faith, it was a real danger. Man is satisfied with nothing less than touching, possessing and controlling even God himself. Within limits, anthropomorphism serves to express the personality of God. As a living God, he is the source of all life and has determined the mode of existence for his creatures, but is himself without limits. He is a free creative personality while man is not.³³

The development of Israelite religious beliefs reached its end in the affirmation of the "Unity and uniqueness of Yahweh".³⁴ The unity of God is emphasized in the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-7, "Hear O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD...". This unity of Yahwism was greatly imperilled by a multiplicity of cultic centres. As a result the Deuteronomist insisted on one cultic centre, that is, Jerusalem, in order to avoid Yahweh being reduced to several gods and that worship be centralised and made uniform. Now his unity indicates that Yahweh is not divided and his uniqueness means that Yahweh alone is God. Just as his unity was endangered by a multiplicity of centres, his uniqueness was asserted against the influence of baalism of the canaanite religion.

The recognition of Yahweh as unique did not at first exclude the thought that there were other gods. For a long time Yahweh was acknowledged beside other deities. Baal worship became a formidable force in Israel at one time to the extent of forcing a duel between Yahweh and Baal.³⁵

Elijah fought for the uniqueness of Yahweh which was demonstrated by his sending fire that burnt a wet sacrifice. Yahweh alone had to be worshipped and the prophets who led the people astray were put to death in accordance with the Deuteronomist traditions.³⁶

By declaring the unity and uniqueness of Yahweh, the Deuteronomist

aimed at avoiding all possibilities of differences within Yahwism and dis-
session in religious life. For him,

"It was not only necessary to abandon the worship of pagan gods, but also the worship of Yahweh in various places with distinct cultic forms of their own and apparently distinct conceptions of God. There was only one way to speak of God and to serve him. There was no pluriformity of faith, confession or cult--In the struggle against Baalism, things had to come to such a pass, that in order to maintain the unity of faith, all the ancient holy places were rejected even if it was Yahweh who was worshipped there".³⁷

Deutero-Isaiah takes to task all so called gods and challenges them to demonstrate that they are indeed gods by either predicting the future,³⁸ or by doing good or harm.³⁹ By declaring Yahweh as creator of heaven and earth and everything found in them, Isaiah summarily banishes these gods completely out of the universe and Yahweh is left to say, "I the LORD, the first with the last; I am He".⁴⁰ Here the doctrine of God attains its highest development. It is no longer Yahweh beside other gods, but Yahweh alone. With Deutero-Isaiah the existence of all pagan gods is denied and the concept of Yahweh is universalized. One cannot escape the impression, reading the traditions of Israel, that for the Israelite, by virtue of the covenant with Yahweh, his loyalty was to Yahweh alone. The decalogue starts from this point.

"And God spoke all these words, saying, ... I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me".⁴¹

To this affirmation and fact, the prophets called the people of Israel. To Deutero-Isaiah pagan worship was irrational, foolish, and empty ritual and an abomination because Yahweh alone must be acknowledged by all nations.

Finally, let us turn to the spirituality of God. It has been noted that within limits anthropomorphic usages can be pointers to the personality of God. E. Jacob says that respect for divine transcendence led to the

substituting of intermediaries. This means that God was too sublime to be represented as man communicating with man. Anthropomorphism was not the best way of speaking about God. He further says that from the beginning, Israel was aware that God was only partially the image of man and even this because man was in the image of God.⁴² By declaring that God is spirit,⁴³ negatively, it means that God is not a material body to be seen and touched, and positively, that he is the source of all spiritual realities. He is the living and creative spirit. The assertion that God is spirit and the contrast between flesh and spirit are meant to protect the nature of God against approximating it too closely to the human.⁴⁴ This has been made apparent in our consideration of God as a personal being. We noted the strong tendency towards anthropomorphism and anthropopathism. Spirit and flesh are made distinct categories to draw out a qualitative difference between God and man. Spirit refers to the inexhaustible power of the divine life, in which all of life takes its origin. Flesh is the life of the earth which is essentially transitory and like everything earthly and created, it exhibits no principle of life in itself. It should be mentioned here that even though the thought of God as spirit is not very explicit in the Old Testament, it is implied and assumed.

5.6. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Apart from the main features of God's essential nature, we find in the Old Testament his attributes. These are the main features of God's character. They are recognized within God's personal dealings with man in the daily business of living and they complete our picture of the Hebrew conception of God.

(a) THE ALL-POWERFUL GOD (EL SHADDAI)⁴⁵

By this attribute God is recognized and presented as an invincible warrior hero who fights on behalf of his people. He is God almighty. He

is also known as the "Lord of hosts"⁴⁶ or master of the heavenly armies or forces". A God who has all things at his command. While such a conception of God induces fear, it provides at the same time the greatest security to those who know him and trust him. Yahweh was seen to be powerful and highly exalted, terrible in his activity and doer of wonders.⁴⁷ Yahweh's power is not an irrational brute force, but rather a living operation of a self, and personal will purposively directed.

(b) THE LOVING GOD

The Hebrews had a number of words for love, but commonest were Chesed and Ahabah. Snaith⁴⁸ distinguishes the two by saying that Chesed is conditional upon there being a covenant while on the other hand, Ahabah is unconditioned love. Both these terms are applicable to God. The prophet Hosea gives us a vivid picture of God's Chesed through his own marriage relationship with Gomer. Because of his own attitude to his wayward wife, he came to know that the Chesed of God meant God's steadfast determination to be true to his share of the covenant obligation no matter whatever Israel did on her part. The other prophets⁴⁹ bear witness to this love of God. The love of God is not limited by the covenant but is unconditioned sovereign love. In spite of Israel's rebellion, God still loves her and has chosen her for no reason at all on Israel's part.

The power of God is directed by love. Love is, therefore, the earnest and anxious desire for and an active and beneficent interest in, the well-being of the one loved. God's basic attitude to man is one of love even when he judges and punishes. It is this love which is the basis of the covenant relationship. The idea of a loving God comes out also in passages where God is described as "Father",⁵¹ "Husband",⁵² "Shepherd".⁵³ God's love is seen uniquely in relation to sin because sin is a direct affront to God's majesty and authority. It is only a loving God who would seek to forgive a rebellious people in spite of being God almighty.

The major characteristics of this love of God are:

- (i) It is a personal love, it issues from the very being of God; it is part of his personality. In Hosea 11:9, the Old Testament comes very near to saying God is love.
- (ii) It is voluntary. As we have already seen, it is unconditioned.
- (iii) It is spontaneous; it is not caused by any worth or attractiveness in its object, but rather creates worth in objects.

(c) THE RIGHTEOUS GOD

The third attribute is that of Yahweh's righteousness. The Hebrew words for righteousness are tsedeq (masculine form) and tsedeqah (feminine form). These words may have developed from a verbal root meaning "to be straight". Snaith tells us that,

"the word thus very easily comes to be used as a figure for that which is, or ought to be, firmly established, successful and enduring in human affairs. It stands for that norm in the affairs of the world to which men and things should conform and by which they can be measured".⁵⁴

Therefore applied to God, Tsedeq signifies that standard which God maintains in this world. It is the norm by which all must be judged. Righteousness is what God wills because such is his nature. It is not a reality independent of God, but he is the reality of righteousness. The word righteousness is not only ethical in its usage, but also soteriological. The thrust of God's righteous will was the banishment of evil and the salvation of men. Wickedness is the opposite term for tsedeq. The righteousness of God shows itself in His saving work. He vindicates the poor, the orphan, the widow by establishing them firmly in their rights. God has regard for what is right. He is righteous in his character and activity. His righteousness is the source of all proper ordering of both nature and human societies. He is consistent in himself and in what he does. God does not contradict

himself either in his purpose or action.

(d) THE HOLY GOD⁵⁵

Yahweh is a holy God. The Hebrew word used for holiness is Qodesh. The usage of this word has undergone progressive development. The word qodesh has intrinsically the idea of separation. Applied to God, it means that he is unique and apart from man and what belongs to man. Originally, the word qodesh may not have had moral connotations. Snaith, while accepting the premise that the idea of qodesh was non-moral, says that it had no moral content in our developed sense of the word moral, but that it involved pre-ethical restrictions, as undeveloped in content as itself.⁵⁶ Rankin⁵⁷ agrees with Snaith when he says that the root significance of qodesh and its Aramaic equivalent is that which is separate and this in a religious sense the word implied that which, being associated with a deity, was cut off from all profane contact or use. In the Old Testament holiness is designated of places, of things, seasons and official persons, in virtue of their connection with the worship of God, but in its primary sense the word holiness is applied to God. It refers to the absolute transcendence of God's being over and against every being. By extension, his very nature and character are marked by holiness and hence the later moral connotation which came to be associated with the term. Finlayson says,

"But as the conception of holiness advanced alongside the progressive revelation of God, from the outside to the inside, from ceremonial to reality, so it took on a strong ethical significance".⁵⁸

Yahweh is a holy God. He is unique and transcendent in every way. The word also conveys the idea of a brilliant dazzling light, hence God's awesomeness and unapproachableness.

(e) A GOD OF WRATH⁵⁹

Wrath refers to God's displeasure and there is nothing evil about it.

It is expressed against any disobedience and offence to the divine majesty and sovereign authority through lack of trust or through wilful rebellion. It comes as a terrible punishment. God's wrath is not a loss of temper on his part or deliberate aggression, but his righteousness dealing with what is wrong. His wrath operates where his loving kindness has been disregarded. It is the conclusion of his righteousness against what is wrong. God's wrath and grace are two sides of the same coin each is understood only in terms of the other. Obedience leads to mercy while disobedience leads to wrath.⁶⁰ God is not non-moral. The idea of wrath speaks of his active displeasure in the face of immorality. It has been suggested that wrath in God is an incidental element in his character. This view fails to appreciate the seriousness of sin in relation to God. To say that it is an incidental element in his character is to assume that evil is incidental and not serious and yet it is a challenge to his majesty and nature as God.

This list of attributes is not exhaustive, but forms part of the major features in our picture of God in the Old Testament. Here we see a God who is sovereign, mighty, loving, holy, righteous and wrathful. He owns the universe and governs it according to his own will. His rule is a just and an everlasting rule. He commits himself to man in a personal and perpetual way for man's well being.

5.7. GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As in the Old Testament, the New Testament takes the existence of God for granted as a universal basis of all life and existence. The New Testament presupposes and fulfills the Old Testament both in its message generally and in the idea and activity of God in particular. That is, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God of the Christians.

It is necessary here to consider briefly the problem of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Differing positions

have been adopted. For instance, some scholars have opted for a complete separation between the two, while others have viewed the Old Testament as mere history and of no theological significance. Still others have rejected the New Testament as not scripture. There are other scholars who have linked the two, but are not agreed on what links the two sections of the Bible.⁶¹ One strand of thought may not be an adequate linkage to hold together firmly such diverse literature. We would go along with Hazel when he says,

"The complex nature of interrelationship between the testaments requires a multiple approach. No single category, concept, or scheme can be expected to exhaust the varieties of interrelationships".⁶²

Among the patterns of historical and theological relationships between the Testaments that he singles out is the following:

"the continuous history of God's people and the picture of God's dealing with mankind".

This will be our cue in dealing with God in the New Testament. We will now proceed to look at some key concepts associated with the concept of God.

(a) THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the teaching of Jesus, the central idea of the doctrine of God is that of the Kingdom of God (Heb, *malekut shamayim*) (Greek, *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*). The term Kingdom of God (heaven) came into prominent use during the intertestamental period. It originated with the late Jewish expectation of the future in which it denoted the decisive intervention of God, ardently expected by Israel, to restore His people's fortunes and liberate them from their enemies.

The meaning of this term "Kingdom of God", is the sovereign rulership of God. God's kingdom is not a place, but God's reign itself. Alan Richardson says that the Term "*Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*" should be "the reign of God" rather than kingdom.⁶³ This sovereign rule of God is realised wherever and whenever God's will is obeyed.

According to the teaching of Jesus, the kingdom of God has come in Him. It is no longer around the corner, but it is here. It is characterized by:

- (i) a call to repentance and the announcement of judgement,⁶⁴ but it is the saving significance of the kingdom which stands in the foreground;
- (ii) the actuality of the kingdom which is manifested in the casting out of demons, healing miracles, the gospel being preached to the poor and forgiveness of sin confirmed;⁶⁵
- (iii) that Jesus is the Christ of God. Therefore the long awaited messiah had finally come to inaugurate the kingdom. The kingdom was concentrated in him in its present and future aspects alike.

The inauguration of the kingdom is the beginning of the establishment of that kingdom. It signifies the sowing of the seed which must grow until harvest time--⁶⁷ while the Messiah himself undergoes humiliation and suffering before he is exalted and returns finally to take complete control. It should be remembered that the Messiah is God's agent and in him God's reign is personalized.

Now, what does all this tell us about God? God is the king of the kingdom who rules in a sovereign way. His rule is not a political one, but rather a spiritual one which operates in people's hearts. This is the essential truth of a legitimate rule. It must be established by a people's voluntary consent to be governed because it is in their best interest--the salvation of their lives. He is a God who calls people to repent and offers them liberty from the oppression of sin and demonic forces.⁶⁸ He is a God who forgives and who dwells among his people and helps them out of their predicament. He gives opportunity to the people to heed the gospel before he brings them into judgement.⁶⁹ Therefore, he is a God who

is both saviour and judge.⁷⁰

(b) GOD AS ABBA

By calling God "Abba", Jesus introduced a very new feature in the New Testament conception of God. The reverential use of the general term "Father" in Judaism is attested even in Old Testament where God is referred to as father of Israel; but the personal usage of the term "my father" is not seen. In prayer, that act of close communion, Jesus addressed God as Abba (my father). Kümmel says that this was very extraordinary and that therefore, one can recognize Jesus' conceptions of God when one observes how Jesus spoke of God, the Father. Kümmel further says,

"Jesus rather made a word of children's language, which had become the familiar form of address for a father generally, into the designation of God, and thereby made it clear, even in the form of his language, that he did not want to speak of God with a traditional designation, but wanted to preach with specific urgency that God seeks to encounter man with fatherly love".⁷¹

Further to this, Jeremias⁷² says that the significance of this designation is that it expresses the heart of Jesus' relationship to God. This provides a model for all believers. God is not to be feared by his children, but only the rebellious should fear him because he has power to cast into Gehenna.⁷³

God is a father who acts not only in the present, but will also act in future. The fatherly saving activity in the future was proclaimed as the forgiveness of sin which was also a present reality. God is a father who is ready to forgive and justify whoever admits his sinfulness.

Conzelmann⁷⁴ differs in his understanding of Jesus' use of the address "Abba". He denies that this was a distinctive idea in Jesus' relationship to God. He maintains that Jesus did not keep it to himself as an expression of the unique relationship, but rather that it is the community which coloured the word with such connotations. In spite of

Conzelmann's reservations, Jesus' use of the term as indicative of a unique relationship, one cannot fail to appreciate the personal touch in passages as these:

"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father, who is in heaven; but who ever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." Matt. 10:32, 33.

"You are the ones who have continued with me in my trials and I assign you, as my father assigned to me, a kingdom..." Lk. 22:28, 29.

"Blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" - Matt 16:7.

"... All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him". Matt. 11:27

Conzelmann, true to Bultmannian tradition says that it is the community which brought about the distinction of "my Father" and "your Father" and it cannot be attributed to Jesus.⁷⁵ While the community may have made the distinction, they did so because it was a necessary one. They maintained the uniqueness of Jesus' relationship to God in contradistinction to that of the disciples and God. Barrett says,

"Jesus distinguishes between himself and his relation to God, and his disciples and their relation to God. To each, God is "God and Father"; he calls them his brothers; yet he is God's Son eternally; they are God's children through him".⁷⁶

This emphasis on the unique relationship goes back to Jesus. The God who was his Father had now become their (disciples) Father as well. God becomes intimately personal. Jesus came to teach about a personal God known and served through a personal faith. This personal dimension was new in a place where God's personal name was being revered and substituted.

The Fatherhood of God is tied to the inbreaking rule of God which is a fatherly rule and the manifested sovereignty of grace or of God's universal fatherhood,⁷⁷ in the sense that every man by virtue of being created

is a child of God, but spoke of God as his own Father and taught that others might become his sons.

The concept of God as Father is not limited to the New Testament, but is latent in the Old Testament. The emphasis here is on God as Father of a nation, but not withstanding the thought in which he is father of individuals. For instance, in the following passages, God is likened to a father:

"As the father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him".⁷⁸

"For thou art our Father...".⁷⁹

It is only in the New Testament that this idea has been fully exploited.

(c) GOD IS JUDGE

As we discussed the idea of the kingdom of God, we touched on the sovereign rule of God. In other words, God is king where he rules sovereignly. The word king translates the Hebrew Melek and the Greek basileus. In classical Greek basileus denotes the legal hereditary ruler, guiding the life of the people by his justice. Later is found the idea of the king as benefactor whose will is law and this leads up to the idea of divine-king. Kingship in the New Testament has been influenced more by Old Testament conception than by Greek thought. Kingship in Judah, although it became hereditary, was based on the Davidic covenant and derived from God who is King par excellence. The king was supposed to rule in righteousness and justice mostly because God demanded it to be so. It is in the dispensing of justice that a king becomes a judge. The title of judge is attributed to God in the context of the salvation which Christ introduces. Through Christ, God is to judge the world for its wickedness. The Son of God has come into the world to offer men salvation by asking them to turn away from their sin and to believe the gospel. Those who snub at this offer are brought to judgement and condemned.⁸⁰

The judgement of God is related to the concept of the kingdom of God in that it has a present aspect as well as a future aspect. The present aspect is that what men do makes them liable to God's judgement in the future. The establishment of the kingdom of God will culminate in a universal judgement by which those who believed and remained faithful will enter into eternal life and the rest into eternal damnation.⁸¹

Apart from these major aspects of the concept of God in the New Testament, the attributes that we find in the Old Testament are also ascribed to God in the New Testament.

(i) God is love.⁸² Love is the invincible goodwill and this is the attitude that God has towards all men. This love is his nature and he has shown it in giving Jesus to redeem mankind in spite of man's rebellion.

(ii) God is holy. Holiness in the New Testament means being separate from all that is common and being of moral excellence. Holiness refers to the transcendence of God. In his high priestly prayer Jesus refers to God as "Holy Father".⁸³ and the followers of Jesus are commanded to be Holy.

(iii) God is righteous. St. Paul is the one who uses this attribute most. It has three senses. First, the sense of ethical conduct demanded by the Mosaic law. Second, of salvation which is a gift of God through Christ and third, of that ethical conduct which is demanded of Christians.⁸⁴ All these three are a result of God's own righteousness which is his love, truth and justice in operation. This is what St. Paul refers to when he says,

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe".⁸⁵

(iv) God's sovereignty. The gospels are firm on sovereign rule of God in individual hearts and over all that he has created. The Bible is written revealing that God in Christ has united all things in heaven and on earth.⁸⁶ As sovereign Lord, he acts in mercy and wrath.⁸⁷ He has the last word.

The idea of wrath may be repulsive to be predicated of God and attempts have been made to disassociate the action from the doers by words like effect and affect. It is maintained that wrath is an effect outside of God and not an affect in God and that the effect is impersonal and the affect personal.⁸⁸ We beg to differ from this view. Wrath as an effect arises out of the way God feels about the objects of his wrath. It is a personal effect rather than an impersonal one. It is his displeasure no matter how it is manifested.

5.8. THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TESTAMENTS

A considerable literature⁸⁹ has emerged on the relationship of Old Testament to New Testament. In our discussion here, we will limit ourselves to the concept of God.

Marcion in the early church maintained that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament who was the father of Jesus. He taught that ^{that} God of the Old Testament was judicial and not good, while the God of the gospels was good.⁹⁰ This denial led Marcion to leave out of his canon of scripture certain books of the Bible. He rejected the Old Testament, Paul's pastoral letters and re-edited the gospel of Luke.

Out of the many ideas that have been put forward to explain the relationship of the Old and New Testament, there is the idea of God. This idea of God plays a part in understanding the relation of the two testaments. This relationship can be viewed historically in that the

Bible is a continuous history of God's people and how God has been dealing with them. Viewed theologically, we see that the main actor is God. The Bible is God's commentary on his own activities and thus it becomes his written revelation. The holy One of Israel is the one who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. As a revelation of God, the Old Testament looks forward to a fulfilment of God's promises.

5.9. CONCLUSION

Broadly speaking the Bible gives us the view of God that;

1. God is a sovereign God. He rules over all that he has created. He transcends everything in holiness, power, righteousness and love.
2. God is a living God. This is in contrast to idols^(Is. 40). They can neither do evil nor good, but Yahweh is an active God. He acts in history and directs historical events. He speaks in word and events demanding moral action of man.
3. God is a covenant God. He does not act like a despot or as a brute impersonal force. He enters into an intimate personal relationship with man. The centrality of this covenant relationship will be discussed in the next chapter.
4. God is father, the only one who is truly deserving of that term. God is not merely a friend, but a caring and loving father. He is gracious and can be trusted.
5. God is king and has a kingdom to which he calls men to become members. He is a God of salvation.
6. God is judge. While he reigns in the lives of his people, his wrath^a is kindled against his enemies, He judges them and condemns them. When his children go astray, He punishes them in judgements with a view to reforming them.

Notes on Chapter Five

- ¹ G. Hasel, Old Testament Theology. Basic Issues in Current Debate (Revised Edition) Michigan, 1975, p.35.
- ² For instance, Edmond Jacob in Theology of the Old Testament, London 1958, p.31.
- ³ G.E. Wright, "Biblical Archaeology Today" in New Directions in Biblical Archaeology, Freedman and Greenfield (eds) New York 1969, p.159.
- ⁴ G. Hasel *op. cit.*, p.40.
- ⁵ Th. C. Vriezen, An outline of Old Testament Theology, London 1964, p.7.
- ⁶ G. Hasel *op. cit.*, p.43. He quotes W. Eichrodt -
- ⁷ G. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology. Vol. II London, 1975, pp.428-429.
- ⁸ G. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology Vol. I, London, 1975, pp.105-106
- ⁹ Mentioned by Hasel in Old Testament Theology p.49.
- ¹⁰ B.S. Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis, Philadelphia Philadelphia, 1970, pp.13-87.
- ¹¹ A.B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament Edinburg 1904, p.37.
- ¹² G. Von Rad *op. cit.*, (Vol. I, p.181).
- ¹³ The following are some of the names that show God's active involvement in peoples lives and how his presence is felt and known:

Eliazar	meaning	God is helper
Eliab	meaning	God is father
Elishab	meaning	God is saviour
Eli	meaning	My God
- ¹⁴ W. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. I London, 1961, pp.179-180.
- ¹⁵ See Fohrer's Introduction to the Old Testament, SPCK London, 1970.
 He says,
 "Characteristic content and theology of Eichrodt includes a marked emphasis on distance separating God from the World and from man".
 p.157.
- ¹⁶ Gen. 13:18-20.
- ¹⁷ H. Ringgren, Israelite Religion, SPCK London, 1966.

¹⁸Exodus 3:13.

¹⁹Quoted by Ringgren in Israelite Religion, p.32.

²⁰Cf. D. Stalker, Commentary on Exodus in Peck's commentary, M. Black and H. Rowley (eds) Nelson 1962, p.212.

²¹Ps. 97 and 98 In I Sam. 8:7 when the Israelites demanded a king, God says that he has been rejected from being king over them. The institution of kingship was viewed by some as apostasy, a turning away from God. God was the only king of Israel and later on the king was seen as a vice regent who was adopted by God himself as seen in enthronement Psalms.

²²All the names of God have the connotation of sovereignty such that the title King could be easily accommodated. It is not necessary that it be introduced only with the introduction of kingship. God was King of Israel even before Israel had a king.

²³Isaiah 41:21; 43:15; 52:7, 10.

²⁴Eichrodt *op. cit.*, p.198.

²⁵I Chron. 29:11, Dan. 3:33, 4:31, 34.

²⁶From names like Jerubbaal (Baal Contends) Judges 6:32, Ishbaal (man of Baal) I Chron. 8:33 Ringgren says,

"Therefore "Baal" (meaning Lord) is understood as an epithet of Yahweh, or else people worshipped Baal beside Yahweh without sensing any contradiction".

p.44.

²⁷Joshua 3:11, 13.

²⁸Cf. Elihu's Speech in the book of Job narrates the power of God in directing natural events.

²⁹Eichrodt *op. cit.*, p.206.

³⁰Dt. 29:29.

³¹E. Jacob. Theology of the Old Testament, London, 1958, p.40.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Man can only speak of God from his own personality. He seeks to make him real and concrete by use of visual representations.

³⁴Vriezen *op. cit.*, p.175.

³⁵I Kings 18.

- ³⁶ Deut. 13:1-5.
- ³⁷ Vriezen *op. cit.*, p.176.
- ³⁸ Isaiah 40:18-26.
- ³⁹ Isaiah 41:21-24.
- ⁴⁰ Isaiah 41:4.
- ⁴¹ Ex. 20:1-3.
- ⁴² Jacob *op. cit.*, p.40.
- ⁴³ In Isaiah 31:3 the word "man" is contrasted with that of "God" and the word "flesh" with that of "spirit". As man is flesh so is God spirit.
- ⁴⁴ Eichrodt *op. cit.*, p.211.
- ⁴⁵ Gen. 17:1.
- ⁴⁶ Is. 6:3.
- ⁴⁷ God's power is seen in the conception of Isaac "Is anything too hard for the Lord?", Sarah was asked. It is also seen in the death of the first born of the Egyptians, the drowning of the Egyptian army and the capture of Canaan. God led them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Gen. 18:14; Ex. 12:29-36; 14:21-29, Dt. 4:34; 5:15.
- ⁴⁸ N.H. Snaith, The distinctive ideas of the Old Testament, Epworth Press, London 1962, pp.94-95.
- ⁴⁹ The whole story of Hosea and Gomer is a vivid demonstration of God's love for his people in spite of their unfaithfulness. cf. Jer. 2:1-3; 3:12-15; 11:2 Amos 3:2; 7:15.
- ⁵⁰ cf. Prob. 3:11-12. Punishment can be discipline in love.
- ⁵¹ Psalm 68:5; 89:26.
- ⁵² Jer. 31:32, "God as husband to Israel".
- ⁵³ Psalm 23:1.
- ⁵⁴ Snaith *op. cit.*, p.74.
- ⁵⁵ Isaiah 6:3, Lev. 11:45; 21:8 Josh. 24:19 I Sam. 2:2 for a discussion of the meaning of the word holy see N.H. Snaith pp.270-280.
- ⁵⁶ Snaith *op. cit.*, p.32.

⁵⁷ Richardson (ed) The Theological word Book of the Bible, SCM London, 1957 p.215.

⁵⁸ J.D. Douglas, (ed) The New Bible Dictionary, Inter-Varsity Press 1962, p.530.

⁵⁹ cf. Ez. 20:33, Lam. 4:11; 2 Chron. 36:6.

⁶⁰ Isaiah 1:18-20; Dt. 30:15-18.

⁶¹ For extensive discussion on this problem see Von Rad Old Testament Theology Vol. II, Hasel. op. cit., and for the various positions adopted by scholars see D.L. Baker Two Testaments one Bible, IVF Leicester, 1976 pp.209-358.

⁶² G. Hasel op. cit., p.125.

⁶³ A. Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament. London 1979, p.84.

⁶⁴ Matt. 3:1-2.

⁶⁵ Lk. 7:18-35.

⁶⁶ Lk. 9:18-21.

⁶⁷ Lk. Mt. 13:3-30; 24-

⁶⁸ Lk. 4:18-21.

⁶⁹ Matt. 3:1-10, 4:12, 10:28.

⁷⁰ W.G. Kümmel, The Theology of the New Testament, London, 1973 p.37.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.40.

⁷² J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology Vol. I SCM London 1971, p.68.

⁷³ Lk. 12:4-7.

⁷⁴ Conzelmann op. cit., pp.102-106.
His views represent the Bultmann School and explains the role of the early church in formulating doctrine.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.105.

⁷⁶ C.K. Barrett Commentary on John's Gospel in Peaks Commentary p.867.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁷⁸ Ps. 103:13.

⁷⁹ Is. 63:16.

⁸⁰ Matt. 25:31-46, The judgement scene
 Matt. 28:18 "All authority in heaven and one earth is given to me."
 Acts 17:31, God has appointed Jesus to be the judge.

⁸¹ Rom. 2:6-11.

⁸² John 4:8; Rom. 5:5-8.

⁸³ John 17:11.

⁸⁴ Snaith in Theological word Book of the Bible.

⁸⁵ Rom. 3:21.

⁸⁶ Eph. 1:10.

⁸⁷ Rom. 1:18.

⁸⁸ See the discussion in D.E.H. Whiteley.
The Theology of St. Paul, Oxford 1972, pp.61-72.

⁸⁹ G. Hasel *op. cit.*, pp.105-127.
 D.L. Baker, Two Testaments on Bible. They discuss various proposals and theories which have been used to explain the relationship in the quest for a Biblical Theology.

⁹⁰ J. Stevenson (ed) A New Eusebins SPCK London 1957, pp.99-100.

CHAPTER SIXGOD AND MAN IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT6.1. INTRODUCTION

The Bible presents man as a creature. This means that his origin is outside himself. In so far as he is a created being, he shares in the feebleness and limitations of all creatures. Still this is so, the Bible also tells us that man has been endowed with dignity all of his own by his peculiar communion with God, his creator. Man is given the capacity for entering into a living relationship with God by virtue of his nature which is basically spiritual.

C H A P T E R S I XGOD AND MAN IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT

In this chapter we shall consider the biblical view of man. We shall begin by declaring that man is made in God's image. Then, an attempt will be made to determine man's nature. A note will be put that man's response to God is determined by his nature. We will then look at various responses and try to determine the significance of each in relation to himself. Finally, we will consider the spiritual side of man and the hereafter. This subject is vast and we will not pretend to exhaust it. Our major aim will be to determine the nature of God's effects on man's spirituality.

Man is created with a spiritual nature.

When God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," he was not only creating man in our image, but also in his own image. This is the basis of the spiritual nature of man. The spiritual nature of man is the basis of his relationship with God. It is the basis of his ability to receive God's love and to love God in return. It is the basis of his ability to understand God's will and to obey it. It is the basis of his ability to experience God's presence and to share in His life.

This is where the spiritual nature of man comes in. The Bible presents a picture of a man who is created in the image of God and who is capable of knowing God and loving Him. This is the spiritual nature of man. It is the basis of his relationship with God. It is the basis of his ability to receive God's love and to love God in return. It is the basis of his ability to understand God's will and to obey it. It is the basis of his ability to experience God's presence and to share in His life.

CHAPTER SIX

GOD AND MAN IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The Bible presents man as a creature. This means that his origin is outside himself. In so far as he is a created being, he shares in the feebleness and limitations of all creatures. While this is so, the Bible also tells us that man has been endowed with dignity all of his own by his peculiar association with God, his creator. Man is given the capacity for entering into a living fellowship with his creator by virtue of his nature which is basically spiritual.

In this chapter, we will first seek to understand what the Bible means by declaring that man is made in God's image. Then, an attempt will be made to determine man's nature. A case will be put that man's response to God is determined by his nature. We will then look at various responses and try to establish the significance of each to God and to himself. Finally, we will consider the biblical view of death and the hereafter. This subject is vast and we will not pretend to exhaust it. Our major task will be to observe how the concept of God affects biblical eschatology.

Man is created after a divine pattern.

"Then God said,¹ 'let us make man in our own image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over the cattle, and over all the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."²

This is where the Bible begins in describing man, but this passage presents a number of problems. For instance, in what does the image of God and likeness consist? How does the division between male and female relate to this image and likeness? Of what does that dominion consist? Biblical scholars and systematic theologians are not agreed on all these

problems.

6.2. THE IMAGE OF GOD

The outstanding feature in the conception of man in the Old Testament is the pronouncement of the priestly code that man is created in the image of God, after God's likeness. The question that arises is, "what do we understand by, "in the image of God and after his likeness"?"

Various attempts have been made to define this phrase "Image of God". For Wheeler Robinson, the phrase is intended to recognize man's unique relationship to God and his supremacy over the animal world.³ Edmond Jacob is of the opinion that the phrase refers to outward appearance. The image refers to a representation.⁴ Some scholars have seen the image of God as the upright posture of man which in turn symbolises domination of the animal world.⁵ Rowley holds a different view. He writes,

"For it has been said that he (man) is a creature of God, made in the image of God and that this is not meant to minimize the difference between man and God".⁶

He sees the likeness or the image in the spiritual quality of his being and not the physical.

Derek Kidner commenting on the phrase, 'image of God', says,

"The term "in our image, after our likeness," are characteristically bold. If image seems too strong there is the rest of scripture to control it, but at a single stroke it imprints on the mind the central truth about us. -- The scripture does not use them as technically distinct expressions, as some theologians have done".⁷

Berkouwer defines the phrase image of God in christological and eschatological terms. He contends that Genesis alone does not give us the meaning of the term, 'man in God's image'. He finds some light in the New Testament where the restoration of the image by Christ is mentioned. In this, he finds the clue to the meaning of the phrase. He says,

"If we listen to the Biblical witness regarding the image of God, we find it filled with actuality, and with earnestness. We can here see a note of eschatological earnestness of our ordinary life. The image of God stands before us in the context of guilt and restoration, of being lost and being found. The image of God is something which concerns the wholeman, his place in this world and his future, his likeness in his being a child of a Father, of this Father in heaven".⁸

If the restoration of the image involves redemption or reconciliation and the return to the status of a son, then the original image was something akin to God's nature and character.

We have to rid ourselves of certain misconceptions when we consider the term 'image of God'. We are accustomed to speaking of image in terms of facial resemblance or physical aspects. Of course, we cannot escape these linguistic trappings, but to do so is to have wrong thoughts about God and man. It has already been noted in our considerations of the Hebrew conception of God that the representation of God by an image was forbidden because God could not be associated with specific forms. In this case, it is man who is made in the image of God and likeness and not the other way round. The two terms speak of the one and same thing. The one elaborates the meaning of the other. The prior question is not, "What is the image of God in Man?", but "In what does God's image consist?" God's image can be nothing short of his nature and character or essence of his being. One fundamental feature of God's nature is his spirituality. The image of God in us consists in that we are created spiritual beings-- that is, a capacity to have a personal fellowship with God. St. John's gospel highlights this when it says,

"God is spirit and those who worship him, must worship in spirit and truth".⁹

It is this that distinguishes man from other creatures and bestows on man a dignity all his own. The other major feature in the nature of God is his personality. He is not a thing, an impersonal force, but a personal being. Human personality is derived from this. Eichrodt links the idea

of image of God with his personhood.¹⁰ Our personality is a manifestation of God's image, a share in his personhood.

We can say that the image and likeness in which we are created is the capability of entering into spiritual communion with the creator, a privilege which only man enjoys in all creation. Vriezen makes the point even clearer when he writes,

"In the Old Testament, the conception of man is closely bound up with living in communion with God. As a result, there is a prior fundamental distinction between God and Man. Man does not spring (emanate)¹¹ from God, but is created and made a living being by the breath of God. This radically theistic starting point implied on the one hand, the absolute dependence of man upon God, on the other hand, the recognition of the high place given to man by God in his world order."¹²

The representation of man as the "image of God", is the symbol of this certainty of his communion with the Holy God.

6.3. THE NATURE OF MAN

We have so far maintained that though man is a creature, he has an important living relationship with God. He is not an emanation from God. As a created being man is an embodied soul and an ensouled body;¹³ so to speak, all at once. Neither the body nor the soul is primary, but both compose the principle of man's life as a creature. He is not just a soul with a body as an encasement, but an animated body and taken as a unity. The Old Testament accepts no dualism in man's nature.

For the Israelites the nature of man had three aspects which are: the breath-soul, the psychical functions of physical organism, and the ascription of all abnormality in conduct and character to the action of invasive spirits.¹⁴ While this is true, the Israelite view was stamped with a new understanding of man's relationship with the creator and his place in the universe producing a unique concept in the whole Middle-East. The Hebrews did not come up with a composite-soul body and mind, but

rather they saw the various psychical aspects of man which belong together and have a common origin--one personal life.

The following are some of the terms used to describe some psychical and physical aspects of man:

(a) Nephesh

This is a Hebrew term meaning life or soul. Eichrodt maintains that this term nephesh is not an abstract concept, but refers to a substantial entity which might almost be described as the stuff of life.¹⁵ By extension, the term goes on to denote not just the life within the individual, but the living individual himself.¹⁶ Beyond this nephesh goes on to include being alive--all dimension and dynamics of life. Therefore, nephesh is a pervasive term referring to the vitality of life itself.

(b) Ruach

This Hebrew term means the individual spirit of man which comes out of the breath of God. Ruach is defined by Eichrodt as,

"the life force present everywhere and existing independently against over a single individual".¹⁷

The two concepts nephesh and ruach are not distinct from each other. While nephesh is particular ruach is universal. The two terms do not describe opposites or differing aspect of man's nature, but they are rather representing the whole of life from a particular point of view. Through these terms the connection is made between the organic and the psychic life. By these terms man's relationship with God on the one hand as the only source of life and man's relations with his world is defined. All in all, every living thing shares in God's breath of life which goes forth to renew the created order. Thus ruach is at all times plainly superior to man, a divine power within his mortal body, subject to the rule of God alone.

Man is made in such a way that he has a relationship not only with God, but also with nature. Nature defined as what is, is not independent of God and has been put at man's disposal for his pleasure under God's sovereign rule. Man is made for fellowship with God being made in God's image and likeness, and is granted dominion over nature. He is commanded to subdue the earth and to fill it.¹⁸ The fullness of man's life and the realization of his true humanity is dependent on this fellowship expressed through obedience. In the story of creation, we notice how man is given a command which must be obeyed lest he suffers death. Obedience would mean life, but disobedience would automatically lead to the annihilation of life.¹⁹

Apart from this communion with God man was not meant to live a solitary life. He was created a social being. The Bible describes this basic human need vividly when it says,

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him'.²⁰

Man's social needs are realised in the same verse as the words that define his dual character,

"... Male and female he made them." "... Therefore a man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh".²¹

By creating man as a sexual being, God meant that sex should be a necessary cornerstone in the establishment, building and maintenance of the community. The life of the individual is intimately linked to that of his family and also to that of his community.

It is part of man's nature to relate to other men through marriage, kinship system, economic and social associations. Man as a social being is created to be responsible. He is accountable to God²² and to his fellow man for his action. He is a moral being. Even though Eichrodt refutes attempts to interpret the image of God in terms of moral excellence and to use it as a basis for developing a dogmatic doctrine of mankind's primal condition, he sees the term as important for revelation. He says,

"For by virtue of his pre-eminence above all other creatures man stands as a sinner in a special relationship with God, accessible to the judging and compassionate word of the Lord whose image he wears, and called to responsibility".²³

It is this sense of morality that binds the community together, a morality that has its roots in the very nature of man. The Ten Commandments as a moral code reflect human nature as related to God and man.

Wheeler-Robinson has written,

"The thing that makes life supremely worthy is its morality. This, the Israelites discovered and recognized. It is this that their God demanded."²⁴

Morality has its significance for man in the idea of his personal responsibility to God. He stands accountable to God and he must either please his creator or earn his displeasure and judgement. As a vital link between his creator and his environment through the managerial responsibility that has been delegated to him, the fruitfulness of the environment and its stability and utility is dependent on man's ordering of himself in accordance with the divine directives. This is made abundantly clear in the story of the Fall.²⁵

Man in the Old Testament may be seen from both a personal and a corporate perspective. Wheeler-Robinson spoke of the concept of corporate personality as an important aspect in the understanding of man in the ancient thought. He says,

"The unit for morality and religion is not the individual, as the group to which he belongs. Yahweh was the God of Israel and only secondarily the God of the individual Israelites. The relation of God to man was mediated through the corporate personality of the nation--(important here is the idea of blood revenge). The idea of individual responsibility was acknowledged but was not prominent until it was asserted by the seventh century prophets".²⁷

In the concept of corporate personality we find a comparable concept with similar importance as that of the "communal-man" discussed in connection

with the Chewa. In that connection it was also noted that God is primarily a community's concern rather than an individual's and yet personal moral deviance can bring disaster on the whole community.

The sense of moral responsibility was further heightened among the Israelites by the concept of covenant. According to Vriezen the doctrine of the covenant implies three things:

1. The recognition of the reality of a true communion between God and the people of Israel.
2. The absolute recognition of God as the Holy one who establishes and guides this relationship.
3. The absolute acknowledgement of the rules of the covenant.

This idea of covenant is very important and fundamental both to the theology of the Old Testament and history of Israel. The identity of the Israelites as a people unique to God is founded on the covenant relationship that existed between God and their ancestor Abraham. This covenant is firmly fixed in their history as forming one of the covenantal epochs²⁸ of history in God's dealing with man since creation. In these covenants the initiative lies with God and they are not between equals, but a superior and inferior, a creator and his creature. Man has an obligation to God besides his obligation to his fellow man because the covenant terms are binding on him.

Understanding the centrality of the covenant idea, Motyer says,

"At the centre of the world-view of the Old Testament and the centre of what God has revealed about himself lies the doctrine of the covenant. Covenant is thus the very heart of Old Testament theology, the central essence of what it teaches us about God".²⁹

It is within this covenant relationship that God reveals his will to Israel through various salvific events. These historical events gave concreteness to the covenant and the covenant gave them meaning and

significance. "The covenant knows not only of a demand, but also a promise: 'you shall be my people and I will be your God.' In this way it provides life with a goal and history with a meaning".³⁰ The goal is the fulfilment of the divine will and along with this is a sense of trust and security because man knows where he stands with God. It is out of the covenant that comes a legal code by which man's secular and sacred activities are governed. God is the divine law-giver and the initiator of the covenant. The law demanded right living and worship before God.

To recapitulate, the Bible teaches that man is a unity and not body and soul. He is animated by God's spirit. He is akin to God, having been made in God's image. He is meant to have fellowship with God to whom he must respond in a moral and responsible way. Among the Israelites this fellowship found expression in the covenant. Man's goal and fulness of life are achieved in and through the covenant relationship.

6.4. MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD

According to the terms of the covenant, obedience and trust were demanded of man as the most appropriate response to the grace of God. To Saul, Samuel said,

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifices and to hearken than the fat ^{of} rams".³¹

Even though these sayings may be seen as Samuel's continued criticism of kingship and that he is looking for every opportunity to discredit Saul, he is pointing at a very important fact. The heart of worship is not in external ritual, but rather in the inner attitude of obedience. The acceptability of a sacrifice before God depends on this attitude. Isaiah too warned,

"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword".³²

The Deuteronomic message declared that obedience would lead to blessings while disobedience would lead to a curse.³³

It has been said that there was tension between the prophets and the cult representatives. The prophets were very critical of the abuses of the cult by the priests. In all fairness to the prophets, they criticised the cult not because they wanted to get rid of it, but because it was becoming an end in itself rather than the means to an end. It ceased to be symbolic and failed to point beyond itself. The prophets were concerned with the glory of God just as the priests who were true to their calling were concerned with his holiness. The prophets wanted to lead the populace beyond a mechanical sacrificial system to a personal religion based on obedience and trust. The outward expression of worship had to tally with an inner disposition of obedience and trust. Let us now look at the external significance of the external aspects of the cultus.

The cultus is no mere epiphenomenon but a genuine expression of a living religion seeking to penetrate the whole of human life. For the men of the ancient world, as it is for the Chewa, the outward form of the cultus possessed a symbolic significance and for that reason, they signified not an unimportant or secondary element, but a necessary and essential activity of religious experience.

It is the sacrificial worship which formed the heart of the cultus as man's response to God. Fundamental ideas associated with sacrificial worship are those of providing food for the deity, offering of gifts to God, sacral communion and atonement. Can Israelite sacrificial system be interpreted in these terms? The idea of providing food for the deity is rejected as a crude thought which we do not find in the Old Testament.³⁴ There are several instances in which food is placed before God and he passes over it and does not eat. The significance of the action is the ratification of a covenant.

In Israelite religion the notions of communion or fellowship and atonement formed the basis of the sacrificial system. The power of the sacred communion mediated by the sacrifices rested rather on God's declaration that he was prepared to enter into a special relationship with his people and to give them a share in his own life. The communion sacrifice became a sacrament in which the blessing pronounced by the priest, the hymn sung to the glory of God, the casting of oracles and the promulgations of law carried out in conjunction with the ritual, all recalled men to the exalted power of their divine Lord and judge, whose fellowship they were experiencing in the celebration. The sacrifices were made because God had sanctioned them and had assured the participants of the fellowship of his presence.

There were different kinds of sacrifices and each had its own religious emphasis and function.

- (a) The whole burnt sacrifice: The characteristic feature of this sacrifice is that the entire victim is burnt. The destruction of the victim may be explained as a means of making the offering useless and therefore letting it become an irrevocable gift.
- (b) The communion sacrifice where the characteristic feature lies in the fact that the victim is shared between God, the priest and the person offering the sacrifice, who eats it as a holy thing. These sacrifices are meant to strengthen the covenant.
- (c) Expiatory sacrifices: These are sacrifices used to remove the offence and restore normal relations. The use of blood and the disposal of the victim are the distinguishing features.

Sacrifice was among the Israelites an essential act of external worship. It was a prayer which was acted, a symbolic action which expressed both the interior feelings of the person offering it and God's response

to his prayer. By sacrificial rites the gift made to God was accepted, fellowship with God achieved and the guilt of man taken away. De Vaux comments,

"But these effects are not achieved by magic. It is essential that the external action should express the true inward feelings of man and that it should be favourably received by God. Failing this, the sacrifice is no longer a religious act."³⁵

The failure to realize this was at the centre of religious apostasy in Israel. In practice, sacrificial symbols were vested with mystical (magical) powers and it was deemed that their effect was automatic regardless of human disposition. This is what the prophets tried to refute and correct. Speaking on behalf of God, Isaiah said,

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? ... Bring no more vain offerings... I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly".³⁶

Jeremiah testified,

"The LORD said to me, 'Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and cereal offering, I will not accept them but will consume them by the sword, by famine and by pestilence'.³⁷

Let us sum up what we have been saying about man's response to God. In man's response, God takes the initiative and remains the initiator. Man is called upon to respond freely and responsibly within the context of a covenant relationship with everything at his disposal. Within the covenant relationship are prescribed certain means by which man maintains this relationship and these means are sacramental in nature, that is, divinely sanctioned and provisioned. Through the cultic activities, man acknowledged his dependence upon his creator and his need to respond appropriately in order for him to fulfil himself. Through the cultus, man puts at God's disposal not only himself, but the whole of his existence. As long as man lives, he must maintain ^a positive relationship with God.

6.5. DEATH AND THE HEREAFTER

(a) OLD TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY

Even though man was made in God's image and likeness he was not created an immortal being, but mortal. The possibility of immortality was within his grasp, but he thwarted it by sin and that act of disobedience sealed his fate with death. How does the Bible view death and existence beyond the grave?

The Bible sees death as something that was not originally an aspect of human existence, but that it came as a result of human disobedience. The Yahwist source reports that Adam and Eve were told they would die if they ate the fruit from the tree in the midst of the garden. The story is told simply and symbolically in a mythopoetic manner. When they sinned or disobeyed, the curse of death came on them accompanied by a hard and harsh existence. Death remained a reminder that man had not the final word on his life. He forfeited the possibility of eternal life through disobedience. His utopian dreams of becoming like God were not realised and would not be realised as long as man was mortal.

The Old Testament conception of life after death is diffused and not fully developed. It is left to the New Testament to develop the doctrine of life after death. The Old Testament thought on life after death finds expression in the concept of Sheol. Sheol was conceived of as a place under the earth to which one descends but in which there is no communion with the dead and consequently no hope of seeing again those who have gone before. The dead continued to exist in some shadowy form of existence and were totally disarmed and left to a passive and silent existence. It is a realm of the powerless (cf. Is. 14:10). The state of the dead is compared to that of the men who sleep (Neh. 3:18). It was not a state to which people looked forward. Hozekiah wept bitterly when he was told to put his house in order because he was going to die. After

being spared from death, he said:

"Lo it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but thou hast held back my life from the pit of destruction, for thou hast cast all my sin behind thy back. For Sheol cannot thank Thee, death cannot praise Thee, those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness".³⁸

God's presence is unknown in Sheol and those who are there cannot respond to God with thanksgiving and praise. Significant about the conception of Sheol is that it is not the soul that lives on, but rather the whole man. In this existence there is no contact with either the living or with God. Sheol also served as a place where the wicked were banished to a solitary existence. The righteous pray and hope that God will rescue their lives from Sheol.

"This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence, the end of those who are pleased with their portion. Like sheep, they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd, straight to the grave they descend and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God shall ransom my soul³⁹ from the powers of Sheol, for he will receive me."

Side by side with the conception of Sheol is another view according to which the dead dwell in the grave. Two things are important here, firstly, the manner in which the dead man is buried has a bearing on his future existence--whether it will be peaceful or not. Secondly, the custom of burying along side members of one's family. It seems that the terms pit and sheol are used interchangeably. The one puts emphasis on the place where the body is laid while sheol lays emphasis on the actual state of existence. To be gathered to one's people, is a common biblical expression for death. Somehow family solidarity goes beyond the grave.

In Israel it was forbidden for the living to have anything to do with the dead, e.g. consulting mediums and practising necromancy. (cf. Lev. 18:31; 20:6 Dt. 18:11). These prohibitions may have been introduced to counter the temptation to worship the dead and to depend upon them. Saul resorted to necromancy when he received no answer through all the

accepted means of determining God's will (1 Sam. 28:1-14).

Arguments have been advanced that the Israelites had an ancestor cult, but nothing of the sort can be found in the Bible. Of course, the Israelites had a very high regard for the ancestors. The patriarchs were highly honoured to the extent that God was known as God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The prohibitions against any association with the dead do not presuppose ancestor-worship, but fear of pagan influences which were in conflict with the purity of Yahwism. Ancestor worship in Israel has been advanced on the idea of the family unit and the institution of levirate marriage, but these are inadequate grounds. The Bible is silent on the matter, an indication that it was virtually non-existent as a problem.

What importance did these beliefs about the dead have for Israelite religion? Eichrodt writes,

"It was the shattering experience of God's will to rule which shut the gates of the Kingdom of the dead, and proscribed any dealings with the departed. Yahweh's claim to exclusive Lordship covered not only alien gods but also those subterranean powers which might offer their help to men."⁴⁰

While Sheol was not independent of God's sovereign rule, his activity was restricted to the world of the living who could respond to his works of grace. Sheol had no effect on the living and the living loathed the thought of being banished there, especially when they had not lived their life to the full--(being full of years). The righteous began to hope for rescue from Sheol and to look forward to a life with God.

Having removed Sheol from their immediate concern, God remained their God at hand. Animistic ideas were rejected and God remained sovereign in life and death. The Old Testament does not provide a fully developed eschatology and it is not until we get to the new Testament that we find a developed eschatology.

(b) NEW TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY

The fact of Jesus or what has been called the "Christ-event", brings biblical eschatology into a sharper focus in the New Testament than we have in the Old Testament. Our present study will not look at the whole subject of eschatology, but will limit itself to how the Christ-event has affected and influenced the Christian eschatological outlook. We will however consider some important eschatological questions as we go along.

Eschatology in the New Testament starts with the Christ-event. The fact of Jesus provides a new perspective on human existence and destiny thereby transforming man's view of death and what lies beyond the grave.

According to St. Mark, Jesus begins his ministry with these words,

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel".⁴¹

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus inaugurates his ministry with a reading from Isaiah 61:1-4 and declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

To achieve his theological purpose Luke placed the birth of Jesus in the context of Old Testament predictions concerning the future ruler (cf. Matt. 2:6). Jesus begins his ministry with the themes of repentance and the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore what is observed is that the New Testament speaks of fulfilment, and the realisation of the kingdom of heaven.

The Old Testament anticipates the visitation of God when he comes as judge of the wicked, the redeemer of the righteous and who would purge the world of all evil. "The day of the Lord" and the abbreviated phrase of "In that day", designate this divine visitation. The New Testament sees in the incarnation of Christ the fulfilment and hope, and in his second coming the consummation of that hope. The coming of Christ therefore is the beginning in the inauguration of the reign of God which comes to completion in his second coming.

The second coming of Christ is the beginning of the consummation. This phenomenon is described variously in the New Testament "παρουσία" means presence or arrival. In hellenistic Greek it was used to describe the visit of a ruler. Jesus will come back in power and glory (Matt. 24:27). "ἀποκάλυψις" means the unveiling or disclosure. This refers to the manifestation of Jesus in all his splendour and glory as king of kings. "ἐπιφάνεια" means appearing, it refers to the visibility of his return.

At the return of Christ the resurrection of the dead will also take place. The resurrection is the direct outcome of Jesus' redemptive mission. Christ has abolished death in his own body. Jesus' resurrection stands as a guarantee of the resurrection of the just. There is life after death which will be adapted to the spiritual conditions then existing which will be radically different from what is experienced now. The resurrected life is not a shadowy existence that we meet in the concept of Sheol. It is rather the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:35ff). G.E. Ladd writes,

"The revelation that death does not end human existence is enlarged in the New Testament. The natural metaphor of sleep is frequently used of the dead".⁴¹

Even though the Bible has little to say about the state of the dead, there are some glimpses that the redeemed are with Christ. St. Paul longed to be with Christ as a far better prospect than remain in the present existential situation.

In the New Testament we find the element of Judgement as an integral part of the consummation. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that,

"It is appointed unto men to die once, but after this the judgement".⁴²

In our consideration of the concept of God, we saw him as ruler of men, the divine law giver and final judge. Sometimes Christ is mentioned as agent of this judgement. The parable of the sheep and goats illustrates this theme and that the final judgement rests on faith and work. Another aspect of this judgement is that the decisive factor is man's attitude towards

Jesus and that by this people have either escaped being judged or condemned themselves already. Even after this is said, Judgement remains an eschatological fact.

How did these eschatological features affect the attitude of the early Christians towards death and the grave? The resurrection of Jesus Christ transformed the reality of death. Death lost its power to harm and was transformed into an instrument of salvation. This is why the writer of the Fourth Gospel can report of life and death in the same breath without feeling any sense of contradiction. Jesus says,

"I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he dies yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die".⁴³

As the smallpox vaccine in which the harmful and deadly effects are removed and becomes potent against itself, in the same way death has been demobilized and transformed into a force for good. Hence the jubilation of the believer:-

"Death is swallowed up in victory;
O! death where is thy victory?
O! death where is thy sting?"

Death has been transformed by the Christ-event. The grave is conquered and eternal life is in the grasp of believers. Salvation has dawned and it is being enjoyed, but it is not yet consummated. The initial benefits of being a kingdom member has been received, its fullness is yet to come. To the Thessalonians, St. Paul wrote of Christ's return and the resurrection of those who had died as the hope of a believer and source of their comfort. Therefore, there was no need for them to grieve.⁴⁴ Peter speaking on the expected return in order to allay fears of those who were beginning to doubt the parousia, said that God's time is very different from our time and that his apparent delay is actually a divine kairos for those who have not repented to do so. The return of Jesus cannot be a subject of speculations or prediction, but that the believer must be prepared for it all the time. Jesus should be trusted to fulfil what he promised.⁴⁵ Such an

eschatological outlook had great implications for life in the here and now. The new life meant a new ethic based on godliness and holiness.

The eagerness that we see among the early Christians and the criticism from the non-believers which they had to put up with reveal to some extent how their attitude to death had been affected by the death, resurrection and imminent return of Jesus. Against Schweitzer,⁴⁶ the New Testament writers are convinced that Jesus had fulfilled a divine mission of saving mankind. They were not trying to cover up a failed mission. In the light of his resurrection, death was no longer considered a defeat, but a real victory. After all they had the Old Testament paradigm of the suffering servant. Therefore, what Schweitzer maintains to the effect that Jesus forced matters when apparently his "political mission" was failing, does not tally with the evidence as we have it in the New Testament.

Sheol was no longer for the believer. For them, there was life beyond the grave in living communion with God. This world would vanish and a new created world order would take its place.

Apart from Schweitzer various views have been put forward in an attempt to make sense of this eschatological message scattered in the pages of the New Testament. Briefly, let us turn to these and look at each in turn.

Schweitzer had maintained that eschatology was the key to understanding the life and mission of Jesus. All that Jesus taught and did were governed by his eschatological outlook. Schweitzer argued that the cross was not part of his eschatological outlook, but a way of forcing the issue when he found that his expectations were not being fulfilled. Important as this thesis is both in terms of the theological situation in which it was expounded and the place that it was given in New Testament studies, it ignored certain important facts of the gospel tradition. The impression is inescapable from these traditions that Jesus was fully aware of the end results of his mission. He rejected all the simple and cheap

methods of carrying out his mission (cf. the temptations of Jesus). He spoke about his death as part of his mission. Seen against a Jewish and Hellenistic background to insist on the death of a redeemer or a god as Jesus claimed would be the greatest of scandals and folly. This is what St. Paul says, "It looked like foolishness to Jews and Greeks". He writes:

"... but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the gentiles".
(1 Cor. 1:23).

C.H. Dodd in the 1930's restored the balance by insisting on the present reality of the new age. He rejected the futuristic emphasis found in Schweitzer's thesis. In his thesis on "realized eschatology", he maintained that with the coming of Jesus, the kingdom had actually arrived insisting that the word "ἡ βασιλεία" means the kingdom is here and not just near. The new age had broken into the old age and the course of history had been altered.

R.H. Fuller⁴⁸ brought in a mediating position. Indeed for Fuller, the kingdom of God was connected with the mission of Jesus but was not completely operative. The coming of Jesus inaugurated the stage for the kingdom of God, but the climax and effective establishment was still future.

Those of the Form Criticism School doubt whether much authentic material can be got from gospel traditions to establish a viable view of New Testament eschatology. However, they insist that Jesus did not expect a period between his death and the consummation.

To this author, Schweitzer called attention to eschatology as an important factor in understanding the life and mission of Jesus, but this is not the only factor. We cannot go along with him when he sees the mission of Jesus as a failure and then Jesus forcing the situation and failing miserably. We maintain that the gospel tradition is abundantly clear that Jesus was aware of his mission and that the cross was part of

it. He came on a mission to introduce the kingdom of God and that involved reconciliation of men to God through his ministry and death as the climax of that ministry and the reconciliation process. The kingdom has been inaugurated by Jesus, the New Age has dawned, but the complete establishment of the kingdom of heaven is not yet complete.

6.6. CONCLUSION

In all creation, the Bible singles out man as having been created a unique being. Both creation narratives in a complementary way declare this uniqueness. The rest of creation comes into being by a mere declaration, but with man, God deliberates and fashions him after his own image and likeness. In this way, man is privileged with a unique relationship to God. It is only man for whom no suitable helpmate was found among all other creatures. This unique position is significant for man's existence and life.

The Bible views man as a single entity or being and not as a composite of body and spirit. The two are coordinated in such a way that it is impossible to speak of the one without the other. This is the very opposite of Greek conception of man where man is a duality, the body serving as an encasement for the soul. This unitary conception has significance for man's existence and life. Whatever is done in the body or spirit affects the entire human nature and has implication for God.

It is as a spiritual being that man responds to God in worship and acknowledges God's authority. Man seeks fellowship with God and God takes the initiative by entering into a covenant relationship with man. Man's disobedience destroys this fellowship and puts man in danger of everlasting damnation. Through the New Covenant established through Jesus, God has reconciled the world to himself. With the Christ-event, man's destiny is affected and death is transformed. Sheol is replaced by heaven and the

faith and hope of the Old Testament becomes the living hope for an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven.⁴⁹ Man can look forward to it.

Gen. 1:26-27.

⁴⁸ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁴⁹ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁰ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵¹ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵² See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵³ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁴ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁵ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁶ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁷ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁸ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁵⁹ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶⁰ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶¹ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶² See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶³ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶⁴ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

⁶⁵ See also *Exposition of the Old Testament*, Oxford, p. 35.

Notes on Chapter Six

- ¹cf. Psalm 8:3-5. The writer describes man's place in the cosmos. He has authority over and above all created things. He comes between other creatures and God.
- ²Gen. 1:26-27.
- ³H. Wheeler Robinson Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, Oxford, p.85.
- ⁴E. Jacob *op. cit.*, p.168.
- ⁵*Ibid.* Quoted by Jacob.
- ⁶See H.H. Rowley The Discovery of the Old Testament SCM - p.147.
- ⁷D. Kidner: Genesis Tyndale Commentary Series. Intervarsity Press - p.51.
- ⁸G.C. Berkouwer, Studies in Dogmatic Man, The Image of God, Eerdmans 1975, p.117.
- ⁹John 4:24.
- ¹⁰E. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 2 p.126.
- ¹¹The work in brackets is mine. Man is not a spark from God.
- ¹²Vriezen Th. C. An Outline of Old Testament Theology, Oxford, 1979
- ¹³For this idea, I am indebted to J.I. Packer (from a talk entitled "conflict leads to maturity", recorded on cassette by Christian Audio-Vision Services (NO TC 002, Middlessex England).
- ¹⁴Wheeler Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.85.
- ¹⁵Eichrodt *op. cit.*, Vol. 2 p.134.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.137. Cf. Gen. 14:21; Deut. 24:7; Jer. 2:34, 43:6; Ez. 17:17; Prov. 28:17.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.136.
- ¹⁸Gen. 1:28.
- ¹⁹The same demand is made to the Israelites in Dt. 31:15; Psalm 119 and Isaiah 1:18.
- ²⁰Gen. 2:18-20.

- ²¹ Gen. 1:27; 2:24.
- ²² Psalm 32:1-5; Exx1 12:14.
- ²³ Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p.130.
- ²⁴ Wheeler Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.77.
- ²⁵ This theme of disruption to the whole environment as a result of man's moral irresponsibility can be found throughout the Old Testament and is the theological basis of taboos and various rituals-- see Noah's flood Gen. 7:1-8: 22, The parable of the Vineyard Is. 5:1-7; Jer. 12:4.
- ²⁶ Wheeler Robinson, *op. cit.*, p.87.
- ²⁷ The question of individual responsibility was asserted by the Mosaic law Jeremiah and by Ezekiel in Ch. 18:4.
- ²⁸ A sequence of covenant forming historical epochs and marking important milestones is discernible in the Old Testament starting with Adam in the garden, the Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets look to the new covenant.
- ²⁹ J.A. Motyer "Old Testament Theology" article in D. Guthrie and others (ed) - The New Bible Commentary Revised (IVP 1970) p.30.
- ³⁰ Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p.38.
- ³¹ I Sam. 15:22.
- ³² Isaiah 1:19-20.
- ³³ Deut. 30:15-20.
- ³⁴ For a fuller discussion of these two views see Eichrodt's Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 2 Chapter Four, pp.98-154.
- ³⁵ R. De Vaux. Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions p.451.
- ³⁶ Isaiah 1:11-13.
- ³⁷ Jer. 14:11-12.
- ³⁸ Isaiah 38:17-18.
- ³⁹ Psalm 49:11-15.
- ⁴⁰ Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p.221.

- ⁴¹ J.D. Douglas (ed) The New Bible Dictionary IVP London 1962 art. "Eschatology" by G.E. Ladd p.390.
- ⁴² Heb. 9:27.
- ⁴³ John 11:25-26.
- ⁴⁴ 1 Tes. 3:8-15.
- ⁴⁵ John 14:1-7, cf. Acts 1:11.
- ⁴⁶ A. Schweitzer's views were written in The Quest of the Historical Jesus in which he traces the vicissitudes of critical theories from H.S. Reimarus in the 18th century to his contemporary W. Wrede. He is also famous as the missionary doctor of Lambaré in present Cameroon.
- ⁴⁷ C.H. Dodd expressed his views in The Apostolic Preaching and its development, 1936.
- ⁴⁸ R.H. Fuller expressed his views in The Mission and Achievement of Jesus (1954) and also in The Foundations of New Testament Christology (1965).
- ⁴⁹ 1 Peter 1:4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHEWA AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTS: A COMPARISON

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7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to draw out parallels between the Chewa and Biblical concept of God before coming to consider what implications each concept has for the other in particular and the christian faith in general. Although our main concern is with the concept of God in both Chewa and biblical traditions, our comparative discussion will touch on as many aspects relevant to our main task as possible. We shall undertake this comparative study under the following headings:- Categories of thought, the cosmological outlook, the concept of God, Man's response to God and his eschatological outlook. Under all these headings, our interest will be in the concept of God.

7.2. CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT

The clarity of a concept depends on a number of factors e.g. usage, meaning of words used to explain the concept, the development of thought patterns and the use of appropriate categories or whether the concept has been used in written document or not. The Western world has a long history of the written word and through philosophical thought and the scientific method, clarity of thought has been achieved in many disciplines. Concepts in Chichewa have not been subjected to this sort of treatment and therefore may not be as precise as they are for instance, in English.

When a discipline has been subjected to a long period of writing, an appropriate technical terminology develops which becomes refined with the passage of time. This is less likely to happen when words are not written or defined precisely, let alone when terminologies and beliefs remain unexplored. It is not the practice in traditional African society to question beliefs that have been handed down from generations immemorial. The

traditions are treated as sacrosanct. They can neither be questioned in order to clarify them nor to remove what is fallacious. These traditions must be simply accepted, practised and passed on. But this state of affairs cannot be left to go on like this. The time has come when the refinement of the concepts must take place.

Sometimes precise terminology is hard to come by because of the symbolic nature of the language which does not conform to rules of deductive and inductive thinking which are modes of thought in Western thought and education. Religious phenomena are notorious for their use of symbols which are in turn embedded in the particular culture where they occur. These symbols can be understood only within the cultural context and they are difficult to translate precisely into the categories of another language and culture. The Chewa culture is rich in symbolisms and the language in its daily usage is highly idiomatic and proverbial.

Systematic thought is also always coloured by the beliefs of a particular culture and it is employed more in the West than in Africa. It would be untrue to say that Africans are incapable of systematic thought, although it may be true to say that their thinking is limited in scope and to concrete situations. The other reason is that systematic thought is tied to speculative and/or theoretical thought and it happens that the Africans are not given to speculative or theoretical thought as we find it in the West. In the West, thinkers will seek to understand the whole universe by either a single unifying concept or by several, but related concepts. The African views the universe in a concrete way as mysterious, full of contradiction and beyond human understanding. He does not need to understand it in order to come to terms with it, and makes no attempt to resolve the apparent contradictions. Equipped with various beliefs, which are themselves unsystematized and often contradictory, he meets each situation and interprets it according to those beliefs. The limited scope of systematic thinking has not been conducive to the development of

preciseness in conceptualization and creation of technical terms.

The other important factor in the development of terminology is the social dynamics of a given culture. By social dynamics is meant those factors that activate a social situation making it vibrant, responsive and meaningful. The African social systems have a number of such factors which affect the system in varying degrees. Some of these are those of kinship by blood and marriage, age groups, the solidarity of a community, hospitality, the spirit world, rain and the economic activities. These factors related to the social dynamics have an effect on the conceptualization of things so that one culture values one thing while the other culture values a different thing. In the Hebrew society and history the concept of God exercised the greatest influence and all of life revolved around this concept. When it did not revolve around the concept, it was seen as a state of rebellion. This was not the case among the Chewa. The concept of God did not have any significant role in the social life of the people except in the belief that he gave them rain.

Within their cultural limits, the Chewa have concepts relating to their world-view, but these concepts have not received the refinement which some concepts in western countries have received. The biblical concept of God was progressively refined from crude anthropomorphism to abstract descriptions and in theological thinking it has a long tradition of reflection and refinement. From early times, the Hebrews were enjoined to tell the saving activities of God to succeeding generations.²

The Chewa concept has no literary tradition behind it and it has come to us through traditional beliefs handed down from the fathers by word of mouth. There is no evidence that any reflection on it has been done in order to clarify the concept. The concept, therefore, bears the trappings of mystery and the resulting beliefs have animistic tendencies. The concept is theologically less developed especially as it affects life, history and human destiny. Whereas the biblical concept of God is central

and dynamic, having direct inescapable implications for life, history and human destiny, the Chewa concept remains latent within the culture. This latency may be explained by the fact that God was remote, but not detached and that he was not central and therefore not an important factor in the social dynamics of the culture.

7.3. COSMOLOGICAL OUTLOOK

In broad outline, the biblical and Chewa cosmologies are very similar. They both begin with God as creator who lives in fellowship with men and takes care of them. They both have a realm of spiritual beings even though they are different in origin. In the Bible this realm of spiritual beings is occupied by angels and demonic spirits. The angels being God's messengers and the demonic spirits being fallen angels working against the will of God in the world. The idea of angels may be pre-Mosaic, but that it only received its full development in the post exilic period. The angels as messengers of God, show the exaltedness of Yahweh (Is 6:3), his succouring power in fighting Yahweh's battles and are agents of God's punitive action. For the Chewa, the realm of spiritual beings is filled with the spirits of the living-dead. These act as intermediaries between the living and God and they look into the well-being of the living. After the realm of spiritual beings, there is the physical world in which man lives. Man is dependent for his livelihood on what the physical world gives him. He receives rain, light, air, vegetation and plant growth for himself and for animals. The Bible assigns the responsibility of stewardship to man. In the Chewa tradition the stewardship role is not explicit, but hunting, agriculture and food gathering have been the major occupations for man.

Both traditions acknowledge God as Creator. Among the Chewa, this comes out in the word *Namalenga*. In the Kafirintiwa creation myth, creation

is assumed when God, man and animals come from the sky in a shower to an existing earth. How the earth was made, is not made clear. According to the Biblical tradition, God created the heavens and the earth and he has a direct relationship with man as testified in the book of the Prophet Zechariah,

"Thus says the LORD, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him". (Zech. 12:1).

Man owes his life to God. There are no spiritual intermediaries between God and man who act as the go-between as the ancestors are among the Chewa. Man can approach man directly even though the priesthood came to occupy a mediating role in the later years of Israelite history. Man's integrity before his Creator, according to the Genesis story and the Deuteronomic historian, results in environmental stability and beneficence and that the loss of this integrity leads to destabilization of the environment. The link between man's moral integrity and environmental stability is also found in the creation myth and popular belief.

While it is acknowledged in Chewa thought that God sustains the world, his active presence has been replaced by the ancestors. It is understood by this that the activity concerned with man's well being, which according to Biblical tradition is ascribed to God, is ascribed to the ancestors in the Chewa tradition. Good rain, a good harvest, multiplication of domestic animals are due to the good favour of the ancestors and they reciprocate their hospitality with offerings. In speech the name of God rarely comes up and if it does it is due to Christian influence and not traditional religiosity. Names (personal) that are associated with God are hard to come by and the writer has not come across one. One usually hears people swear, "Mulungudi!" meaning, "by God I swear my innocence" or "Mulungu yekha adziwa" meaning, "only God knows" or "Mulungu sapanganika" meaning, "one cannot negotiate terms with God". The author has not come across a proverb on God or his activity even though, as it has

already been noted, there are a lot of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in Chichewa. The possibility that there might be remains open. Therefore, the Chewa knew a God who was creator and remotely remained sustainer.

The God of the Bible on the other hand is not only creator and sustainer, but one who is actively involved in its affairs as he guides human destiny. It is not the universe which is mysterious, but God, and consequently man is forbidden to be amazed at the host of heaven, to consult wizards and diviners, and to practice necromancy. God is over and above the universe and presently available to man.³

7.4. THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

Earlier on we looked briefly at how culture can shape theological thinking and expression. We shall now pursue this further. Here we would like to compare words used to express the concept of God in the Bible and the Chewa traditions.

Looking at the names of God in the Bible, we have words which refer to his essential being, such as Elohim, El Olam, Yahweh. There are other descriptions which emphasize his moral essence, for instance, righteousness, justice, goodness, truth etc. We have descriptions of God which give the idea that God has a physical body e.g. phrases which depict God as a man of war,⁴ or an angry beast bellowing smoke and fire from his nostril.⁵ Of course this point cannot be pressed too far because poetic language deals with vivid imagery and cannot be taken literally.

From our discussion of the Chewa conception, it is observable there too, that the various names, attributes and descriptions of God emphasize certain aspects of his nature. For instance, Mphambe refers to the terrible-ness and power of God, the biblical equivalent of God as a consuming fire.⁶ The name Namalenga places emphasis on God's creative activity while Chanjiri emphasizes fearsomeness.

What we need to note here is that, it is common to both traditions to use phenomena to describe God, but this is done analogically. When the Bible refers to God as "rock",⁶ it does not mean that God is made of that substance. When the Chewa call God Leza, it does mean that he is lightning, but that lightning is a manifestation of his power, wrath, swift action and terribleness. Physical phenomena are used in both traditions to describe one deity. This is so because the mystery of God comes to man in a veiled manner. He is to both Chewa and the Bible, a God who hides himself.⁷

In the biblical traditions a development of the concept is discernible. From simple naive conceptions in the patriarchal narratives of a God who speaks directly to people, manifests himself as man, we see a change in conception to a highly refined concept during the exilic and post exilic period. The emphasis is more on his transcendence than his immanence. There is a movement from a period when God is one of many to a period when he is the only God and all other so called gods are nothing. There is a shift from the thought that various gods are in-charge of various aspects of nature, against which Deutero-Isaiah spoke, to a declaration that all natural phenomena are under the direct control of God. Such a development is lacking in the Chewa traditions. Without a literary tradition it may be expecting too much by looking for such a development.

The other idea which is significant to our discussion of the concept of God in biblical and Chewa traditions is that of revelation. There is a vast amount of literature on the subject and the scope of this study does not allow us to make an adequate survey of the literature and subject. The Bible claims that God has revealed himself to man through epiphanies, the prophets, the law and the cult. The prophets themselves always preface their message with phrases like, "Thus saith the LORD", "The word of God came to me" or conclude with, "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken". The prophets were not speaking out their own ideas, but God's word just as a messenger sent by his king would say when delivering the message. In the

New Testament, God's revelation has been focused in Jesus.⁸ God has spoken in a final way in Jesus. He is the fullest revelation of God, being himself Emmanuel (God with us) or God incarnate.

In the Chewa tradition, we do not find the same claim as we find in the Bible. The nearest we come to it is in the case of spirit possession, but even in this, it is the dead who speak rather than God. In our discussion on Makewana, it was mentioned that she acted as a prophetess interpreting the message from beyond the grave, be it of God or the ancestors to the people. The prophetic tradition took the form of prediction, than the declaration of God's will even this element of prediction was carried out by those who practised ula. Those who predicted or practised ula could be properly described as seers. These were people who had the ability to discern the future or what is hidden. Therefore, we may not find among the Chewa the same kind of prophet as we find in Israel during the 7th century and later, but we find seers, a kind of prophet and how they performed their task was more culturally determined than theologically.

With a fully developed concept of God, the Bible has a far-reaching theology that touches every aspect of man's existence and his world. This is not the case with the Chewa concept and its significance is limited as the God it portrays is remote and of little immediate conscious significance. In conception, the functions of God and those of the ancestors which affect their daily life, get mixed up and it is the ancestors who seem to get the immediate attention.

7.5. MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD

Here too, both traditions claim some kind of worship and in certain respects their worship has common features. At the heart of the structure of worship are cultic activities which act as means of communicating with their object of worship whether directly or through intermediaries. These

cultic activities involve prayer, sacrifices, offerings, eating and drinking, and even dancing. In the case of Biblical traditions, the cultic drama is directed towards God, even in the case of enthronement ceremonies. The king was thought to be appointed and anointed by God and it is God who was called upon to bless the new king.⁹ Worship in the Bible follows a calendar pattern after agricultural festivals and some festivals follow historical events. It is likely that the commemoration of historical events may have been linked to agricultural festivals.¹⁰ In the New Testament the sacrificial system has been replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus and the liturgy consists of prayer, the breaking of bread and the ministry of the word.¹¹

Among the Chewa cultic activities follow the seasonal calendar. They concentrate at the beginning of the rainy season, then at the beginning of the new crop, then after this, during the hunting time in the dry season. These religious acts are generally directed to the ancestors and through them to God with whom they seem to be closely associated. Worship among the Chewa is sporadic, governed by the occurrence of natural disasters or crises. In Chewa liturgical traditions the significant element is the placating of the spirits or deity to alleviate suffering or whatever misfortune or it is to forestal their displeasure. It is negative in its import. In the biblical traditions, the most important element is praise¹² and thanksgiving. Praise and thanksgiving because God deserves this kind of response and secondly because man does not deserve God's acts of power and mercy. God acts inspite of man and against a background of man's inability to help himself. The cultic hymns as seen in the book of Psalms are based on the praise motif. This motif is so dominant that even the laments end up on a note of praise and hope.¹³

Apart from the cult, man responds to God by his way of life depending on which authority he acknowledges as ultimate. In the Bible, it is God's authority which is ultimate and it is God's law which enshrines that

authority--an authority demonstrated historically by the deliverance from Egypt through Moses and theologically by the covenant with Abraham, that of Sinai and the redemption through Christ. Man's behaviour has to conform to God's standard out of gratitude for what God has done and as the most appropriate response befitting man. Failure to acknowledge this authority renders one subject to condemnation. Such a prospect acts as an incentive for proper behaviour.

For the Chewa ethical considerations are not determined by God's law but by mwambo as prescribed by the fathers (Makolo). Misconduct may be punished by the living through the court (bwalo la mlandu) or the ancestors by showing their displeasure. Therefore, misconduct is primarily either against the mwambo or the ancestors or the living, and only secondarily does it affect God. Common to both traditions, as already seen, is that immorality results in the destabilization of the environment. The right ordering of one's life according to the Torah and Mwambo, ensures the peace of the land. By peace we mean the proper working of natural forces so as to enhance man's wellbeing instead of disrupting it through floods, droughts, barren soils, epidemics and wild animals becoming destructive. God can be said to determine behaviour among the Chewa only in and through the ancestors. The idea of sin as lawlessness in respect to God is virtually non-existent. The law and authority that is feared or acknowledged is that which accords with the Mwambo, and the mwambo has no divine origins. The Torah was given by God through Moses and all other traditions were derived from it, but the mwambo was given by the Makolo (Fathers). By Chewa traditions, David's sin with Bethsheba could have had nothing to do with God, but only with the relatives of Uriah and Bethsheba. Yet the confession in Psalm 51, traditionally attributed to David says,

"Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in your sight,...."

Among the Chewa, God does not come immediately in their ethical considerations.

7.6. HUMAN DESTINY

That life continues beyond the grave is one of the major beliefs among the Chewa, but the life in the hereafter is not determined by their relationship to God, rather by their lives in the here and now. Good and beneficent lives in this life continue to be good and beneficent to those who are still living. Their happiness is determined by the living through what they offer them and not by God. This is why the living must take a lot of care in burying their dead and performing all the associated rituals, especially those of putting the spirit to rest (Kugoneka mzimu). The relationship of the dead to God is not clear. It is thought that they are closer to him and he is more accessible to them. This is why they also act as intermediaries.

The New Testament goes beyond the idea of Sheol and transforms it by putting in its place heaven where God lives and welcomes those who perform his will. The wicked are consigned to everlasting punishment.¹⁴ God judges the actions of men by Jesus and this judgement takes place continuously depending on what attitude men adopt towards Jesus. The Bible also speaks of a final judgement when men's destiny is finally sealed.

The idea of salvation is of great significance to the whole question of human destiny. This idea has relevance for all aspects of life in the here and now and also in the hereafter. Salvation has to do with the saving of the whole of man's existential situation from the destructive and corrupting effects of the power of sin leading to restored and living fellowship with God. It is the reconciling of man to God by God. As we saw in the last chapter, God is at the very centre of this process as its subject and initiator whereas man is the object of salvation. People enter into this salvation by their association with Jesus and have a foretaste of the full salvation to come at the consummation of the kingdom. Salvation in this sense of the word is not found in the Chewa tradition.

The Chewa tradition limits itself to escape from physical harm or danger and does not extend to the whole of man's existential situation. It does not involve God, but rather the ancestors. Whenever one escapes from some danger or strikes at some fortune, it is to the Azimu (spirits) that the success is attributed. The quality of life beyond the grave is viewed differently by both traditions. According to the Chewa view, life beyond the grave follows the same routine as life on this side of the grave. The dead are buried with their utensils and implements. Dying is sometimes thought of as a journey and the dead are given provisions for their journey. It is not known how long it takes to get back to the place of the dead. The Bible presents the view that the dead live in the presence of God as disembodied spirits even as they wait for the resurrection and translation of their mortal bodies into immortality. St. Paul, with this hope in view, expressed a desire of dying so that he could be with Christ as a better prospect than remaining in the flesh. For him, to live was Christ and to die was gain.¹⁵ The difference in the quality of life is due to the concept of God who has a purpose for man and controls his destiny in the biblical traditions, while in the Chewa traditions, it is the lack of such a concept and a life viewed in terms of man that diminishes that quality. As a result, life beyond the grave is no different from what it is like now except for the body. It is suggested here that the idea of eternal life is the logical outcome of the concept of God who is greater than the universe and purposively involved in it.

7.7. CONCLUSION

The comparative discussion that we have undertaken in this chapter has shown us, inspite of the differing perspectives and emphasis, that there are areas in which theological bridgeheads could be made for a meaningful dialogue. These areas are the concept of God, the communality of the Chewa Society, the anthropocentrism and the culture of the people.

In daily living God is remote and man is generally concerned with himself as a member of a particular community. He does not consciously live in response to God or some liturgical demands. Man is the measure of all things. Since there exists the concept of God, it would be a matter of realising that what they ascribed to the ancestors actually came from God. In other words, God has to be presented as a practical reality in the way St. Paul is reported to have preached.

"... and (we) bring you good news that you should turn... to a living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them... yet he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" Acts 14:15-17.

and

"Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our beings; ...' Acts 17:28.

There is much to which the biblical concept of God could be grafted and thus enlarging and enriching the traditional concept.

The Chewa view takes man, his social and physical environments and his life very seriously and as a result his whole perspective on life centres around him. It would be important to understand the existential conditions in which the Chewa find themselves, analyse and isolate those factors that give meaning and direction to their lives as the following: (food, drink, kinship, hospitality, marriage, procreation, status, but also fear of witchcraft, illness, physical harm, death) and fit that existential situation into the enlarged concept of God. In other words, there is need for a theology of culture and of man in which man and his culture are explained in the new concept of God. Popular preaching has more often than not ignored the factors that condition and to which man reacts and degrading this life while promising people life beyond the grave as the most important and valuable. The Chewa tradition should stand as a reminder that life in this world must be taken seriously. It is in this

life that God has to be a practical reality.

The question of their solidarity with the ancestors is a very crucial one. The biblical tradition manifests aspects of it in regarding the patriarchs as the ancestors, but this is limited to the Old Testament. In the New Testament linkage to Abraham is through Jesus. God being God of both the living and the dead, and involved with both, the concept of God can be brought in between the living and the dead and through it establish a new solidarity which is no longer based on kinship and community, but on God, and humanity. Any reverence to them should be in gratitude to God for their contribution. A relevant theology of culture should be able to deal with this question. The solidarity that exists among the living on varying levels—family, clan, village, tribal, language and now nation must be theologically viewed and fitted into the enlarged concept of God. There is the need for a theology of society that takes seriously man's existential situation.

We have hinted on the fact that anthropocentrism can be accommodated in theocentrism. This is important for morality. Once man is the measure of all things, the rule of conduct may be anything. A concept of God as described above leads people to internalise their ethical values and to act accordingly so long as they are mindful of God. Therefore, a theology of ethics is necessary and should be based on the concept of God, and also a theology of man, evil and the environment.

With these conclusions in mind, we will turn in the next chapter to look at what implications the Chewa concept of God has for the Christian faith. We will have occasion then to survey some of the needs we have expressed here at a deeper level.

Notes on Chapter Seven

- ¹It is not certain when the Deuteronomist composed the book of Deuteronomy and other historical books. The book of the law found in the temple should mark the latest period for the book. Since it was long deposited in the temple, it shows that some time has elapsed before it was discovered. Therefore its composition should be possibly before the fall of the northern kingdom and the traditions it records may be of great antiquity even though they might have been modified theologically.
- ²Dt. 6:20-25.
- ³Is. 47:12-15, 8:19.
- ⁴Ex. 15:3.
- ⁵Ps. 18:8.
- ⁶Dt. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:2.
- ⁷Is. 45:15.
- ⁸John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20.
- ⁹Ps. 93, 97, 99, 101.
- ¹⁰For instance the passover was celebrated in the month of Nis-an to commemorate the beginning of the Jewish year. It has been suggested that the festivals done following the calendar month reflects the situation after settling in Canaan. (Ringgren, p.185).
- ¹¹Acts 2:42, 6:4.
- ¹²See Ps. 135, 136, 138; 146-150; Josh. 7:19; 34-36.
- ¹³Cf. Ps. 69:34-36.
- ¹⁴Cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:3-11.
- ¹⁵Philippians 1:21-24.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER EIGHTIMPLICATIONS8.1. INTRODUCTION

In this last chapter, we will draw out whatever implications the Chewa concept of God has for Christian theology, anthropology, culture, evangelism and church discipline.

There is need for a dialogue, between Christian theology and African religious traditions, if Christianity is to speak relevantly and meaningfully to the African. Christianity came to Africa as something from outside just as it came to Europe, but with time it adopted the culture of those areas. Indeed as early as the time of Paul the question of cultural relevance was urgent as the gospel message went beyond the confines of Judaism. When Christianity reached Africa, it came in the cultural and theological wrappings of Europe and America and the variety of their churchmanship. Until now, the church in Africa, in general and Malawi in particular, is governed by creeds formulated in those countries where the missionaries came from and the theological traditions which they followed. This being the case, the gospel message has not been relevantly presented by not shedding the Western culture and grafting itself to the African culture and thought and it has also failed to relate meaningfully to the existential situation of the people. Even though Christianity has been accepted, it is viewed as a foreign religion and the message as that which concerns foreign deities. Further to this, the message has not been addressed to their problems, but kept on speaking of western problems. Therefore, it lacked relevance. The thought form in which it is being presented is of a foreign culture and therefore less meaningful. The question of relevance and meaning is an urgent one. Western civilization and its culture has produced a split personality among those who have been

influenced by it and this state of affairs is an unhealthy one from which the African must be rescued.

Although theology must be as universal as possible in its essence, it cannot avoid having a local twist in order to suit its cultural environment. There is therefore need for a relevant theology in the categories and thought forms that are meaningful to the people among whom the theological task is done. Christian theology as we have it in Africa has been developed in the West in response to intellectual, social and cultural challenges in an attempt to make the Christian message relevant and meaningful in those areas. Africans have different problems and a relevant theology must address itself to these problems. These problems have already been mentioned elsewhere. Bishop Tutu¹ states that Christian theology arising out of Africa should offer a theology of power in the face of an epidemic of coups and military rule, a theology of development, a theology that addresses itself on issues of poverty, disease among others.

8.2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

African Christian theology has not yet come up with a method of carrying out its task of the production of a relevant and meaningful theology. Fr. Charles Nyamiti² has tried to argue for an anthropocentric theology. He subjects the doctrine of God to that of man and God is considered only in terms of man. He says,

"African anthropocentrism implies that the African makes the dimensions of human life and existence as the centre of value and understanding. The result of this is that he centres everything (including God)³ on human life, both in the appreciation of its value and in the way of thinking of it. God and universe are interpreted in terms of human existence".⁴

G. Setiloane presents a more radical view on doing Christian theology in Africa. He would rather have nothing to do with western concept. Writing on the concept of religion he says,

"It is because I am myself of the conviction that the concept of 'religion' is a western phenomenon, defining the deity (God) whether it be a supreme being, father, brother, or mother, and even capable of dying. To do this in this paper would be importing foreign categories and trying to force the African understanding to stand or fall according to whether they make sense to them".⁵

He lets the traditional concepts speak for themselves and stand by themselves. The gospel message is then interpreted in terms of this. He criticises Mbiti for forcing traditional thought into a western mould. He says,

"It is a pity that Bolaji Idowu's book African Traditional Religion: A definition, reached the printers so late. By then John Mbiti had already filled hungry minds in Africa and abroad with his apologetical work, compiling African religion with philosophy and much too simplistically drawing up similarities between African traditional understanding and the christian faith".⁶

Advocates of Black theology have approached theology from their existential social situation. Buthelezi says,

"Black Theology methodology takes seriously the situation of the black man and seeks to understand the gospel in relation to experience in this situation. Seeing that the black man experiences life from the position of being rejected because of his blackness, the methodology seeks to interpret the gospel as a liberating event from the chains of rejection".⁷

This approach is limited to the South African situation where there is oppression of the blackman. The rest of Africa does not share in a similar situation even though at one time they did.

There are other theologians who have advocated different approaches such that there is not one method for doing theology in Africa, but all these approaches have points to recommend them and they tend to agree on major points even though they differ in emphasis. Jose Chipenda sees these areas of agreement to be:-

1. The understanding of African history and to discover what has shaped the African people to be what they are.
2. The stressing of the fact that God's revelation is addressed to all people.
3. Theology in Africa should spring from the people. Theology or talk about God should take the African culture seriously.
4. Theology should help us to realise that faith flows from life to doctrine and not the other way round.⁸ Bishop T. Tshibangu of Zaire also mentions similar points to those of Chipenda. He mentions the importance of:
 - (1) Traditional values.
 - (2) The general evolution of the African situation; and
 - (3) The clarification of theological problems which have not been resolved.⁹

The question of method can be tackled adequately only from a proper understanding of what theology is or ought to be and what its aim is. Theology as word about God and how he relates to man's existential situation, can only start from God. The primary source for talking about God is the Bible. This has been maintained by a number of theologians.¹⁰ God's revelation has come to all people in some measure and it is the biblical and Christian view that it is concretely and visibly focused in Jesus. That revelation shows us who God is and what this means for man and the world. There are some theologians who have made man's existential situation as the starting point, but while it is important to know the human condition, it cannot be the starting point because it has nothing to say about God, but God addresses the human condition in his revelation. To start from the human condition will lead to the same. Even those who make man the starting point, do so on the assumption that God has addressed himself to the human condition. A prophetic theology is possible only on the

assumption that God has spoken otherwise one has nothing to declare, but one's own thoughts and not God's word.

Nyamiti argues against theological narrow-mindedness. The surest way towards this is to start from man and move out to God. Compared to God, man as a starting point is a narrow perspective that is bound to distort theology. Only the God perspective is wide enough to make sense of everything that exists. The smaller should subject itself to the greater. It is very African to define the smaller in terms of the greater; to identify the child in terms of his parents or grandparents, the village headman in relation to his chief.

By denying that man can be the starting point we do not say that he is only a passive recipient of what God gives, but rather it means that God is the initiator and man responds to God's move actively. Therefore, it is a theological task to look at how he is responding to God's initiative and whether it accords with the revelation in Jesus. Jesus being the God-Man, provides the pattern for man's response. The task of studying man's response is secondary to that of studying God's revelation. This is why anthropocentric theology must give primacy to theocentric theology.

African theology needs to be done in the context of Africa. It need not dress African deities in western robes or dress the biblical God in African robes, but letting God be the God as revealed in scripture to Africans in their existential situation. This can be done by leading the people to a personal experience and knowledge of God. It means a personal commitment and not a blind following of tradition. Each person to know and rejoice in the reality of God who is sufficient to meet all his needs and to find in him a sense of purpose and destiny.

8.3. THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Let us suppose that we had only the Chewa traditions to theologize

with, what kind of theology could we come out with? To answer this question, it is important to know first what the theological task is.

Beginning with what Bishop T. Tshibangu writes, he says,

"Theology is actually a scientific or scholarly act of commitment. Defining it in precise and dynamic terms, we can say that it is 'the science dealing with the divine destiny of humanity.' This science is grounded on God's revelation in Christ and it is based on deep, thoroughgoing knowledge of human beings and the factors that condition their lives".¹¹

Bishop Tshibangu mentions three important things in the task of theology.

These things are:-

1. Personal commitment without which the task is only speculative. This commitment makes a person to person communion possible which is an important factor in religious knowledge.
2. God's revelation in Christ as the focal point of the theological task by which God and man are linked in the salvation process.
3. A deep knowledge of human beings and factors that condition human life.

This observation is very significant such that relevance and meaning in theology cannot be achieved without this. It is maintained here that right theological thinking coupled with a correct analysis of the human condition is the only way to a balanced, relevant and meaningful theology.

Where does this leave us with the Chewa traditions?

Chauta or Mulungu is a pervasive, personal, terrible creative spirit who is acknowledged as creator of all that is. Even though he is invisible, yet he reveals himself through his acts of concern for man by providing rain, air, plant growth, and the sun. He can be relied upon in time of need with the aid of the ancestors. Even though he seems remote, it is because he is socially transcendent and therefore must not be bothered with little matters. The fact that he is not bothered with small matters results from the fact that he is too "elderly" and such a request could

amount to disrespect. On the other hand, it means that man in his limited capacity can take care of some of these small affairs without referring them to God. Man is allowed some authority and ability to manage some of his own affairs. Those matters which man finds that are far beyond his capacity even with the aid of mankhwala, he refers to Chauta. Chauta is not an individual person's God, but God of the community and he is appealed to from the solidarity of the community which is in fellowship with the ancestors.

Chauta's revelation of himself comes through natural phenomena, the lightning, the thunder, the wind, the rain, droughts and epidemics and also through religious personalities in dreams, trances and spirit possession. This revelation has meaning and value for the time it is given and it is never made into a universal creed even though future revelatory events might be affected by past events in their interpretations.

In understanding the human condition among the Chewa, one cannot overlook the solidarity between the living and the ancestors. Whether they are good or bad, the ancestors are all part of the united community and they all relate to God as such. The well-being of the living is closely connected with the ancestors and the ancestors are dependent on the living for their own well-being and together as a united community they are all dependent on Chauta, Namalenga.

Such a theology has significant implication for the Christian faith on two important points. Firstly, where are we to place Jesus in this scheme? Setiloane has seen the concept of Sing'anga (traditional healer) as a christological departure for Africa. This is a bold suggestion. A sing'anga ideally, has both the knowledge to diagnose a disease and treat it, his Mankhwala is filled with (living) power which makes it potent and often he has psychic powers and acts as a seer. Such a concept covers only an aspect of Jesus' ministry, and is therefore inadequate for

christological thinking unless we have to fill in the rest with other concepts. In areas where physical and psychical ailments are attributed to evil men and evil spirits, the Sing'anga is the person who deals with these. Jesus dealt with these very problems and he delved deeper than the Sing'angas are able. All that is needed is to build the picture of an ideal Sing'anga and prune it of all bad connotation before it can be used christologically. This is one way of accommodating Christology with the Chewa tradition in mind for theological relevance and meaning.

Secondly, the place of the ancestors. Is there room for them in the Christian schemes or are they to be left out completely in the cold? Are the living to accept this and how do they escape the displeasure of the spirits thus divorced from the rest of the community? What is going to happen to their communal identity and traditions? These are important and urgent questions. The Church in Africa can ignore these questions on its own peril.

Edward Fashole-Luke has suggested that the doctrine of the communion of Saints be developed to include the ancestors. He thinks this is important because (using the Tallensi of Ghana as a case study),

- (1) Ancestry and more particularly parenthood, is the critical and irreducible determinant of their whole social structure.
 - (2) The chief filial obligation of sons is the performance of funeral rites for their parents.
 - (3) The ancestors are the guardians and custodians of the moral values.
 - (4) Morality is not only based on right conduct but right relationships.¹²
- Commenting on what Fortes says, Fashole-Luke mentions two significant truths about ancestral cults in Africa:

1. That the cult represents the sacralization of family ties, preserve the solidarity between the dead and the living, thus enhancing unity in the community.

2. The cult indicates that the ancestors are the custodians of the morality of the tribe or community, hence ethical conduct is determined by reverence for the ancestors.¹³

Fashole-Luke argues that there is need for a profound appraisal and a deeper theological interpretation of the beliefs about the departed and suggests that the interpretation of the phrase sanctorum communio to mean fellowship with holy people of all ages and the whole company of heaven through participation in the holy sacraments gives a lead to the solution of the place of the ancestors in the Christian church. He urges further that through the eucharist, we are linked by Christ death to the communion of the departed and since the death of Christ is for the whole world and no one either living or dead is outside the scope of the merits of Christ's death, in him we are linked with the -Christian ancestors.

A warning to the effect that theological interpretation should conform to the revelation that we have of both God and man and not just to fit in the African beliefs, is necessary here. The danger of trying to accommodate the Bible to African beliefs will always be with us. We must be careful in our interpretation of the Bible and our understanding of the African traditions. While it is true that the death of Christ is for the whole world, it is equally true that it was a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Greeks, but to those who were being saved, it became to them power and wisdom of God to both Jews and Greeks.¹⁴ The Christ-event introduces an element of individual responsibility in order to regroup Jews and gentiles into a new solidarity, no longer based on clan, tribe, race, but on Christ the bearer of the new humanity. The Bible testifies that Jesus went and preached to the spirits (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18-20)". They are supposed to make a personal response and be united with the living in Christ. As already stated we cannot equate sainthood with ancestorhood. The one depends on a positive response to the finished work of Christ and

while the other depends on physical reproduction. While appreciating Fashole-Luke's concern for the ancestors share in Christ and in trying to accommodate them to the new faith, his universalism should be rejected. There should be another way of dealing with the problem of solidarity with the ancestors than by assimilating them into the communion of saints. St. Paul may be giving us a pointer to a right understanding of the status of the ancestors when he says,

"For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When gentiles who have not the law, do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not know the law. They show that "What the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness..." (Rom. 2:13-16).

The point being that man even without being exposed to the law has an idea of right action, right dealings or right relationship and by following the path righteousness he is justified. Have there not been a lot of ancestors who pursued the way of righteousness before God inspite of the structural evil prevalent in their day? Surely there were just as there were wicked people. The standards of righteousness in the traditional African society are a testimony to the genius and influence of such people. Solidarity with them may be maintained through their righteousness and/or Christ finish work of redemption which extends to them as well. On both accounts, not all of them may be included in the communion of saints just because they are in the group of ancestors. To claim that the ancestors are lost forever is as presumptuous as saying that they are part of the church triumphant.

The third point we need to consider is that of the factors that condition man's life-his cultural heritage. What is needed before an assessment of any culture is made, is a theology of culture, a theology that takes man and his creative powers seriously and views these within

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8.4. ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Man occupies the centre of the Chewa world-view in his individuality and in his communality. Man has value in himself as man and he is distinct from other created things. He is munthu (human) and not chinthu (thing or wild animal). His social status adds little to him as Munthu. He is a spiritual being even though not made in God's image. In his life, man is preoccupied with himself and how to survive against tremendous odds that confront him on every side. His life is conditioned by these physical and spiritual forces. The man, in Chewa tradition, cannot be said to be man come of age, that he need not depend on God any longer. This would go contrary to the traditional understanding of blood kinship. Children are never ever completely independent of their parents. They might enjoy some amount of freedom and live at a distance from the parents, but they are held together by strong cords of kinship. This is also true of the Chewa and Chauta. Man is left to enjoy some freedom of action, but through kinship relationship with the ancestors and because of their dependence on the environment, he cannot be completely independent of Chauta. He comes of age within the realm of interdependent relationships.

The intrinsic value of man as to his nature must be maintained, but not at the expense of doing away with the creator. The man we are concerned with is not just the individual, but the one we have called the communal-man or man-in-community, the munthu. The individual is supposed to be the concentration of what the best of humanity is as manifested in the community. Kenneth Kaunda singles out the following as the major characteristics of the African community, which must be reflected in the individual also. He says that first, it is an inclusive society. He then declares "African Society has always been man-centred".¹⁸

Both the Chewa and biblical tradition present a high view of man and maintain his unique position in the created world. He has a dignity all

of his own. It takes the whole of his existential situation to understand who man is. The Chewa view differs from the biblical view in that its theological context is narrow, that is, man's unique relationship to God is not only through creation and providence, but in and through salvation history. Therefore, it needs a coherent theological world-view which while maintaining man's dignity and delegated managerial power to subdue the earth, has God as the centre. It is only within a theological context that the human ideal can be fully appreciated and made possible. To understand man, he must be defined within a greater perspective. The Chewa concepts therefore provides a useful bridgehead in the theological task.

the culture that doctrine arise and the resulting church becomes authentic.

8.5. ETHNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Much has been said about what relationship must be maintained between christianity and African culture. Do we have to christianize the African traditions or Africanize Christianity? Do we have to adopt Christianity to the African world view or the African world-view to Christianity? Is African tradition the precursor of Christianity and therefore fulfilling the role of a forerunner? These questions are based on a wrong assumption that the two traditions are opposed to each other. Such a presupposition arises out of a faulty understanding of what the gospel is. The gospel is Jesus Christ and Jesus came to reconcile,¹⁹ to create one man in place of two.²⁰ He is God incarnate, the word that became flesh - dwelling among us full of grace and truth.²¹ It is Jesus who comes into the Chewa culture and he must incarnate himself within it. Jesus does not come to abolish culture even though he may sit in judgement over it. He comes to redeem it from those elements which ran contrary to the will of God and man's well-being and to give a deep significance to those elements which conform to God's will and man's well-being. Setiloane sees authentic Christianity for Africans to be possible on condition that they are truly and fully African,²²

in other words, Christianity must implant itself within their culture. The question may be asked how does Jesus become incarnate in a culture? This is the task of the spirit of God, but from the human side through the influence of the same spirit, Jesus becomes incarnate through the word preached and taught relevantly and meaningfully. The preached word must relate meaningfully to the existential condition of the people. The people to whom the gospel is preached must be made to see their need of Christ for their culture and only when they see the need and make a commitment, only then can they be taught to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus over the rest of their culture. It is out of this encounter between Jesus and the culture that doctrine arise and the resulting church becomes authentic. Therefore for Jesus to become incarnate in a culture, we need to have comprehensive knowledge of the existential condition within the culture, and a relevant and meaningful christology. In whose lives Jesus and their culture are at home will each other. They will always be children of two

8.6. EVANGELISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Jesus is the good news. Mark begins his message by declaring that he is writing the "gospel of Jesus".²³ Evangelism is the proclamation of this good news which is Jesus. It is the good news of salvation from the alienation of sin in all its spiritual and structural manifestation accomplished in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, evangelism among the Chewa should mean the proclamation of Jesus in such a way that they see the need of this salvation by having the alienation brought about by sin demonstrated in a concrete way both in its spiritual and structural aspects, on a personal and communal level. Evangelism should aim at declaring the good news in the idiom and thought forms of the people with a view to making it easy for them to perceive their condition and opt for what Christ offers.

The introductions of organizations or a set of doctrines to people

the Lordship of Jesus. It is not Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Methodism that needs to be substantiated but Jesus among Malawian believers and their confession of the same.

will lead to a commitment to either the organization or the ideology, and probably not to Christ. Jesus is supposed to enter into the existential condition of any people and he takes the condition seriously and then deals with it accordingly in order to bring about abundant life.²⁴ Evangelism must take man's condition seriously, be it social, economic, political, educational, psychological, religious and cultural. Jesus must be presented to these conditions in his saving power. The approach which promises only better things in heaven and not in this life, or that fosters the hellenistic view of the salvation of the soul regardless of what is done in the body or the simplistic view of the new birth which makes salvation a thing of the heart and not of the whole condition of man, and failing to spell out existential implications of the call to repent and believe, will not do. They will result into superficial christians and not authentic ones. They will not produce wholesome Christians in whose lives Jesus and their culture are at home with each other. They will always be children of two worlds. The churches in their missionary effort must learn to be a Malawian church to the Malawians for the Malawians. Doctrinal formulations must come from the people themselves in the way they comprehend God's revelation. The church can never become truly Malawian until the Malawian believers formulate from their own understanding and within their existential condition in the light of the Christ-event, their own Malawian confession or creed.²⁵ Without this, the church will remain foreign and largely irrelevant to the culture and socio-political and economic condition of the people.

Even though we have discussed all that has gone before, the political emphasis on national unity does not allow us to restrict our theologizing to the various language and cultural groups. Indeed points of emphasis may differ from group to group, but the church must rise above the local colouring, beyond the national to a universal solidarity of believers under

the Lordship of Jesus. It is not Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Methodism that needs to be authenticated but Jesus among Malawian believers and their confession of the same.

8.7. ECCLESIASTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

(a) DOCTRINE

Much has been already said on this one. It is not being advocated that all Christian doctrine must give way to new formulation based on African Traditional Religion but that the doctrinal formulation as received here must be reconsidered and possibly modified and those found wanting rejected or reformulated against a traditional outlook. Since the outlooks on theology differ and the questions being asked are not the same, make this task of reconsidering doctrine urgent as part of achieving authenticity and selfhood of the church.

It is suggested here that the way the task of reconsidering doctrine within the context of Malawi will have to start with the doctrine of God, and then that of man before considering soteriology and finally eschatology. As it has been argued, God is the greater perspective from which everything else must be considered, he is the starting point. Under the heading of God will be considered the traditional understanding, the biblical view, the contrasting of the two view and then formulation of the doctrine from the two views. Beginning with the traditional view is important because we have to start from what is known and move to less familiar ground. The doctrine of man could be considered in a similar way beginning with the traditional view, the biblical view, the contrast, a synthesis, man's relation to God, man and community, man and the environment, the concept of sin as alienation and its effects on man's existential condition, and a theology of culture.

Having looked at the idea of alienation and defined a theology of culture, we move to the doctrine of soteriology and that christology and

pneumatology would be considered against and within this doctrine. Here again we would look for bridgeheads within the traditional view before considering the biblical view and possible amplification. We consider that the eschatological doctrine is very important in view of what traditions have to say on it. The doctrine of Trinity important as it has been in the church would not be treated along with the doctrine of God because there is no clear formulation of it which could be meaningful and because of the intellectual climate in which it developed. Possibly the best that can be done to the doctrine is to reformulate it as Bishop Christopher Mwaaleka has done in terms of community and sharing.²⁶

(b) CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Church discipline is an area that raises great concern. People are suspended from membership for following traditional forms of marriage, taking protective medicine against witchcraft (and not for taking small-pox vaccine) for drinking beer, for observing traditional funeral rites, for dancing, for taking part in initiation ceremonies or belonging to gule. Yet, very little effort is made to give clear Christian teaching on these matters, a part from simply saying they are forbidden, a taboo for Christians. It must be born in mind that most of the churchgoers live their lives by the Mwambo for most of the time than by the gospel. The fact that the Mwambo is not a divine law militates against adherence to church's discipline code and has no divine imperative. This being the case, morality is more of a human affair and having very little with God until some crisis happens.

For church discipline to be made relevant and meaningful there is need for a theology in context which addresses itself to the existential problems of the people. The immanence of God must be made to bear on man's life otherwise God remains remote in his transcendancy and man is left to himself in his pretended autonomy. In such a situation, where man is

pneumatology would be considered against and within this doctrine. Here again we would look for bridgeheads within the traditional view before considering the biblical view and possible amplification. We consider that the eschatological doctrine is very important in view of what traditions have to say on it. The doctrine of Trinity important as it has been in the church would not be treated along with the doctrine of God because there is no clear formulation of it which could be meaningful and because of the intellectual climate in which it developed. Possibly the best that can be done to the doctrine is to reformulate it as Bishop Christopher Mwaaleka has done in terms of community and sharing.²⁶

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For church discipline to be made relevant and meaningful there is need for a theology in context which addresses itself to the existential problems of the people. The immanence of God must be made to bear on man's life otherwise God remains remote in his transcendancy and man is left to himself in his pretended autonomy. In such a situation, where man is

left to himself, the church remains but another organization like any other philanthropic organization and failing to preach relevantly and meaningfully, discipline will remain a major problem. In other words, members will not live authentic Christian lives of commitment to the will of God. What needs to be done is a balanced concept of God which relates to all of life in a relevant and meaningful way. Membership of the church must focus on commitment to the saviour rather than loyalty to an organization or an intellectual acceptance of doctrines (and not an existential commitment). The church must insist on teaching and addressing itself to those areas which cause the most problems. The believers should be a theologically enlightened community which is intellectually, morally and socially committed to the leadership of Jesus.

8.8. CONCLUSION

If we are to develop a relevant theology for Africa in general and Malawi in particular the following points are important:

(a) There must be a fully developed, all-embracing doctrine of God made relevant and meaningful by taking into account the traditional concepts. It has to stress the reality of God in here and now. A weak doctrine of God will produce a weak theology and a diluted and adulterated faith. A sound and adequate doctrine of God must go along with a personal knowledge of Jesus as Saviour and Lord of man's total existential situation and this leads to a theology that incarnates itself in every culture. The Chewa concept of God provides the point of contact with the Biblical conception but is inadequate for a full doctrine.

To bring about this doctrinal implementation will need a change of approach in the theological education. There has to be an integration of biblical studies and traditional world-view not as just an extra optional subject, but a major theological concern in the educational task of the

church. The church must bring theological education which has been properly integrated with African culture into the pulpit and church classes. It is the duty of every pastor and church leader with the church members to work out this in their local situation.

(b) The ethnological study of a people to be reached by the gospel must be a major concern of those involved in the church's mission of evangelism if the kerygma is to be relevant and intelligible. This concern will show itself in taking the cultural context of the people seriously as the element that conditions their mentality, responses, values and attitudes. At the present time, this will extend to the socio-economic and political aspects. This means that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary for theologians in practice and in training. God has to become real in the daily social, economic and political condition of the people.

(c) A clear grasp of the gospel and the salvation that results is required of all those involved -- the evangelistic task. There is need for the development of the doctrine of salvation which embraces the totality of the existential condition of the Chewa or the Malawi people. God in Christ confronts man in his total situation and comes to redeem that situation from the alienation of sin which affects that situation on all levels - personally, communally, politically, socially, economically, religiously and even psychologically. An adequate doctrine of salvation must address itself to this situation at all these levels. A doctrine concerned with individual salvation of the soul to be gained at death as popularly presented is not only a distortion of the teaching of scripture which sees the work of Christ in cosmic terms, but incompatible with the greatness of God and inadequate for human existence.

(d) The biblical and traditional world-views must be synthesized into a new world view which will be biblically based. This new cosmic orientation would be part of the social, economic and political change taking place.

In practice it means a comprehensive doctrine addressing itself to all aspects of man's existential situation. This exercise will not be limited to the theological topics found in books of systematic theology, but will also include items like politics, development, justice, tribalism, work, recreation, trade, labour, power, urbanization, business, in short, the whole of the human condition. Coupled with the comprehensive formulation of doctrine will be the intensive and sustained discipling of church members so as to orient their thinking and way of life to this doctrinal framework. In this way it will be possible for members to perceive the full implication of their commitment to the lordship of Jesus. Failure to do this will only lead to syncretism in their daily lives. To achieve this, theological schools and the pulpit are crucial. Teaching and learning materials for the African situation need to be developed for both theological colleges and the church membership at large. An authoritarian and dogmatic attitude which tends to impose doctrine rather than teach and clarify it should be avoided. Each member should be encouraged to seek and perceive the truth of the gospel message for himself. Therefore, there should be freedom in their search for truth and also to question some of the fundamental beliefs which are usually taken for granted. Only when the church membership is aware of what it believes can it be authentic and fully responsive to God's will in all situations.

¹² E. Fashole-Luke, "Receptor Veneration and the communion of saints", in A. Glascoff and E. Fashole-Luke (eds) *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the world*; SPCA London, 1974, p. 312.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 1:22-24.

¹⁵ E. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*; New York 1957, p. 2.

Notes on Chapter Eight

- ¹ D. Tutu, "Whither African Theology?" in Christianity in Independent Africa, E. Fashole-Luke, Richard Gray and others (eds) London, 1978, p.369.
- ² C. Nyamiti, The way to Christian Theology; for Africa; Spearhead, Gaba Publications p.8.
- ³ Words in bracket are mine.
- ⁴ C. Nyamiti, *op. cit.*, pp.68-70.
- ⁵ G. Setiloane, "Traditional world-view of the Sotho-Tswana" in Christianity in Independent Africa; p.410.
- ⁶ G. Setiloane, "Where are we in African Theology?" in African Theology en Route, Kofi-Appiah Kubi and Sergio Torres (eds) Maryknoll, New York, 1979, p.62.
- ⁷ M. Buthelezi, "Africa Theology and Black Theology, A search for a theological method", in Relevant Theology for Africa, Hans-Jurgen Becken, Durban 1973, pp.18-24.
- ⁸ J. Chipenda, "Theological options in Africa to-day", in African Theology en Route; pp.69-72.
- ⁹ T. Tshibangu, "The task of African Theologians" in African Theology en Route, pp.73-79.
- ¹⁰ So Mbiti in the article "The Biblical basis for present trends in African Theology" in African Theology en Route; pp.83-94.
- ¹¹ T. Tshibangu, *op. cit.*, p.73.
- ¹² E. Fashole-Luke, "Ancestor Veneration and the communion of saints", in M. Glasswell and E. Fashole-Luke (eds) New Testament Christianity for Africa and the world; SPCK London, 1974, p.212.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p.213.
- ¹⁴ 1 Cor. 1:22-24.
- ¹⁵ W. Robertson Smith, The Religion of the Semites; New York 1957, p.2.

APPENDIX I

A GLOSSARY OF CHEWA WORDS

- Akafula or Batwa - A race of short people of the pygmy stock who occupied most of Malawi before the arrival of the Chewa. They are called Akafula possibly because they were iron smelters.
- Chinamwali - Female initiation ceremony done during puberty. The girls are taught how to behave as grown ups now that they have attained the puberty stage.
- Chithumwa - Protective medicine or medicine for luck tied or sewn in a piece of cloth. It is believed to be potent and can protect against witches or bad fortune or can bring good fortune.
- Chiwanda - An evil spirit of a dead person.
- Kubwebweta - To speak ecstatically in an uncontrolled manner usually attributed to spirit possession.
- Kukhwima - To be made tough by medicine. To make or learn the use of destructive and protective medicine.
- Kutsuluka - To lose power or effect, to become dilute. Usually used in connection with herbal medicine.
- Kusilika - To apply medicine in order to protect from some danger. The object protected can be a house, a garden or anything that can be valued.
- Matsano - Servants of Makewana deemed to be spirit wives. Literally it means graves.
- Mankhwala - Any medicine.
- Makolo - Parents, but the meaning can be extended to ancestors.
- Masiye - An orphan or motherless child.
- Mbira - The sacred drum used at Msinja.
- Mdulo - A disease caused by a breach of sexual taboos.
- Mwali - The wife of Kalonga.
- Mwini dziko - The Lord of the Land or ruler.
- Nthunga or Nsato - Makewana's male consort symbolised as a snake usually a python.
- Mfumu - Tribal chief or village headman.
- Mwambo - Traditions or traditional value system.

- Mwayi - Fortune or Luck.
- Phungu - Advisor, advocate, guardian or representative who takes the neophyte to the Gule wa m'kulu initiation ceremonies.
- Sing'anga - Traditional medical practitioner. The term is also used of Western trained Doctor.
- Tsoka - Misfortune or bad luck.
- Ula - The mechanism for divination.

Christians interviewed 35

Traditionalists 17

Christian Headmen 8

Non-Christian Headmen 8

A. THE NAMES OF GOD

1. What did your ancestors call God? Most of those interviewed gave the name of Cheta.
2. Did he have any other names? If so what were they? Yes, the names are Namalanga, Chiswaphi, Lema and Mulungu. Less common were the names of Chanjiri, Masopegu, Papa and M'Twebe.
3. Were Mulungu, Cheta, Sphakwe, Namalanga, Lema and Chiswaphi names for the same God or did they originally represent different gods? The unanimous answer was that they all referred to the same God.
4. If they represented different gods, were these gods territorial or clan gods? Some names were linked to certain areas, but they all referred to the same divine reality.
5. Did the clans have one name for God and the others? No, such division.
6. During epidemics, did your ancestors call one of the names of God and when asking for rain or another? No, each attribute appropriate to the occasion.
7. Did they ever call on God at all during the time of trouble e.g. epidemics, drought and wars? Yes they did. If so, why? They sought the help and mercy of God and the ancestors as their only hope.
8. Did the ancestors think of Cheta as not a part and parcel of God? They thought of Cheta as invisible spirit. They did not consider him as man, but as spirit.
9. If he was a man, are there stories remembered about what he did or said? While denying that he was a man, a few alluded to the Kapirintwa creation myth.
10. Can you tell some? See the myth in the next chapter two.
11. Do you think that you and your ancestors descended from him? God is considered as man's creator and therefore source of man's existence.

APPENDIX II

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Number interviewed ... 53

Christians interviewed 36

Village Headmen interviewed 16

Traditionalists ... 17

Christian Headmen 8

Non-Christian Headmen 8

A. THE NAMES OF GOD

1. What did your ancestors call God? Most of those interviewed gave the name of Chauta.
2. Did he have any other names? If so what were they? Yes, the names are Namalenga, Chisumphi, Leza and Mulungu. Less common were the names of Chanjiri, Masopegu, Papa and M'bwebwe.
3. Were Mulungu, Chauta, Mphambe, Namalenga, Leza and Chisumphi names for the same God or did they originally represent different gods? The unanimous answer was that they all referred to the same God.
4. If they represented different gods, were these gods territorial or clan gods? Some names were limited to certain areas, but they all referred to the same divine reality.
5. Did the Banda have one name for God and the Phiri another? No such division.
6. During epidemics, did your ancestors call one of the names of God and when asking for rain or another? No, used attributes appropriate to the occasion.
7. Did they ever call on God at all during the time of trouble e.g. epidemics, drought and wars? Yes they did. If so, why? They sought the help and mercy of God and the ancestors as their only hope.
8. Did the ancestors think of Chauta as man or part man and part God? They thought of Chauta as invisible spirit. They did not consider him as man, but as Spirit.
9. If he was a man, are there stories remembered about what he did or said? While denying that he was a man, a few alluded to the Kapiri-ntiwa creation myth.
10. Can you tell some? See the myth within the text chapter two.
11. Do you think that you and your ancestors descended from him? God is considered as man's creator and therefore source of man's existence.

12. Are there stories about how you descended from him? Here many showed the christian influence by citing the Adam-Eve story of Genesis. Only three from among the traditionalists mentioned Kaporintiwa and a fourth one mentioned an ape as the origin of man. The rest mentioned the genesis story.

B. HOW GOD IS WORSHIPPED

1. Does a man have to appeal to his departed ancestors to approach Chauta or does the priest do it on his behalf? On family matters he may appeal directly or resort to a priest. All communal functions are under the chief and the elders.
2. During which occasion is God approached? When there is drought, epidemic, floods, wars. Why? To solicit his aid and protection.
3. Are sacrifices offered during these occasions, if so, why? Yes, sacrifices are offered. They are offered to appease either the offended spirits or deity, to re-establish broken relations, to reciprocate their hospitality, to win the favour of the spirits.
4. What sacrifices are offered? Why these sacrifices? Sacrifices consist of flour, beer, either a black cock or goat and whatever other thing appropriate.
5. If different sacrifices are offered at each occasion, why this difference? Whatever is available at any occasion is offered, but usually beer and flour ought to be available.
6. Does a dying man call on spirits or God? No specific answer was given to this question. The answer tended to be either on one or the other and or none at all.
7. Do the chiefs appeal to their own personal ancestors or do they call to all the ancestors in general? To all ancestors in general and in these are included his own. Definitely he had his own ancestors in mind.

C. THE NATURE OF GOD

1. Does God get angry or is it the ancestors that get angry and punish their living relatives? Both God and the ancestors can get angry, but it is usually the ancestors who are thought to punish the living.
2. If lightning strikes a man's house who is thought to have caused it and why? The lightning is thought to have been caused by another man. The reasons are usually jealousy and enmity.
3. Is God concerned whether man is good or bad or is it only the ancestor spirits? God is concerned with man's conduct. He punishes bad behaviour with floods, drought and epidemics. The ancestors too are concerned with moral behaviour and the above catastrophies are ascribed more to them than to God.
4. Does God take pity on man? Yes God takes pity and in their prayers

- to God and the ancestors the people ask them to have mercy on them.
5. Who is responsible for good or bad harvest? God gives good harvest, but immoral conduct can have an adverse effect on the harvest e.g. the breach of sexual taboos.
 6. Does God know everything that man does? Yes. Who tells him? God is everywhere and nothing is hidden from him.
 7. Does God control the rains? If so, why does he hold back the rain at times and sends too much at other times? God gives the rain, but man can control its flow. Too much or too little of it is considered a punishment for some gross misconduct.
 8. Does God send epidemics? If so, Why? It is either God or the ancestors for bad conduct.
 9. Why does God allow witches? Answers varied on this question. Some said he does not allow them to practice witchcraft. Others maintained that it was not God's will. The other opinion was that God's kindness extended to witches as well. Some went as far as to say that God uses witches to help him punish by killing people.
 10. Is it God who gives to ancestors the powerful medicine and magic that they possess? If so, why? Here too the answers were varied. Some said that it is God who gives them the powerful medicine and others said that it was Satan.
 11. Does God love all people equally or does he not care at all? It was unanimous that God loves all people equally.
 12. Who shows greater concern God or the ancestors? The majority of the traditionalists mentioned God as one who shows greater concern. One went as far as to say that ancestors are messengers serving God and man.

D. SPIRITS.

1. Who are the azimu? These are the spirits of the dead.
2. Are there other spirits apart from the spirits of the ancestors? There are none.
3. What is the work of the spirits? Their work is
 - (a) To warn the living of any danger.
 - (b) To act as intermediaries between God and the living.
 - (c) To protect the living and to look into their welfare.
4. Are all spirits good? Not all spirits are good. There are some bad ones.
5. If not, what makes them bad? If the dead person was bad in this life, he will continue to be bad as a spirit. Improper burial or a bad death can make a spirit bad. The neglect of spirits can make them bad.

6. Are these spirits greater than God? No, God is greater.
7. What is the relationship between the God and the ancestral spirits? They are between God and man. They are God's messengers.
8. What is the relationship between the living and the ancestral spirit? The spirits are part of the extended family and are considered to be the guardians of the living.
9. Can the living survive dangers without the help of the dead? It depends on the type of the danger, some dangers can be controlled by use of medicine. Danger that threatens the very life of the community calls for the help of ancestors.
10. Do the spirits speak to the living? Yes. How? They speak through dreams. Why? To instruct and warn the living.
11. Where do the spirits of the dead live? Everywhere, but mainly in the graveyards.
12. Why are they remembered by the living? They still belong to the community of the living and are sought for help.
13. What would happen if no prayers and sacrifices were made to the ancestral spirits? Miscortunes would follow, deaths, illnesses, drought, floods etc.

E. MAN AND THE WORLD

1. Where did man come from? The common answer is that he was created by God. Most of the answer reflect biblical influence.
2. Why was he put in this world? No clear answer was forthcoming. Some said to do God's will. One suspects christian influence in this kind of answer.
3. Did man and God ever live together? If so, when? They lived together. Even those who mentioned the Kapirintiwa creation myth maintained this.
4. If they once lived together, what brought about their separation? Having said No in the above question, most of them went on to explain that sin brought about the separation, an obvious reference to the genesis story and hence christian influence coming through once more.
5. Does it matter how man lives? Yes. Good conduct is recommended. Bad conduct brings God's and the ancestors' displeasure.
6. What causes the men to be bad? Sin; man's thoughts; man's nature is naturally bad; spirits; parental bad conduct; evil acts; satan.
7. What taboos are observed in connection with:-
 - (a) Asking for rain. No white cloth or animal and no sexual relations.
 - (b) Sacrifice for the new crop: No conflicts, no white cloth, no other food, but meat only.

- (c) Birth: No adultery, the mother not to handle salt.
 - (d) Death: Pregnant women not to attend the funeral. Husbands of pregnant women not to help in the digging of the grave. Hoes used in digging the grave have to be passed through the flames.
 8. Why are these taboos observed? To avoid misfortunes and the displeasure of the ancestors.
 9. What causes evil? Satan, evil spirits, lack of love, jealousy.
 10. How can evil be overcome? By praying to the spirits and making sacrifices. Right to participate in sacrifices, traditions of the fathers.
 11. Has God anything to do with evil? He does not like evil.
 12. What is done to remove evil? Kill the evil doer; pray to the spirits of the ancestors; punishing the evil doer.
3. Should traditional practices be preserved for future generations? Yes, why? To maintain the traditions and way of life, for fear of evil if customs are neglected; to give honour to the ancestors; To avoid breaking the taboos; for the welfare of society.

F. DEATH

1. Is death the end of a person? No, his spirit continues.
2. What causes death? Spirits of the dead; God; disease; witches.
3. Where do the dead go? They roam about; To God for judgement.
4. Does God ever reward them with gifts? No.
5. Why is it that mourning takes the form of dancing and feasting? They are considered appropriate to proper burial; to give an honourable escort to the dead; to prevent the dead person from troubling the living; it is the dead man's gift to the living; it is done to settle the spirit of the dead; to cheer the bereft.
6. Are the dead to be feared: If so, why? Yes, because the spirits may come back to trouble the living and that at times they can kill.

G. PERSONAL

1. Does christianity bring anything good to your life? It shows us what sin is; there is forgiveness of sin; there is eternal life, salvation; it teaches faithfulness in marriage; it brought education and work; its ethical teaching is good.
2. Do you think the goal of christianity and that of your ancestors the same? Yes. They both teach about the same God, there is judgement, and all teach faithfulness or moral integrity.

The aim is not the same. Funeral rites are different; customs are not the same; Christianity is whiteman's wisdom; worship is different; christianity forbids beer (some churches of course) and Nyau.

3. What do you consider to be the most important elements in Chewa religion? Sacrifices; spirits; integrity; repentance and fear of God, traditions; child upbringing; Nyau and initiation rites.
4. What do you consider to be the most important elements in christianity? Everlasting life, education and work.
5. Is God important in Chewa religion? Yes he is creator of everything and he looks after them.
6. Would you lose something by becoming a christian? Yes, Gule wa m'kulu, the right to participate in sacrifices, traditions of the fathers.
7. Do you think you could gain anything? Yes, everlasting life, forgiveness of sin, salvation.
8. Should traditional practices be preserved for furture generations? Yes, why? To maintain the traditions and way of life, for fear of evil if customs are neglected; to give honour to the ancestors; To avoid breaking the taboos; for the welfare of society.

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