

**CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA : AS DEPICTED IN  
AFRICAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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D E C L A R A T I O N

This dissertation entitled "CHRISTIANITY  
IN AFRICA : AS DEPICTED IN AFRICAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH",  
submitted by RAAJ KUMAR SUNDEEP MONDOL in partial fulfilment  
for the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been  
previously submitted for any degree of this or any other  
University. We recommend that this dissertation should be  
placed before the examiners for their consideration for  
the award of M.Phil. Degree.

VIJAY GUPTA  
Chairperson

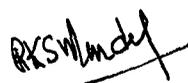
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PREFACE

Research works in Area Studies have been increasingly taking recourse to inter-disciplinary approach. Studying the social phenomena of a particular area from different aspects and angles of various disciplines can add a better perspective to our knowledge. My background in the study of literature, inspired me to make use of literary writings in studying Christianity in Africa. To understand the African response to Christianity, the writings can provide valuable insights and informations — with this premise I have undertaken this study. To make this appraisal I have opted the sociological approach to literature, selecting some novels dealing with the subject. The main focus is on the period of evangelization that corresponded with the colonial phase and the period after. The process of its growth in different phases leading to the emergence of Christianity in its present form has been explored in this study.

I express my sincere gratitude to my Supervisor Prof. Vijay Gupta, for his valuable suggestions, help and patience in enabling me to complete this work. I am also thankful to Prof. Meenakshi Mukherjee, Centre for Linguistics and English, JNU, from whom I learnt much in relating literature to life and gained confidence to undertake such study and to Mr. H.C. Narang of the same Centre who introduced me to the field of African Writings in English. I am greatly indebted to my friends and well-wishers who have been a tremendous source of encouragement and support. Finally, my special thanks goes to University Grants Commission for providing the financial assistance without which it would have been very difficult to complete this work.

JNU, New Delhi.



RAAJ KUMAR SUNDEEP MONDOL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

## 1. THEORETICAL PARADIGM

Developments in the discipline of Sociology, in the recent past have led to a much wider diffusion of the sociological approach in other social sciences. Interaction and the carrying out of research along with the other established disciplines like economics, political science, law, history, anthropology, psychology and the history of religion etc. have revealed the varied connections between particular institutions or areas of social life and other elements in the social structure. The need for comparative studies which would unfold the constancy or variability of these connections across different types of society and different historical periods has been realized with a greater force in the recent years. The behaviouralist and the post-behaviouralist movements too have contributed to a large degree towards an inter-disciplinary approach in studies. The movement in this direction has not restricted itself within the ambit of social-sciences only, but has brought other disciplines from natural sciences and humanities also, into its fold. The branch known as Sociology of literature is one such area of interaction.

### 1.1. The Sociology of Literature

Tracing the history of its origin, James H. Barnett in his essay on "The Sociology of Art" writes that the intell-

ectual background to the Sociology of art can be found in the writings of a number of nineteenth century Europeans. The roots of the social interpretation of art can be traced in the writings of Madame de Staël (1800), who asserted that the literature of a society should be brought into harmony with its prevailing political beliefs. She was of the opinion that literature should portray important changes in the social order especially those which indicate movement toward the goal of liberty and justice.<sup>1</sup>

The writing of Karl Marx as early as 1845, present a more specific proposition concerning the relation of art and society. He wrote that the system of production in existence at a given time determines both the content and the style of the arts of a society.<sup>2</sup> Another influential precursor of contemporary Sociology of art Hippolyte Taine propounded the thesis that, "a work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of mind and surrounding circumstances".<sup>3</sup> His detailed analysis of this proposition made it clear that he attached special importance to the social medium or milieu which produces the 'state of mind' necessary for artistic creation.

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1. J.H. Barnett, "The Sociology of Art", in The Sociology of Art and Literature, Eds. Milton C. Albrecht, James H. Barnett, Masan Griff Duckworth, London 1970, 2nd Impression, 1982, p. 621.
  2. Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, "Literature and Art", in J.H. Barnett, *Ibid*, p. 621.
  3. Hippolyte Taine, History of Eng. Literature in J.H. Barnett, *Ibid*, p. 623

In fact we find that, in the nineteenth century a host of thinkers were grappling with the question of how art and society were related. They perceived it differently, but none of them seem to deny that art, society and culture were inextricably linked together. The nature of these connections however remained obscure.

The chief aim of the Sociology of Literature is to investigate and explain this relationship between literature and society. Works of literature or for that matter any art forms are not created in vacuum, and they do not come into existence autonomously. Their genesis, form and content are influenced and shaped by a number of social, cultural, economic and political factors. Literature in itself is called a social institution, which uses language, a social creation as its medium and 'represents' life which is in large measure a social reality.<sup>4</sup> So literature can only be properly understood within the larger framework of social reality. We cannot consider literature in isolation. By divorcing it from society and history we can never fully understand and appreciate the true value and scope of literature.

## 1.2 Approaches

One of the most popular approach to the Sociology of literature is the documentary aspect of literature. According

4. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, Penguin Books Ed. 3. Harmondsworth, 1968, p.94.

to it, literature provides a kind of documentation, for the understanding of social and cultural structures, social values and political ideas of a particular era of the society. This approach is also known as the 'reflection model', which sees literature as reflecting a reality outside it. Historically this view, can be traced to the writings of Aristotle and Plato, where we find the concept of art as 'mimesis'- an imitation of life. Lenin was referring to this aspect when he wrote about Tolstoy as the "mirror of the Russian revolution". Marx had also maintained that external reality is prior to ideas in the mind, that the material world is reflected in the mind of man and translated into forms of thought.<sup>5</sup>

Louis de Bonald (1754 - 1840), a French Philosopher was one of the first writers to argue that through a careful study of any nation's literature one could tell, what their people had been.<sup>6</sup> However in the sociological analysis of literature the reflection model has to be used carefully, since a writer is always deeply involved in his work, the mirror view consideration poses certain limitations. In this approach active participation of a writer's consciousness in his work often gets neglected. The writer does not just

5. Karl Marx, "Literature and Art", in *Marxist Literary Theories*, by David Forgacs ed. Jefferson, Ann & David Robey, Modern Literary Theory, BT. Batsford Ltd. London, 1982 p. 171.
6. Louis de Bonald, in Diana T. Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature, Macgibbon & Kee, London, 1972, p. 13.

reflect the social reality in his work, but he often re-creates it. His imagination and aspirations play a significant role in his expression. It has been said - A literary writer sets his character in motion with an imaginative framework of situations, in order to represent the aspirations, attitudes, norms, behavioural patterns and values within the social order he is dealing with. But at the same time, his portrayal is also coloured by his own viewpoint, which must be taken into account.<sup>7</sup>

George Lukacs, a famous critic is of the view that "The social determinants of an artistic creation, depend on the degree to which writers are bound up with the life of the community, to the extent they take part in the struggles going on around them or their merely passive observation of the events".<sup>8</sup> From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the writer's worldview, attitude and outlook, background and training etc, also determine to a large extent, the position he takes in his writings, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o leading Kenyan writer and critic provides us some more insights into this proposition. He says -

" A writer after all comes from a particular class and race and nation. He himself is a product of an actual social process-eating, drinking, learning, loving, hating - and he has developed a class attitude to all these

7. Sulochna Rangeya Raghav, Sociology of Indian Literature, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1987, p. 2.

8. George Lukacs, Studies in European Realism, A Sociological Survey of the writings of Balzac, Standhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorky others, in Sulochna Rangeya Raghav, Ibid, p.3.

activities themselves class conditioned. A writer is trying to persuade us, to make us view not only a certain kind of reality, but also from a certain angle of vision often, though perhaps unconsciously, on behalf of a certain class, race or nation".<sup>9</sup>

It is this world-view of the writer which is always present in any literary work, that has been explained in the above statements. In other words it can be explained as his own ideological expression, his philosophy towards life, which gets reflected through his work. This is generally formed on the basis of his own experiences in life, the mental constructs that he frames during the process of his intellectual orientation and his responsiveness to the social situations of his time.

The reflection model tends to overlook this involvement of the writer in a work. The other limitation of the mirror view approach is that the literary qualities of a work in terms of its style, structure, language and symbols etc. are neglected. A work is judged more on the basis of its sociological and historical content than the literary worthiness. In the present study however we would not consider it as a limitation, because the very nature of our study demands and deals with the documentary aspect of the literature concerned.

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 9. *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Writers in Politics, Heinemann Edn. Books Ltd., London, 1981, p. 6.*

We are interested in the realistic portrayal of the society, a kind of authenticity in literature in representing the social realities of its time.

The true nature of inter-relationship between literature and society is however difficult to define. Some of the commonly accepted features in this relationship are that literature is a social phenomenon and creation of literature is a social act. The very act of writing is intended for communicating, and addressed to a group. Literature has a function in society and it gets its material from society. We cannot think of a literature outside a socio-cultural context. So in one important sense they can only be fully understood and appreciated, when they are examined within the context of the society in which they are produced. Some one has aptly remarked, "Literature is a record of social expression, an embodiment of social myths and ideals and aims, and an organization of social beliefs and sanctions".<sup>10</sup> These 'social beliefs and sanctions' have usually included religious beliefs and customs, as manifested in myths and other art forms.

Study of literature, therefore can provide us valuable insights into the nature of society and its different institutions. Writers in their role of recorders, interpreters and

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10. De Votto - as quoted in "The Relationship of Literature and Society", Milton C. Albrecht, American Journal of Sociology, Vol.59, March 1954, p. 425.

judges of their society provide a social commentary. To the extent that they offer choices and criticisms of social phenomena, their ideas have a clear social and political relevance.<sup>11</sup> Underlying this important role of literature, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o says :

"...literature has often given us more and sharper insights into the moving spirit of an era than all the historical and political documents treating the same moments in a society's development".<sup>12</sup>

## 2. THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

In the case of Africa, because of the unique nature of the historical processes that the continent has undergone the inter-relationships between literature and society is much more pronounced. In fact literature, politics and society there are very much intertwined to one another. The role of art in the African tradition has been highly functional, closely integrated with the other aspects of life. The notion of 'art for art's sake' does not seem to have existed in Africa. Artists by and large remain integrated members of the community. The literature, songs, dance, crafts, sculpture, music and other art forms have been part and parcel of their daily life activities; the mundane, prosaic world of feeding,

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11. G.C.M. Mutiso, Socio-Political Thought in African Literature : Weusi? Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1974, p.7,

12. Thiong'o, n.g. p. 72.

clothing and sheltering themselves. Functionalism in Africa is taken for granted.

## 2.1 The Colonial Situation in Africa

The colonial situation imposed and initiated certain processes which were completely unheard of, and set into motion a chain of reaction virtually affecting all areas of an individual's and society's life. The colonial exercise which swept over almost entire continent made two clear divisions in the history of Africa - the pre-colonial period and the post-colonial era. Thereby any discussion on the modern history of Africa cannot brush aside colonialism or its varied manifestations and influences. This "Colonial Situation" has been explained by G. Balandier in his treatise on the same topic as having following traits :

" 1) the domination imposed by a foreign minority, racially (or ethnically) and culturally different, acting in the name of a racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority dogmatically affirmed and imposing itself on an indigenous population consisting of a numerical majority, but inferior to the dominant group from a material point of view.

2) This domination linking radically different civilization into some form of a relationship.

3) a mechanized, industrialized society with a powerful economy, a fast tempo of life, and a Christian background, imposing itself on a non-industrialized, 'backward' society in which the pace of living is much slower and religious institutions are most definitely "non-Christian".

4) The fundamentally antagonistic character of the relationship between the two societies resulting from the subservient role to which colonial people are subjected as instruments of colonial power.

5) The need in maintaining this domination, not only to resort "force", but also to a system of pseudo-justification and stereo-typed behaviour etc".<sup>13</sup>

Above mentioned characteristics aptly summarize the nature and form of colonialism that was imposed upon Africa. It helps us to understand the character of the colonial situation which is of utmost importance for the subject of our study. The colonial process which had been largely consolidated by the end of nineteenth century, marked a great upheaval in the history of the continent. The economic and political subjugation that had been brought forth was hand in glove with the cultural subjugation, which Ngugi described as cultural imperialism.

"Cultural imperialism was then part and parcel of the thorough system of economic exploitation and political oppression of the colonized peoples and literature was an integral part of that system of oppression and genocide".<sup>14</sup>

Under this cultural imperialism the colonial powers worked towards the destruction and denigration of the culture of the colonized countries. The ideology and cultural and

13. G. Balandier, "Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach", in Immanuel Wallerstein(ed) Social Change : The Colonial Situation John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, 1966, p. 54.

14. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, n.9. p. 15.

intellectual superiority with the slogans of 'civilizing mission' and liberating from their darkness virtually led them to deny any past or history to the colonized nations. It had its impact upon the natives in the development of a kind of inferiority complex. Frantz Fanon in his seminal book on Third World Politics, The Wretched of the Earth explores into this aspect and states :

"Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.

He further illuminates us into their machinations -

"...the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality".<sup>15</sup>

We realize that cultural imperialism was not just an instrument of coercion, but it was an intrinsic feature of colonialism itself. Culture of a society or nation is a part of its identity, so colonialism tries to strike a blow to the identity of the colonized nations or societies. This is

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15. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth Trans. by Constance Farrington, 1961, p. 169.

similar to the process of slave making, where the identity of the individual as a member of his family, his social group is destroyed, his human dignity is robbed in turning him into a commodity. And it is understandable that the colonial powers also wanted to turn those countries as slave - nations to them. Amilcar Cabral has explained this as a practical necessity for them. He argues that imposition of any external rule cannot be sustained except by the permanent and organized repressions of the cultural life of the people in question. For as long as a section of the populace is able to have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation. At any given moment, depending on internal and external factors which determine the evolution of the society in question, cultural opposition (indestructible) will take on new forms (political, economic, military) with a view to posing a serious challenge to foreign domination.<sup>16</sup>

Ngugi also writes in a similar vein that "But to make economic and political control the more complete, the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self".<sup>17</sup>

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 16. Amilcar Cabral, "National liberation and Culture : in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o n.9 p. 13.

17. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o n.9. p. 12.

It is necessary for us to have all this background in mind, to understand the historical context in which the literature which we are dealing with, came into existence. There lay upon the African intellectuals an enormous burden to fight against the cultural imperialism, to expose the colonial lies told to their people, and to emancipate the culture and identity of their society and self from further debasement, and to restore and assert their values. Well known Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe sees this responsibility as, "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement".<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2. The Writer's Position

Most of the African writers have thus felt a special obligation to their society, in terms of assigning literature a social function, to give voice to their feelings and aspirations and educate them. This notion of 'commitment' on their part is seen in taking the social and historical reality as the centers of their attention. The modes of expression they chose was a result of the colonial situation. Writing in the language of the colonial powers, in literary forms taken from their tradition was one such outcome. For those African writers, their upbringing, education received,

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 18 . Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as a Teacher", African Writers on African Writing Ed. G.D. Killam, Heinemann, London, 1973, p. 3.

and exposure to the literary traditions of the European countries, through the language they had learnt, were some of the influencing factors to undertake writing in the language of colonial powers. It was also a case of expediency for them, because of the existence of a large number of African languages and the absence of a tradition of written literature in most of them, a wider readership could be addressed by writing in English, Portuguese or French. The urge to show and reply to the members of the colonial powers about their own past and asserting their identity and struggle, also could have been the motivating factors for this choice in the initial phase of their writings. Ngugi perhaps sums up their situation when he says :

"In the case of Africa, the very act of writing was itself a testimony of the creative capacity of the African and the first tottering but still important steps by the 'educated' elite towards self-definition and the acceptance of the environment from which they had been alienated by western, Euro-centric, imperialist education. But the literature produced, because of its critical realism, also reflected the reality of the African struggle against colonial domination".<sup>19</sup>

In the African context another notable feature is that, often the writer has also been an active participant in the political struggle for freedom, and even has been a

19. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o n.9. p. 29.

committed politician. Leopold Senghor, Agostinho Neto, and Alex la Guma are few names which instantly come to our mind in this regard. Especially in the case of South Africa, whether actively participating in the political struggle or not, the very fact of writing has put the writers against the racist regime. It is understandable, because most of the African intellectuals or the educated class were the first generation of their society to receive western education and to get exposure to the developments and movements in the outside world. The situation in which they found themselves was the period of intense struggle against the colonial regimes. Their standing in the society compelled them to assume different roles together by joining the mainstream. Turning a blind eye to the big social and political issues of their period would have made them completely irrelevant.

If we consider the writers as the inheritors of their oral tradition of literature, where the older generations passed on the traditions and knowledge of their society to the younger generation in the form of tales and folklores, their role becomes more significant to us. These writers also carry forward the same task in the new acquired form, incorporating certain characteristics of these oral tales, such as the use of idioms and sayings in the speech of their

characters. The documentary aspect of their writings also can be explained under the same reason. But to this we can add the attempt on their part to correct the distortions and false image of Africa portrayed through the writings of foreign writers on Africa and the wrong notions and myth in European mind about Africa.

It becomes quite obvious that the evolution of the literature, which we are concerned with, was a product of specific historic conditions, prevailing in Africa at that particular period of time. The resolution passed in the Second Congress of Negro writers and Artists held in 1959, expressed the sentiments of that particular era.

"The Negro writers and artists regard it as their essential task and sacred mission to bring their cultural activity within the scope of the great movement for liberation of their individual peoples without losing sight of the solidarity which should unite all individuals and peoples who are struggling for the liquidation of colonization and its consequences as well as all those who are fighting throughout the world for progress and liberty".<sup>20</sup>

It is not without significance that the emergence of this consciousness among the writers was witnessed in other countries under colonial rule as well. The manifesto of the Progressive writers Association of India, in 1934

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20. *Presence Africaine* (Paris, 1959), special issue, See Shatto Arthur Gokwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, Heinemann, London, 1977.

had declared the concern "...to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people; and to make them the vital organ which will resist the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future".<sup>21</sup>

Born out of the colonial experience, those African writings thus could not transcend the economics, politics, race, class and such pressing "burning issues" of their time. The writer there almost becomes a microcosm of the accumulated expression of his society.<sup>22</sup> Therefore it becomes easier to get into the "heart of the matter" and gain understanding of the social and political realities more directly from the literature there, than from the conventional political descriptions.<sup>23</sup> It also helps us in the task of deducing social and political theories from literature. In fact literature there has presented itself as one of the main reservoir of information to know African responses, and reactions to colonialism, racism, the struggle for freedom, and the gaining of independence etc. due to the paucity of political and social analysis by African scholars in the earlier years. Although the situation has changed now, but the significant outpouring of African literature during those years has meant that much of the understanding of African society as seen by African

21. *Manifesto of the All India Progressive Writers Association, 1934.* See Carlo Coppola (ed.) *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, New Delhi, 1988.

22. Charles R. Larson, "The Emergence of African Fiction" in Christian P. Potholm's *The Theory and Practice and African Politics*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1979, p. 108.

23. Henry Holland (Jr) ed. *Politics Through Literature* in Christian P. Potholm - *Ibid* p. 108.

themselves, comes to us through literature.

### 3. CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

#### 3.1. Background

As mentioned earlier, any discussion on the modern history of Africa invariably leads one to the subject of colonialism in some or other way. Very closely related to this, has been the issue of Christianity in Africa. The connexion between colonialism and Christianity has been one of the most debated and controversial issue not only in the case of Africa but in most of the colonies of other continent too. These two spheres have often been considered as the two sides of the same coin. The obvious reason being the fact that all the European colonial powers had the background of Christian religion tied with them. As we have observed before also, G. Balandier while delineating the different features of colonial situation, includes Christian background of the colonial power as one of these. Although Christianity as a religion has a history many centuries before the colonial process begun, but it was restricted only in few parts of the African continent. Missionary activities, evangelization process and subsequent conversions that took place at such a large scale both in terms of area and numbers, were however

witnessed during the colonial period beginning in the nineteenth century. For the vast majority of Africans their first encounter with the white man also meant encounter with white rule and white religion. It is for this reason that the study of Christianity in Africa holds significance for us. Apart from this there are other factors which lead us to undertake this study.

There is no denial to the fact that religion is a complex phenomenon, one which has influenced mankind in varying degrees throughout the history. It is not something that exists in isolation, but it has always been part of an ongoing, dynamic social system in which it influences and is influenced by other social factors. Whether it be the case of the making of political kingdoms or states, framing of rules, social code of conduct, cultural norms or even in the matter of an individual's life style and view point, the role of religion is easily discernible. In the case of Africa religion has occupied a central position in the lives, thought and institutions of the people. Religion permeated almost all aspects of their life in the society. A proper understanding of the history, society and nature of the African people cannot be gained in separation from their religious beliefs and practices. Writing about this typical aspect of African society

Ambrose M. Moyo an African Scholar from Zimbabwe states -

"In traditional societies religion was not an affair of the individual, but was viewed as a matter for the entire community. Every member of the community was obliged to participate in the faith of the community, was bound by the tradition of the ancestors, and was required to observe the regulations which were given to the family or to the community by its ancestry,

The other dimension which must never be forgotten in dealing with African thought is the fact that religion permeated all aspects of African life. This all pervasive character of African <sup>religion</sup> negates any separation between the sacred and the profane, or the Church and the state. Such categories do not exist in traditional African thought....The terms "religious" and "secular" just did not exist".<sup>24</sup>

So we are dealing with such a kind of society where religion was intrinsic to their very existence. The encounter of this society with a completely different set of beliefs of the so called "universal religion" during the colonial period thus holds interest for us.

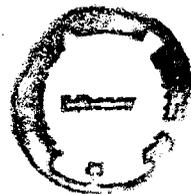
Another factor for consideration is the phenomenal increase in the number of adherents to Christianity. It has been estimated that Christian population has increased to over one hundred and sixty million in little more than one hundred years of evangelization. Christianity has become

24. Ambrose M. Moyo, "Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe", in Kirsten Holst Petersen (ed.), Religion, Development and African Identity, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1987, p. 67.

or is in the process of becoming the majority religion in many parts of Africa, south of the equator. Considering the fact that just about a century ago the missionary penetration into the interiors of Africa was just at its initial stages, the rapid growth naturally draws attention of social scientists and historians of religion.

Moreover the advent of Christianity in this phase corresponded with a period of rapid socio-cultural change, industrialization and modernization which swept Africa into the mainstream of world activity. Its influence in the thought pattern, life-style, traditions and culture, education and political processes are easily recognizable. Not only in the struggle for liberation but even after independence as many of the leaders who came to power had accepted or were influenced by Christianity, their policies and ideologies reflected that influence. The indigenous version of socialism to which they gave the name 'African Socialism' bears testimony to this fact.

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### 3.2 Selection of Literature

It is in this context that we propose to study Christianity in Africa. As most of the available materials



on this subject are written by the missionaries and Europeans study of the creative literature by African writers can provide us the African response to the whole question. Therefore by "African Writings in English" here we mean the writings of African writers of African origin written in English. However the latter term has been qualified to include some writings originally written in French but translated and commonly available in English. As the topic suggests we want to study Christianity in Africa in general, although in a continent vast and diverse as such, making generalisations always carry the risk of being dubbed fallacious. But because we are approaching the subject via literature in its representative character, and not doing a historical study, we can be saved from such perils.

In the sociological approach to literature the method to which we have taken recourse in this study, novel has come to be accepted as most popular of all literacy forms. The reasons of this are not difficult to see. The very evolution of novel in the European literary tradition has been associated with a corresponding growth of realism in portrayal. Compared to it, poetry where the personal element generally overshadows, and the play with words and the symbolic nature is an essential component, cannot match in realistic portrayal. In fact

Pablo Neruda had gone to the extent of saying that poetry is opposed to realism. Drama because of its original intention to be presented on a stage has its own limitations of setting, dialogue, stage adaptability etc. With the fall of feudalism and monarchical form of government the epic has declined in its significance.

Rise of capitalism, and democratic form of governance also saw the rise of novel and replacing the epic to be called the modern epic of our times. In fact of all literary forms novel is the most socially oriented. Compared to other literary forms novel is much more grounded on the society and history of its time. The characters in a novel belong to a particular society of a particular period of history. The wider canvass available in a novel places the writer in a better position to present life in its varied aspects at different levels. It can be said that the novelist is more or less a sociologist who keenly observes the existing social values, ideologies and issues and depicts not only his own reactions to them, but also of the people he represents in his fictional world. It is for these reasons that of all other forms the Sociology of novel is the most developed in the field of Sociology of literature. Of all art forms in

terms of popularity and closer resemblance to life, only film can beat the novel in the present age. Because of this suitability, our selection has also been narrowed down only to novels in our present study. Considering the limited scope of the work, sample from different areas which are mostly East and West African countries, dealing with this issue has been selected as specimens. All these novels have the portrayal of Christianity in the colonial or the post-colonial period. The time-span of publication of these novels is about twenty-five years beginning from 1956 to 1980.

### 3.3. Points of Analysis

Beginning with a historical background of Christianity in Africa, study leads into a discussion of the pre-Christian values, thoughts, customs and traditions as portrayed in those novels. Most of the writers have delved into the past, to assert the value of the age-old traditions that had held the society together so far. There is also an attempt on their part to counter the false assumptions of many Europeans that the continent's history begins with their "discovery" and arrival into the scene. The traditional religion is here seen as reinforcing social norms and values, acting as a cohesive agent in maintaining social solidarity.

However the picture painted is not that of an all rosy, peaceful, tranquil society. The inherent weaknesses, conflict and cleavages are also brought into the limelight.

The impact made by the spread of Christianity is analysed in three different aspects - social, economic and political. Although there cannot be clear cut divisions, as they overlap each other; but the attempt is made for the sake of convenience and clarity. The arrival of new religion has been viewed as a catalyst for change, resulting in disruption and transformation of the then existing social order. The effect it had at different levels of society is our main concern.

The conflict between the traditional religion and Christianity at the level of individual appears in the form of internalized conflict in a person as well as with the group to which he belonged. Conflict between the two groups has outer manifestations and far-reaching influences. Along with it the process of assimilation takes place and there is a movement towards Africanization of the foreign elements in the religion. The variety of African Christianity that emerges as the result of this process is the focus of attention in this study.

While doing this study under different headings, some of the important questions that have been raised and examined are -

the validity of the assumption of the hand in glove nature/relationship between colonialism and Christianity. How far the identification of white man - white rule - white religion was responsible in the success or failure of its expansion, or in other words its acceptance or rejection by the masses. Along with it the supposed nexus between administration and missionary activities has been examined. The typical features which emerge in the African context, the assimilation of those traditions and customs which could not be given up, inspite of the adoption of new religion have been investigated to understand the forms Christianity took in different parts of Africa. In its role of an agent in socio-cultural change whether Christianization has been synonymous with westernization is another point of inquiry. In the political sphere its role in the liberation movements and to the formation of new political institutions has been explored.

The validation for the answers to these questions have however been restricted to the portrayal which we get in the selected novels. The conclusions which we draw from this analysis will justify our approach of exploring literature for the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY  
IN AFRICA.

## CHAPTER II

Before going into the analysis of the novels for the purpose of our exploration, it will be worthwhile to get a background of Christianity in Africa from non-literary (historical) sources. Our examination of the fictional works can be greatly helped by the knowledge of historical details. The history of Christianity in the African continent dates back to the very first century of its origin. For the sake of clarity and convenience its history can be divided into five major phases.

- a) The beginnings
- b) Under Portugese Patronage
- c) Pre-colonial era
- d) Under Colonial rule
- e) Modern indigenous movements

1. First Phase: The Beginnings - Giving a glimpse of the earliest phase, A.S. Atiya in his essay on "Christianity in North Africa"<sup>1</sup> states that according to the indication of the archaeological evidences, Christianity was preached on the southern shores of the Meditarranean in the first

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1. A.S. Atiya, "Christianity in North Africa." in Encyclopedia of Religion vol. III Mircea Eliade (ed-in-chief) Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1987, pp.368-71.

century A.D. itself. The two centres of preaching in the Apostolic age were Cyrenaica and Carthage.

Cyrenaica (Libya) was within reach of the influence of Alexandria (Egypt) and Carthage (Tunisia) from neighbouring Rome, across the sea. The emergence of Christianity in Cyrenaica is associated with the evangelization of Egypt by apostle Mark. The tradition holds that Mark was a native Jew of Cyrene, who came to Alexandria by way of the Pentapolis,<sup>2</sup> and after sowing the seeds for the new Church in Egypt returned to Cyrene to evangelize.

Cyrenaican Christianity was mostly concentrated among the Greek Population who fought the Berber natives along the Southern frontier of the Sahara. When the Arabs conquered the region, the Greeks emigrated. The Arabs were able to establish greater rapport with the Berbers than the Greeks had been able to do. So with the advent of the Arabs there was a rapid spread of Islam and Christianity virtually disappeared from the Pentapolis.

It is assumed that the preaching of the gospel in Carthage initially came from Rome. Before the end of second century Roman registers were found, which recorded the exi-

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 2) Pentapolis - refers to the five towns of Cyrenaica (the easternmost Part of Libya)-Cyrene (modern day Shohhat). Apollonia (Marsa Gona), Ptolemais (Tolmeta), Berenice (Benghazi), and Barce (Barka). in A.S. Atiya - n.1 p. 368.

-stence of an organized and well developed church. It was largely concentrated in Carthage and its adjacent territories. Roughly they covered the areas of modern day Tunisia, Algeria and northern Morocco. This part of Africa gave to the Church some of her greatest thinkers. They included Tertullian (d.about 220 AD). Cyprian (c.205-258) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430), whose works are acknowledged as great landmarks in the development of Christian theology.

After the conquest of Egypt in 640-642 by Arabs. Carthage also came under their control in 698. The Greek and Roman population emigrated to Byzantium, Sicily, Italy and Spain. The members of the Churches were mainly from those people, who had been practising a Latinized Christianity, living apart from the indigenous peoples. It had remained rooted only in the urban centres and had never tried to reach the Berber tribes. The Arabs offered them Islam with equality and full brotherhood. They also offered full enfranchisement to all slaves willing to convert. A large emigration also took place from Arabia to North Africa to fill the vacuum created by Christian departure from these regions. It was therefore not surprising that the Berber population found the new situation more advantageous to them and they participated with the conquerors

in the elimination of all remaining pockets of Roman settlers and vestiges of the church. Those were the principal factors that led to the downfall and disappearance of Carthaginian Christianity.

The Church in Nubia - The other ancient center of Christianity was in Nubia. Noel Q.King<sup>3</sup> in his book Christian and Muslim in Africa, gives an account of the church in Nubia. The Nubian Kingdoms in those days were the area south of Egypt, along the Nile which is now known as Khartoum in Sudan. The Nubians were the first people of Negro descent to adopt Christianity. Since there was constant contact between Egypt and the South, it is assumed that Christianity filtered through to the Nubian lands in the fourth and fifth century. The churches in Nubia prospered and gained strength during ninth to eleventh century and developed Christian architecture and art of their own. However under the Islamic pressure, Nubian Christianity also could not withstand for long, and disappeared by the fifteenth century.

The Church in Ethiopia - When speaking of Christianity in Africa one is more familiar with the church in Ethiopia, because of its continuity from those ancient times. The

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3. Noel Q.King, Christian and Muslim in Africa Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1971 pp - 7-11

Falasha or the so called Ethiopian Jews claim their origin to King Solomon and Queen of Sheba, and consider themselves as the lost tribe of Israel. Without going into the veracity of this semitic connection, it is commonly agreed from the available historical evidences that the Ethiopian Church was established by fourth century AD., King Ezana of Aksum was converted to Christianity which then became the religion of the whole Aksumite Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

The Ethiopian Christianity had incorporated many Jewish practices, reminiscent of the Christian Jews of Jerusalem in the first century A.D. Monasticism, circumcision, ritual cleanliness, chanting, drumming and dancing in their worship of the Lord, were some of the special features, which had given them a distinct and independent identity as Christians. Yet it seems to have exerted no direct influence on, nor taken part in any extension of Christian faith to the rest of Africa.

Thus we see that the early Christian Churches in Africa had failed to penetrate across the Sahara and except the Ethiopian Church all had fallen victim to the onslaught of the rise of Islam, through the Arab conquests. There

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 4. Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans : A Triple Heritage*, BBC Publications, London, 1986. pp.155-156.

was a big lull for Christianity in Africa till the end of fifteenth century, when we enter into the second phase of its journey under the Portugese patronage.

## 2. Second Phase: Under Portugese patronage

The second wave of Christianity touched the shores of the African continent by the seafarers of Portugese Empire. The Portugese had been trying to find a way around Muslim power so as to trade directly with India. In the explorations along the African coast, during the fifteenth century, priests generally accompanied the expeditions.

In tropical Africa, they discovered the mouth of the Congo river in 1482. Bartholomew rounded the Cape in the year 1486. These expeditions gave the Portugese an impression of wide open fields with great possibilities for their political and missionary establishments. The priests who accompanied the expeditions served as chaplains to the new trading settlements and as missionaries to neighbouring Africans. The state and Church worked hand in hand and wherever the Portugese flag went, the Jesuits followed and made efforts to establish missions.

The Christianity brought by the Portugese had acquired a different shape from that which had reached Africa in the first phase. It had become now more distinctly western, with

Latin as its official language and liturgy. Their first attempts for evangelization were made in the Gambia and Sierra Leone areas. Portuguese records claim the baptism of members of the Benin royal family as early as 1491.

Alfonso d'Aveiro made considerable progress in Benin in the early sixteenth century, building churches and baptizing thousands of people. The king's son became a Christian, succeeding as king Oba Orhogbua in 1550. The Portuguese went further south to the Congo and Angola. The Congo Kingdom was one of the largest tropical African states and the King Mani Kongo and some of his chiefs were converted to Christianity. Gunzala da Silverira, a Jesuit priest went up into the Kingdom of Monomotapa in 1560 and baptized some members of the royal family and others.<sup>5</sup>

But all these efforts were soon overtaken by the terrible trade of human beings in the form of slaves. Fights took place and the Kingdom of Congo broke up and by the end of the eighteenth century Christianity in Congo had withered away. Black Africa was being used as an unending reservoir to extract cheap labour force to run mines, fields, transports, harems and armies. Not only Portugal but Spain, France, Britain, Denmark, Arabia, Persia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, the

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 5. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, Sheldon Press, London, 1969, p.121.

Maghrib and Turkey all were participating in this appalling business, flouting all norms of human dignity and decency, without any shame. The pall of the slave trade hanged over their religion, and with the decline of Portugese power this phase of Christianity also faded away.<sup>6</sup> Parrinder writes that Christian missionaries of this period were all Roman Catholic, shared between different orders. They continued in their efforts for about two centuries, but all vanished eventually leaving no continuity with the modern times. The mass baptisms had largely meant superficial conversions. The liturgy had remained in Latin and the Bible was not translated. African society was broken up in the interests of the slave trade in the west and in a scramble for gold in the east. The fall of Portugese power, due to troubles in Europe as well as to the climate and warfare in Africa, took with it missions which in few places had taken much root.<sup>7</sup>

Cecil Northcott considers that consent given to mass baptisms by the African coastal chiefs in this period was due to the consideration of political expediency. He views

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6. King, n.3, PP 29-36.

7. Parrinder, n.5, p.122

much of the work of the missionaries as a cloak for the Portuguese participation in the slave trade and comments that because of this it deserved to fail.<sup>8</sup>

However in the next phase a strong wave for the abolition of slave trade arose, in which some of the Christian missionaries and organisations played a leading role. A large number of Africans who were taken as slaves to Europe or America, had been converted to Christianity. They played a significant role in the propagation of the gospel after their return to their own continent.

### 3. Third Phase: Pre-colonial era

The third phase roughly beginning during the last decades of eighteenth century was sparked off by the rise of a tremendous missionary awakening in Europe. A religious revival was taking place in the Western World. There was an enormous increase in the amount of Christian activity and the evangelical movements in Europe and America had led to the formation of numerous new missionary societies among the Protestants. The missionary call to "go and preach the gospel to every nations" was proclaimed and emphasized with a greater force. Even the Catholic Church

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 8. Cecil Northcott, Christianity in Africa, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1963, p.58.

had emerged more vigorously organized, with a kind of militant faith after the Reformation experience. Due to these movements the abolitionist move gained much support. Many Christian leaders were able to stir the conscience of the people and members of Parliament for support to pass legislation against slave trade.<sup>9</sup>

Against the backdrop of these events, Sierra Leone was opened as a home for freed slaves. A small group of people who were returning to Africa under the aegis of a London emancipationist committee in 1787, were settled at Freetown in Sierra Leone. More and more groups of such freed slaves were brought there. First from England, then Nova Scotia, and in 1800 there came Maroons from Jamaica, ex-slaves of the Spaniards. After the act of Abolition of slavery it became a crown colony and a centre for suppressing the slave trade. The cargoes of slave ships were intercepted by the British Navy along the West coast and the freed slaves were landed at the Freetown settlement.<sup>10</sup>

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9. King, n.3, p.45

10. Adrian Hastings, "Christianity in Sub - Saharan Africa" in *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. III n.1. p.412.

Those people were settled in the villages, and colony was divided into different parishes. For most of these Negro settlers from Novia Scotia, Jamacia and England were already Christians before their return to the continent of their origin. In their new settlement they built their churches and chapels and continued in their faith according to their various traditions. The Church Missionary Society which was founded in 1799 by a group of British Evangelicals began to send help and in 1827 Fourah Bay College was established at Free town which developed into the first institution of higher education for black Africa. In 1852 the diocese of Sierra Leone was established, with an English Bishop. Sierra Leone became, the source of a network of West African coastal Christian communities who spoke English and had an urban influence. These people became agents of Christianization along the Guinea Coast as far as Nigeria. They played an important part in the mission to Yorubaland. They had a different African Christian identity, and because of their changed situation they were not able to mix well with the rural masses.<sup>11</sup> Because of their adoption of Western mannerisms, language and style etc. they displayed an air of superiority which was not liked by the native Africans, and created some hostility against Christianity in their mind.

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11. *Adrian Hastings, n.10, p.412*

However within fifty years of the founding of Freetown, Christian communities were to be found in many coastal towns in Gambia, the Gold coast, Dahomey and Nigeria.

In South Africa, a comparable African Christianity was coming up. In 1652 few Dutchmen were put ashore at the cape of Good Hope to ensure the supply of fresh meat, vegetable and water for passing ships to East India. Gradually this grew into a settlement and colonists began to arrive. In 1737 George Schmidt of the Moravian Bretheren started work among the Hottentots. Young London Missionary Society sent Dr. Vanderkemp a Dutch ex-soldier and physician to South Africa in 1799. He set up a refuge for Hottentots and tried to protect them from the settlers who wanted them for their farms and work. John Philip sent by LMS in 1821 also fought for the rights of the non-whites. The commitment of LMS to the fight against slavery along with the proclamation of the gospel brought it into constant difficulties with the white settlers of South Africa. Robert Moffat and his son-in-law David Livingstone who came in 1840 were involved in the struggle with the Boers. David Livingstone was successful in breaking his way through the Kalahari desert and helped opening large part of the interiors of Africa for European penetration.<sup>12</sup>

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12. King, n.3, PP. 53-59

The same period also witnessed the ascendancy of the British imperial power, expansion of trade and increase in medical knowledge. The advances made in the medical science led to the control of many tropical diseases. The period from 1840s marked a missionary thrust from the coast into the interior of Africa. The push into the hinterland was made possible by the geographical explorations which greatly increased European knowledge of the interior of Africa. Great inspiration was derived by many missionaries from the exploration and ideas of David Livingstone who made the results of his expeditions known through his prolific writings. This view that missionaries should establish centres for Christianity and civilization which would not only promote religion but also commerce and agriculture, came to be widely shared by many enthusiastic missionaries who penetrated for into the interior of Africa.<sup>13</sup>

The opportunity to live in the hinterland gave the missionaries more knowledge about Africa which according to K.Asare Opoku proved a crucial factor during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Scramble for Africa began. He says that the growing interest of the European nations in

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13. K. Asare Opoku, "Religion in Africa during the colonial era", General History of Africa VII, Heinemann & UNESCO, California, 1985. p-512

acquisition of African territories was helped by the missionary initiative. He views the missionaries as agents in paving the way for colonialism, in some areas of Africa -

".... colonial government in Africa, most missionaries argued, would not only provide the much desired security and protection which would assist them in redressing the evils of the slave trade, but would also stimulate and guarantee the development of new economic opportunities for the Africans. Missionaries therefore enthusiastically encouraged European intervention as a morally justified undertaking, especially from 1870s onwards."<sup>14</sup>

From the 1870s onwards there was a marked increase in the number of missionaries and missionary societies for Africa the translation of the Bible into the African languages also began at this period, which proved to be a significant factor for the growth of Christianity in Africa. For many Africans their first exposure to a written text in their own language came through the Bible.

#### 4. Fourth Phase : Under Colonial rule

The colonial powers had gained supremacy and control over the continent by the 1890s and had parceled it out among themselves, through the Berlin Conference. The relationship

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14. Opoku, n.13, p, 513.

between the colonial order and Christian missions in this period has come under most scathing attack from several quarters. The help each one provided to another in their respective domains has come to term Christianity and Colonial conquest as two sides of the same coin. The nationalists have described the missionaries as the running dogs of hated imperialists and as an accomplice of colonialism.

The establishment of the colonial order definitely helped missionary activities in different ways. Although the attitude of the different colonial powers to Christianity and mission work varied from one another, generally the colonial administration was favourably disposed to the work of missionaries. Under the Colonial regime the missionaries assured, themselves of the protection from the administration. The introduction of better means of communications, money economy resulting in a boost in trade and commerce and a new system of governance, etc facilitated the work of the missionaries. In dealing with many institutions and practices of the traditional religious systems, Christianity received the support of the government.

Beetham writes that for the first time, missionaries were seen by Africans as members of a ruling group, and then of a ruling race.<sup>15</sup>

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 15. T.A. Beetham, Christianity and the New Africa, Pall Mall Press, London 1967, P-16.

For many Africans Christianity as the religion of the conqueror was regarded as containing the secret of the source of power of the white man. For them it meant gaining access to education, employment, power and influence in the white man's world. Establishment of schools, hospital or dispensaries cash crop plantations & trading centres by the missionaries drew many to the new faith. The missionary efforts combined with that of the local catechists, converts and ministers resulted in a phenomenal success of Christian missions.<sup>16</sup>

It can be said that both the colonial order and the Christian missions were trying their best to consolidate their gains with a general non-interference in one another's matters. The period saw a growth in the establishment of mission stations around the Church, village schools, dispensary units and an increase in the number of village catechist, and the vernacular Bible. The school came to symbolize a new order of the changing social system. The pressures of the colonial economy drew many to those schools and work in the mission stations. The servants, workers in those stations and students of the schools came early under the mission influence and were converted in large numbers.

The aim of the missionaries to "Convert the heathen" was linked with the task of "civilizing" them, which to their mind was to encourage them to adopt a way of life similar to

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16. Opoku, n.13, p. 525

their own. The introduction of commercial crops in agriculture, different crafts and technical skills, adoption of their language came to be associated with a new pattern of life for the converted especially those living in mission communities. Mission stations acquired great importance because of the secondary schools and hospitals they contained; The boarding schools became the breeding and training ground for a new class of educated 'elites' in the society, from which later on most of the nationalist leaders came. The mission schools also imparted Western secular skills and values which had a major contribution in preparing the young minds for a political consciousness and growing realisation of the need, for the struggle of liberation. The influence of the Bible in this regard was very significant.

Along with this spread of Christianity to a larger number of people also arose several problems and conflicts among the converts in the practice of their new faith. The missionaries had a negative attitude towards African religion and culture and were determined from the start to stamp them out."Armed with the conviction of possessing the only truth, missionaries condemned all that was 'pagan'. They preached against all kinds of traditional practices- The pouring of libation, holding state offices, drumming and

dancing, traditional ceremonies of the rites of passage, such as outdooring, girls' puberty rites and customs associated with deaths and burials. They also denied the existence of gods and witches and other supernatural powers which Africans believed in"<sup>17</sup>. So the questions of polygamy, female circumcision, veneration of the spirits of the dead and other traditional rituals and customs became major subjects of controversy for the recent converts. They could not sever themselves completely from those beliefs which were deeply ingrained in their mind and hearts, with the adoption of new faith. The control of the Church and mission stations had largely remained under the whites, which had been causing great dissatisfaction and resentment among the African Christians. The growing consciousness for natural independence movements and a sense of African identity led to the fifth phase of indigenous movements of separatist and independent Churches.

##### 5. Fifth Phase : the modern indigenous movements.

This movement was primarily motivated by indigenous expressions of Christianity. The interpretation of the Bible and Christianity in African terms led to serious

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17. *Opoku, N.13, p. 526.*

doubts and conflicts among the African Christians. They sought for their own version of Christianity in which they could feel more at home. The blending of the African traditions and customs into the rituals and practices of the church, and the emergence of a great number of local prophets have been recognized as prominent characteristics of this movement.

Bennetta Jules-Rosette writing on these modern movements traces five basic factors that provided impetus for this development -

" 1) The disappointment of local converts with the premises and outcomes of Christianity led to the growth of prophetic, messianic, and millenarian groups.

2) the translation of the Bible into African vernaculars stimulated a reinterpretation of Scripture and a spiritual renewal in Christian groups.

3) The perceived divisions in denominational Christianity and its failure to meet local needs influenced the rise of separatist churches and community based indigenous churches.

4) The weakness of Western medicine in the face of psychological disorders, epidemics and natural disasters

stimulated concern with spiritual healing among new African religious movements.

5) The failure of mission Christianity to break down social and cultural barriers and generate a sense of community led to the strengthening of social ties in small sectarian groups".<sup>18</sup>

The above enumerated factors do explain to us the underlying causes which precipitated the indigenous movements. There can be other reasons also, but these are the ones which to our view can be said as the most important.

The independent Church movement took different forms. Somewhere they splitted from the mainline missionary churches over some issues, like the promotion of local leadership, nationalist sympathy and cultural connections, acceptance of the polygamists in the church etc. Examples of such kind were the establishment of United Native African Church in 1953, the Legion of Mary from the Irish Roman Catholic Church and Balkole, the East African Revival movement from the Protestant churches.<sup>19</sup>

Churches of this type have generally retained substantial continuity in doctrine, liturgy and order with

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18. Benneta Jules - Rosette, "Modern Movements", under African Religions in Encyclopaedia of Religion Vol.1, n.1, p. 82.

19, Adrian Hastings, n.10, pp. 414-415.

those from which they broke away.

The other variety of the indigenous churches are groups that have been started under the initiative of African leaders outside the immediate context of mission churches. They are also classed as "zionist" in Southern Africa and "Aladura" or praying churches in Nigeria. These bodies generally grew out of the career of a prophet or a messianic leader and often continued to be led dynastically by the founders' families.

Some of the major African prophets in this line were Liberian William Wade Harris, who had a large following in Ivory Coast and Ghana known as Harrist Churches, Simon Kimbangu in Zaire, the founder of Kimbanguist church, and Alice Lenshina in Zambia of the Lumpa Church. These churches had strong emphasis on healing ministry and visions and divine revelations received by their leaders. The charismatic role of their leaders was an essential part of these churches.

Very near to these prophetic Churches, there also arose messianic churches formed around a single figure who was regarded as the new messiah. Some examples of this kind are the Mai Chaza Church and the Apostolic Church of John Masowe in Zimbabwe and Isaiah Shembe's ama Nazaretha

church in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> The messianic churches mainly depended on the personalities and the power that the leaders showed to possess. Even after the death of their founders their messianic traits have been perpetuated by their followers.

The political content of some of these movements have been described by Vijay Gupta in his book *Kenya : Politics of (In)Dependence*<sup>21</sup> he sees the growth of these churches as a protest movements against the imposition of European Christian morality on the African traditional cultural patterns, and their response in mixing Christianity with their own traditions, drawing inspirations from the Old Testament. He says - " These protest movements embodied the aspirations of the people. And besides religion they included political and economic issues and thus supplemented the anti colonial struggle. These movements became rallying points for the Africans.<sup>22</sup> The new movements preached a doctrine of the white man's brand of Christianity and opposition to missions and the government and its agents - The chiefs: Some of the major movements of this nature in Kenya were 'Watu Wa Mungu' (People of God) in the Kikuya land, Wata-Wa-Roho (Man of the Spirit),

20. Rosette - n.18, pp.83-85.

21. Vijay Gupta, *Kenya : Politics of (In) Dependence*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981.

22. Ibid. p. 89.

Ndi ya Jesu Christo (The Men of Christ), DYM or the Church of the Africans and Dini - Ya Kaggia (Religion of Kaggia) movements.<sup>23</sup> These movements emphasised on the boycott of European articles and destruction of their institutions, revival of the African customs which is well summarized in the objectives of the Kaggia movement - "1) to create a purely African movement; divorced from European domination and entirely independent of the European Church's doctrine. (2) To establish a holy Church freed from all the European customs which had been preached to African concurrent with religious teachings and (3) to formulate an independent doctrine to suit Africans".<sup>24</sup>

These independent movements and the influence of the mission schools in preparing Africans for the cause of African liberation along with the inspiration drawn from the Bible were the major contributions of Christianity to Africa's liberation struggle. Their significant role in shaking the colonial foundations, no one can deny.

Apart from these indigenous movements the traditional denominational churches have also continued to grow. There also the process of indigenization and efforts to bring them

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23. Gupta, n. p.95-102

24. Ibid., p.101.

more in tune with the local needs and milieu began, and has been continuing, in the post-independence period.

According to the governments' policy towards religion, many states have acknowledged the role of the Church in struggle for liberation and have urged it to play a constructive role in the nation-building process, to contribute towards the formation of a just, participatory and socialistic society.

Robert Mugabe voices one such opinion in his vision of a socialist pattern of development, in eradicating individualism -

" The elimination of an individualistic society, with its attributes of inequity and selfishness, and its replacement by a collectivistic society, with its attributes of equality and selflessness, is undoubtedly a moral philosophy. When we talk of socialism versus capitalism we are actually talking of morality versus immorality, equity versus inequity, of humanity versus inhumanity, and, I dare say, Christianity versus unChristianity".<sup>25</sup>

C.S. Banana also in his book Theology of Promise also has expressed a similar view of state considering

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 25. R.G. Mugabe, as quoted by Banana in A.M. Moyo's "Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe, in K.H. Peterson (ed.) Religion, Development And African Studies, Uppsala, 1987, p. 70.

Church as one of its natural allies in its efforts to create an egalitarian socialist society:

"Whatever strategy of socialist transformation the state adopts, the need to harness allies will continue forcefully to present itself. Thus, if the morality of socialism is also the morality of Christian teaching in respect of the humanisitic values it cherishes, the state and the church must be themselves more as socialist allies than as vying opponents".<sup>26</sup>

We see that the history of Christianity since the colonial era has come to a full circle in Africa. From the charge of being an accomplice to colonialism, the expectation to be a natural ally of state, towards the creation of an egalitarian society definitely indicates that Christianity has come a long way in the African soil.

It is an interesting feature of Christianity in Africa that the religion used by the colonialists to establish their domination was also used by the Africans to overthrow their regimes..

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 26. C.S. Banana - quoted from press statement in A.M. Moyo's ,  
 n.25, p. 69.

CHAPTER - III

PRE-CHRISTIAN VALUES, TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Chapter III

When we speak of pre-Christian values traditions and customs in Africa, we mean those aspects of African society which had been in existence there, before the coming of Christianity in those areas. Essentially they are related to the traditional African religions. Although Islam had arrived into the continent with the Arab conquests and through the traders, in many parts of Africa had made significant impact on its adherents; none of the novels under discussion depict any Islamic influence on the society. Most of these novels have the traditional tribal background set against the arrival of Christianity on the scene. The writers have recreated the history of their society in great details in those novels, from which we can deduce the structure, organisation of these societies, the values and world-view shared by the people and the common customs and traditions that bound them together.

Chinua Achebe in an interview had stated the reasons for undertaking this task of 'recreating the past' in his novels, which can very well serve as a representative voice of the other writers. He said:

"Even those early novels that look very gentle recreations of the past-what they were saying in effect, was that we had a past that was protest, because there were people who thought we didn't have a past, what we were doing was to say politely that we did - here it is - One big message of the many that I try to put across, is that Africa was not a vacuum before the coming of Europe, that culture was not brought to Africa by the white world. You would have thought it was obvious that everybody had a past, but there were people who came to Africa and said, 'you have no history, you have no civilisation, you have no culture, you have no religion. You are lucky we are here. Now you are hearing about these things from us for the first time'. Well you know, we didn't just drop from the sky. We too had our own history, traditions, cultures, civilisation. It is not possible for one culture to come to another and say, 'I am the way, the truth and the life; There is nothing else but me,' If you say this you are guilty of irreverence or arrogance. You are also stupid. And this is really my concern"<sup>1</sup>.

And really it seems to be the concern of many other writers too. The lengthy quote cited above gives a beautiful explanation

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1. Chinua Achebe, "Interview with Chinua Achebe", *Palaver: Interviews with Five African Writers in Texas* ed. Bernth Lindfors et al. Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute University of Texas, 1972 p.7.

for the concern of the African writer with his past. It serves the purpose of an introduction to this chapter as well because we are also discussing about those very values, traditions and customs.

Value refers to a belief shared by people that something is good and desirable. It defines what is important worthwhile and worth striving for. Attached to the values are certain guidelines which direct conduct in particular situations, known as norms. Norms can also be seen as reflections of values. Shared norms and values are essential for the operation of an ordered and stable human society.<sup>2</sup>

The customs and traditions basically derive their origin from the culture of a society. Culture as a sociological term has acquired a number of definitions. Ralph Linton states that, "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation". Broadly we can say that culture is an essential component of human society. which has two qualities; firstly it is learned, secondly

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2. M. Harlambos, Sociology: Themes and Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980, pp.5-7.

it is shared. To a great extent culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life<sup>3</sup>.

Fixed behavioural patterns and rules, that the members follow in their day to day life activities, or on special occasions; having their source from the culture of that society, can be called the customs and traditions, handed over from generation to generations. To those aspects of life and society, the study is focussed in this chapter.

Traditional African religion by its very nature has been inextricably woven into the fabric of African culture. pointing to its pervasive character Emmanuel Obiechina writes:

"There is hardly any important area of human experience which is not linked to the supernatural and the people's sense of religion and religious piety... these... are part and parcel of the ideological structure of traditional society, and so essential to a proper interpretation of experience in the traditional social context!"<sup>4</sup>

This pervasiveness of religion through the total way of life of African peoples gave traditional religion a remarkable wholeness within the context of the culture out

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3. Harlambos, n.2, p.3.

4. Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.208.

of which it originated.<sup>5</sup> So its study has to be done in the overall context of other aspects and institutions of society. There are some general characteristics which can be found in most of the religions, like belief in the supernatural, rituals, places of worship and provision of a mediator between the worshipper and the deity. Taking those characteristics as our points of analysis we will discuss the nature of traditional African religions, as it emerges from the study of those novels.

A point to remember in this regard is that like other major religions of the world, African religion does not have any sacred scriptures, from where one can get to know the principal tenets and beliefs of that religion. Literacy came to Africa only with Islam and Christianity and so there was no written tradition of literature of any kind in the traditional African religion. Other important factor to keep in mind is that there does not exist a religion named African traditional religion. This nomenclature is used for the sake of convenience only, as the African traditional religions are closely tied to ethnic groups. Hence it may be said that there are as many different "religions" as there are ethnic language groups, which

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5. K. Asare Opoku, "Religion in Africa during the colonial era", General History of Africa VII Ed. A. Adu Boahen Heinemann & UNESCO, California, 1985, p.508.

number over seven hundred south of the Sahara according to one estimate. There are however many similarities among the religious ideas and practices of major cultural and linguistic areas, and certain fundamental features are common to almost all African religions. Although these features are not unique to Africa, taken together they constitute a distinctively African pattern of religious thought and action<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, when Chinua Achebe narrates the story of Okonkwo and Ezeulu in his novels Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God respectively, it is the Ibo Society living in the eastern regions of present day Nigeria that gets portrayed; and similarly in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's The River Between it is the Gikuyu society of Kenya. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to arrive at some general characteristics, of the African traditional religions from the description available in those novels about different societies.

Beginning with the system of beliefs, at the theological level. African religions contain both monotheistic and polytheistic principles. The concept of a supreme God is widely known in Africa. Essentially a spirit, God has no images or physical representations and is acknowledged as the Creator

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 6. Benjamin C. Ray, "African Religions : An Overview, "Mircea Eliade (ed.in chief) Encyclopedia of Religion vol.1 Macmillan Publishing Company, New York 1987, p.60

and sustainer of the world. He is regarded as the source of all power and final authority in all matters.

In Things Fall Apart, Akunna, a village elder tells Mr. Brown, the missionary about this supreme God who made all the world and the other gods, whom they call Chukwu. He compares him to an overlord who is supreme and the other lesser gods as his messengers.

"We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants, but when his servants fail to help us then we go to the last source of hope"<sup>7</sup>.

Thus we see that it is not with Islam or Christianity that the concept of one Supreme God first came to Africa. But in addition to one Supreme God they also have a number of lesser gods or deities. In contrast to the invisibility and remoteness of the Supreme God, those deities are constantly involved in the daily affairs of the people. They are considered as intermediaries of the Supreme God. They have their shrines and priests, and people regularly attend their shrines to pray, receive advice and make offerings, usually in the form of animal sacrifices. They are sources of both protection and harm, depending upon how faithfully they are served. Belief in the existence of numerous gods makes an old man

<sup>7</sup> Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Heinemann Edu. Books, Ltd. London, 1958, p.127.

ask the white man about his god-"which in this god of yours,'  
 ... the goddess of the earth, the god of the sky, Amadiora  
 of the thunderbolt, or what?"<sup>8</sup> The different gods also  
 include god of diseases, such as god of small pox, called  
 Shonponna in T.M. Aluko's One Man, One Wife, worshipped  
 devoutly by Ma Sheyi and her mother. The author of the novel  
 writing about the function of these deities comments:

"The many deities of the land promised material  
 reward to their devotees; fertility and happy  
 maternity to the barren; security against and  
 immunity from the machinations of witches and  
 evil doers; rain in due season and abundant  
 harvests; health and immunity from small  
 pox though Shonponna , the god of small  
 pox, would continue to claim his thousands  
 a year from the herd of the unfavoured."<sup>9</sup>

Different deities were thus served for their power over  
 things that had a direct bearing on their lives. Natural forces  
 like rain, lightning, Sun etc. Idemili in Arrow of God is the  
 nature god holding up rain cloud in the sky, as his name  
 means Pillar of water. Shango is the god of lightning in  
One Man One Wife.

An interesting feature that comes to surface is that,  
 a god could be rejected or even destroyed. In Arrow of God this  
 befalls the deity of Aninta when he fails his people, as one

8. Achebe, n.7, p.103.

9. TM Aluko, One Man, One Wife, Heinemann Edu. Books Ltd. London, 1959, p.35.

reminds, "Did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set fire on him"<sup>10</sup>.

In the same novel we also see the installation of a new deity, jointly by the inhabitants of six villages who worshipped different deities, when they are faced with a crisis situation.

"Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves they hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called 'Ulu'"<sup>11</sup>

The underlying principle here is that the people acknowledged the direct involvement of the deities in their affairs, and failure of expectations could result in rejection of the god as an extreme step. Their role as beneficial guardian is deeply ingrained in the minds of the people. People talk about the success and sudden growth of a village market, and attribute it to one deity in Arrow of God.

"At first Eke was a very small market. Other markets in the neighbourhood were drawing it dry. Then one day the men of Okperi made a powerful deity and placed their market in its care. From that day Eke grew and grew until it became the biggest market in these parts. This deity which is called Nwanyieke is an old woman".<sup>12</sup>

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10. Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God, Heinemann Edu. Books Ltd. London, 1964, p.33.

11. Achebe, n.10, p.17.

12. Ibid, pp.22-23.

Man has the right to appeal to gods on issues affecting his welfare. They are forces that link man with the unknowable Supreme Creator.

Apart from these gods, each person has his or her own personal god, referred as 'chi' in many of the novels. Basically it is a person's destiny, the way his life is ordained by the 'chi'. Someone's good fortune is explained as his chi has been active and benevolent to him. On the other hand when someone suffers a loss, then also it is attributed to his chi. Akukalia's death in Arrow of God is referred as, "he has gone the way his chi ordained". One is advised not to challenge his chi. But this should not lead us to infer that there is a passive resignation to fate; for we come across the Ibo proverb 'when a man says yes, his chi says yes also', which underlines the importance of individual's initiative and effort.

Gods may sometimes enlist the services of special men and women to convey their will. These people are known as spirit-mediums, diviners, priests, oracles and prophets etc. They have different names in different societies. They hold an important position in the society and are revered

by the people because they are the carriers of the messages of gods, they are the ones who express the will of deities to be translated into action. The god usually makes his desire known through an illness. Sickness sometimes is seen as a sacred calling, that is manifested in the form of a possession, the cure will take the form of apprenticeship and initiation into the service of the deity, and it will place the person in lasting debt to society. Henceforth the chosen man or woman becomes professionally established at a shrine and becomes god's medium; devoted to the healing of afflicted people. The remedy usually involves moral advice, herbal prescription, ritual actions and offering of sacrifices etc. Delineating the role of such priest-doctors John Munonye in his novel The Only Son writes:

"Ezedibia was only his title name. It meant that he was chief among all dibias, men who by the nature of their profession were priests as well as doctors. (Diseases, whether of the mind or of the body; were caused by spirits, therefore anybody who professed the medical art must also be a priest, and intermediary between spirits and men"<sup>13</sup>

People have deep faith in the efficacy of their treatment and they are usually seen to go at any length to fulfil their demands. Some of them are shown to possess love-  
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13. John Munonye, *The Only Son*, Heinemann Edu. Books, Ltd. London, 1966, p.106.

charms, as the one in Blade Among the Boys, whose help Nkiru takes to win the love and attention of Patrick. There are different varieties of them. Oracles have different functions as we read about one in Things Fall Apart:

"The Oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps, or when they had a dispute with their neighbours. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers."<sup>14</sup>

Not only these but on such important occasions as deciding on whether to go into war with other clan or not, it was considered necessary to consult the oracle. It has been recorded about Umuofia in the same book that it never went to war unless approved by the Oracle of the Hills and Caves and there had been occasions when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war and people believe, that had the clan disobeyed, they would surely have been beaten.

An interesting feature about these oracles is that, they are generally ordinary men and women who fall into a condition of dissociation, similar to possession and speak as though with a voice entering them from outside. Chielo the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves in Things Fall Apart is described in such a condition :

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14. Achebe n.7, p.12.

"But at that very moment Chielo's voice rose again in her possessed Chanting and Ekwefi recoiled, because there was no humanity there. It was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the market and sometimes bought bean cakes for Ezinma, whom she called her daughter. It was a different woman the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves"<sup>15</sup>.

The utterance of the Oracle is considered as god's will and voice, and is carried out even if one has some doubt or hesitation in its execution. Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna with his machet, despite the fact that he had lived in his house for three years and called him father; because the Oracle had so demanded.

The distinction between mediums, diviners priests, oracles and prophets is a fluid one, and transition from one to the other is made easily. Generally diviners and mediums are spiritual consultants, whereas prophets are leaders of men, who may go directly to the people with programs for action and initiate religious and political movements. In The River Between Waiyaki, the hero of the novel is told by his father Chege about the prophecy of one great prophet Mugo Wa Kibiro, who had warned the people about the coming of the whites, as men wearing clothes like butterflies. He had prophesied that, "Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood

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15. Achebe, n.7, p.75.

that flows in me. I say from the same tree a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people"<sup>16</sup>.

In fact there had been a great Gikuyu seer named Mugo Wa Kibiru who had given a forewarning of the coming of the white strangers, and of their invasion and occupation of the land. He had advised them among other things, to be very cautious in their dealings with the white stranger, for they were a treacherous and ruthless people, who would not hesitate to annihilate the whole nation with their powerful magical sticks (guns), at the slightest pretext. The Mau Mau freedom fighters of Kenya during 1948-1960 made frequent reference to these prophecies and drew strength to continue in their struggle for 'uhuru' (freedom).<sup>17</sup>

Another important feature of the traditional world-view that emerges from the reading of these novels is the belief in ancestral spirits. The general conception of man is that of a composite of social moral, physical and spiritual being. The physical body disintegrates after death, but it is not the end. The spirit survives him and the dead remain the members of society. They are the ones who are

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16. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., London, 1965, p.20.

17. Samuel G. Kibicho, "The continuity of the African conception of God into and through Christianity : a Kikuyu case-study". Ed. Edward Fashole-Luke & others, *Christianity in Independent Africa* Rex Collings, London, 1978, pp.381-.2

referred as ancestral spirits here. The community of the dead remain alongside the community of the living, and there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Human society is construed as a continuous unbroken family made up of the dead, the living and the yet unborn.

The ancestral spirits come to the land of living in times of festival or at village assembly, meeting for a collective decision in form of masked spirits. We witness a case for decision by the citizens assembly being presided over by nine masked ancestral spirits in Things Fall Apart. All Umuofia is assembled in the village square. The masked ancestral spirits representing the nine villages act as the executive judicial body and the verdict is delivered by the senior ancestral spirit Evil Forest after consultation with the other spirits. The real function of the masked spirit here is to put the stamp of ancestral authority on the verdict of the community tribunal. The masked ancestral spirits are a manifestation and dramatization of the continuing interest of the ancestors in the affairs of the living<sup>18</sup>.

In Francis Selormey's The Narrow Path ancestral spirit's help is sought at the time of a difficult labour of a kinswoman. The family members pray at his shrine saying - "without your

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18. *Obiechina, n.4, p.211*

help at such times. Your family would die out and be lost from the face of the earth"<sup>19</sup>. Ancestral spirit is sometimes believed to return in the body of a child in the family; Close resemblance to character or looks of an ancestor is attributed in this manner. Chiaku, the mother of Nnanna always calls him 'my husband's father' in The Only Son because of this belief.

Related to this belief and reverence for ancestors is the special significance of father-son relationship in traditional African society. A father brings up his son in the best tradition of clan customs and usages, works hard to provide for his necessities till the time he becomes self-sufficient. He expects that when he will die, his spirit will draw sustenance from the sacrificial offerings which his living son will make to him. More important still, the performance of the proper funeral rites which will smooth the father's way into the spirit world may to some extent depend on a living son's sense of obligation and indebtedness to his dead father<sup>20</sup>. It is the fear of abdication of this filial duty on part of his children, that terrifies Okonkwo, while contemplating on his son Nwoye's action of joining the church.

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19. Francis Selormey, The Narrow Path Heinemann Edu.Books Ltd., London, 1966, p.34.

20. Obiechina, n.4, p.218.

"Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the horrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god"<sup>21</sup>.

Sons are therefore more associated with their fathers in their hut, while the daughters help their mothers in the kitchen. They learn a lot by hearing the stories from their fathers as well as by listening to their conversation with other elders. It is generally assumed that a father always tells truth to his son. So the statement which we come across many times in Arrow of God that, "my father told me", bears the authority of a true statement that cannot be challenged. A child's training under his father is symbolized by the customary tradition in which the father allows his son to carry his bag wherever he goes. In John Munonye's The Only Son this has been pointed out by one character:

"The child who carries an elder's bag has a very good chance of being a wise man in his life. He follows his father to meetings and places, and listens to the wise words the elders speak. The result is that he knows at an early age the idioms & proverbs with which we fool the foolish and baffle the stranger, and also the customs of the land"<sup>22</sup>.

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21. Achebe, n.7, p.137.

22. Munyone, n.13, p.32.

It was a form of traditional education that a child received from his father. This special relationship is very well portrayed in The River Between, where Chege trains his son Waiyaki in the earlier part of the novel. He narrates to him various details of information about the tribe, the mountain and valleys, the trees bark of which is good for fresh wound and trees whose fruit is poison etc. The relationship between father and sons was crucial to the traditional system because it is the foundation of the ancestral authority upon which the continuity of the institutions, common values, attitudes and sentiment of the traditional culture and religion depended.<sup>23</sup>

In the traditional African world-view land is held in great esteem. It is addressed as Mother Earth and is worshipped as earth goddess. In a primarily agricultural society the reasons for such reverence is not difficult to understand. Dependence on the land for their subsistence is the most obvious one. Major festivals are related with the agricultural season of sowing or harvest, such as the New Yam festival. Man's continual relationship with the land are symbolized by the burial of the umbilical cord of the

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23. *Obiechina*, n.4 p.218-19.

infant in the place of his birth, the blood shed from his body during the initiation rites of circumcision on the land and the final burial of the dead, marking return to the same mother earth. Old man Ahamba expounds the importance of land in Obinkaram Echewa's The Land's Lord:

" The land is greater than all other gods. greater even than the sky god, because when the sky cannot any longer hold it rains, it releases them to the land to hold. And the land is everywhere. We come from it, we live on it; we return to it. We reincarnate from it. We are always standing on it or on something that stands on it. Whether we are on top of a tree on top of water. The rivers and the seas have the land to hold them up..."<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, any offence against the land has to be punished. The twin children are thrown into the bushes in the the forest because, "The earth had decreed that they were an offence in the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land the and not just the offender"<sup>25</sup>.

On three occasions Okonkwo offends the earth and severe penalties are exacted. When he beats his wife during the sacred week of Peace. The priest of Ani orders him to bring to the shrine one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth

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24. T. Obinkaram Echewa, The Land's Lord Heinemann Edu. Books Ltd. London, 1976. p.134.

25. Achebe, n.7, p.87.

and a hundred cowries. Secondly when he accidentally kills Ezeudu's son, he is made to flee his fatherland and his whole house-compound, along with its property are completely destroyed. Thirdly when he commits suicide by hanging himself he is denied a proper burial by his clansmen, because :

"It is against our custom," said one of the men. 'It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen'<sup>26</sup>.

The earth is sacred, so it cannot be defiled by offenders. The relationship between man and land is spiritual and thereby inviolable.

The next important feature of their custom which we are going to study comes under the purview of the social-anthropological term - 'rites de passage'. Van Gennep a French anthropologist explains this term by saying that in simple societies, every change that could be thought of as a passage from one state to another was ritualized - changes in the phases of the moon or in the seasons, as well as changes in the social status of individuals; the movement of a community to a new village, the entry of a

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26. Achebe, n.7, p.147.

couple into a new house, or even entering or leaving any house <sup>27</sup>.

The above mentioned feature is truly characteristic of African society. They have been woven as intrinsic pattern of African culture, and find their way into the narratives of those novels as well. In Arrow of God the climax of the novel is built on declaring the New Yam festival by the priest. A crisis situation has arisen because Ezeulu has refused to eat the remaining yam, to mark the festival day. His task of declaring the new moon, the day for the feast of the Pumpkin leaves and for the New Yam Feast are all part of this ritual of declaring the changes in the cycle of time and seasons.

A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites. A human being does not become a member of his society merely by being born; he has to be formally accepted into it, and this is done by a public naming of the infant or a presentation of him to his parents. In The Narrow Path we find a description where all relatives are assembled at the ancestor's hut, libation is being poured and prayers offered. Cornflour solution is offered to feed the friendly spirits and the body is laid on bare ground

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27. Van Gennep, Cited in Lucy Mair, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, edn.2. Oxford University Press, Delhi 1972, p.233.

under the hut. Water is poured to symbolize the hardships in the world and mother gets the baby only after paying a token price to the kinswoman who has picked up the baby from the ground<sup>28</sup>.

Passing through one state to another is marked by rites which can be divided into three steps. The person whose status is to be changed is removed from everyday contact by a 'rite of separation' during which period he spends at a special place fixed for such rites. Boys and girls who are to be initiated are taken to cult house; similarly a bride is also placed in a hut where she spends a period of seclusion, either before she goes to her husband, or at her husband's home before she takes up the household duties of a wife. This is followed by a transitional period when the person going through the ritual has left one status behind, but has not yet entered the other, then comes the rite of incorporation in which the new status is formally confirmed. The Gikuyu rite of circumcision is in fact one of the central concerns in the novel The River Between, where the author has underlined the social and moral significance of the rite. This is a rite through which a society not only moves its young into new

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28. Selormey, n.19, p.39.

social roles but also transforms them inwardly by molding their moral and mental dispositions toward the world. The rite is held in the confines of initiation groves where an intensified instruction is given to the initiates regarding moral, social and their traditional aspects of life. During this period one has to go through severe tests of physical and mental endurance. The physical mark indicate that the transition to adulthood is permanent, personal and often painful, and that society has successfully imprinted itself upon the individual.

An addition to transition rites there are some rites which are performed on behalf of a whole community, to maintain the moral order of society. The Pumpkin leaves festival described in Arrow of God is an example of one such ritual. It is both a purification ceremony and a pre-planting supplication festival. Umuofia women symbolically hurl upon the person of Chief Priest, the evils and defilements of their household in the form of bunches of pumpkin leaves, which each woman has brought to ceremony for the purpose. The chief priest thus serves as ritual carrier of the community's sins and misfortunes for burial in the shrine of Ulu.

The rituals are not only symbolical, but they also fulfil the task of continuance of the natural and social order. They re-inforce the various roles assigned to different people for the proper functioning of the society. They also remind each one, how indispensable to the community is the existence of one's office and the due performance of its responsibilities; by assigning to each a part in the natural drama, that only he can perform. Ezeulu the priest in Arrow of God muses over this question which is quite revealing in nature :

"Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was No.1 the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival-no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare"<sup>29</sup>.

Because it is the corporate will of the people that is enshrined in any power or responsibility given to a person in a specific role. By the non-performance of one's

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29. Achebe, n.10, pp.3-4.

duty one may lose his assigned role.

Another form of ritual common to the traditional African society is that of sacrifices. The sacrifice of animals and offering of agricultural produce mark a transaction between the spirit-world and the realm of human beings. Sacrifices are offered to gods and spirits in return for their favours. By killing an animal the life is released and offered to the gods for their sustenance in exchange for their blessings. While sacrificing for a cure from illness the underlying concept is that the act of sacrifice may also transfer the illness to the animal victim, which thus serves as a scapegoat. An animal may also be sacrificed so that its blood may act as a barrier against malevolent spirits. Fowls, sheep and goats are the most common sacrificial animals. A scene of a sacrifice is here presented to understand the nature of the ritual from one of the novel.

"The Fai was offering a sacrifice on behalf of the family. He stood on a tombstone with the sacrificial cock in his hand. Then he bent down and put the cock's legs under his right foot and the wings under the left and recited the following prayer:

O Shafe! O Lambu! O Dule'!  
 Come and take your Chicken  
 You left me here to head this family.  
 Go to the gods and bring us health, bring us numbers  
 and bring us yield.  
 Bring us health and make us strong, stronger than rock.  
 Female child., female child, male child.  
 Let the harvest fill the farms and the barns.  
 O Shafe, O Lambu, O Dul'e!  
 Come and take your chicken  
 Holding the upper and lower parts of the chicken's  
 beak he pulled them part thus tearing the head in two.  
 The chicken struggled in his hands and the blood spurled  
 out and flowed on the tombstone. The Fai took the  
 blood from the tombstone on his forefinger and marked it  
 on the men's chest and between the big and other toes  
 of the women's left feet. After the cock was roasted  
 and those present,....were given a piece"<sup>30</sup>

During a sacrificial offering... the unseen guests were,  
 as a rule, served first. For one thing, it reflected their  
 position in the esteem for the people. For another, these guests  
 were spirits who could not share in the substance of the  
 feast but only in its essence which, according to tradition,  
 was contained in the first measure of any food, drink or blood  
 intended for a sacrificial offering or ritual communion.<sup>31</sup>

The sharing of the meat here confirms the bond between the people  
 and the spiritual power, to which a portion is given.

Different purposes for which sacrifices are offered  
 come into light by the reading of those novels. In The Narrow Path  
 and The only Son these are done to ward off the evil spirits  
 causing sickness and trouble to Kofi and Nnanna respectively.

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30. Kenjo Jumbam, The White Nam of God Heinemann Edu. Books Ltd.  
 London, 1980, pp.18-19.

31. Onuora Nzekwu, Blade Among the Boys, Heinemann Edu. Books Ltd.  
 London, 1962, pp.50-51.

In The White Man of God sacrifice of a he-goat is offered by the family priest as a part of cleansing ceremony of Dinny and Biy Wibah who have been found guilty of a disgraceful act.

The propitiatory value of sacrifice has been recognized by most of the human societies and it has been the part of ritual in many religions of the world. It is a reciprocal act which brings gods and people together and restores moral and spiritual balance for the positive flow of life on earth.

Belief in witchcraft has been wide-spread in Africa. It is a belief that some persons with an evil intent or socially destructive mind possess power through which they can bring misfortune on someone they envy or dislike. They are generally associated with night and night creatures for their suggestions of foreboding. They are believed to possess the ability to turn themselves into another creatures at their will, and are linked with the performance of indecent and antisocial acts.

Kofi's friend Tona is suspected of being killed by

a witch in The Narrow Path as people have seen a witchbird in the previous night. Because the child has died an unnatural death, she wants to be avenged. Her funeral procession is led by some bewitched men, and it stops before one house. Three suspected women are brought out and before the village assembly, the priest elicits confession from them on the charge of being a witch. Before asking each woman he cuts the throat of a cock and throws it in the air, if it falls on its back then the woman's answer is considered to be true. But the last woman, before the cutting itself, falls onto the ground with her limbs twitching and foam coming out her month. She confesses herself as a witch and her crime, which leads to punishment by the villagers.

Dominic Mulaisho's The Tongue of the Dumb in fact revolves around this belief in witchcraft. Lubinda has his eye on the seat of village chief and fails in his evil designs on Natombi a young widow. He plots to eliminate the present chief Mpona, Christian teacher and Natombi together, on charges of being witch. He is nearly successful in convincing the people and having his own way, but for a dramatic turn of event at the last moment. The novel points

to the evil practices of this belief in falsely implicating one on charges of witchcraft and getting eliminated. In Blade Among the Boys there is a lengthy discussion on witchcraft after an unnatural death which occurred during a masquerade play<sup>32</sup>. Ascribing some accident or death to the doing of a witch as in the above case - according to Evans Pritchard, who has done a detailed study on witchcraft is basically a way to supply causal explanation of events that would otherwise have to be unexplained, and along with the explanations, a practical recourse without which men would be helpless in situation of crisis.<sup>33</sup>

The shrines also held a significant place in the traditional African society. They are the dwelling places of gods and spirits which also serve as a channel of communication with the spiritual world. In Africa they existed mainly in natural forms such as forest groves large rocks and trees. Some are in the form of a hut or a small house. Generally in every house compound one can find such shrine of their ancestral spirits or gods. In Things Fall Apart Okonkwo's compound has a shrine which has the wooden symbols of his personal gods and his ancestral spirits, "where he worshipped them with sacrifices of Kolanut, food and palmwine and offered prayers to them on

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32. Nzekwu, no.31, pp.75-79.

33. Mair, n.27, p.246.

behalf of himself and his family members.<sup>34</sup> In The Narrow Path the family shrine contains the buried tools of a powerful ancestor who was a blacksmith, and is supposed to live there guiding and protecting his descendants. A public shrine of the earth goddess is<sup>5</sup> described as following in Blade Among the Boys.

" Within the square some ten yards from its entrance stood a shrine, a little hut roofed with zinc in which was an earth mound at one end of which grew an egbo plant, accepted among the people as tree of life ... this was the shrine to Ani, the earth goddess in her role as guardian of the village." 35

Ritual art related to the shrines and worship also find description in these novels. These consist of the ceremonial implements like masks, head-gears, sacred-staffs of office, carved images of gods etc. In Arrow of God an Ikenga is depicted, which is the carved embodiment of a man's strength, his life force. Breaking of this Ikenga leads to a serious brawl and killing of person, because it is split only when the person dies. An osisi, the staff of office of Ozo title holder is portrayed as five feet six inches long, having three metal rings at regular intervals along its length in Blade Among The Boys. Generally, it can be said that African ritual arts are linked to an understanding of their function. They are meant to establish a relationship or remind one of that relationship with supernatural forces.

Like any other culture, myths abound in the traditional African culture too. African myths deal primarily with the origin of mankind and with it the origin of social and ritual institutions.

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34. Achebe, n.7, p.10.

35. Nzekwu, n.31, p.45.

In the novels we find reference to some myths. Chege is here telling to his son Waiyaki, about Keninyaga mountain in The River Between.

" It was the seat of Murungu; who made Gikuyu and Mumbi the first man and woman ... it was before Agu; in the beginning of things. Murungu brought the man and woman here and again showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and the children of the children ... world without end."<sup>36</sup>

The myths have a functional and spiritual relevance to their worldview, in supplementing their beliefs and rituals with a kind of charter and in providing answer to many of the universal "why" questions, like about death, suffering, evil etc. They help us to understand the elements of their religious belief.

In the sphere of social structure a deep sense of close knit community and an emphasis on social unity is well evident in the traditional African society. The collective solidarity of the people is based on shared common customs, beliefs and identical world-view. It is strengthened by blood relationships and marriage ties. There is considerable involvement in one another's personal or family lives. Emmanuel Obiechina sees in this the value ascribed to collective responsibility. He says:

" We find that the value which sustains the society is collective responsibility, the responsibility of the group for the lives and well being of the members. In both personal and social relationships, everthing which disrupts the orderly life of individuals must be removed or set right. There is tremendous respect for customs

and traditions. The group and its interest always takes precedent over the individual and his self interest." 37

The above statement explains, some of the events and behaviour in the novels, which may appear as strange and cruel to non-African eyes. The killing of Ikemefuna in this light can be seen as the fulfilment of a collective accord decided between two clans as Obiechina has explained, "... that Ikemefuna's life is forfeit the moment he is given as hostage, for when he is introduced as Okonkwo's ward, he is referred to as 'the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbours to avoid war and bloodshed' and as 'the ill fated lad' 38 Similarly the destruction of the whole compound and property of Okonkwo by his own people, the exile forced upon him, and the denial of a proper burial can all be attributed to the supremacy of group interests over the individual. The traditional law is hard and no respecter of persons, but it justifies itself on the ground that social order must be maintained and the health of the community protected. 39

The support which individuals receive from the community is no less important. When Okonkwo goes to the land of his mother, after fleeing from his fatherland, his clansmen receive him with open arms, they provide him a plot of ground to build his compound, agricultural land to farm and even seedlings for planting. All possible help is given to him to establish himself. Similarly in The Only Son when the widow Chiaku returns to her brother's house

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37. *Obiechina, n.4, p.219.*

38. *Ibid., p.213.*

39. *Ibid., p.215*

along with her son Nnanna, her people there provide all help to start her own house and farm , through their contributions.

Warm hospitality is also part of religion. It is one feature of the traditional African culture that cannot go unnoticed. Any guest who comes to the house is welcomed and offered kolanut by the host , which is broken with a prayer to ancestors and gods for life , health and general welfare. On occasions like child birth, entry to a new house, negotiation for a bride, marriage or death, the whole clan is invited. The host offers hospitality by providing kolanut, palm-wine, yam or other foods as per his standing in the society. The bond of kinship is strengthened through those feasts and ceremonies, as one of the elder says:

" A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving . They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so." 40

The high philosophical content of his statement can hardly be missed. He is directing his speech to the young kindred, to emphasize the value of the bond of kinship and "to speak with one voice" Value of 'one voice' is seen in deciding the affairs of the village, where unanimity in decision is arrived at after long deliberations in the village assembly. Every one is allowed to express his own opinion on the matter.

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40. Achebe, n.7, p.118.

Then the persons involved are given a chance to present their case. After which the elders consult together to arrive at a common decision, that is delivered by the leader, and is acceptable and binding upon everyone, as the voice of the whole community. Details of such deliberations and decisions abound in these novels, depicting different kind of cases brought for consideration.

Communal nature of living is seen at its best, during various celebrations like the festivals, dances and sports, which include wrestling, hunting, arrow-shooting etc., when the whole community participates and immerses itself into the pool of joy and vivacity. They reinforce the strong ties existing between the individuals and groups with nature and the world of spirits and gods.

Marriages are not just contract between two individuals, but an affair where two families make ties and the whole clan thereby enters into a new relationship with the other. Therefore it is the parents who do the negotiation for the marriage of their children, alongwith their extended family members. In The Only Son, the author has presented very interesting details of the different steps through which a marriage is finalized. The bride-price is the recognition of the value of a woman in the family, considering the significant role she plays in an agricultural society.

A person's status in society is recognized by his prowess, his barns, numbers of wives and children, and the titles he has won. The fame and honour which Okonkwo has earned is described in reference to those terms.

" Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barnful of yams, and had just marriage his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest man of his time." 41

Chiaku, the widow mother of Nnanna dreams of her son growing into a -

" tall well proportioned, handsome ... a man of great skills and strength ... a masquerader, wrestler hunter, dancer ... a successful farmer with twenty double rows of rich rotund yams in his barn ... the husband of two and father of many. In short, the best that any mother can expect in a son." 42

Her dream is characteristic of the set of values and traditions of the society she lives in , and it reveals to us a great deal about the nature, custom and worldview of that society.

The writers have been successful in recreating the past of their society by destroying the false notions of a dark continent, ' inhabited by brute savages, living far away from any knowledge of culture or civilization, ' ' leading life like animals in the jungles.' Their attempt to correct the distortions and

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41. Achebe, n.7, p.6.

42. Munonye, n.13, p.48.

misconception about their country and the people are substantiated with the documentation and effective presentation of a society, with its own set of values , a vibrant culture with customs and traditons, having a long history. The existence of a complex system of religion that pervaded all areas of their life and the in-built mechanisms inthe social-structure to face different kind of pressures are some of the distinguishing features of the traditional African society. The writers have generally paid more attention in defending certain institutions and highlighting the positive aspects. However in glorifying they do not gloss over the weaknesses, defects and abuses present in the system. They examine the past with a critical eye to realise the mistakes, so that they can see in Achebe's words - "Where the rain began to beat us," It is not an idyllic world , free from imperfections, that they have presented, but it has its own share of shortcomings, failures and evils.

We can say that their effort is more of an affirmation of values which were denied to them. It is a challenge to the derogatory use of workds like ' heathen' and 'pagan' in describing them. They have pointed out the folly of approach in which one considers a culture in terms of superior and inferior against the other. One should realise that any two cultures are first and foremost, different, therefore an outright condemnation or rejection of one, smacks more of arrogance and stupidity than

anything else. It is fair to acknowledge that those writers did make a contribution, however modest it may be , in "liberating the mind ." Their role as active participants in the movement for cultural liberation, that preceded the political liberation in the continent cannot be denied.

Against this background we move on to examine their response to the spread of Christianity and the impact it had on different areas of people's lives and society in general.

CHAPTER IV

SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY : SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

CHAPTER - IV

" Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

" Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ... " (Matthew 28: 19-20)

These words of 'great commission' spoken by Jesus Christ to his disciples, form the basis of the missionary vision in Christian religion. The emphasis on the mission to preach the gospel has remained with it, in the last two thousand years of its history. It witnessed a great spurt in the nineteenth century when most of the major Christian denominations in the West set out to evangelize the globe. Their effort to spread the Christian gospel was tied historically to European colonial expansion. Due to this factor the spread of Christianity in this period is necessarily linked up with the colonial situation.

As discussed earlier the period of our study corresponds with the above phase of the history of Christianity in Africa. It has been depicted by many writers as the time when the Africans saw the arrival of first white missionaries in their soil. In addition to this we will also be considering the next phase extending upto the twentieth century in which Christianity

experienced a phenomenal growth, and shed the label of "white man's religion" to emerge as an indigenous brand of African Christianity. Imposition of colonial rule had initiated a number of changes and had generated conditions which gave rise to forces virtually affecting all areas of people's lives. The steady acceleration of the processes of change is manifest in the growth of new social relations, transformation of the economic patterns, institutions, techniques and the introduction of new ideas and modes of thought. Because Christianity as a religion also penetrated at a large scale during the same period, it had a direct bearing on many of these changes. To these aspects, in their socio-economic and political dimensions we will concentrate our study in this chapter.

Most of the writers in these novels have depicted the white missionaries as the first agents for the spread of Christianity in Africa. Their first arrival among the people evokes a sense of queer. The sight of a white man in an unusual appearance starts the circulation of many stories. First they are taken light-heartedly and even indulge in little buffonery with the white preacher in Achebe's Things Fall Apart. Because of the characteristic hospitable nature of the Africans, the missionaries do not face much difficulty in acquiring a place for themselves. In the above mentioned novel when they ask the

elders of the village for a plot of land to build a Church, the elders allot them the land of " Evil Forest," saying-

" Let us give them a portion of the Evil Forest. They boast about victory over death. Let us give them a real battle field in which to show their victory." <sup>1</sup> The villagers had thought that they would be stricken dead by the spirits, but when nothing happened to them they got puzzled and start believing on the power of white man's fetishes. While they continue to wait upon their gods to strike them dead, missionaries complete the Church building and even win a few converts.

Making converts to their faith is shown as the overriding pursuit of most of the missionaries by the writers. Referring to the background of their zeal in this direction, John Munonye in The Only Son takes back his readers to a seminary in Ireland where the Father Superior was emphasizing on the need for winning as many converts as possible in what he described as the first concentrated invasion of tropical Africa. He says-

"In this our early phase, with so many Christian denominations literally pouring into that pagan world, our first emphasis must be statistical success ... We want on our side the vast numbers who in Africa of the future will sustain the Church with their numerical strength ... In pursuit of that objective, I'm afraid we've got to be impatient with the culture of the people. There just isn't the time to sort out first and label their customs as acceptable and unacceptable." <sup>2</sup>

1. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Heinemann, London, 1958, p.105.

2. John Munonye, The Only Son, Heinemann, London, 1966, p.146.

John Michael Smith who is a seminarian and later comes to Africa as a missionary expresses a different opinion and stresses on the need for a true Christian ideal in the approach. Instead of converting a mass he would like to concentrate on a few promising ones and try to make them real good Christians. But this idea is not acceptable to the Superior who maintains, " .. We are on a virgin soil, very vast too, and we want acres and acres of it to ourselves. Besides you can never be sure of your promising ones, human nature being what it is." <sup>3</sup>

These two divergent opinions in fact represent two different approaches adopted by the missionaries. Those subscribing to the view of the Father Superior, take a strong stand, and condemn all pagan practices and the gods worshipped by them. Taking a rigid posture they try to impose the Christian doctrine and a related life style through all available means. Rev. James Smith in Things Fall Apart, who " sees things in black and white," and for whom black was evil; <sup>4</sup> Father Patrick Ryan in The Only Son, who is shown throwing coins at the curious crowd, <sup>5</sup> Fr. O'Brien in Blade Among the Boys, who turns away all the non-Catholic applicants from the school, <sup>6</sup> Fr. Chiphwanya in The Tongue of the Dumb, <sup>7</sup> and the Big Father in The White Man of God, <sup>8</sup> are all examples of this kind.

3. Munonye n.2.p. 146.

4. Achebe, n.1. p. 130.

5. Munonye, n.2, p. 142.

6. Onuora, Nzekwu, Blade Among the Boys, Heinemann, London, 1962, p. 84.

7. Dominic Mulaisho, The Tongue of the Dumb, Heinemann, London, 1971,

8. Kenjo Jumbam, The White Man of God, Heinemann, London, 1980.

On the other hand those subscribing to the viewpoints expressed by John Michael Smith adopt a gentler approach. They try to mix-up with the people ,learn their languages and seek to know about their traditional gods and beliefs.They help the people in their times of need, especially by providing medical aid. They tell the people about the advantages of education and encourage them to send their children to the mission School and give them lessons in skills such as carpentry and tailoring. Mr.Brown in Things Fall Apart , Father Cosmas in The White Man of God, Sister Agatha in Obi<sup>9</sup> and Livingstone in his earlier stint in The River Between<sup>10</sup> can be put under this category.

They have been shown enjoying the respect of the people for their good deeds. Father Gonzago's empathy for the Africans and his policy of accomodation invites criticism from his colleague and the charge of diluting the Christian faith. Father Cosmas wins the heart of the villagers,Christians and non-Christians alike because of his warm heartedness, loving nature, extra affection for children and visiting the people in their homes. His quick learning of their language and tireless efforts during the epidemic of small pox makes him very popular.

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9. John Munonye, Obi, Heinemann, London, 1969.

10. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, The River Between, Heinemann, London, 1965.

Father Higler in The Land's Lord<sup>11</sup> represents yet another variety of missionaries. He is an army deserter of the second World War and is shown of being unsure of his whole mission, Going through different conflicts and nursing an unfulfilled aim of constructing a massive Church building, he only manages to bring a big bell for the incomplete Church from gifts of his friends at home. His character indicates the presence of many missionaries who for reasons other than a genuine missionary vocation had come to Africa. And it is true that the sudden outburst in the demand for missionaries had drawn all kind of persons with scant regard for qualifications, ability or interest for the job in many cases. The more competent ones were sent to the countries with a "higher civilization" like India, China and Japan etc.

Apart from the white missionaries the spread of Christianity in Africa was largely due to the work and zeal of African Catechists and converts who served as cross-cultural propagators of the new faith in their own continent. They were in a better position to reach to the people for being African. Writing an essay on African Church history Bengt Sundkler had emphasized on putting the history in a

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 11. T.O. Echewa, The Land's Lord, Heinemann, London, 1976.

new key by exposing the hitherto neglected role of the African initiative. He says that most of the historical surveys of the Christian Church in Africa are mission histories which treat Christianization as an exclusively Western invasion of Black Africa. Stressing the need to correct this view he says - "It was often through individual and group initiatives that the Christian faith was irradiated in their own communities. These harbingers of religious change, the liberated slaves, refugees or migrant labourers, generated the feeling of numinousness which is so indivisibly a feature of the history of Christian spirituality in Africa"<sup>12</sup>.

Their significant role in the expansion of Christianity becomes evident by the reading of those novels. Joseph in The Only Son is a young man who makes special efforts to win the young, "who in future would be fathers and mothers and leaders of the town"<sup>13</sup>. His efforts to woo the children and teenagers to the school results in phenomenal success. Mr. Kiaga in Things Fall Apart defends the inclusion of osus or the social outcasts in the Church, inspite of loud protests by the members<sup>14</sup>. Similarly Pastor David in One Man One Wife<sup>15</sup>, John Jaja

12. Bengt Sundkler, "African Church History in a New Key", (ed), K.H. Petersen, Religion, Development and African Identity, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1987, pp. 73 - 74.

13. Munonye, n.2, p. 57.

14. Achebe, n.1, pp. 111-12.

15. T.M. Aluko, One Man, One Wife, Heinemann, London, 1959.

Goodcountry in Arrow of God<sup>16</sup>, Brother Aruppe and teacher Aphunzitsi in The Tongue of the Dumb, PaMaitu in The white man of God and Joshua in The River Between are examples of Africans who toil independently or under a white priest to bring more and more of their people to the Church. Some of them like Raphel in The Poor Christ of Bomba<sup>17</sup> and Royasin in One Man One Wife are shown to be involved in sex-scandals under the garb of their work. Lack of understanding of the people and the situation, condescending behaviour, rigidity and common human failings of the missionaries and Catechists have been depicted with a satiric tinge in most of the novels.

The outcome of their efforts have generally been described in the establishment of new Churches, mission compounds, schools and a number of converts who join their fold. The first converts are shown to be mostly drawn from the socially marginals or outcasts.

"None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called efulefu, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an efulefu in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle.

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16. Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God, Heinemann, London, 1964.

17. Mongo Beti, The Poor Christ of Bomba, Heinemann, London, 1956, (Trans. from French, 1971).

Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up"<sup>18</sup>.

Those social outcasts have been described as having no social position in the society. They consisted of slaves or ex-slaves offered to a deity and were known as 'osus'<sup>19</sup>, and the downtrodden such as lepers and others who suffered various forms of social disabilities in traditional African society. They had nothing to lose by embracing Christianity but they gained acceptance, hope and confidence from the missionary teachings of equality and brotherhood. When the converts protest against their inclusion, Kiaga the catechist explains- "Before God, there is no slave or free. We are all children of God, and we must receive these our brothers"<sup>20</sup> In The Only Son, David and Dominic who are better known as ex-slaves become the first converts in town after the preaching of all before God by the Church<sup>21</sup>. The Church also became a refuge for many other groups of people. Mothers of twins, who were forced to throw away their children in the bushes, saw in the Church a place to safeguard the lives of their babies. In Things Fall Apart Nneka who had bore twins four previous times, when again

18. *Achebe, n.1, p. 101.*

19. *Ibid, p. 111*

20. *Ibid, p. 111*

21. *Munonye, n.2, pp. 56-57.*

expected a child joined the Church to become the first woman convert in the village<sup>22</sup>. The Church people also picked up the twins thrown into the bushes and brought them to the Church. There were also those who were dissatisfied with some of the customs of their society, or were troubled by their families. They found in the Church a place of shelter and a good deliverance. Nwoye who nurses an ire against his father Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Toundi Ondoua who has become tired of father's beatings in Houseboy<sup>23</sup> are drawn to the Church for these reasons. Toundi flees from his home on the day before his initiation and same is the case with Philip in The Land's Lord.

But it is not only the lowborn and the outcast who joined the Church, but worthy man like Ogbuefi Ugoma who had taken two titles joins the Church in Umuofia in Achebe's Things Fall Apart. Although the appeal of Christianity to the socially marginals, in bringing a change in their social position is understandable. It can be described as one of the manifestations of social change that was coming, through the spread of Christianity.

While considering Christianity's impact at the social level, the family as a basic unit of society comes first to

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22. Achebe, n.1, p. 107.

23. Ferdinand Oyono, Houseboy, Heinemann, London, (Trans. from French) 1966, pp. 11-12.

the picture. The institution of family came under pressure because those who embraced Christianity came in direct conflict with the members of their family and often quit to join the Church. The African traditional society in which the father enjoyed an unchallenged authority over his family members, started having problems with the defiance of many children against his authority. In *The Only Son* the writer has described the situation of a village which is in great stir because many of their children have joined the mission school. The elders of Nade are perturbed, their anxiety and anger is expressed in their conversation-

"White man who is called Fada has no wife or children.'  
'And he wants others' children instead!  
The wolf from above will cleave his body into two one of these days'!"<sup>24</sup>

Conversion does not only create rift between parents and children, but the long existing tradition of polygamy in marriage comes under attack. Because of the insistence on monogamy by the Church, those who were having more than one wife, and subsequently became Christians are asked to leave all others except one. This becomes a serious problem for the converts because a commonly accepted social custom is now labelled as sinful indulgence. The strongly influenced

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24. *Munonye, n.2, p. 76.*

ones like Jerome in Obi,<sup>25</sup> sever their relationship with the other wives and send them to their parents' homes. Thus a well settled family gets divided and strife ridden. Mongo Beti has described the consequences of such crisis in his novel King Lazarus<sup>28</sup> where the chief of Essazam has twenty three wives. During the period of his long illness he is converted to Catholicism. Le Guen the local priest pressurizes him to follow the Catholic principle of one wife. The compliance to this directive leads into a big turmoil as all the clan members of the discarded wives join in protest against the arbitrary decision.

Change from commonly prevalent polygamy to monogamy was accelerated by other factors as well . The urbanization, occupation of large parts of land by the settlers, migration to towns and cities for jobs etc. Created a situation where it was not conducive for a man to keep more than one wife. It led to the growth of prostitution, keeping of mistresses, cases of unwed mothers and abortions; some of the ills which were not much heard about in the traditional pattern of society. No Longer of Ease<sup>27</sup> and Blade Among the Boys

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25. Munonye, n.p. p.16.

26. Mongo Beti, King Lazarus, Heinemann, London, 1958, (Trans. from French) 1970, p. 106.

27. Chinua Achebe, No Longer At Ease, Heinemann, London, 1960.

portrays this situation prevailing in the city of Lagos in Nigeria. Changes in the structure of a family were bound to have their reflection on the community level too. With the growth in the number of converts a clear divide within the community comes to exist. At first the new group of people who joined the Church after quitting their families and homes made the mission compound as their new home. With a gradual increase in the area of mission land, other establishments like cash crop plantations, trading centres and centres for teaching manual skills also came to be set up. This meant an increase in the members of mission community. Some writers have depicted the attraction of living in a mission compound, close proximity with white man and prospect of a job as some of the pulling factors for embracing Christianity in many cases.

Toundi Joseph accounts in the novel Houseboy:

"Father Gilbert believes it was the Holy Spirit that led me to him. In fact I just wanted to get close to the white man with hair like the beard on a maize cob, who dressed in woman's <sup>clothes</sup> and gave little black boys sugar lumps" <sup>28</sup>

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28. Oyono, n.23, p. 9.

Nnanna the young hero of The Only Son who leaves his mother to be the mission boy for Father Smith at Ossa, is also the hero of the novel Obi where he has become Joe. His marriage is arranged with Anna, a girl from the convent and few months after the District officer at Ossa makes him a forest guard<sup>29</sup>. In The River Between, Siriana the nearest missionary centre gives a picture of "a big place with hospitals and flourishing schools taking boys and girls from all over the country..."<sup>30</sup>.

The divide between the two communities becomes pronounced in this novel. Makuyu emerges as a Christianized community by the zeal and efforts of Joshua, whereas Kamenos stick to their traditional religion. The gap between the two widens with mutual suspicion and rivalry against each other. With the loosening of the traditional ties of common beliefs and customs the community now cannot speak with one voice. Disintegration of the cohesive nature of the society has begun.

At a later stage when Christianity has gained more hold with an increase in the number of its adherents another kind of friction comes in. The different denominations which were involved in proselytizing, divide the community into splinter groups. John Munonye shows the rivalry between

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29. *Munonye, n.9, p.4.*

30. *Ngugi, n.10, p.28.*

Anglican and Catholic groups in Obi. The children sniping at each other for their beliefs describe this situation.

"...The man who began your Church had eight wives, Deny that.'

'You are not allowed to read the Bible. your Father is afraid you will discover God's true word and dispense with his services. Deny that'<sup>31</sup>.

Watching them from a distance, which has taken the form of a scuffle an elderly man comments:

"That's we find in Umudiobia these days. Brothers fight one another and would not even attend one another's funeral or marriage just because they go to different Churches!"<sup>32</sup>

Even the priests of the two Churches Father George and Rev. Godson are shown having dig at one another. In the latter part of the novel another group of Spirituals have also joined the fray. In White Man of God same kind of antipathy is shown between the adherents of the Baptist mission and the Catholic mission<sup>33</sup>. The development from clan or tribe loyalty to different denominational and religious loyalty marks a shift in the traditional community. The traditional authorities also come under pressure and lose much of their earlier power. The role of the traditional priest is much reduced. Ezeulu in Arrow of God represents this very effectively. Towards the end of

31. *Munonye, n.9, p.58.*

32. *Ibid., p.58.*

33. *Jumbam, n.8, p.100.*

novel he tries to assert his authority by refusing to eat the yams to mark the New Yam Festival. But the local catechist Goodcountry sees in it a good opportunity and issues a call to bring the yams to the Church as harvest offering to God and promise of protection from the anger of Ulu. The result is that, "The Christian harvest which took place a few days after...saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed."<sup>34</sup>

In Obi the Christian children are shown making fun of the traditional priest-doctor without any respect for his age, which indicates the decline of his position in the the society<sup>35</sup>. The traditions and customs lose their value. Dance is described as pagan revelry by missionaries and the Christians forbidden to participate in it<sup>36</sup>. Father Drumont in The Poor Christ of Bomba storms into a dancing group and destroys their musical instruments to stop the dance, because it is first Friday of the month, a Christian day of penance<sup>37</sup>. The school children are forbidden to attend pagan sacrifices, masquerade dances and all other rituals which have any connection with the traditional religion. Some of the converts show extra zeal in breaking social taboos, like Oduche tries to kill the python in Arrow of God<sup>38</sup>

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34. Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God, Heinemann, London, 1964, p.287.

35. Munonye, n.9, pp.58-59.

36. "So you won't dance again?"

'No, Master says that it's sin; We mustn't take part in dances.'

Munonye, n.2, p.71.

37. Beti, n.17; p.53.

38 Achebe, n. 16, p.61.

Enoch unmask a masked spirit in *Things Fall Apart*<sup>39</sup> and David and Dominic desecrate the shrine of a deity in *The Only Son*<sup>40</sup>. When the people see that after breaking such taboos also the Christians were not stricken dead by the wrath of their gods and spirits, the belief in their powers begin to diminish.

In this aspect education played the biggest role in the spread of secularization. So far there was no distinction between social and religious life for an African, but the Western education brought by the missionaries among other things led to a schism between spiritual and secular. Through the teaching of physical sciences, hygiene, biology and geography etc. the students came to realize that many gods whom they worshipped were just part of the natural phenomenon. The teaching against many traditional practices shook the faith of many students from their age old beliefs.

The Western education system was initially introduced by the European missionaries in almost all part of the continent. In fact the school became so much associated with Church in people's mind that going to a school meant becoming a Christian in the earlier period. Education's use as a tool to attract the people to Christianity has been depicted by

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39. *Achebe, n.1, p.131.*

40. *Munonye, n.2, p.57.*

John Munonye in The Only Son. Joseph, the catechist adopts this measure with a phenomenal success, in drawing the children to school.

Ononye, uncle of Patrick explains to him in Blade Among the Boys, that the early missionaries tried to preach them about the faith and did not get much success, so thereafter-

"They decided to turn their attention to our children, who were yet unformed and pliable, and who would be the fathers of tomorrow. They introduced schools and made them a cover under which Christianity would operate. To my mind, the essential thing to them was not the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, which we have now learnt to value as the passport to future wealth and power, but the spread of Foreign faith"<sup>41</sup>.

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, power, status and job prospect got attached with education, and became one of the most sought after thing. It held for them "a key to the future". Ngugi's Weep not Child<sup>42</sup> and The River Between portray this desire very effectively through their protagonists Njoroge and Waiyaki respectively. The link with employment and power is emphasized by Mr. Brown, the missionary in Things Fall Apart. While arguing with the parents, in asking them to send their children to school,

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41. Nzekwu, n.6, p.86.

42. Ngugi Wa Thiang'o, Weep Not Child, Heinemann, London, 1964.

"He said that the leaders of the land in future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. They could already see that happening in the Native Court, where the DC was surrounded by strangers who spoke his tongue. Most of these strangers came from the distant town of Umuru on the bank of the Great River where the white man first went"<sup>43</sup>

With the changing situation under colonial administration education indeed became a passport for higher status, government jobs and the "hallmark of gentleman".

Importing education to the Africans was considered a major part of their "civilizing mission". It created a new class of elite who became the forerunners of an upward mobile social group. Identification with those who held the reins of power resulted in creating a group of Africans who considered themselves superior to their non-literate counterparts, leading to a kind of alienation from the traditional values.

In The Only Son Nnanna as a young boy is very bright and promising according to the traditionally held social values. He has won the village wrestling competition, is the best in arrow-shooting among all his age-group, and proves

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43.           *Achebe, n.l, p.128.*

himself better than others in the field also. But when Ibe his friend who has failed to impress in any of the above activities, starts going to school, and tells Nnanna what all he has learnt, Nnanna starts getting an inferiority complex before him. It shows the change that education brings in judging a person's capabilities from the traditional values. The teacher acquires a new place of authority as the children are seen, referring to him to prove a point, by saying "Master says"<sup>44</sup>. Education considered to serve the purpose of colonizers in preparing a work force needed for administration, later on proves to be a catalyst in the growth of peoples' consciousness and movement to overthrow the colonial regime. This aspect of its influence will be dealt under the political dimension.

Christianity also brought changes in the habits dresses and life style of the converts. The European missionaries imparted and imposed their own customs, tastes and style alongwith the teaching of new faith. Traditional attire used by the people was considered as being naked, and so they are asked to take a dress resembling to the white man. The Christians can be said to be the

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44. *Munonye, n.2, p.71.*

first ones in adopting the life style of missionaries which was essentially a western style of living. In The Only Son Christians are described as being neatly dressed on the occasion of arrival of a new priest in the Church. "The more prosperous ones wore leather or canvas shoe and the most sophisticated of the men wore hats and sunshades in addition"<sup>45</sup>.

The way Joe and Anna are described when going to the Church in Obi, shows the adaption of western manners and style.

"Joe wore a light-grey tussore suits, brown leather shoes and a dark grey hat. A shining metal chain looped from the lapel into the breast pocket of his coat. She wore a flowered silk dress and a pair of low heeled black shoes. They walked side by side and they conversed, which was rather a curiosity in a land where the women kept a long distance usually in front of their husbands."<sup>46</sup>

Even in the eating habits the change is visible in The Only Son when Ibe takes Nnanna to his uncle Andrew's house. Agnes his wife serves to them-

"She brought a bowl of rice. The sight of the grains, as white as her teeth. With the soup spread daintily on top sent a thrill into the boys hearts... In Nade and towns around rice was still a new addition.

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45. *Munonye, n.2, p.143.*

46. *Munonye, n.9, p.56.*

to the diet. So far only the most enlightened, like Agnes, could cook it well, and to offer it to a guest was a special honour"<sup>47</sup>.

In terms of housing also the Christians are ahead of their brothers in the clan in imitating the European structures of house. Joe is the first man to build a pan-roof house in Obi which becomes a talk of the town. In The River Between, Joshua's house stands distinct from all other round thatched huts, as his is the only tin roofed rectangular building. Jacobo's house also "looked like a European's house" in Weep not Child.

On the economic front changes that can be attributed to the spread of Christianity relate to the land. Land in the pre-colonial period was viewed sacred and revered as earth goddess who yielded crops for their sustenance. Man had a deep spiritual relationship with the land as discussed in the earlier chapter. But with the arrival of colonial government, lands were grabbed by the settlers. The local inhabitants were pushed to the status of squatters and forced labourers. Ngotho in Weep not Child represents this class.

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47. *Munonye, n.2, p. 83.*

With the change from a subsistence agricultural economy to cash crop market economy-land became a commercial commodity. The missionaries generally owned big plots of lands and introduced a variety of cash crops in their plantations. The Christians at the mission learnt about the cultivation of new crops. When Joe returns to his own village in Obi, he starts work for rubber plantation in his own land. Trade and skills learnt at the mission houses also helped the Christians towards more prosperity. The trend for upward social mobility is visible more among the Christian converts. Because of their proximity to the white missionary and the teachings received at the mission they make full use of the opportunities, skills and market opened up due to the colonial set up.

Joe and Anna in Obi depict this very well. We see them making use of the traditional land for rubber plantation, engaging in trade of salt and making huge profits due to the rumours of short supply on account of the world war. Anna makes use of her skill in tailoring learnt at the convent by opening a shop in the market square. Within no time she is in great demand and expands

her shop to a workshop where as many as twenty apprentices are enrolled<sup>48</sup>. Jacobo's family in Weep not Child is no less than any European family, owning a big plot of land, good house with all amenities and his children receiving education at reputed institutions<sup>49</sup>. Kofi's father in The Narrow Path is a headmaster in the Catholic school, while his mother starts small trading store in the school premises itself, "which sold cooked foods, and biscuits sugar, sweets, corned beef, sardines soap, candles, rice, kerosene and many other articles among other things"<sup>50</sup>.

All these examples point to the new dispensation where trade and commerce have come in a big way to stay in Africa.

"The White man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm oil and kernel became things of great price and much money flowed into Umuofia"<sup>51</sup>.

David Living Stone's writings for opening up Africa to Christianity and commerce" had started showing up results. The introduction of money economy had its manifestation in the Church also, as the Church contributions were to be paid. Some young girls are heard

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48. *Munonye, n.9, p.67*

49. *Ngugi, n.42, p.18.*

50. *Francis Selormey, The Narrow Path, Heinemann, London, 1966, p.68.*

51. *Achebe, n.1, p.126.*

talking in The White Man of God :

"Widin replied. 'I have sold all the cassava on my farms and also sold my two chickens, but the amount has just been barely enough to pay for my Church contribution. And believe me I have not a drop of cooking oil in the house and my mother has been scolding me for paying all the money I have to the mission, when I can't afford to have cooking oil in the house.

I haven't paid my own Church contribution yet', Paulina said.

'My father has paid for me', Martha said"<sup>52</sup>.

Paulina solves her problem by going to her sister's place at Bameda where she sells palmwine. By helping in her selling and making business with men who drink till late nights she receives good amount to get her baptism dress. white canvas shoes and pay her church contribution. The anger against the burden of paying tributes to the Church in much more scathing in The Poor Christ of Bomba. The Catechist of Timbo tells Father Drumont that the natives have lost all respect for the missionaries. "Father, they say a priest is no better than a Greek merchant or any other colonial. They say that all of you just care about money"<sup>53</sup>.

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52. *Jumbam, n.8, p.16.*

53. *Beti, n.17, p.20.*

Thus the Church is seen as a partner of traders and colonial government in sucking the wealth of the people.

The political dimension of the spread of Christianity in Africa has to be first seen in light of the relationship between colonial power and missionaries, Church and the administration. From the very beginning the African viewed white missionary and his religion and the colonial government in close association with each other.

"...Stories were already gaining ground that the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgement in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion. It was even said that they had hanged a man who killed a missionary"<sup>54</sup>.

Religion, trade and government were seen together in relationship to the whiteman. At Lagos the political leaders term it the "unholy trinity". The view expressed by some leaders there are recorded by the writer of Blade Among the Boys.

"European priests,... held the Gospel aloft, and while Africans, naturally religiously disposed, looked up to it for eternal salvation, the firms

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54. Achebe, n.l, p.111.

grabbed the wealth with which god blessed the people. The Government allowed them to cheat, and ensured by the laws that no opposition came from the oppressed Africans simply because the act favoured the white man"<sup>55</sup>.

All the writers share the same view with regard to the nexus between mission and state. State lent protection and support to the missionary activities and the mission eased the task of colonization and its maintenance is the general view expressed through these novels. Hugh Dinwiddy also points out that the mission and the state are seen to combine in the civilizing process and refers form One Man, One Wife -

"When we, in our camp; refused to listen to the white Man, it was a big clergyman, that begged us to listen to him. It was he who persuaded us that the white man was our friend... That was the beginning of our slavery in Adasa land - our slavery to the cunning white man... we were sold to the whiteman by that clergy man..."<sup>56</sup>.

The Church's teaching on the relationship with the government is that of obedience, and "rendering unto Caesar the thing that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's, as Joshua has learnt from Livingstone in The River Between. He considers his duty as a

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55. Nzekwu, n.6, p.124.

56. Aluko, n.15, pp.133-34. in Hugh Dirwiddy, "Missions and Missionaries as portrayed by English speaking writers of contemporary African literature." Ed. Edward Fashole-Luke & Others. Christianity in Independent Africa, Rex Collings, London, 1978, p.436.

Christian to obey the government and wants other Christian also to do so. "And was the White man not his brother? Was the white man responsible for the ills of the land? No.1 it was the blindness of the people, people would not walk in the light".<sup>57</sup> Therefore we see that in an atmosphere where the people of the villages are rising against the colonialist powers, and organizing different movements Joshua and his group are shown as having nothing to do with all this business.

In the field of education, the work of the missionaries went against the colonial rulers. The Bible became a big influence in the growth of a new consciousness among the people and an awareness to fight for their rights. The missionaries had learnt the African languages, codified them and brought out books on grammars and dictionaries. The translation of the Bible in many native languages had meant that for many, first exposure to a written text in their own language was through the Bible. The teachings of Bible on equality of all before God, and importance of each individual in the sight of God had given a new sense of dignity and strength for the assertion of their rights. The stories of Old Testament gained a special meaning in their context as they could associate themselves with the

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57. *Ngugi, n.10, pp.31-32.*

sufferings of the Israelites in the bondage of Egypt. The characters of Moses, Joshua, Daniel and David etc. held a greater significance for them. Knowing that God is on the side of the oppressed in the battle against the oppressors. For them the identification of Europeans with Pharaohs and Philistines came easy, and gave inspiration for their struggle.

Njoroge in Weep not Child shows this influence very vividly - "... there was growing up in his heart a feeling that the Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by white man, were no other than the children of Israel, about whom he read in the Bible. So although all men were brothers, the black people had a special mission to the world because they were all chosen people of God. This explained his brother's remark that Jomo was the black Moses"<sup>58</sup>.

The identification of Jomo with Black Moses is drawn there by other leaders as well. In a big meeting, for organizing the great strike the parallel is drawn again by a leader who says that God had now heard their cries and tribulations. "There was a man sent from God whose name was Jomo. He was the black Moses empowered by God to tell the white Pharaoh, "Let my People go!"<sup>59</sup>

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58. Ngugi, n.42, p.49.

59. *Ibid.*, p.58.

In Grain of Wheat<sup>60</sup> also the revolutionary parties and leaders draw parallel from Biblical allusions in their struggle for freedom. Harry Thuku the revolutionary leader prepares the people for the desert journey of fierce struggle to reach the promised land of independence. Kihika a great freedom fighter is talked by his colleagues after his death as a man who believed in prayer and read the Bible everyone. His Bible has many underlined verses in red which include the following one.

"He shall judge the poor of the people; he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor"<sup>61</sup>.

The separatist Churches which had appeared in big numbers, ushering many prophets and priests also championed the rights of Africans against the whites and made use of the Bible and Christian hymns for the freedom struggle. by adapting into their own situation. Willie a cousin of Joe in Obi is one such supporter of the African Church, active in the movement for independence.

Even the school education which introduced the students to the ideas of great philosophers, the concept of nationalism and the history of liberation movements around the world, enabled them to have a vision for the freedom

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60. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat, Heinemann, London, 1967.

61. *Ibid.*, p.22.

of their own society. The yearning for education to get back their lands and attain liberation has been highlighted in Ngugi's Weep not Child and The River Between. The denial of non-Christians for admission in the missionary schools led to a movement of Independent schools with a traditional background. The development of transporting network, media and publications gave a new upsurge to the assertion of African culture and identity. It took shape in new expressions and modes of thought. The formation of many cultural organizations, Church societies and trade-unions played a contributory role in the strengthening of nationalist parties. Most of the leaders of struggle were product of mission schools, because there they had realized their responsibility and potential to lead their people. The tools and training they had acquired there and after, through higher education prepared them well for the task.

We have examined here the perceptible influences that the spread of Christianity had at different levels of the society. Its significant role is not to be seen only in the changes that it brought or accelerated, but as an important factor in the changed context of the African society after the colonial chapter. The colonial chapter is over but Christianity is there to stay.

CHAPTER V

CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Chapter V

The spread of Christianity had given birth to many different kind of conflicts. The major conflict had arisen between the belief - system of the traditional religion and that of Christianity. Several opposing forces were born out of this collusion, manifestations of which we find at different levels. These can be described as social, cultural, and ideological conflicts which also found expression in an individual in the form of internal conflict. Some of these have been discussed already in the previous chapter while discussing the influence of Christianity on different spheres of life. Here we will concentrate on the shape those conflicts take, and the manner in which they are resolved.

The beginning of such conflicts was seen in the establishment of a Church, with a small group of converts, through the preaching of some missionaries. It had signalled the emergence of a new group within the society, comprising of members drawn from it, who defied the basic premises and rules that governed it. One must not be mistaken that previously there were no conflicting groups, or there was no divergence of opinions, but all these were settled within the parameters of a system, that was commonly acceptable to all. So either through war, negotiation, or arbitration they were resolved. But now it was not possible, because the new

group had challenged the very authority of the existing system. In addition to this another point of reference had emerged in the form of the colonial law and administration, which had asserted its authority over all other existing laws or system.

The tragedy that takes place in Things Fall Apart is the consequence of this new dispensation. The tension between the two communities is fuelled by the inciting action of one of the fervent converts Enoch, who unmask an egwugwu\* in public on the annual ceremony day of the earth deity.<sup>1</sup> This was one of the greatest crimes a man could commit, and so the anger of the whole community comes down in the destruction of the Church compound, which was sheltering the criminal. Mr, Smith the priest, complains to the District Commissioner and leaders of the village are arrested, humiliated and heavy fine is extorted in return of their release. The law which has come to "administer justice" and "maintain peaceful administration" sees the destruction of Church as a crime but desecration of the immortal prestige of an ancestral spirit in form of an masked egwugwu is completely overlooked.

These kind of conflicts between the adherents of two religions had been very common in the initial period. The

\* a masked spirit  
1. Achebe, Things Fall Apart, p. 131.

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growth of Christianity had meant loss of their members for the traditionalists, so their aversion for the Christians was natural. On the other hand those who had suffered under the rules and taboos of the traditional system, and had joined Christianity, could not resist to take vengeance, after getting a base and support. So, they are the ones, who claim victory by desecrating shrines of the deities, killing sacred Python, and defying the masked spirits.

In The River between the conflict between The two communities has other manifestations. Now the numbers in the side of Christians has increased. People of Makuyu have been Christianized while that of Kameno remain traditional. Joshua the catechist forbids his daughters to go across the river to meet the heathen people on that side. People at Kameno say that Christians are bad people, "they say that we worship snakes and non-existent gods, and all that sort of thing".<sup>2</sup> Before this they lived in complete harmony. They used to come to 'the river between,' Honia, from where they draw their water, where they go for circumcision, and other social events.

With the passage of time however the rough edges of conflict wore off and the hostility between Christian

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2. Ngugi, The River Between, p. 44.

converts and their traditionalist kinsmen was eased. In novels like Obi, Narrow Path, Weep Not Child and The Marabi Dance it is hardly seen. Those who have become Christians, they follow their own religious rites and the traditionalists continue in their old pattern. The opposition has led to adjustment and accomodation. This is partially due to the increase in the number of Christians as well as the fact that the novels are depicting the second, third generation of Christians who have been brought up in a Christian background, and have very little familiarity with the traditional beliefs and customs. Obi son of Isaac Okonkwo, (Nwoye of Things Fall Apart), in No Longer at Ease, after his stay abroad has even lost his faith in God and religion. In the same novel when a ceremony is held to celebrate Obi's return to his home, Kola nut is brought. Breaking of the Kola nut has been a ritualistic custom in the traditional religion for offering prayers to gods while marking any occasion, or welcoming a guest. The oldest man, whose duty traditionally it is to pray for the group and break the nut, picks it up and says, "Bless this Kola nut so that when we eat it will be good in our body in the name of Jesu Kristi. As it was in the beginning it will be at the end. Amen". Everyone echoes "Amen".<sup>3</sup>

3. Achebe, No Longer At Ease, Heinemann, London, 1960, p. 48.

The interesting feature here is that the elder is not a Christian but a titled traditionalist. Referring to this incident Emmanuel Obiechina has written -

"In Obi Okonkwo's Umuofia, unlike the Umuofia of his grand father, you either pray as a Christian or as a traditionalist, but good sense dictates that you pray the Christian way when you are in a Christian home and like a traditionalist in a traditionalist's home. There are alternatives, and one needs to take account of the context of each action to avoid muddle".<sup>4</sup>

The Spirit of accomodation, synthesis and selection has replaced the initial confrontation, aversion and rivalry, at the social level. The other kind of conflict which had caused serious controversies, debates and doubts among the converts was the cultural conflict . . . Most of the customs and rites were so much ingrained in the cultural milieu of the people that the change in religion was not able to remove them from their lives. The initiation rites like circumcision and clitoridectomy, dances, polygamy and the communal festivities became the issues of great conflict for the converts. Muthoni in The River Between presents a very poignant case for her burning desire to be circumcized. The fact of being a Christian and daughter of a strict catechist does not stop her

4. Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 259.

drive. She runs away to her aunt's place and gets circumcized. However she does not recover from her wounds and dies in the hospital, rambling those words - "I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe, Look. I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe .... I see Jesus, And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe...."<sup>5</sup> These words express her yearning to be a full woman in the tribe, while remaining a Christian. She did not see any contradiction between the two. Through her suffering she felt herself closer to Jesus, and with a satisfaction of fulfilling the rites of tradition for a complete woman, she dies. Her death is not a failure but a triumph as that of Jesus, for she was able to unite the rituals of the tribe with Christ, which the successive generations were to follow.

This is important because circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life.<sup>6</sup> For it was not important as a physical operation; it was what it did inside a person. It initiated a person into adulthood, teaching the ways of the tribe, and so Muthoni found it "beautiful".

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5. *Ngugi, n.2, p. 53.*

6. *Ibid, p. 65.*

On the question of polygamy even very committed Christians, seem to have their reservations. The outright condemnation and prohibition of polygamy for Christians, by the missionaries was creating serious doubts in their minds; for they knew that in the Bible itself there were numerous examples of men having more than one wives. Abraham, Jacob, King David and King Solomon some of the important figures of the Old Testament belonged to this category. More than this the concept of having many wives was associated with the prestige and standing of a person in society. In an agricultural based society it meant more hands for work, both through the wives and the children they bore. Joshua, an elder of the Church in One Man One Wife is caught in the same dilemma, because before his conversion he had already made up his mind to marry Masheyi's daughter Toro as his second wife, and had been giving gifts and money as part of the bride price. Although he does not succeed in his plan, but we see him turning back to the old ways of life. The Church does not want to make any compromise on this issue, Pastor David preaches forthrightly -

"Polygamy is the scourge of this land. It poisons the blood stream of our nation. Love between a Christian man and a Christian

woman cannot admit of a third party save these issues with which God Blesses their union. For that love to be true and fully reciprocal it can be directed toward only one person, not two or three.... On these things the stand of the Church is clear. The sanctity of the home above all else. One man, one wife ...".<sup>7</sup>

This stand of the Church caused many to go back to their traditional religion. But later when the issue started becoming a major hurdle for many, to embrace Christianity, it was discussed and debated within the Church and many waived the former regulation of discarding one's already married wives at the time of conversion. In Obi we find the growth of Churches who have nothing against the institution of polygamy. They are the group of Spirituals who have come to attract Joe, a devout Catholic, whose wife Anna has been unable to bear a child and is facing increasing pressure from his family and clan members to take another wife.

The group of Spirituals are singing, praying and dancing before his house. They announce :

" Our own Church has nothing against any man who chooses to marry more than one wife'...

'Did not the Holy Book ask us to increase and multiply? went on the Apostle'.

'It did, Apostle'.

'How many wives had the wisest man of ancient times?'

'A countless number, Apostle'".<sup>8</sup>

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7. T.M. Aluko, One Man One Wife, Heinemann, London, 1959, p.38.

8. John Munonye, Obi, Heinemann, London, 1969, p.166.

Similarly in the case of dance, one of the most expressive forms of their traditional community life, joyous celebration and culture, the prohibition order issued by the white missionaries for Christian members had triggered deep conflicts. In their condemnation of these dances as part of a pagan orgy, a missionary Peter Drumont is even shown to destroy the musical instruments, and forcibly stop the dance group in The Poor Christ of Bomba, Nnana who had shown great penchant for the traditional dance, stops participating after joining The Church, because he considers it as a sin, in The Only Son. But later on we see that the dance forms were adopted by the Christian circles too in their celebrations and worship. In One Man One Wife dance festivities are held during Christmas Celebration and New Year Song has been incorporated by the singer of the dancing group. The prophetic and Spiritual Church movements used dance in their worship of God. In Obi the Spirituals are portrayed singing praises to Lord with clapping, singing and swaying their bodies.

"Then they began to dance. They danced to abandon and screamed. It was a ma<sup>SS</sup> orgasm, a terrible mixture of high pitched emotions. Then, at the back, someone stole tom-tom beats into the confusion. Another started a metal triangle tinkling. Finally, rattles and clappers joined in".<sup>9</sup>

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9. *Munonye, n.8, p.165.*

It shows that the Christians in this group are feeling perfectly at home in their worship of the Lord Jehovah in their own dance forms which would have invited a condemnation from a missionary earlier. The realization that a distinction has to be made between 'cultural' and 'religions' aspect of the old religions under the new dispensation led to the argument that, Christianity must enter, and be permeated by African culture; that the indigenization of African Christianity must not be hindered by its European cultural trappings. However speaking of the difficulties faced in this task J.D.Y. Peel a Professor of Sociology, writes -

"Upto a point, it is always a problem to strike a satisfactory balance between the the universalities of a world religion and peculiarities of a national culture. English Christianity is as English as it is Christian, Persian Islam is as Persian as it is Muslim". 10

And so the African Christianity to be as African as it is Christian had to undergo a long process of conflicts debates, controversies and divisions. In fact all non-western countries where Christian gospel was preached and accepted had to go through similar kind of problems. It is an ongoing process which will continue until it reaches a state of perfect harmony between one's own culture and faith. It had begun

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10. J.D.Y. Peel, *"The christianization of African Society : some possible models."* (Eds.) Edward Fashole-Luke and others, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, Rex Collings, London. 1978, p.448.

with the first generation of Christian converts who came from non-Jewish backgrounds. The controversy that had arisen at that time, over the insistence of the Jewish Christians in forcing the gentile Christians to follow circumcision and their other rituals to become Christian, continues everytime Christianity makes inroad into a new cultural group. But persons like apostle Paul also emerge to refute such imposition and advocate the universal message of the gospel for each in thier own cultural situation.

Another important area of conflict was at the ideological level. The contrary nature of the belief systems of one believing in one God, Father of the whole mankind against the other, with a belief on a multiplicity of gods with an ethnocentric nature, conflicts were bound to occur. The deep rooted belief of the African traditional religionsists on ancestral spirit, witchcraft, charms, herbal medicines and diviners, power of gods and spirits etc. were hard to be removed with a single stroke of the acceptance of a new faith disclaming all the above. The conflict arises because change in affiliation had not, always meant change of conviction for a large number of converts. Therefore in times of crises those converts followed their own previous methods,

Kofi's parents in The Narrow Path call for the native medicine-men at the time of his sickness to drive away the witch, believed to be trying to steal his life, and offer purification ceremony to drive the spirits. However his father later on also orders a 'Mission Cantata' of thanksgiving to be sung in the parish church and invites friends for a refreshment party.<sup>11</sup> Mr. John Ikenga an active Church members and described as one of the model Christians by the Roman Catholic Priest in Blade Among the Boys is told to hide charms behind the photographs hanging on his parlour walls.<sup>12</sup> For his brand of Christianity, accomodated some principle and practices of his tribal religion. For protecting himself and his family "he resorted to magic, for only magic could counter magic effectively. He consulted fortune tellers, made and wore charms and even sponsored sacrifices to placate his tribal god and his ancestral spirits. All these he did secretly at night when his wife and child were asleep, so that the latter would not be scandalized"<sup>13</sup>

Many characters are shown leading a similar kind of life. Some consult a fortune telter, like the station master in Blade Among the Boys, who advises, Patrick to do the same, "Don't tell me you are a Christian, for I too am one. Yet,

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11. Francis Selormey, The Narrow Path, Heinemann, London. 1966, pp.72-74.

12. Onuora, Nzekwu. Blade Among the Boys. Heinemann. London, 1962. p.29.

13. *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

when I am in trouble, I propitiate our gods and things come right again".<sup>14</sup> some are troubled by the fear of witches and take preventive medicines, as we find in One Man One Wife where son of elder Joshua writes in his letter to his father about the medicinal soap that the old Chief Lotun prepared for him as a protection against witches and wicked men, which had melted in the rain. Although he says that he no longer believes on Lotun's medicine because of his faith in Jesus, but he is troubled in his dreams.<sup>15</sup> In fact examples of this nature abound in the novels indicating the widespread existence of this phenomenon among the Christians. The indigenous churches that emerged, were fully aware of these deep rooted beliefs among the Africans, they recognized the existence of evil forces, such as witchcraft and sorcery contrary to the mission - founded churches. But they also firmly believed that God could give them full protection against these. In The Marabi Dance when Tshirongo goes to a prophet after heavy drinking for vomitting out, the prophet invokes God in the following manner :

"Hallelujah! God of Israel, God of Moses, God of Chaka, God of Moshesh, God of Senzanga Kona, God of Nkunyana, Kupa Satane-take away the devil from this man. He has been bewitched by a woman. A woman who sleeps with evil spirits ...." 16

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14. Nzekwu, n.12, p.

15. Aluko, no.7, p.24.

16. Modikwe, Dikobe. The Marabi Dance, Heinemann, London. 1973, p.16.

The prophet is here exorcising the evil spirits, invoking the name of God, in a method similar to the traditional diviners.

K. Asare Opoku has commented on this trend -

" The recognition of the reality of evil forces, such as witch\_craft and sorcery, is an acceptance of the African world view which recognized demons, evil spirits, principlaities and powers and the rulers of darkness in this world. To deny such powers, as the missionaries did, was to be western and not necessarily biblical, for the Bible recognizes these powers, but proclaims the power of God over them".<sup>17</sup>

The shift in this direction gave way to the realisation that the Christianity according to the Bible was much more than what was presented to them by the European missionaries. Above realisation, coupled with their own understanding and interpretation of the Bible in their own languages led to the rise of a great number of African prophets and spiritual leaders in Messianic tradition. Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka in his first novel The Interpreters,<sup>18</sup> depicts one such leader, who is preaching a message on Jesus' victory over death and resurrection in a special church service -

"It is true that Christ was raised from The dea, but that is Christ the Father Christ the Son Christ the Holy Ghost. He raised himself, for he is the Father who raised the Son, the Son who raised the Holy Ghost

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17. K. Asare Opoku, "Religion in Africa during the colonial era", General History of Africa, vol.VII Heinemann, UNESCO.University of California Press, California, 1985, p.534.

18. Wole, Soyinka, The Interpreters, Heinemann, London, 1965. p.165.

who raised the Father, But, I who was re-baptised Lazarus, the good Lord raised from the dead.....

....I am the resurrection and the life... And I, Lazarus, give you this assurance, from the personal confirmation which I was given by the Lord. For the hand of God descended on my head, and the light of the Lord poured a new life into me". 19

After finishing the sermon he selects a shoplifter as twelfth apostle in God's service and baptizes him as Noah. Great ecstasy grips over the Church, hymns and prayers are followed by washing of the feet of the congregation by Noah; a woman is taken by the spirit and begins to prophesy.

Mushrooming of a big number of local prophets had also meant a good business for some. A conversation in the same novel refers to this phenomenon.

" 'Wasn't it your paper which tried to pull down a Christ not so long ago?'

'He was the boldest of them yet, He said he had come to enjoy himself at this second coming, not to suffer. The paper waged a most vicious attack on him'.

'Did he survive it?'

'He's prospering more than ever. Big transport business and a bakery and a big harem which has survived two suits of seduction".20

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19. *Soyinka, n.18, p.180.*

20. *Ibid., p.180.*

Mr. Tshirogo in The Marabi Dance who served as Rev. Ndlovu with a fake certificate which he had managed to get from the Native Commissioner, later on becomes a popular Mfundisi after serving as a cook of a white priest in Salisbury. He is looked upon as a person who would call upon the Gods of the Africans to guide the people to freedom.<sup>21</sup> His house becomes a popular centre for religious and political discussions. He calls his new church the 'Church of Africa'. "The white Mfundisi I worked for had a Church for the English people. Why shouldn't I also have a Church for Africans?"<sup>22</sup> The novel which is set in a South African back-ground reflects another major area of the ideological conflict due to the existence of an unjust, illegal system, based on apartheid. The very precepts on which Christianity is founded are being betrayed under such situations. The reaction of the Africans cannot be different from what Ndlovu says : "The white Christians say, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' and yet they don't love us".<sup>23</sup> The contradiction and hypocrisy in the preaching and practice of the white Christians, observed and experienced by the Africans become a major source of conflict.

In Houseboy Toundi Joseph witnesses a horrible scene of torturing meted out to, two Africans suspected of stealing, at the prison director's house. He jots down the

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21. *Dikobe, n.16, p.118.*

22. *Ibid., p.118.*

23. *Ibid., p.118.*

images in his diary-

"I could not hold myself from shaking as I watched. It was terrible. I thought of all the priests, all the pastors, all the white men, who came to save our souls and preach love of our neighbours. Is the white man's neighbour only other white man? who can go on believing the stuff we are served up in the Churches when things happen like I saw today....." 24

Even inside the Church of St. Peter at Dangan in the same novel discrimination is visible through the sitting arrangements, demarcated for the whites and the Africans,

"In the Church of St. Peter at Dangan the whites have their seats in the transept beside the altar. There they can follow the Mass comfortably seated in cane arm-chairs covered with velvet cushions. Men and women sit shoulder to shoulder. The nave of the Church is completely reserved for Africans. They sit on tree trunks instead of benches and these are arranged in two rows. The faithful are supervised by catechists ready to pounce at the least sign of inattention, these servants of God march up and down the central aisle that divides the men from the women, carrying sticks". 25

The extra-marital affairs of the commandants' wife with the prison-director is observed by the houseboy, cook, laundry boy etc, and gets leaked to the natives. This is the

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24. Ferdinand Oyono, *Houseboy*, Trans. Heinemann, London 1966, p.76.

25. *Ibid.*, p.33.

same Madame who had been enquiring Toundi about his Christian faith - "don't you believe in God anymore? Have you gone back to being a pagan?".<sup>26</sup> Such apparent contradictions between the professed faith and their observed behaviour make many Africans disgusted with mission Christianity. Willie in Obi represents this feeling in his condemnation of the European colonialists and priests and his advocacy for an African Church. Kihika a strong Christian believer and a freedom fighter is more forthright in his condemnation in A Grain of Wheat-

"We went to their Church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He Said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth". 27

The nationalist fervour which was gaining ground, with the growth of a new consciousness among the people contributed to the establishment of so many separatist, independent or indigenous Churches and movements. Christianity was coming out of the European trappings, gaining deeper roots on the African soil. Gradually the Christianization of Africans

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26. Oyono, n.24, p.56.

27. Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, Heinemann, London, 1967, p.15.

also resulted in Africanization of Christianity. It will be very clear to us, if we hear a devout Christian woman Mary of Umuofia, praying at the prayer meeting called by Obi Okonkwo's parents, before his departure to England.

"Oh God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob, ..... the Beginning and the End. Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not big enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece, we are like ants in your sight. We are like children who only wash their stomach when they bath, leaving their back dry...' She went on and on reeling off proverb after proverb and painting picture after picture. Finally she got round to the subject of the gathering and dealt with it as fully as it deserved, giving among other things, the life history of her friend's son who was about to go to the place where learning finally came to an end".<sup>28</sup>

The typical features of her prayer underline the distinctive African characteristics of Iboland in Nigeria, where 'proverbs are considered to be the palm oil with which words are eaten', and nobody can raise a finger on the Christianness of it. This quality makes her as African as she is Christian, and African Christianity that she represents, as African as it is Christian. For, "The Christianity of the Bible does not necessarily lose its universality or sacredness by bearing the imprint of the African, his emotions, his intense yearning to see God, through African based forms and

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28. Achebe, n.3, p.8.

formularies which would elicit the best of his spiritual nature and resourcefulness. This is not just a demand, but a right - and that a right in the best interest of Christianity - that there should be African versions of Christianity, in the way there are European and American versions, not in disharmony with national aspirations and not paganized, in which the African would be able best to fulfil himself spiritually to the maximum of his endowment, As put succinctly by Bishop James Johnson earlier this century, in a manner reminiscent of Aopstle Peter at that first Jerusalem Council :

"Christianity is a Religion intended for and suitable for every race and tribe of people on the face of the Globe. Acceptance of it was never intended by its Founder to denationalize any people and it is indeed the glory that every race of people may profess and practise it and imprint upon it its own native characteristics, giving it a peculiar type among themselves without its losing anything of its virtue. And why should not there be an African Christianity as there has been a European and an Asiatic Christianity?". 29

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29. E.A. Ayandale, *Address to a conference held at Jos Campus of the University of Ibadan on Saturday 31 August, 1975*. Eds. Edward Fashole-Luke & Others, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, Rex Collings Ltd., London, 1978. p.613.

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Our study has reinforced the social documentary nature of African Fiction. In portraying the human conditions, the processes of change and the African response to the historic situation in its totality of socio-economic and political realities, the writers have given valuable insights. They have not only recorded a particular period of history, but have also captured it in finer details with the nuances of a painter's brush. In stirring the imagination of the readers to go beyond the factual informations, they enjoy a better position than a social historian or a political analyst. In this capacity they have enabled us to see through the "heart of the matter" and get the sense of social and political realities more directly than from conventional political descriptions . Due to the limitations of this study we could not go into the personal background of the authors, as is generally done in a sociological study of literature. Assuming the heterogeneity in their background, world-view and approach, the common ground they seem to share is their attitude on the subject of our study. The critical vein in their description of the missionaries, missions and Christianity in general is felt in all these

novels, although some have tried to balance their criticism with some positive appraisal, and few flashes of praise. But the general tone of censure is evident in all the novels, It is mainly addressed to the methods, attitude and behaviour of the carriers of Christianity and later on among its adherents. This fact can be taken as a cue to the general response of a majority of African people towards Christianity at that period.

The major contributing factor for such a response has been Christianity's link with colonialism. The colonial chapter has become one of the most controversial in the history of Africa, and the above connection has made the African chapter, one of the most controversial in the recent history of Christianity. Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu considers this as an "unfortunate unholy alliance between the political, economic and cultural hegemony of the West on the one hand, and the missionary enterprise on the other", He says :

"While we cannot undo history, we must nevertheless still record our conviction that it was a great pity that Christianity was brought to largely unevangelized Africa by persons whose countries were riding on the crest of a wave of almost unprecedented prosperity and expansionism ".1

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1. Desmond M. Tutu, " Whither African Theology? ", eds. Edward Fashole'- Luke & others, Christianity in Independent Africa, Rex Collings, London, 1978, p. 364.

It was due to this reason that the clash took that form. Very few among the carriers of the Christian gospel could be said to be free from this notion of superiority, and paternalistic attitude, venturing into the "civilizing mission" with a "white man's burden". The gospel got blurred under the trappings of western civilization, which resulted in the zeal to demolish the "heathen" and "pagan" ways of the "uncivilized".

Our analysis of the pre-Christian values, traditions and customs has revealed that the traditional African religions permeated all spheres of peoples' lives and society. The very concept of "religious vs, secular" was absent, because such compartmentalization did not exist in that society. We have observed that the writers have taken extra care to recreate their past in order to correct the distortions done by others to their history and to assert their own cultural identity. It was the mistake of the missionaries to not take cognizance of this fact of their deep rooted belief systems and to neglect and show insensitivity towards their social and cultural milieu.

In our discussion on the spread of Christianity  
we considered its role and impact on the society at different

levels. In effecting various socio-economic and political changes, its role as a catalytic agent was realised. While it undermined the clan solidarity and had disintegrating influence on many institutions it also gave rise to new groupings, and social relationships. On the economic front it did not have much direct bearing on the changes, but it encouraged its adherents in making good use of the fast changes that had been introduced under the colonial system especially in relation to cash crop economy, trade and commerce. At the political level, inquiry on its relationship with the colonial administration, revealed that the colonial regime did view the missionaries as ally in their task. Whereas the missions got support in terms of legal and administrative force against some oppositions or problems that they faced. For a great number of Africans the association of white man - white rule - white religion remained till very long. The later developments which took place, helped creating a situation in which we can say that, if the colonial powers used Christianity as a tool in establishing and maintaining their domination, the Africans got in it a powerful weapon in overthrowing their regimes. The influence of the Bible, Christian teachings and mission school education in the liberation

movements we have acknowledged in this regard. The various indigenous Christian movements that started had an anti-colonial content. The mass-mobilization and the growth of a deep political consciousness against the colonial rule, that was achieved through those movements had great significance in African independence struggles.

Alongwith it the discontent against the European mission brand of Christianity also found expression in these movements. Various conflicts which had arisen because of the mission approach in the spread of Christianity at the social, cultural, ideological and individual level were tried to be resolved in the process of Africanization of Christianity. For the African Christians the Bible came to supplement many of their traditional beliefs which were neglected or denied by the Western missionaries. As, for them, religion was a phenomenon permeating in all spheres of their lives, they adopted Christianity also in a way which could satisfy their needs in totality. They retained all those values which could not be divorced from the community level. This gave birth to new forms and expressions in Christianity akin to their milieu, which gave them a typical identity as African Christians. Christianization which had been taken synonymously with westernization

in the initial phase, later on grew into a strong movement for an African version of Christianity, which can be called African Christianity. It is to the emergence of this version of Christianity that we had addressed our study, and the novels have depicted the process of this growth in different phases in a realistic mode.

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