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PROBLEMS OF ACCULTURATION
CONFRONTING A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY IN A PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

PROBLEMS OF ACCULTURATION
CONFRONTING A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY IN A PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

The culture of an uncivilized primitive society vastly differs from that of a civilized Western Christian society, and superfluous to note, there are numerous problems of acculturation which arise when representatives of the two societies come in contact with each other. As representatives of the two societies respectively, the national and the missionary are often hindered in their communication with each other by any number of such problems. These problems, which obviously hinder the Christian witness and influence, are due largely to avoidable barriers caused by cultural differences between the two societies represented. It is these barriers that constitute what one may call "problems of acculturation", and they confront every Christian missionary attempting to communicate the Gospel message in a society characterized by different cultural patterns.

Before a message can be transmitted and received there must be a proper contact between the transmitter and the receiver. To facilitate sufficient contact by which the message can be clearly communicated, all barriers of resistance must be removed between the two.

Problematic barriers between two individuals, two parties, or two nations with entirely different cultural patterns can be broken

down through sympathetic understanding between them. In order for a missionary with his Christian civilized patterns of culture to establish and maintain contact with the native whose primitive patterns of culture are so strangely different, he must sympathetically understand the national as he is. To do this the missionary must attempt to answer the question: Why does he think, feel, and act the way he does? Anthropological sciences seek to answer this question, and if the missionary could utilize them by applying their scientific principles, perhaps he could sympathetically understand the national. J. Merle Davis says:

Since man is the subject of foreign missions and since the social order he creates is the field in which they operate and in which they seek to plant the Christian Church, there is every reason for the missionary to secure an intimate understanding of Social Anthropology.¹

An intimate understanding of social anthropology involves not only the physiological and psychological make-up of man as related to his environment; but as Dr. Ira Brown, professor of Social Anthropology at Scarritt College, says, it also involves an "awareness of cultural differences, a point of view, and a knowledge of the various ways in which human behavior is institutionalized."² The realization of this accomplishment can be done only as one knows and understands the religious beliefs and practices of the people in a given culture (which is, in this case, primitive), because they are their reasons for thinking, feeling, and acting the way they do, both as individuals and as members of society. Therefore a valid approach to a sociological, cultural,

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1. J. Merle Davis: New Buildings on Old Foundations, p. 47.
2. Ira C. Brown: "Why Anthropology?" World Outlook, November, 1953, p. 31.

anthropological study of primitive society would be from the viewpoint of the religious beliefs and practices of its people. Apart from this approach their cultural background could not be understood, nor could one adequately analyze the problems of acculturation.

To understand the problems of acculturation, one must understand the nature and characteristics of the culture to discover wherein lie the cultural differences between the two societies. To understand the nature and characteristics of a particular culture, one must understand its religious beliefs and practices because they are the essential roots of the cultural patterns of any society. Therefore, though the main burden of this thesis will be to bring into the light the prominent problems of acculturation confronting a Christian missionary in a primitive society, this thesis will also involve a study of both the nature of the religious beliefs and practices of a primitive society in general as well as the nature of a particular primitive culture.

B. Significance of the Problem

Oftentimes a missionary with little or no understanding as to the problems of acculturation is sent to a foreign field to communicate a message where many barriers of resistance exist and greatly hinder his work. Through years of hard work he becomes more and more aware of the problems and thus disciplines himself to govern his actions in their light. He also may become aware of the basic underlying causes for their existence. When, and only when, he has this understanding, he can begin to suggest solutions. He must be aware of the problems, and he must understand their essential causes, which are, in this case, rooted in the cultural differences.

The missionary among the primitives, unless he has studied them scientifically, knows little about his people except in a theological sense. He knows that they are separated from God because of sin and consequently in dire need of liberation from its bondage. The missionary, as an ambassador for God, has as his main task the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through whom liberation from bondage to sin is made possible. In proclaiming this message proper contact between the missionary and the primitive is essential to its accurate and speedy communication. The missionary as the transmitter of the Gospel message must know and understand the national to whom the message is to go in order that such a contact can be established and maintained.

C. Delimitation of the Problem

It will be necessary to narrow the scope of the study to one particular primitive culture in chapter two because, with the cultural characteristics so different even between primitive groups, the study would otherwise be too broad. It would be impossible to make an exhaustive study of either 1) the religious beliefs and practices of primitive societies, 2) the culture of Bantu primitive society, or 3) the problems of acculturation facing missionaries; so various limitations will be stipulated as suggested in the introductions to each respective chapter.

For instance, volumes of material concerning the primitive religion have been published and most of these volumes were written from the viewpoint of the origination of religion to prove the author's respective theory, whether it be evolutionary or devolutionary. Authors

have left any number of monumental works for the good of later investigators and it remains no challenge to this writer with his limited knowledge of the field to add to these works. In making a study on primitive religions, therefore, the first chapter will deal merely with the basic, universal concepts of religious ideology as practiced among the primitive cultures of the present day. Not all of the cultures reveal all elements here discussed; however, for the most part, it can be validly said that primitive culture has inherent in its religious beliefs and customs the factors considered here.

D. Method of Procedure

There will be three chapters, each of which will be practically a structural entity in itself because of the very nature, scope, and purpose of this thesis. The first chapter will be a study of the religious beliefs and practices of primitive cultures in general. With this as a basis for understanding, the next chapter will be a movement from the general to the specific in that only one particular primitive culture will be considered. Chapter two will be a study of the Southern Bantu primitive culture from the viewpoint of its religious beliefs and practices.

From a study of chapter two, one should become aware of cultural differences between the Bantu culture and Western civilization. Chapter three will be a study of the problems of acculturation resulting from these cultural differences as approached from the viewpoint of the "Western" missionary called of God to serve in such a primitive culture as that of the Bantu.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
OF PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES

A. Introduction

As has previously been stated, the religious beliefs and practices of any culture largely determine the nature of its mental, social, moral, and physical characteristics. In other words, the physical characteristics of a culture have their root in the spiritual concepts of its people. Thus to make a study of the culture of a given society, it is imperative that one acquire an understanding as to the nature of its religious beliefs and practices. With this intent one should have a concrete, working definition for the ambiguously used term, religion, which many writers have attempted to interpret. It has been defined to mean anything from Dr. Tylor's famous definition, "a belief in spiritual beings"¹ to Father Schmidt's definition as follows:

Religion may be defined both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, it is the knowledge and consciousness of dependence upon one or more transcendental, personal powers, to which man stands in a reciprocal relation. Objectively, it is the sum of the outward actions in which it is expressed and made manifest, as prayer, sacrifices, sacraments, liturgy, ascetic practices, ethical prescriptions, and so on.²

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1. E. B. Tylor: Primitive Culture, Vol. I, p. 428.
2. Wilhelm Schmidt: The Origin and Growth of Religion, p. 2.

The former definition, in allowing no corresponding manifestations of the belief, seems to be inadequate in present day terminology whereas the latter defines religion as not only the belief in the supernatural but also the expression of that belief. In keeping with the latter interpretation, which is judged as valid and reliable by the writer of this paper, this chapter will essentially consist of two parts. The first part will have more to do with the inward beliefs concerning the "transcendental, personal powers, to which man stands in a reciprocal relation" and the second portion will involve, by and large, the outward expressions and manifestations of these beliefs. The latter, in terms of religious practice and worship, is the outgrowth of the former.

Dr. Wallis¹ uses the word "sacred" to represent the supernatural, and for the sake of clarity the term shall be used here similarly. The supernatural or the sacred is expressed in different ways among the primitives. These expressions inter-relate, overlap, and are complementary to each other and thus are difficult to catalogue in separate, distinct categories; however, they do have their distinguishing elements and shall be dealt with accordingly.

B. The Sacred Expressed in Their Thinking

(Basic Religious Beliefs)

1. Sacred Expressed as the Divine.

a. Universal Belief in a Supreme Being.

At the beginning all things were in the mind of Wakonda. All creatures, including man were spirits. They moved about in space

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1. Wilson D. Wallis: Religion in Primitive Society, p. 2.

between the earth and the stars. They were seeking a place where they could come into a bodily existence . . .

Dry land appeared; the grasses and the trees grew. The hosts of spirits descended and became flesh and blood. They fed on the seeds and grasses and the fruits of the trees, and the land vibrated with their expressions of joy and gratitude to Wakonda, the Maker of all things.¹

These words quoted by Grace H. Trumball from the ritual of the Omaha Indians give evidence of a monotheistic belief, a concept which is universal among primitive cultures. The Negrillo people of Africa, the Negritos of the Philippine Islands, the arctic Indians, and the Indians of North and South America conceive of a "Supreme Being" or "High God" who stands above man as creator and ruler of the universe. Dr. Schmidt summarizes his findings on the distribution of this concept in the primitive cultures by the following statement:

Comparing the primitive cultures with the later ones we may lay down the general principle that in none of the latter is the Supreme Being to be found in so clear, so definite, vivid and direct a form as among the peoples belonging to the former . . . This Supreme Being is to be found among all the peoples of the primitive culture, not indeed everywhere in the same form or the same vigour, but still everywhere prominent enough to make his dominant position indubitable.²

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1. Samuel M. Zwemer: The Origin of Religion, p. 79 (as quoted from Trumball's "Tongues of Fire," p. 10).
2. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 257. Concerning this statement Dr. Schmidt states in a footnote on the same page: "Evidence of the facts cited in this and the following sections is all to be found in the author's 'Ursprung der Gottesidee', Vols. 2, 3 and 4." Samuel Zwemer in his book, "The Origin of Religion" (pp. 57-58) (which he dedicated to Dr. Schmidt), quotes freely from Schmidt's "Origin and Growth of Religion," a book which he considers to be a masterpiece in this field even though it is but an English translated summary of many German volumes, says, "In the five [volumes] which have already appeared, he weighs in the balance the various theories of Lubbock, Spencer, Tylor, Andrew Lang, Frazer, and others, and finds them wanting. The idea of God," he concludes, "did not come by evolution but by revelation, and the evidence, massed together, analyzed, and sifted with scholarly acumen, is altogether convincing." Paul Radin in his book, "Primitive Religion," p. 257, says about Pater Schmidt: "His bias and the uncritical nature of his knowledge have often unfortunately led him to state as positive facts what are often simply his own idealized

b. Nature of the Supreme Being.

The concepts of the nature of the Supreme Being in various cultures differ widely; however in all of the primitive cultures the Supreme Being is represented as absolutely good, having no contact with evil whatsoever. Solar mythology reveals that some think of him as being a "First Father"¹ of the races existing in some sort of marital and family relationship with other "out-of-this-world" beings. In more primitive cultures, "it is said that he used formerly to live on earth with men, whom he taught all manner of good and instructed in their social and moral laws";² but now because of some sin of mankind, he has gone to a heaven where he now lives. Although he is connected with the sky, most all primitives believe that he is an independent and separate personality. Phenomena such as lightning and thunder storms are explained as weapons or expressions of anger of the Supreme Being. His form is thought of in terms of being "like a man," or "like cotton,"³ or in terms of having no shape at all like the sky. His name almost everywhere is revered and can be classed in one of three groups denoting respectively "fatherhood, creative power and residence in the sky."⁴ The name "Father" is most common and "is applied to the Supreme Being in every single area of the primitive culture when he is addressed

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(con't from previous page) conjectures." He then goes on to say, however, "as far as our present actual knowledge goes, it can be said that the most typical instances of an aboriginal belief in a Supreme Deity are to be found among the most complex of primitive civilizations."

1. Ibid., p. 262.
2. Ibid., p. 264.
3. Ibid., cf. pp. 266-267.
4. Ibid.

or appealed to."¹ Not so widely used is the name "Creator" or "Maker" for only a limited number of tribes think of him as having the power to create. Other names given to the Supreme Being and derived from his place of abode or present dwelling are Sky, He That is Above, Old One Above, Sky-Lord, Thunder, Giver, Power, Upholder, Most High, Slayer of the Sky, He Who is Outside, and Universe.²

c. Attributes of the Supreme Being.

The names used as given previously indicate many of the attributes of the Supreme Being as conceived in the thinking of the primitive. He is thought to be eternal in that he existed before all other things and will so exist after the extinction of all things. Omniscience is regarded to be a function of his immanently ethical character and he is said to apply this function in the interests of mankind's morality even to the extent of inflicting punishment on all offenders of the moral law. He is beneficent or absolutely good and all good that men enjoy, and only good, comes from him. They think of him as being unalterably righteous, moral, just and pure, having no connections with evil except for penal purposes. He is said to be omnipotent in that his enormous boundless power makes him mightier than all other beings. This power is no more evident than in the Supreme Being's creation of the universe; and he it is to whom practically all the primitives attribute this act which includes the making of man.

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., cf. pp. 267-269.

2. Sacred Expressed as the Potent.

There exists in the thinking of almost the entire primitive populous the conception of a mysterious supernatural force or power present in the realm of the natural. Probably the best example of this conception of a controlling potency can be found in the ideology of the Melanesian aborigines who call this power by the term "mana." Mana is a Polynesian term meaning power, or literally, "ability to do or act; capability of doing or effecting something."¹ Bishop Cobrington, the early authority on the Melanesians describes it thusly:

There is a belief in a force, altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, which is of great advantage to possess or control. This is mana . . . It is a power or influence, not physical, and in a way supernatural, but it shows itself in physical force, or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possesses. This mana is not fixed in anything, and can be conveyed in almost anything; but spirits, whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings, have it and can impart it . . . All Melanesian religion consists in getting this mana for oneself, or getting it used for one's benefit.²

The idea of mana exercises a profound influence on the social and religious life of the people because it is the central element of motivation in the societies which believe in such a potency. Though unseen, it influences man to regulate his behavior by it. Mana to the Melanesian means a force, "which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil,"³ and which is of the greatest importance to possess and control. This force is said to be everywhere dwelling in the ghosts of the dead and in spirits. Therefore if ghosts and spirits can be propitiated, their mana can be controlled. Not only does this force lie in the realm of the spiritual but it lies also in the realm of the physical.

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1. American College Dictionary, p. 950.
2. R. H. Cobrington: The Melanesians, p. 118.
3. Ibid.

Mana can reside in a man or an object. Strength, intelligence, dynamic personality, motor ability, reputation, and prestige are the outward manifestations of the indwelling mana in a person. Chiefs, priests, medicine men, shamans, and successful warriors are the product of the mana which they possess, and thus all their achievements are attributed to it. An exiled chief or a dead warrior would seem to be indicative of a quantitative deficiency of this supernatural power. Mana "essentially belongs to personal beings to originate it, though it may act through the medium of water, or a stone, or a bone."¹ Objects such as weapons, implements and ornaments have mana when they are said to be lucky, efficient, or able to accomplish great things. If mana exists in a stone, it can be buried in the garden and do more good than fertilizer or it can be placed in a leaky canoe and eliminate further leakage. William Howells states the following:

A man who has mana is stronger, or smarter, or more graceful, though mana is not strength or brains or agility. That man's spear or, if he has been civilized, his tennis racket, has mana if it does what is expected of it with particular sureness; but mana is something different from the niceness of balance or the workmanship which has gone into it. At the same time, if the pro who made the spear or the racket consistently turns out first-class spears and rackets, then he obviously has mana of his own, or else he has ways of inducing mana into whatever (spears or rackets) he makes. And there is no difference in the mana which is in the tool, or its owner, or its maker; it simply causes each one to excel in his special way.²

Thus it seems valid to say with Cobrington that the basis of Melanesian religion is the pursuit of mana. The quantity of mana one possesses depends largely on one's status in the system of hierarchy. The chief of a tribe, acting in a mediatorial capacity between man and

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1. Ibid., p. 119.

2. William Howells: The Heathens - Primitive Man and His Religions, p. 27.

the super-man source of mana, is the largest agent for the distribution of this force. Next in line of potential distributors are the priests and people of high birth. At the bottom of the scale are the common people and especially the women. Through various means of contact it can be transmitted from one person to another of lower position. One's capacity for mana is thought to be increased not only through contact with others but also by the acquisition of skills and by the observance of ritual. Objects, tools, and weapons are said to acquire mana either by direct contact with some worthy distributor or by proving themselves to be possessors of the force, and they henceforth are considered invaluable until the potency fails to function.

Similar concepts of a strange supernatural force are called "manitowi"¹ by the Algonkin Indians, "orenda"² by the Iroquois Indians, "wakan" or "wakanda"³ by the Sioux Indians, "maxpe"⁴ by the Crow Indians, "baraka" by the North African Moslems, and "njomm"⁵ by the West African Ekoi tribe.

3. Sacred Expressed as the Animate.

a. Belief in the Soul or Spirit.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Concerning the genesis of man the Biblical account clearly

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1. Cf. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 163-165.
2. Cf. ibid., pp. 137, 163-165.
3. Cf. ibid., pp. 163-165.
4. Cf. Robert H. Lowie: Primitive Religion, pp. 15ff.
5. Cf. Lowie, op. cit., pp. 43ff.
6. Genesis 2:7

reveals that man is more than mere physical substance in that he was created with that which made him a live being. God created physical man with a soul making him a live spiritual creature.

Without going into the theological arguments for the dichotomous or trichotomous hypothesis of man's composition, "the soul may be regarded as the separable personality of the living man, the animating principles of his body, the life, the self, the ego. Primitive man, like many civilized folk, makes no distinction between soul and spirit."¹ Though the primitive does not have the revelation of the origin of man as given in the Word of God, a belief in man's possession of at least one soul seems to be a universal conception. It is difficult to ascertain with certainty what is understood by this conception (even among those who call themselves civilized); however the belief in the soul, regardless of how it is conceived, is basic in primitive thought.

There are two phenomena which are largely responsible for the primitive's beliefs concerning the soul: Firstly, because of the phenomenon termed as sleeping or dreaming, the primitive has experienced the transformation of himself from one who can see, hear, move about, and communicate ideas, to one who is merely an inert breathing body which can not see, hear, move about, and communicate ideas. Secondly, because of the phenomenon of death, he has witnessed the transformation of a loved one from a live, warm, energetic personality to a dead, cold, stiff corpse. Reasoning that because of the tremendous change which

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1. Gordon H. Smith: The Missionary and Anthropology, p. 83. For the sake of clarity this definition shall be considered reliable and the term "soul" shall be used as meaning both soul and spirit.

has taken place in either of these phenomena, he assumes that the soul has evidently made its departure from the body - sleep being a temporary withdrawal of the soul from the body and death being a permanent withdrawal.

In formulating their own ideas regarding the intangible, unseen soul of man, the primitives have probably exhausted the logical possibilities of what and where the soul is. In some regions of the Congo and other primitive areas of the world, the tribes claim that the soul of man is in the blood stream. Others consider it to be in the heart reasoning that in either case the soul (or life) leaves the body when the blood fails to flow and the heart fails to pump. Still others think that the soul lives in one of the other internal organs of the body (i.e., the liver, head, eyes, etc.). The soul is sometimes thought to live not only in one's body but also in one's shadow on the ground, reflection on the water, breath in the air or, even in areas where civilization has made known photographic sciences, images on sensitized paper.

A belief in multiple souls is quite common. In many localities the people believe in two, three, or four and sometimes thirty or more. Some people distinguish between a soul representing one's consciousness and a soul representing one's life principle. Some believe that one's name is practically synonymous with one's soul. Luck is oftentimes personified and treated as though it were in the same category as a man's soul.

Though mindful of these and other ideas concerning the quality and quantity of one's soul, Father Schmidt, in a discussion pertaining to Dr. Tylor's theory of animistic origination, states the following:

Most commonly we find two souls, one belonging to the body and connected with the blood or the breath, the other the shadow or phantom, which probably owes its origin to memory-images of the departed and with which is usually connected a belief in a future life.¹

This quotation indicates the existence of a common belief that man possesses at least two souls, a body-soul and a shadow-soul. The former is man's possession during life and the latter "comes forth only at death and is supposed to be a continuation of one's individuality."² This continuation is essentially a belief in the immortality of the soul. In other words, the soul has a future even though the body is dead.

Incarnatory and transmigratory thinking is the natural product of the primitive mind with its concept of soul immortality because they have no knowledge of the "more perfect"³ revelation of Jesus Christ as the "Resurrection and the Life."⁴ It is thought by them that at death, the soul or spirit of man is incarnated into or transmigrated to another being or object in the form of a "ghost." As the soul is considered to be "the separable personality of the living man or other being, or object",⁵ so the ghost is considered to be "the separable personality of the man or other being after death."⁶

b. Belief in the Ghost.

By and large with primitive beliefs such as they are, the soul can be said to have a future. In its future state the term "ghost"

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1. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 84.
2. Ione Lowman: Non-Christian Religions, p. 39.
3. Cf. Epistle to the Hebrews.
4. Cf. Gospel of John, chapter 11.
5. Smith, op. cit., p. 108.
6. Ibid.

is sometimes used. At death a person's ghost may be born again, perhaps instantly, in the body of another or perhaps later in a descendant. It is also a common belief that the ghost may appear incarnated into an animal or object. There are those who would rather think that another world is the usual destination for ghosts. With this conception, the "other world" is sometimes in the sky, sometimes in the earth, or sometimes on the earth, perhaps in a place inaccessible by man. Many advocate that the ghost is restless after departing from the body at death and wanders aimlessly about until the body is buried. He may hover near the grave for a period of time until a final abandoning ceremony or sacrifice.

As all mankind know, death makes a tremendous difference to man, and this knowledge is no where more apparent than in the thinking of the primitive. Edmund Soper records their thinking in these words:

A man cannot be the same after he dies that he was when alive. Not hampered by his body, he is free to roam at large. He has powers which were not his before . . . Food and drink, clothing and weapons, and in the case of the great man, servants and attendants are as necessary as before . . . It is even thought that his condition in the other world is determined at least in part by the treatment he continues to receive from his family.¹

With their philosophy based on this type of reasoning, they have the basis for their myriad other beliefs and practices as revealed in ancestral worship, fetishism, and idolatry. The primitive concept of souls, ghosts, and spirits seems to be the heart of their religious beliefs and practices and will be given additional study in a later portion of this chapter.

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1. Edmund D. Soper: The Religions of Mankind, p. 40.

c. Belief in the Demon and Evil Spirit.

Not only are there the souls, spirits, and ghosts claimed to be affiliated with living beings and dead objects, but there are also the spirits which are directly affiliated with a common source, the Devil. They are called evil spirits or demons and whether one believes in their existence or not,¹ they are none-the-less very real to the primitive. As Joh. Warneck phrases it, "God has become an abstraction, but they have personal contact with the demons."² From a strictly Biblical approach, one discovers that demons are spiritual beings, emissaries and servants of the Devil, oppressors of man, and opposers to God. Probably the greatest manifestation of demon power is found in "demon possession", the name given to that phenomenon which takes place when an evil spirit or demon indwells, controls, or possesses a person.

Obviously, a belief in demons is universal and more evident in primitive religion than is the belief in a monotheistic deity. Assuming the evolutionary theories of the origination of religion to be fallacious, and the devolutionary theories to be valid, it is easy to see that monotheistic beliefs and worship in God (or a Supreme Being) have been substituted by polytheistic beliefs and worship in Satan and demons. Instead of being controlled by God and His Spirit, they are now controlled by the Devil and his spirits. They believe that death is a work of demons and that "they may enter the body of the victim,

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1. Cf. Merrill F. Unger: Biblical Demonology, pp. 62ff. Dr. Unger in this inductive work makes this statement on p. 81: "Laying aside the Scriptural witness and proof, the facts of physical nature, human nature, and human experience combine to adduce substantial evidence that demons, as well as cases of demon possession, do exist today."
2. Joh. Warneck: The Living Forces of the Gospel, p. 116.

and either dominate his mind as well as his body, inflict specific diseases, or cause pains of various sorts."¹

In cultures which have degenerated so far that any conception of a Supreme Being has become almost oblivious, the atmospheric phenomena not understood by the people, such as thunder, rain, tempest, and lightning are thought to be manifestations of the spirits or demons which are more powerful than they. It is evident that the primitive lives in a world very much alive with spirits and demons, and as Donald Fraser records:

Faced day by day with forces he cannot control, the African is compelled to believe in spiritual powers that are all about him. The lightning and thunder, the clouds that pass overhead, the silent disease that stalks through the village, all witness that there are forces at work in the universe which his hands and powers cannot guide, so he seeks to propitiate these and to make them friendly.²

Thus one can sense that with the sacred expressed as the animistic (i.e., spirits, souls, ghosts and demons), there must obviously be numerous and varied manifestations of these beliefs evidenced in the primitives religious practices. Religious practices quite common to all of the primitive cultures are those of the fetishistic variety in which the spiritual powers thought to be indwelling in some material object are appeased by some propitiatory means. The primitive constantly seeks to propitiate and make friendly these super-human, animistic powers prevalent in the realm of the spiritual.

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1. "Demonology;" Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. VII, 14th edition.
2. As quoted from Donald Fraser's "The New Africa," p. 32 in Smith: The Missionary and Primitive Man, p. 125.

C. The Sacred Expressed in Their Acting
(Customary Religious Practices)

1. Sacred Expressed as the Mysterious.

a. Practice of Fetishism.

(1) Its Nature and Function.

Beliefs in the Sacred expressed as a Supreme Being, a potent super-human force, spirits, souls, ghosts, and demons are the foundation for the expression of the Sacred in the practices of fetishism, idolatry, totemism, divination, ancestral worship, and "tabu." At the mercy of other powers, the primitive lives in the fear of possibly displeasing them, and so he has thought and sought ways and means whereby he can adequately fulfill their pleasure. One of the most common ways he has considered is by either acquiring or making a sacred object called a fetish, which "may be defined as (a) any object whatsoever, which (b) is thought to be inhabited by a spirit, and which (c) its possessor may make use of for his own benefit."¹ Fetishism is the practice of this assumed principle.

There are two ways to acquire a fetish: by discovery or invention. As George W. Gilmore, in classing them under primary and secondary fetishism respectively, says:

The original fetish is an adventitious find of which care is taken, to which success in an undertaking is ascribed, and subsequent worship is accorded Secondary fetishism shows a likeness to magic in that it is the result of the exercise of primitive invention like that which attempts to produce rain by stimulating its fall.²

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1. Soper, op. cit., p. 41.
2. "Fetishism," Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, pp. 305-306.

In discovering a fetish, the primitive may observe a curious or conspicuous object and by putting it through various experimental testing procedures, assume it to possess a spiritual power or potency of super-human quality. By "proving" itself the object (i.e., stone, twig, feather, bone, tooth, claw, finger, etc.) becomes a personal fetish to the one making the discovery. If the fetish becomes esteemed as the possessor of great spiritual power by others also, it may become a community fetish. Other individual and communal fetishes are made either by the native himself or a religious leader of the community in anticipating a future need for special protection, guidance, and help of any sort. Fetishes, which may be worn on one's apparel or hung on one's dwelling place, may number anywhere from one to 20,000 depending on the individual and the customs of his tribe.

In their daily life the primitives use their fetishes for everything they do. A hunt for wild game may be preceded by an elaborate ceremony of dedication and offering to the spirits of a fetish and each man of the party will carry his own fetish with him. "No journey of importance is made without preparation of a fetish, to which more forethought and time and care are given than to the preparation of food, clothing, etc., for the way."¹ In war, victory does not depend on strength, skill, equipment, and courage so much as it does on the potency of the fetish, which is honored on all such victorious occasions by much ritualistic processions, dancing and other ceremonies. "Defeat is easily explained by saying that someone in the crowd had spoiled the charm by not obeying some item in the ritual."²

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1. Robert Hamill Nassau: Fetichism in West Africa, p. 174.
2. Ibid., p. 178.

Not only is the fetish used in hunting, journeying, warring, but also it is used in fishing, trading, love-making, planting, and in all the emergencies of life, such as plagues, famines, births, diseases and deaths.¹ The whole primitive culture is wrapped up in fetishistic means of propitiating the unseen controlling forces thought to be at enmity against man. To make propitiation demands both individual and group action which in turn demands leadership.

(2) Its Leaders.

Excluding the chief, the most important character in the social structure of a primitive culture is the religious leader. Whether he is addressed by the name of shaman, witch-doctor, medicine man, priest, magician, prophet, wizard, rain-maker, exorciser, soothsayer, diviner, or some other name, he is the one who has the most influence on the people because he is given credit for knowing how to deal with the supernatural forces and thus protect the people from every known enemy. Propitiatory ceremonies (in which are involved the invention, offering, dedication or honoring of fetishes) of all kinds are supervised under his guidance.

The two following quotations illustrate the tremendous importance of the religious leader in a primitive society:

The witch-doctor's or medicine-man's function is to "smell out" the culprit who has brought calamity on a citizen or on a community, and also to make the spirits friendly and beneficent. He makes the sacrifice that brings the rain. He cleanses the village when pestilence has smitten it, and protects it with his charms. He brings the spirits into the charms that a man may possess; he hangs on his neck the bundle that saves him from pneumonia, or on his leg the

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1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 172-190.

Defence against snake bite, or ties to his bow or gun the charm that will make him a sure marksman, or fences his possessions by magical police.¹

When a heathen Negro is sick, the first thing done, just as in civilized lands, is to call the 'doctor,' who is to find out what is the particular kind of Spirit that by invading the patient's body has caused the sickness.

This diagnosis is not made by an examination and comparison of the physical and mental symptoms, but by drum, dance, frenzied song, mirror, fumes of drugs, consultation of relics, and conversation with the spirit itself.²

b. Practice of Idolatry.

"When a fetish, an object indwelt by a spirit, is fashioned to appear like the spirit, it becomes an idol"³ and is worshiped. This is idolatry; and although it is not a common practice in every primitive culture, it is prevalent enough to warrant a limited discussion here.

Image worship is a term sometimes used synonymously for idolatry, however there are some distinctions which should be clarified. Goblet D'Alviella⁴ makes a distinction between purely representative images, magical images, and idols. The first group includes drawn, carved, sculptured, or painted images of a purely commemorative, instructive, or edifying nature. Their function is to reproduce the features of a well-known object, an episode taken from history or legend, the appearance of a sacred spot or the celebration of a rite.

"Primitive man believed that, by tracing an image, he was producing

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1. As quoted from Donald Fraser's "The New Africa," p. 42 in Smith: The Missionary and Primitive Man, p. 156.
2. Nassau, op. cit., p. 215.
3. Only the higher stages of primitive civilization practice idolatry.
4. "Images and Idols (General and Primitive)," Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VII, p. 110.

the reality, and that, when he acted on the image, he was also acting on the thing itself."¹ With this concept, the primitives of today worship "magical images" which they sculpture, carve, and paint on stones, bones, cave walls and wood. By acting on the image in some manner, either good or bad, the spirit represented by the image is thought to be the direct recipient of the action. The third classification consists of "idols" which are worshiped because they are fetishes representing the supposed form of the spirit dwelling inside of it.

Idols come into being in various ways. They can be formed (a) by the natural association of natural objects with the human features which they resemble, (b) by simply manufacturing an image representing a superhuman being, (c) by the supposed command of the divinity whom the image represents, and (d) by means of some magical operation.²

Magical rites and ceremonies are used to induce the spirit which the image portrays to enter into the image. In proving themselves to possess life, idols are expected to perform physiological functions such as moving about, talking, or crying. They are supposed to deliver messages and bestow blessings, and consequently are the cause for much prayer and gifts offered to them. Concerning their worship, Gordon H. Smith quotes Goblet D'Alviella as saying:

The service of the images which are dressed, ornamented, anointed, erected in different places, carried about in processions and implored with prayers and gifts, forms the necessary condition in order to obtain what is wished for, and to avert what is feared.³

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1. Ibid., p. 111.

2. Cf. Ibid., pp. 112-113.

3. Smith, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

c. Practice of Totemism.

From the primitives conception of soul incarnation and transmigration has come the ideology of totemism, a social and religious phenomenon basically defined as an association of human groups with animal groups by an existing supernatural blood relationship between the two. Although defined in many different ways by worthy writers,¹ the term totemism essentially denotes the belief in a common origination of a human being from either an animal-man relationship or some other supernatural blood affiliation between beings and some species of animal or bird.² Every person tracing his origin to a certain totem (species of animal) is a totemite (individual member) in that particular totemic group (social group having common origin).³

As a social phenomenon totemism cannot be understood apart from a knowledge of the various forms of primitive society such as sibs, clans, and tribes which are organized because of totemic affiliation. However, suffice it merely to note here that totemism is generally connected with divisions of society called sibs (in the U. S. A.) or clans (in England) which are groups of blood-related families forming one political unit. These totemic units are usually exogamous and are called by the name of their respective totem (i.e., bear, wolf, lion,

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1. Alexander LeRoy defines totemism as "an institution consisting essentially of a magical pact, representing and forming a relationship of a mystical and supernatural order, by which, under the visible form of an animal and, by exception, of a vegetable, mineral, or astral body, an invisible spirit is associated with an individual, or family, a clan, a tribe, a secret society, in view of a reciprocity of services." LeRoy: *The Religion of the Primitives*, p. 87.
2. "Rarely it may be with some plant or inanimate object or natural phenomena." Cf. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
3. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 159.

grass, etc.). The totems are portrayed in numerous ways, such as in ornaments for personal use, in carvings on posts and dwelling places, in ceremonies and dances,¹ and in many other manifestations, through the medium of art and speech.

Membership of a totemic group is according to either heredity or initiation. One can be born into a certain clan, or he can be initiated into one through a process of blood exchange. This process consists of the exchange of blood by two members of different totemic groups. Accomplishment of this act can be realized by both members cutting themselves to draw blood and either sucking each other's blood into their respective stomachs or placing the wounded areas one over the other to "mix the blood." Thought to be in this manner blood relations, they henceforth belong to the same clan or totemic group.

A dominant feature of totemism, especially in Africa is "tabu." By this is meant that the totem must not be touched, killed, or eaten save only in a sacramental way. Tabu customs vary greatly as to their severity. Concerning this William Howells states:

Some tribes will not even look on their totems or speak their names. Others may have secondary tabus . . . The Nandi of East Africa represent these. Here a Lion man may not eat meat killed by a lion, or wear a lion-skin headdress . . . His neighbor, a Bush Pig man, may in hunting not kill an animal wounded by a member of a different clan, and may not touch a donkey.²

d. Practice of Divination.

Because the future is unknowable, it is fearful to many, and

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1. These ceremonies and dances do not necessarily indicate a worship of a totem for "the actual worship of the totem is rare, although there may be many complex rites connected with the belief." Cf. *ibid.*, p. 161.
2. Howells, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

to these many, time is only useful for the acquisition of knowledge about human affairs by the inquisition of non-human sources, whether it be through the flipping of coins, gazing at stars and crystal balls, throwing dice, reading tea leaves or calling on a shaman. Regardless of how it is done, the procurement of information concerning the future or things otherwise hidden, is called "divination." Etymological observations would indicate that the term has to do with supernatural forces and their control. This appeals to the fearful mind of the primitive, who is in constant threat of danger, ill-luck, and evil powers; and since the common native cannot discern foretelling signs, he seeks the aid of the diviner, shaman, priest or whoever serves in the mediatory capacity with the spirits. The favorable or unfavorable signs thus discerned are called omens.

Omens play a tremendous part in the primitives life for every incident out of the ordinary is regarded as an omen, and is suspected of either good or evil influence. As Howells humorously says:

They are forever watching for omens, which they have built up into a tremendous lore. This seems to be their main religious preoccupation, keeping a herdsman busy when he has nothing to do. If a rat crosses your path, that is good, but if it is a snake, that is bad. If you stub your big toe, that is good, but if it is one of your other toes, it is bad. All day long a Nandi is keeping score, to see how he stands by night.¹

"Divination might be called the response of the supernatural to the prayers of primitive man."² He will seldom act until he has received a favorable response through omens, usually as interpreted by the religious leader of the tribe.

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1. Howells, op. cit., p. 70. (Concerning the Nandi people of East Africa)
2. Smith, op. cit., p. 150.

The numerous forms of divination vary considerably though their basic function is common. A prevalent form is used called scapulimancy in which the diviner either inspects and "reads" the scapular veins of an animal's shoulder blade when held to the light or "reads" the cracks in the bone when cast into a fire. Another means, called hepatoscopy, is by examining the liver ("seat of the soul") of animals sacrificed to gods. Haruspicy is the term applied to another form in which there is an examination of the entrails of animals in order to read messages contained therein. There is also palm reading (chiromancy), fire observation (pyromancy), and consultation with the dead (necromancy).¹

2. Sacred Expressed as the Ancient.

Primitives are not only dependers on magic through fetishism, idolatry, and divination, but also through ancestral worship which stems from a belief in a reciprocal relationship between the living and the spirits of their dead ancestors. Its principles are not difficult to understand, for as Tylor says:

They [the primitives] plainly keep up the social relations of the living world. The dead ancestor now passed into a deity, simply goes on protecting his own family and receiving suit and service from them as of old; the dead chief still watches over his own tribe, still holds his authority by helping friends and harming enemies, still rewards the right and sharply punishes the wrong.²

This would tend to indicate that the relationship between the departed and his remaining kin-folk is, by and large, on a positive basis; however there is a negative side as well. The relationship can be on a friendly basis or an unfriendly basis depending mostly on the

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1. Cf. Howells, op. cit., pp. 71-74, and Smith, ibid., pp. 150-151.

2. "Ancestor-worship;" Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. I, 14th edition.

dead's social status while still living. The primitive regards the dead in at least one of two ways - either with respect or with fear.

The matter is complicated by numerous other ideological factors. The dead are considered terrible because death is assumed contagious, and the death of one is thought to cause many others. Then too, the dead cannot supply their own means of sustenance and therefore must be cared for by remaining relatives. This idea leads rather to a tendance of the dead than to worship. It is thought that the death of a man of high social standing makes him more powerful than ever and his spirits should be propitiated accordingly. Through incarnation others feel that the dead return and are reborn into the community.¹

The principle behind this worship seems to be that the dead look after the well-being of the living if the living act in certain ways to honor and please the dead. In other words, there is a reciprocal interdependence between them. Ancestors are responsible for sending rain, causing fertility, telling future, and helping in war and other emergencies. The living are responsible for pleasing and entertaining their ancestors, observing periodical mourning ceremonies, feeding the spirits of their ancestors and providing them with tools and materials for life after death. The ancestors are said to protect and care for the living as long as they continue to fulfill these obligations.

3. Sacred Expressed as the Forbidden.

In the practice of fetishism, idolatry, totemism, divination, and ancestral worship one can see in primitive religion the positive

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1. Cf. *ibid.*

expression of the Sacred. The primitive does certain acts in order that certain things may happen by the supernatural. As over against this there is also a negative expression, which is known as taboo (tabu), a practice of the prohibition of certain persons, things, actions, and words.¹ The primitive does not do certain acts lest certain things should happen by the supernatural. The aim of the former is to produce a desired effect; the aim of the latter is to avoid an undesirable one.

In most primitive cultures, and especially in Polynesia, where perhaps tabu has been more prominent, it has been a great regulator of the social life of the people, and observance of prohibition laws has been assured through fear of supernatural penal measures. In primitive law, the supernatural acts as a police force. Because of their beliefs in these forces, the primitive recognizes many laws of prohibition to which he clings tenaciously. For instance, the presence of mana in a chief may constitute grounds for having laws forbidding others to touch him or his possessions. The presence of spirits and ghosts in and near a corpse may make it highly tabu and dangerous to touch it. Sometimes warriors returning after killing some enemy are tabued. Anything consecrated by rite, to instill it with mana, or protect it, becomes tabu in many instances. The chief or religious leader may lay a special kind of tabu on areas of cultivation and "first fruits" or fishing grounds and fish catches. There are tabus associated with all the crises of life, such as birth, adolescence, marriage, and death. Various actions, which govern the moral and ethical behavior of a society may be tabu.

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1. Cf. Fraser: The Golden Bough, pp. 194-260.

Although, "unlike civil, religious, or moral law, the law of tabu never implies action, but always abstention."¹ However the violation of these prohibitory laws require some sort of cleansing or purification. LeRoy also records the following:

All infractions will cause death, disease, or some other misfortune, unless the guilty one has been absolved on each occasion on time and has made satisfaction by an appropriate penance, ordinarily in offering or in a sacrifice.²

There seem to be two primary functions of the principle of tabu. The first function has to do with the separation of the sacred from the non-sacred by appointment, service, and special consecration. The touching of sacred elements is forbidden and in this sense one "may say that the taboo is at the basis of religious worship"³ in primitive society. The second function has to do with the basis of moral law. By their religious character, the various tabus are imposed as essential and indisputable, implying immediate penalties in cases of violation.

D. Conclusion

This chapter has been a recorded study of the basic religious beliefs and consequent practices of primitive societies. By first noting the predominant concepts of the primitive mind concerning the supernatural forces of a Supreme Being, mana, spirits, ghosts, and demons, the second step of analyzing the consequent practices was made possible.

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1. LeRoy, op. cit., p. 145.
2. Ibid., p. 144.
3. Ibid., p. 149.

As evidenced by this study, the primitive's motivation for practices of fetishism, idolatry, totemism, divination, ancestral worship, and tabu has its root in an intense fear of the Sacred, whether expressed as a Supreme Being, a potent force, or a supernatural spiritual force. Because of their conception of these unseen forces, the primitives live in constant fear of displeasing them and consequently regulate their daily existence by striving to propitiate them through rituals of all kinds.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURE OF THE BANTU PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

FROM THE VIEWPOINT

OF ITS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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THE CULTURE OF THE BANTU PRIMITIVE SOCIETY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ITS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

A. Introduction

Although an amazing similarity is noted in the religious beliefs and practices of primitive societies, the physical cultural characteristics differ considerably. This being the case, in order better to record the effects which the religious beliefs and practices make on a primitive society, it seems necessary to narrow the scope of this study to the physical cultural characteristics of a particular ethnic group.

The ethnic group considered here will be the Bantu people of South Africa because: 1) the common religious beliefs and practices are essentially the same as those inherent in the other primitive cultures; 2) though some tribes are still untouched by white man's civilization, many have been in the process of "western civilization" for many years. This has produced a large quantity of literature for source material. and; 3) though the problems of acculturation have been intensified (especially with the recent rise of African nationalism), they also have been more adequately analyzed.

Because of the tremendous transformations which have been taking place in Bantu culture where whites have introduced multiplied articles of "western civilization," an attempt will be made to limit

the findings of this chapter to the culture only as it has remained relatively unchanged by external elements.

In recording these findings, this chapter deals first with a brief description of the general nature of Bantu religious beliefs and practices which are the whole basis of their life, as Willoughby states:

Bantu life is essentially religious. The relation of the individual to the family, the clan, and the tribe,--politics, ethics, law, war, status, social amenities, festivals,--all that is good and much that is bad in Bantu life is grounded in Bantu religion.¹

B. Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. Basic Religious Beliefs.

Belief in a Supreme Being² is evident throughout the Bantu people though the conception of his nature is quite nebulous and varies considerably in different tribes. They seem to think of him as being the creator and ruler of the universe. This is pointed out by Rev. W. Donald McClure who says:

All life to them has spirit and these spirits have a direct relationship with the Great Spirit, whom they recognize as God, the Supreme Being and Creator, who has little to do with human beings except through the great multitude of lesser spirits. So it is the lesser spirits which first and daily concern the native.³

They are animistic in that they strongly believe in souls, spirits, ghosts, and demons. Concerning this, Isaac Schapera says:

All the Bantu . . . firmly believe that already during his lifetime a person consists of two separable entities, his mortal body and his immortal soul . . . The soul is . . . also closely connected with the breath, and frequently identified with the shadow . . . The surviving soul, after its separation from the body [at death], becomes a spirit.

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1. William C. Willoughby: The Soul of the Bantu, p. 1.

2. Cf. Emil Torday: African Races, p. 252.

3. W. Donald McClure: An Aniak Becomes a Christian, p. 2.

Some people believe that it continues indefinitely to linger around its grave or former home. But the more general opinion seems to be that it ultimately finds its way into a spirit world, vaguely located somewhere underground, where the spirits lead a life very similar to that on earth.¹

The spirits of ancestors are thought to "have power to protect and help their descendants, as well as to punish them."² Schapera goes on to say:

Continued good fortune is attributed to their benevolence, while calamity may result from neglecting them. The good relations between them and their descendants must therefore be maintained with meticulous care. It is more essential to retain their favour than to propitiate them occasionally; and so a certain well-defined conduct towards them is traditionally prescribed.³

Besides the spirits of the ancestors there are evil spirits, demons, sorcerers, wizards, and witches believed to have supernatural power to inflict bodily injury, cause disease, and bring about death as well as to control the forces of Nature. Motivated predominantly by intense fear of either displeasing the spirits of their ancestors or being the victims of demons and witches, there has been developed a "certain well-defined conduct" or elaborate system of ancestral worship and practices of fetishism, divinations, totemism, tabu, witchcraft, and other forms of animism. Rev. McClure describes this animism by saying:

They [Aniak tribe] see living spirits in all living things and these living spirits have a very definite influence in their lives, some for good but most for evil. It is the spirit which makes the wind blow, the dog run, the tree grow, the river flow . . .⁴

2. Customary Religious Practices.

According to Willoughby,

Bantu religion consists of animism and ancestor-worship . . . it

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1. Isaac Schapera: The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa, pp. 247-249.
2. Ibid., p. 254.
3. Ibid.
4. McClure, op. cit., p. 2.

[ancestor worship] is everywhere present in Bantu Africa and always normative to Bantu thought. It is the basis of their political institutions, the pre-supposition of their law and ethics, and the key to an understanding of their social life.¹

Sacrifices² are constantly offered to the spirits of the dead to retain their favour. Regular sacrificial performances accompany the slaughter of a beast, the dawning of a new day, the partaking of each meal, the making of a new brew of beer, the grinding of a new batch of snuff, the drinking of water and many other daily activities of the tribe. Besides these offerings of favour there are offerings of propitiation which a family or tribe recognize on certain occasions. These are best summarized by Schapera, who says:

In family life these include such momentous events as birth, initiation, marriage, death, the return of members long absent, or the reconciliation of close relatives who have been estranged; occasions when ancestors have revealed their displeasure in dreams, family misfortune, or one of the other ways described above; and occasions when some new enterprise is about to be undertaken--such as a long journey, or the building of a hut--for which the blessing and protection of the ancestors is required. Offerings to the ancestors of the chief, on behalf of the tribe as a whole, are made on such regular occasions as planting the fields, first fruits, and harvest, the inauguration of large hunting expeditions, and tribal initiations, as well as before and after war, when rain is urgently needed, when the land is attacked by an epidemic, or any other serious emergency arises.³

Sacrifices can be any one of a number of items depending on the reason for the sacrifice. "Sometimes beer, milk, grain, porridge, snuff, tobacco, or even articles of clothing are poured out . . . or set aside,

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 1.
2. Schapera quotes Willoughby as saying, "The Bantu appear to have no idea of transferring the sin of the worshipper to the victim, or of substituting the death of the victim for the merited death of the sinner. Their idea of sacrifice is rather that of communion with the spirit . . . The idea that is most prominent in the Bantu mind is the restoration of normal relations of friendship with the spirit, not the buying off of its wrath." Schapera, op. cit., p. 258.
3. Ibid., pp. 254-255.

often with a minimum of ceremonial for the ancestors."¹ Living animals are sacrificed on "important occasions, such as transition rites, or when ordered by the diviners."² Perfect cattle, goats, fowl and sometimes sheep are used as sacrifices. They are generally offered on some recognized altar or the graves of ancestors. Prayers, which are of a stereotyped nature conforming to a traditional pattern,³ accompany the sacrifice to establish some means of communication between the worshippers and their ancestors.

Animistic practices of fetishism, totemism, and tabu are closely related to ancestral worship, and they are essentially the same as previously described in chapter one under the general topic of primitive religious practices. Closely akin to these are witchcraft, magic, sorcery, and divination, which are terms given to the various practices associated with the belief that such supernatural beings as demons, evil spirits, witches, wizards, and sorcerers exist to use their powers in harming others. Thus, magicians, medicine-men, witch-doctors, diviners and other religious leaders are called upon to discover causes for sickness, alleviate suffering and pain, concoct remedies, "smell out" witches and sorcerers, and decrease any maleficent action on the part of these super-human evil powers. "Witchcraft is, objectively, 'maleficium' and subjectively, craven, paralysing fear,"⁴ which has captivated, controlled, and motivated the Bantu people in almost everything they have done and do.⁵

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 257.

4. Denys W. T. Shropshire: *The Church and Primitive Peoples*, p. 413.

5. Cf. Ibid., pp. 107-130 and pp. 400-423.

C. Cultural Traits and Complexes

1. Diet.

The Bantu people are both pastoral and agricultural and depend largely upon these means of subsistence. Although wild animals, plants, and fruits remain a source of food supply,¹ they rely mostly on breeding livestock and cultivating plants. Cattle, goats, sheep, and fowls are domesticated for eating purposes. "The milk of cattle and goats is everywhere an important item of food."² "Carnivora, dogs, monkeys, crocodiles, snakes, as well as such birds as the owl, crow, and vulture, are generally taboo"³ along with sacrificial and totem animals. In many places fish and pork⁴ are regarded as unclean and are therefore also tabued. The principal cereal crop is millet or "Kafir corn." They also raise pumpkins, melons, sugar cane, beans, and other minor crops.

A variation in diet comes by using insects as a source of food. "Certain stages in the life-history of termites are regarded as a luxury, a nutritious cake is made from the compressed bodies of lake flies . . . and some tribes are fond of locusts."⁵ In many areas, "locusts, when procurable in large quantities, are dried and ground to meal; while caterpillars and flying ants are often made into sauce for flavouring food,"⁶ as well as being eaten alive.

Beer, the only other beverage apart from water, "is regarded by the Bantu as an essential food."⁷ Several varieties, varying in

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 132.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 133.

4. Cf. S. M. Molema: *The Bantu--Past and Present*, p. 119.

5. E. B. Worthington: "Food and Nutrition of African Natives," *Africa*, Vol. 9, 1936, p. 160.

6. Schapera, op. cit., p. 132.

7. Ibid., p. 133.

alcoholic content, are usually made from Kafir corn, the fruits of the morula tree, the leaves of the prickly pear, or the sap of the fan palm. In times of plenty, this drink, which usually contains a fair amount of solid matter, thus making it nourishing as well as stimulating, is consumed freely, especially among the men.¹ Its social importance is emphasized by Schapera in the following quotation:

It also plays a very important part in their social life. 'The whole social system of the people is inextricably linked up with this popular beverage, which is the first essential in all festivities, the one incentive to labour, the first thought in dispensing hospitality, the favourite tribute of subjects to their chief, and almost the only votive offering dedicated to their spirits . . .' 'beer is a common means of exchange or payment for services rendered, and is in evidence in a number of transactions that in other tribes are conducted by means of mealies and goats'; and 'it is in evidence in almost all ritual and ceremonial--as a celebration of important occasions, binding together different groups or individuals, (and) effecting a reconciliation where things go wrong'. . . and it may be added that in most of them [other tribes] the harvest thanksgiving takes the form of a national beer-drink, preceded by an offering of beer to the ancestors of the chief.²

In most of the tribes narcotics are taken in the form of snuff or smoking material--usually tobacco or hemp. Tobacco is sometimes mixed with ashes of certain woods and other plants, and either formed into snuff or smoked in a pipe or cigar. Hemp, which is much stronger than tobacco, is often mixed with tobacco or other plant before being smoked or chewed.³

Cannibalism, which is becoming more and more extinct in all parts of Africa, was and is practiced for any one of numerous reasons.

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1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

3. Hemp smoking "produces at the time a drunken excitement, followed by stupor, and those much addicted to it soon suffer from regular delirium tremens." Torday, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

The main reasons are probably due to the belief that the eating of human flesh inspires courage, transmits mysterious, magic powers, or is absolutely essential for the performing of fetishistic ceremonies. Famine has been suggested as another reason. Those eaten are almost invariably wounded, killed, or captured prisoners of war. In some tribes, slaves and elderly people are killed and consumed rather than sold or buried.¹

In areas where cultivation is practiced by the tribes, many "medicines" and rites, both individual and tribal, are considered indispensable to the success of every agricultural enterprise. Medicines are used to increase production and prevent crop failure by natural means. Many taboos of various kinds are observed by the cultivators for the same reason.

Probably the most common among the numerous rites is the one used to produce rain in arid regions and at special times of drought. Ofttimes the most important function of the chief is to obtain adequate rain for his people by performing some type of rainmaking ceremony.² In many tribes there are professional rainmakers or other religious leaders to perform this function. Many other ceremonial rites having to do with agriculture are practiced "before sowing, at the time of the first fruits, and after harvest, when the chiefs' ancestral spirits are either invoked for a bountiful season or thanked for having provided it."³

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1. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 218-227, for detailed descriptions of cannibalistic customs in Bantu tribes.
2. Cf. Schapera, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-269, for descriptions of these ceremonies.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Believing as they do in the supernatural powers of the spirits to control every avenue of existence, the Bantu rely completely on the ancestral spirits for provision of rain and abundant crops, and on the witch-doctors, medicine-men and diviners for analysis of crop-failure and other natural calamities thought to be caused by evil forces. Food is not planted, cultivated, harvested, prepared, and consumed without first praying and offering sacrifices of propitiation to the ancestral spirits, practicing various rites of divination and witchcraft, and observing taboos beyond number. Spirits, whether good or bad, determine the diet of the Bantu.

2. Clothing and Ornamentation.

The type of clothing, of course, varies considerably; 1) from tribe to tribe, depending on the climatic conditions, type of clothing material available, and the various customs of different tribes, and, 2) from person to person, depending on sex, age, and rank. Skins and vegetable fibre are the chief sources for clothing material.

Women and girls usually wear aprons or skirts hanging down in front and back from the waist. Seldom is anything worn above the waist except in cold weather or during special ceremonies. Completely naked "babies are carried on the back in cradleskins slung round the waist and knotted over the breast."¹ In many tribes variations in the girl's clothing occur when passing through the initiation ceremonies, betrothal period, and pregnancy.

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1. Ibid., p. 143.

Men, generally speaking, "wear nothing but a penis sheath of calabash or palm-leaf covering the glans"¹ except in cold weather or during special ceremonies. Sometimes short skin aprons or flaps hanging from the waist are worn. The covering of the genital regions, whether in the form of a flap or a sheath, is worn by boys and serves primarily as protection.²

Ornamentation is very popular, especially among the women of the tribes. The ornamental dress of the men, when worn at all, is limited to a few wire bracelets worn around the wrists and ankles except during ceremonial functions. Beads and wire rings made in varying thicknesses of iron and copper are worn by the women around the neck, arms, ankles, waist, breasts, and in headbands. There is almost no limit to the possibilities for body decoration as is suggested in a work by Emil Holub who says:

Many ornaments are made of bone and ivory, particularly armlets and anklets. There are also ivory discs, sticks with burnt rings and lines which are perforated and worn like beads. Hairpins made of bone or ivory, are as much ornamental as useful; this may be said of the long-toothed, elegantly carved wooden combs . . . Many kinds of ornaments are made of animal hair; the feathers of birds are also used for adornment. Artistic ornaments are plaited of grasses, fibres, raphia, and straw. Claws of birds and animals, the shell of small water-tortoises . . . small tarsus and carpus bones dyed dark or black and polished, seeds, small fruits, etc., are threaded on horse-hair or grass strings and used as bracelets, pendants, rings and hair ornaments.³

Some ornamentation is practiced in most of the tribes in the form of bodily mutilations, tatooing and marking in various ways, enlarging lips by large disks, elongating and stretching ears, head, and

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1. Ibid.

2. Cf. *ibid.*

3. Torday, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

other portions of the skin by weights and bands, or pulling, filing, or knocking out teeth. Most of this, however, is not done merely for ornamental reasons as is so often thought to be the case. On the contrary, most bodily mutilations of all kinds are the direct result of religious ceremonial rites designed to influence the spirits and mark distinctions between certain clans, totems and tribes related to common ancestors. "Ornamentation" as well as clothing is determined almost entirely by the Bantu's reaction to their religious beliefs and practices.

3. Housing and Equipment.

Dwelling places, which are used primarily as bedrooms and storage shelters, are found to be of all kinds, shapes, and varieties. The two main varieties of huts, the "beehive" and the "cone and cylinder,"¹ are constructed with a branch or long sapling framework covered within and without by mud, cowdung, clay, grass, leaves, or a mixture of these. The floor is made of beaten earth and seldom is covered with any grass matting, but rather is frequently smoothed by repeated layers of mud and cowdung. Huts are arranged by households which are easily distinguishable. Clusters of these households form villages, which are sometimes enclosed by wooden fences. In some tribes the huts are arranged by some system of hierarchial discrimination or around a cattle kraal.

With the death of a person, his former abode is destroyed by burning or dismantlement and another structure soon takes its place in another locality, usually selected by divination and inhabited after numerous, traditional, spiritual rituals are performed.

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 144.

Environmental materials are used in any number of ways as a source for household utensils. Clay is used in making large pots for procuring and storing water, brewing and drinking beer, and cooking and eating food. Wood is used for making "headrests, bowls, platters, spoons, grain stampers and stamping blocks, milk pails, and porridge stirrers, as well as sticks, clubs, weapon shafts, pipes, snuff-boxes, divining bowls . . . certain musical instruments, poles for hut-building"¹ and many other minor articles of need. Calabashes are grown for use as "drinking vessels, ladles, snuff boxes, resonators for some musical instruments, and receptacles for ointments, beer, and milk."² Vegetable fibre of grasses and reeds are made into "basket containers of various shapes and sizes, beer strainers, sleeping and eating mats, trays, brooms, and string."³ Animals are used as a source for many needed utensils, as Schapera says:

The horns of animals are used as holders for medicine, or converted into musical instruments, pipes, and snuff-boxes; their bones and tusks are made into ornaments of various kinds, awls for basketwork, snuff-spoons, and divining tables; their teeth and claws are used for necklaces and other ornaments; and their hair is used as the base for wirework or made into switches and ornamental headdresses. Their skins are made into clothing, shields, bags, and bellows.⁴

A bountiful supply of metallic ore is available in most all areas where Bantu tribes are located. "Most tribes can mine in a simple fashion"⁵ and although they are unable to melt iron ore, they can heat it to a high enough temperature in a clay or termite-heap furnace to make possible its being made into a tool or weapon by means of a stone

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1. Ibid., p. 146.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 147.
5. Ibid.

hammer. "Adzes, axes, gouges, and knives, hoes, spears, wire bracelets and many other objects" are shaped by this simple but effective process. In some places copper ore is mined, melted in a furnace, cast into ingots, and drawn through graded holes of a simple drawplate to make wire, which is used for ornamental purposes.

As it is with diet and clothing, so it is with housing; good and bad spirits are thought to be everywhere determining the action of the living. At the building of a new hut, ancestral spirits require sacrifice, prayer, and ritual. At special times of tribal festivities or individual development, the hut must be ritually cleansed. At death, the hut is usually destroyed by fire to drive away the evil spirits. Nothing is made by the Bantu without spiritual significance for spirits are everywhere and in everything.

D. Government and Law

1. Economic Foundation.

The Bantu people are "agricultural-herdsmen"² who also hunt and fish to produce, distribute, and consume food. Cattle are raised in abundance for they "play a part in their whole social, legal and religious life."³ The cattle kraal is often the center of the village activities since the people use cattle as a medium for expressing social relationships by gifts on such occasions as birth, marriage, and death, and relationships with the chief and with the departed ancestors. As Shropshire says:

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1. Ibid.

2. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 42.

3. Ibid., p. 43.

The cattle are less important as a source of meat, milk and leather than as the object of social ambitions, emotions and rivalries. They stand for leadership, a means of expressing ties of relationship, a vital factor in religious life, and are at death one of the chief forms of inheritance.¹

As over against the cattle which are individually owned, the land is communally owned by the tribe under the leadership of the chief.² Though communally owned, the family unit is responsible for its cultivation. Socio-economic status is not dependent on agricultural activities as it is on pastoral activities; however, as stated by Shropshire:

Since success in agriculture depends on tribal religious ceremonies it contributes to the power of the chief, thereby strengthening the cohesion of the tribe itself and, at the same, it stresses the importance of the individual household as an economic and religious unit."³

The economic functions of the family, which is the primary economic unit in both pastoral and agricultural activities, are under direct control of the father. On him depends the general welfare of the family as it participates in these activities. As the father is the controller of the family economy so the chief is the controller of tribal economy. Regarding the economic functions of the chief as well as their foundation, Shropshire, in a summary of a preceeding discussion, states:

The chief organizes tribal activities and regulates the accumulation and distribution of tribal food supplies . . . Not only family but also tribal ties depend on the primary need of food, and the adult does not reach full economic status except in taking part in the tribal hunt and the tribal religious ceremonies . . . Finally the main incentive and drive of this economic quest is, in the first and

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1. Ibid., p. 44.
2. "The chief is theoretical owner of all land, which he distributes by delegation through sub-chiefs and headmen." Ibid., p. 50.
3. Ibid., p. 45.

last resort, that of a religious and moral relationship towards the powers [spiritual] that provide.¹

The economic functions of the family and the tribe are based on communal society which is bound and controlled by animism. Emory Ross, in his recent book, says:

The traditional and "untouched" Africa south of the Sahara is almost wholly an animistic, communal society.² Its animism is essentially like that of all past animist societies, our own included. Animists believe that all objects in nature, animate and inanimate, are inhabited by souls, spirits that may exist in a separate state; that practically all phenomena in nature are caused by these spirits; that food, shelter, health, happiness, progeny, and survival itself are dependent on gaining sufficiently the benevolence of these spirits, or at least on placating, deflecting or neutralizing the malevolent among the spirits.³

The foundation of Bantu economy lies in communalism, and religion in the form of animism "really rules African communalism."⁴

2. Social Division.

a. Tribal Units.

Although organization on a national scale is not unknown to the Bantu, the tribe is usually considered the largest administrative unit of society. Under a patriarchal system of government, the chief is the head and father of his tribe which is supposedly a body of kinsmen all able to trace their descent to a common ancestor.⁵ The chief, being

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1. Ibid., p. 56.

2. "Communal and communalism are used here to refer to primitive social organization where land and goods are possessed in common and the individual is almost wholly subordinated to the community." Emory Ross: African Heritage, p. 9.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 80.

5. In most cases, however, the tribe is not purely related by common descent. Schapera says, "Even the smallest tribe contains many alien families or groups, while in the larger tribes only a small proportion of the people may belong to the original stock . . . The tribe

one who can claim the most direct descent to this common ancestor, is the highest man in the government composed of "regularly graded executive powers, represented by chiefs, each responsible to his immediate senior."¹

In speaking of the tribal social bonds of the Bantu "before they came into contact with the missionaries or any other civilizing influence,"² Molema states the following:

The various members of the tribe were bound together by a strong social element, a kind of unwritten law, a tradition which every member of the tribe was brought up to respect and uphold. If he failed to do this, if he put his personal interests before those of the tribe, or if he did aught that was calculated to serve only a sect rather than the whole tribe, such a person was exposing himself to severe censure from all sides, and even to the danger of violent death—for anti-social practices were considered at once heresy and treason.³

With population numbering anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand, tribes consist of numerous self-supporting and self-sufficing villages grouped together in districts and sub-districts under the jurisdiction of sub-chiefs and headmen. Each village, whose population ranges from fifty to a thousand, is more or less independent of other villages socially, economically, and, to a great extent, politically. The villages are composed of smaller units of patriarchal administration called households.

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(con't from previous page) is . . . an association into which people may be born, or which they may voluntarily join, or into which they may be absorbed by conquest; and which they may, for one reason or another, leave again. Schapera, op. cit., p. 173.

A. Winifred Hoernle also says, "membership of a tribe is determined. . . more by allegiance to a chief than by birth, and the unity of the tribe depends fundamentally on the common loyalty of the tribesmen to their chief." Ibid., p. 69.

1. Molema, op. cit., p. 113.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 114.

b. Family Units.

A. Winifred Hoernle defines the term, "household," as "a group consisting typically of a man with his wife or wives and dependent children, together with any other relatives or unrelated dependents who may be attached to him, but composed frequently also of other combinations of close relatives."¹ She goes on to say:

Within this household, the individual family--or rather a mother and her children--stands out definitely as a group apart, inhabiting its own home. For the Bantu universally allow polygyny in their social system, and a fair proportion of elderly men have several wives, as well as other dependents living in their household with them.²

Many distinguishing characteristics in size, organization, and individual responsibility exist among households of various tribes; however, "polygyny is an ideal which every well-established man strives to attain, and the more important households reveal a complex grouping of wives."³ The household, consisting of a patriarch with his wives and dependent children, his married sons with their families, and possibly also related dependents, may contain one or twenty adults related directly to the patriarch. The number of wives belonging to each man may vary considerably depending on his social rank and wealth. In some tribes the first wife married to a man is always the important one enjoying seniority rights over the others.

Widows, in most cases, remain at the deceased husband's household, where any children they bear are given the same name and status as the children begotten by him. Widows, in some instances, may establish

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 69.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 75.

their own household with their sons, or they may return to their childhood homes. Others are taken by the male next-of-kin to their former husbands, and any children born of this union are regarded as children of the original husband.

Within the household, whether great or small, certain principles of conduct are seen to be at work. They are "the principle of seniority; the principle of the categories of blood kin with distinctive patterns of behavior towards each category; the principle of sex differences; the principle of distinction between kin by blood and kin by marriage."¹

c. Kinship Units.

"Beyond the intimate circle of the household there is a wider circle of the kin, relatives either by birth (blood) or by marriage."² In Western civilization, the family constitutes the basic social unit, whereas Bantu society is based on the grouping together of relatives into clans, though the individual family (household) is everywhere existent. The clan, as the basic social unit of Bantu culture, plays a tremendous part in the establishment of the behavior patterns of the people.

In Bantu culture, a child is born into a world of relatives by either paternal or maternal descent, and these blood relatives, claiming descent from a common ancestor, are linked together socially, economically, and politically. As a member of a clan³ in which whole groups of relatives

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1. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

2. Ibid., p. 70.

3. A clan "includes also the supra-mundane world of departed ancestors of the various groups of family, clan, and tribe." Shropshire, op. cit., p. 5.

are classed with the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brother and sister, one will use the same terms in addressing a large number of relatives as one would use in addressing one's own father or mother.

These clans are extremely powerful in controlling many aspects of Bantu communal life. In most tribes it is the clan that determines the destiny of the children in divorce cases. The clan determines the marriage negotiations. It determines one's social status depending on its dominance in the hierarchical system of government. The clan, because of the tribal patriarchal system of government, can be said to be a dominant controlling factor in all of Bantu economic, social, political, and judicial life. Such is the case because of the Bantu's strong religious beliefs concerning the divine-human nature of the chief and the supernatural controlling powers of the ancestral spirits. All deviations from the traditional social divisions and the corresponding customs involved are thought to anger ancestral spirits, evil spirits, and demons.

3. Political Organization.

As has previously been stated, the basic unit in Bantu social and political administration is the tribe, a unified body of people claiming common descent, having its own name, occupying its own territory, and managing its own affairs under the leadership of a chief. A tribe generally includes a number of towns or villages, each having its distinct head, a subordinate chief who acknowledges the supremacy of the principal one, who is held sacred from his hereditary right to that office. The principal or paramount chief is assisted in the execution of his various duties by councils made up of representatives from local divisions within the tribe which are administered by their respective

heads, assisted by small local councils. In this way, the government can be said to be democratic in that the power of the chief is limited by public sentiment as expressed by his counsellors, who are representatives of the people. However, in many cases the government tends to be more despotic, the chief being little more than a military autocrat.

Chieftainship is hereditary and although in some cases it has been acquired by trickery or force, it is almost invariably intrusted to a son by his father. Policies of succession vary in different tribes to some extent; however, the rightful heir is usually the eldest son of the chief's "principal wife." Succession normally takes place soon after the death of the chief. Concerning this succession Schapera says:

The new chief is first "doctored" with various medicinal charms to give him the power of commanding the obedience and respect of the people. He is then formally invested with the insignia of chieftainship, the occasion often being one of elaborate public ceremonial; is intrusted with the sacred tribal regalia, and enters into the inheritance of his predecessor's household and property.¹

A consciousness of tribal unification comes primarily through the common bond of allegiance to the chief who, as the head of the tribe, occupies a position of outstanding privilege and authority. "He is at once ruler, judge, maker and guardian of the law, repository of wealth, dispenser of gifts, leader in war, priest and magician of his people."² In some tribes, "he is elevated to an almost godlike eminence: his person is sacred, his subjects bow before him in humble adoration and obeisance, and his smallest gesture is greeted with a chorus of fulsome adulation."³

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 175.
2. Ibid., p. 176.
3. Ibid.

Regardless of whether or not the sacred element is everywhere a prime factor to consider in chieftainship, it none-the-less remains generally true that the chief occupies the center of national life and through him the tribe becomes conscious of its unity.

This tribal unity is realized through the chief as the executive head, judicial head, and religious head of the tribe. As executive head, he is responsible for presiding over council meetings in solving any problems of tribal affairs. He must regulate the distribution of land, sowing and harvesting crops, organization of tribal hunts, trade relations, military expeditions, and all other economic activities. As judicial head, he is responsible for maintaining law and order. This involves protecting the rights of his subjects, providing justice for the oppressed, and punishing transgressors of the tribal laws. As religious head,¹ he is often the mediatorial link between the tribe and the ancestral spirits governing their welfare. He is thus responsible for keeping numerous sacred articles and arranging for ritualistic ceremonies, such as rainmaking, purification, initiation, and fetishistic charming. This type of political organization and the manner in which it affects the people can only be understood in the light of their recognition of the higher super-human powers which control them. The Bantu give the chief their full support and they constantly work for his welfare as well as that of the tribe, because they believe that through him the spirits can either be angered or pleased resulting in corresponding cursing or blessing on the tribe.

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1. Religious leaders (i.e., rainmakers, magicians, witch-doctors, etc.) often perform the religious rites, only under direct supervision of the chief.

4. Judicial Administration.

a. Revelation of Law.

Concerning the Kaffir tribe, Rev. Joseph Shooter is quoted as having said, "They 'may be said in their customs to possess laws which meet every crime that may be committed.'"¹ And this, in general, could very well speak for all of the Bantu tribes even though their laws and formal codes are not recorded in written form. They have laws existing, by and large, as traditionally manifested rights and duties developed through the course of history as the people have made attempts to adjust their behavior in relation to their fellowmen and physical environment.

Childhood training by parents supplements a person's conscience in illuminating his thinking in terms of right and wrong conduct. Certain definite rules of behavior are socially accepted through tradition and passed on from one generation to another. Throughout a person's life, his behavior is moulded in such a way as to conform to social norms making for law and order. The principles regulating these social norms of Bantu government are (1) traditional respect for the father of a household or chief of a tribe, (2) his spiritual position as custodian of the household or tribe, and (3) corporate management of household and tribal affairs.² Through generations of thinking, acting, and speaking in relation to the group, individual moral responsibility was developed and revealed in unwritten laws--both civil and criminal.

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1. Torday, op. cit., p. 95.

2. Cf. Shropshire, op. cit., pp. 21-24.

b. Manifestation of Law.

Bantu Law is in practice, although not in theory, divided by the people themselves into two main classes. These may quite conveniently be called civil law and criminal law, although their categories are by no means identical with those of European systems of law. The civil law establishes "inter alia" the private rights of people in regard to personal status, property, and contracts . . . The criminal law treats certain acts . . . as offences harmful to society generally.¹

Civil laws have to do primarily with breaches of contract (i.e., betrothal and marriage, service, permissive use of property by gift, barter, or sale), offences against family rights (i.e., seduction and adultery), offences against property rights (i.e., theft, destruction, and trespass), and offences against reputation.² Criminal laws judge "all offences against tribal authorities acting in their official capacity; homicide, serious bodily assault, and similar offences against the person; sorcery, incest, and other 'unnatural acts.'"³

These civil and criminal offences are looked upon quite differently by the Bantu than by Western civilization even though the penal measures are, in most cases, very severe. Rev. E. Casalis, in working with the Basuto tribe, is quoted as saying:

Suto "idea of property, which is at the root of all their social relationships, places all delinquencies in the category of theft. The greatest of crimes, murder, is less condemned as an outrage upon public safety, as a violation of the sacred rights of a father, who is deprived of the services of his son, or a widow and orphans, who are left without support. Adultery, when it is punished, is not considered so much in the light of an offense against decency, as an illegitimate appropriation of the exclusive rights which the husband has acquired by the purchase of a wife."⁴

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 199.
2. Cf. ibid., pp. 200-208.
3. Ibid., p. 199.
4. Torday, op. cit., p. 95.

The superimposed distinction between civil and criminal law is not clearly perceived as such in Bantu thinking, and thus, many civil injuries are also treated as crimes and certain crimes (especially those against bodily security) may also give rise to civil remedies. Concerning the former, the offender is forced to suffer punishment as well as make amends to his victim. Justice demands a compensation for every transgression of the law.

c. Transgression of Law.

Penal measures differ widely depending on several factors; however, as Schapera states:

The most common punishment is the imposition of a fine, generally also in livestock. The amount varies, "according to the position of the offender, the enormity of his offence, his previous record and his ability to pay," from a single beast to the confiscation of his entire property.¹

The offenders of civil law are usually sentenced to some form of punishment or compensation. As a trespasser, he must remove himself; as a thief, he must return stolen property; as a contract breaker, he must fulfill contract obligations. As an offender of a wrong which cannot be undone, such as seduction, property damage, and defamation, he must pay compensation. Although protection through the limitation of self-vengeance is afforded the offender in most cases; in some exceptional instances² in certain tribes, the offended one is considered justified in punishing the offender himself. An offender may receive corporal punishment as an alternative for compensation. "Certain other offences,

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 200.

2. "In some cases, such as the killing or assaulting of an adulterer, homicide, or thief caught red-handed." Ibid.

in most tribes, may be punished by bodily mutilation, such as depriving an habitual offender of his ears or hands."¹ Banishment, torture, and death, all of which are usually accompanied by the confiscation of property, are common outcomes of offenders of more serious crimes.

Because of the theory that all the members of a tribe belong to, and give strength to, the chief, any offence is looked upon as a direct offence to the chief who is thus the one to whom all just retribution is due. All compensation is claimed by him, and he levies and receives the fines whether they be in terms of cattle, wives, or property. "The chief may and sometimes does give a portion of the fine to the person injured; but this is a gift by him, and not compensation claimable of right by the injured man."² The chief, as the apex of the social structure, is the ultimate authority for the legislation and administration of the law.

d. Legislation and Administration of Law.

The chief . . . is not only king but priest; not only ruler and arbitrator but also pray-er, intercesser and sacrificer. This fact must never be lost sight of, for it is the very essence of Bantu government: it is divine, and the person of the chief is sacred.³

To the Bantu the supernatural world is homogeneous with the natural world. Laws are more than mere legal, authoritative and governing principles; they are attempts "to correlate divine action and nature's laws with human laws and regulations, and involves responsibility for even the normal working of forces wholly beyond our power of control."⁴

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 208.
3. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 20.

Because the chief is the representative of the supernatural world of departed ancestors who interfere with and control human affairs, he is the ultimate authority for the legislation and administration of the law. These laws are legislated and administered to "ensure the normal functioning of nature's immutable laws,"¹ such as continued fertility of land, cattle and tribe, regular cycle of seasons, rain control, sickness, and death. Believing the supernatural forces of the spirit world to be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the regulating of these natural laws, the Bantu people under their "divine-human and sacred"² chief, legislate civil laws.

Though the chief is the ultimate authority for the legislation and administration of the law, Bantu government is more democratic than autocratic in that the affairs of the tribe are handled by the people through representatives to the tribal councils. These representatives are usually the chief's private advisers and distant relatives, all of whom are sub-chiefs and headmen of local divisions of districts and villages. Though ultimate control of tribal affairs rests in the hands of the chief and great reverence is attached to him by virtue of his birth, his authoritative power is greatly limited by the existence of these councils which may accept, modify, or reject any political decisions that he puts before them.

Each local unit within the tribe is governed under the jurisdiction of recognized authority. The smallest local unit under tribal jurisdiction, the sub-district or ward, is under the control of a sub-chief or headman² who is responsible to the chief for the law and order

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1. Ibid.

2. The sub-chief or headman is sometimes a member of the chief's family and sometimes a commoner.

of his area, in which he is the chief's representative. The sub-chief or headman usually has a council whose duties are similar to those of the chief's council. His duties, as outlined by Schapera are as follows:

He must help his people in their troubles, and sponsor them before the chief; he regulates their occupation and use of land, and controls the right of strangers to settle there; he prays and sacrifices on their behalf to his ancestors, and performs other ceremonies for their well-being and protection . . . he has power to impose fines and other forms of punishment. He must further see that his people pay the customary forms of tribute and carry out the commands of the chief conveyed to him by special messengers or at council meetings.¹

Apart from the various tribal councils, both large and small, the chiefs and sub-chiefs have courts in which they try cases over which they have jurisdiction. They appoint their own court members who are usually selected from senior paternal relatives, private political advisers, and "elderly commoners noted for their sagacity and knowledge of precedents."² The competence and authority of a court depends on its position of authority in the tribal hierarchy which ranges from the headman's and sub-chief's courts of very limited jurisdiction to the chief's court of supreme judicial authority, competent to try cases on appeal from all lower courts.³

The source, nature, legislation, administration and results of the law are rooted in the Bantu's religious beliefs and practices. Though the laws remain unwritten, he obeys them because of spiritual authority. He believes not only that the ancestral spirits originated them but also that the chief and other religious leaders have the authority

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1. Schapera, op. cit., p. 185.

2. Ibid., p. 212.

3. Cf. ibid., pp. 214-219, for description of court procedure and jurisdiction.

through spiritual contact to administer them. Thus one can see that ancestral spirits, evil spirits, demons and other spiritual powers act as a fearful, all-seeing police force to govern the action of society and to put authority behind all the tribal laws.

E. Individual Development

1. Birth and Childhood.

Childbirth is one of the greatest events of the Bantu's life; and, because a man's social status is measured in terms of the number of wives in his household while a woman's social status is measured in terms of the number of children she bears, there is much religious significance attached to the birth and childhood of each person.

Children of both sexes are very much desired. Boys are especially desirable because they both represent the family to the spirit world (by means of offering sacrifices and consulting diviners and doctors) and carry on the family name giving the family more prestige in the hierarchical social scheme. Girls are wanted because they take care of household duties and field work as well as represent wealth in the form of "bride-price."¹ Speaking of the Ila-Peoples of Northern Rhodesia, Smith and Dale have written the following which seems to express adequately the general feeling of all Bantu tribes:

To have children, and many of them, is one of the great ambitions of our natives. Any man will tell you that to leave children, especially sons, when he departs from this earth is one of the greatest desires of his heart. He who fails in this respect is regarded by

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1. Cf. post, p. 64. "Bride-price" or "lobola" is the transferring of goods (usually cattle) to the bride's family by the groom at marriage.

others, and he regards himself, as something less than a man.¹

That "a child grows by medicine" is a characteristic belief and seems to permeate the Bantu philosophy of child-rearing. The supernatural forces of spirits are called upon in many ways to avert evil intervention and secure only blessing. Believing that early childhood is a very important but difficult stage because the child is weak and thus liable to injury by harmful spiritual forces, the baby is not weaned from its mother until it is two or three years old.²

During this period prior to weaning, the child is "strengthened" by the wearing of fetishes or the performance of numerous rites. For example, in performing an early childhood rite in some tribes, "the child is held in the smoke of burning animal charms, given medicine to drink, and scarified and rubbed with the charred remains of the charms."³ The child is also named soon after birth usually by one of the four principal ways. He may be given the same name 1) as a chief, 2) as an ancestor, 3) as one who asks such a favour of his parents, or 4) he may be given a name having some connection with the circumstances of his birth.⁴ Later in life he may be given other names in connection with initiations, clans, and totems; however the birth-name is usually the one used by the parents and others of the same generation.

After weaning, the child is free to associate with other children whose ages are quite close to his. They play and work together as a

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1. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 61, as quoted in Smith and Dale: Ila-People of Northern Rhodesia, Vol. 2, p. 1.
2. Usually during this time, sexual intercourse is practiced by the parents but pregnancy is taboo.
3. Schapera, op. cit., p. 95.
4. Cf. Shropshire, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

group, recognized as such by their elders. Boys and girls play with dolls, clay oxen, string figures, and games of singing, dancing, testing of knowledge and skills, and make belief. At an early age of five and six boys begin to work by herding lambs and calves while the girls begin by caring for younger brothers and sisters and helping with small household chores. Later, at the age of ten or twelve, the boys begin to herd cattle all day while the girls, by this time, should be capable of doing all the housework and fieldwork expected of a woman, such as grinding, cooking, and hoeing.

There is a definite transition period between later childhood and adolescence. By the time of adolescence the Bantu child has known the meaning of separation from the household and the loving care of a mother; but, as Shropshire states it:

He has now to go through a more concentrated form of detachment from all the blessings and advantages and privileges the tribe has to offer, and again to be reintegrated or reborn in devotion to, and dependence on, those in the tribe and family from whom all these blessings and privileges are derived. This detachment, death, rebirth and reintegration is brought about in the initiation ceremonies.¹

The Bantu conceives of the development of the individual as a series of transitional periods distinctly marked off from one another. To facilitate the successful passing from one period to another, it is deemed expedient to secure the pleasure of supernatural forces acting for either good or bad. Thus the Bantu child must go through various rites and ceremonies as he begins his more "formal education"² in the initiation schools.

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1. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 81.
2. Schapera, op. cit., p. 99.

2. Education and Initiation.

Although the educational, philosophical trends have been changing somewhat in recent years through the influence of John Dewey and his contemporary disciples, education in Western civilization has been essentially the handing down from one generation to another of a system of knowledge whereby one can adequately cope with the problems of everyday life. In contrast to this philosophy, Bantu education is not so much handing down knowledge as it is appealing to spirits. It is not so much what one knows; but rather what one does that matters. Ritual must be performed, taboos must remain unbroken, and traditional customs must be faithfully followed in order to cope with the problems of everyday life. Knowledge must be transferred from one generation to another; but this knowledge is in terms of ritual, taboos, traditional customs and skills--not science.

This knowledge is not transferred formally until the Bantu child has reached the developmental level of adolescence at which time he enters an initiation school. Boys usually enter a circumcision school¹ at this time, and girls usually enter a puberty school or at least a series of puberty ceremonies² which may even be accompanied by female circumcision.

The circumcision school for boys normally lasts but a few months at the end of which they emerge as adult men accepted back into

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1. "Circumcision is widespread in South Africa . . . The uncircumcised is considered a boy all his life, may take no part in the councils and deliberations of men, is looked down upon by women and may not marry." Ibid., pp. 100-101.
2. Puberty ceremonies for girls are held at or about the time of their first menstruation. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 100.

the tribe. Many taboos are recognized. The school is taboo to every uninitiated person and especially women. Sexual intercourse and certain foods and ceremonies may be forbidden during this period. Obscene language in ordinary speech and special songs are encouraged. Much pain is suffered by the initiates to prove "that they are new men,"¹ and to teach them endurance, obedience, and manliness. This suffering comes not only by crude circumcision methods and improper healing practices but by trials of inflicted beatings, exposure to heat or cold, thirst, hunger, eating unsavoury food, and punishment sometimes culminating in death. The boys are instructed in building huts, making reed mats, spears, axes, baskets and household needs, making animal traps and weapons, hunting techniques and all other skills necessary for community welfare. They are taught their duties and functions in all religious ceremonies and their obligations to the various unwritten laws--especially in regards to married life.

Puberty ceremonies and circumcision² schools for girls are much the same in character and serve essentially the same function as those for the boys. Taboos of all kinds are observed. In many schools the girls "are severely beaten, their meals of dry porridge must, like those in the boys' circumcision school, be eaten very quickly, and unpleasant tasks, such as that of eating fresh cowdung, are set."³ They are

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1. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 83.

2. In tribes where female circumcision is practiced, "some time during the school the operation, usually a cut on the clitoris is performed and the ceremony is ended in a dance and feast." Schapera, op. cit., p. 105.

3. Ibid.

instructed in sexual matters and the duties, privileges and responsibilities involved in married life. They are taught all the finer points of household arts and skills in preparation for making adaptations to adult life into which they enter as soon as departure from the school is accomplished.

The instruction given to the boys and girls during the puberty rites gives them a deep respect for their elders and ancestors. This respect is in reality a religious veneration of elders and is rooted in their beliefs that the spirits are the custodians and quarantors of the honour of past generations and that increased age makes one nearer to being a part of the spirit world. Upon this concept the whole Bantu social order is based and everything is done in direct relationship to the spirit world. So too, the puberty rites are effected and controlled by the religious beliefs and practices concerning this spiritual relationship. J. Raum emphasizes this and elaborates by saying:

The puberty rites, indeed, stand in direct relationship to the spirit world; therefore a veil of gruesome mystery lies over the rites. The dominating thought is the wonderful fact of the transition from childhood to manhood, the awakening of the power of procreation. . . . The awakening of the ability to propagate the race is a mysterious process. A new, creative power bursts up from the depths of nature. Its origin, for people at this stage of development, is not simple natural law but the mighty hosts of former living souls. As barrenness is the stroke of the spirits, so fruitfulness is their gift. Offerings to the spirits, therefore, find place both at the beginning and at the close of the rites Masks worn during the ceremonies by the initiates . . . are considered to represent the demon-spirits into relationship with which they now enter. The whole ceremony is under the protecting and menacing guardianship of the spirits.¹

The function of each school varies considerably within the tribe and between tribes; however, broadly speaking, the schools seem

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1. J. Raum: "Puberty Rites and the Church," The International Review of Missions, Vol. XVI, No. 64, October 1927, p. 584.

to serve as a bridge spanning the gap between two distinct stages of growth making possible the adaptation of an individual to adult life. The teachings which best make possible these adaptations and thus bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood are summarized by Schapera as follows:

The qualities believed by the Bantu to be most important for success in adult life are ability to bear children and strength, courage, and endurance in the work of life; hence these things are emphasized in the schools. In addition they learn to honor the chief and tribal custom, respect those older than themselves, value those things which are of value to the society, and observe tribal taboos, especially those connected with sex life.¹

3. Sex Life and Marriage.

a. Sex Life.

To the Bantu, sex and sin are not synonymous terms as is so often thought to be the case by Western Christians. They consider sexual relations imperative in numerous rites because of its value in the reproduction of life. Thus, in many tribes sexual intercourse is an integral part of many ceremonies, such as those connected with moving into a new hut or new village and purifying a widow or a homicide. On certain occasions such as right after childbirth, during initiation school periods, and after a death, any sexual relations are forbidden.

Because the Bantu believe that "the sex life and functions of the individual . . . influence nature,"² there are many restrictions and limitations placed upon women during the menstrual periods. Abortions, twins, miscarriages and other abnormalities in child-bearing are thought

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1. Ibid., p. 106.

2. Ibid., p. 108.

to have effects on the rain, crops, soil or cattle disease. Some think that "a certain 'uncleanmess' or defilement"¹ can come from sexual intercourse practiced at the wrong time thus preventing the healing of wounds and the recovery of diseases. For these reasons many rites of cleansing, purification, and propitiation are performed to appease the grieved spirits who control the forces of nature.

"In all the Southern Bantu tribes the birth of a child out of wedlock is frowned upon as an offence, and sexual morality consists in avoiding this and in observing sexual taboos."² However, even before puberty, children will "play at sexual intercourse"³ with toleration from parents. Premarital sexual intercourse is morally sanctioned and is a "socially recognized and controlled institution."⁴ Considerable sexual freedom pervades within marriage in most tribes though adultery is disapproved and constitutes grounds for divorce or punishment by fine.⁵

b. Marriage.

After a child passes through all the required initiation ceremonies and schools to be classed as an adult, he is ready for marriage. Marriage is the uniting of a husband and wife by contract; however, in Bantu society this contract is not so much between two individuals as it is between two families, involving many relatives. In some tribes, a man may know all his life whom his destined wife is because he is permitted to marry only a certain relative in the kinship group. Others do

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., pp. 108-109.
3. Ibid., p. 109.
4. Cf. ibid.
5. Cf. ibid., pp. 107-111.

not permit marriages within close kinship groups thus allowing for more freedom of choice; however, the families of the two individuals almost invariably make the choice.¹

The boys parents are usually supposed to open marriage negotiations. In this matter of starting negotiations the customs are so varied it is practically impossible to suggest a general practice carried on by the Bantu people. Any one of a number of ways are used in various tribes. The boy at the expense of his father, may offer the girl's parents a gift of cattle, sheep, ornaments or garden tools to make known his desire to have her as his wife; he may send a messenger or go-between either with or without presents; a feast may be served between the parents of the two parties; taboos may be observed; the father, brother, or a friend may take the girl from one household to another in hopeful anticipation of a proposal; an animal may be killed and taken to the town where the girl's father lives and where, after a brief ritual, the father becomes aware of an offer for her; even abduction or elopement may be lawfully practiced.²

With the opening of negotiations between the two parties the very important question of "lobola" or "bride-money"³ arises. In most

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1. Sometimes those about to marry are allowed to voice their own reaction (whether positive or negative) to a suggested contract though it still remains in the hands of the parents to make the legal transactions.
2. Cf. Torday, op. cit., pp. 31-34, for further description of the different ways used in opening and carrying out marriage negotiations.
3. The term "bride-money" is often used for this practice; however, it may leave an erroneous idea of paying lobola, for "apart from the fact that the words for selling and for paying lobola are not the same, the husband has no rights of property or possession over the woman, nor can he dispose of her or ill-treat her. Lobola is not a dowry, for 'the cattle are where the girl is not' . . ." Schapera, op. cit., p. 113.

Bantu tribes, the following definition of lobola as recorded by Posselt is considered valid and reliable. He says:

Uku lobola (delivery of dowry) may be defined as a contract . . . by which the future husband (or his family on his behalf) delivers or promises to deliver to the father . . . of the future wife, stock or other property, in consideration of which the legal custody of the children born of the marriage is vested in the father (or his family) to the exclusion of any member of the mother's family.¹

In essence lobola ("or the handing over of cattle in marriage")² is for the transferring of the custody of the children to their father. Until the required lobola has been paid, the girl and her off-spring remain the property of her family and clan. But as soon as this has been paid by the boy, she and her off-spring are his, whether he is their real father or not. The ante-nuptial delivery of required lobola may or may not be necessary to the validity or culmination of the marriage; however, in most cases where its delivery is necessary, the man and woman live together and even bear children before the legal contract of marriage has been culminated. In many tribes this delivery of lobola is a life-long process--perhaps even with no finality.³ Others may prefer to hand over lobola before the birth of the first child or after the birth of each child. The amount of lobola given varies from one or two calves to many cattle depending on the economic conditions of the times, social status in the hierarchy, and traditional customs of the respective tribes. "Lobola has many aspects; but its importance lies in the fact that lobola is marriage and to the Southern Bantu marriage without lobola is inconceivable."⁴

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1. As quoted by Torday, op. cit., p. 32.
2. Schapera, op. cit., p. 113.
3. Ibid., p. 114.
4. Ibid., p. 113.

Bantu marriage seems to be a complex legal transaction involving the negotiations over a lengthened period of time between two families and their respective kin. At the close of the traditional negotiations the girl, if she hasn't been living with the boy, will go to live in her new home where usually a beast will be slaughtered to secure the blessings of the ancestors and a feast will be given to announce publicly the termination of the legal transactions.¹ In some cases the marriage may be considered to be complete until either all the lobola has been paid or children have been born. If no children are conceived by the woman, either a new wife must be provided by her family or the lobola must be returned for, because of the very essence of lobola, "sterility is a cause for divorce, and the only alternative to divorce and the return of the lobola is the replacement of the wife by some other woman of the family."²

Only as father and mother of a family can a boy and girl become complete and full adult members of a tribe, with a full participation in its life, and to this end their whole education, training and instruction have been directed.³

4. Old Age and Death.

After marriage the individual is recognized as a full member of the community with all the privileges and duties that this entails. As the years go by, his status grows ever greater in this society in which respect for age is so marked a characteristic. Mature age is the Bantu ideal: the old man is honoured for his wisdom and experience while the old woman enjoys respect and freedom from many taboos of her younger days.⁴

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1. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 115.
Cf. Shropshire, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
2. Cf. Shropshire, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
4. Schapera, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

This respect for old age so prevalent in Bantu society is due largely to the fact that the elderly people "are regarded as belonging more to the other world than to this."¹ In other words they are practically ancestors, which means they will soon occupy a position in the spiritual world where they will have power to protect and help their descendants, as well as to punish them.²

"It is appointed unto men once to die"³ and to the Bantu it means nothing more than the passing from this life into a new life in the spirit world. Hence, as is the custom at other changes of individual developmental stages, such as puberty and marriage, numerous, elaborate religious ceremonies are performed--more as a communal affair than an individual experience. The death ceremonies assure both the individual and society that survival as a spirit comes after death. "The people are perpetually concerned with maintaining a perpetual contact with the unseen world"⁴ through this survival, and so, at death, ceremonies are performed. "There is a wailing and lamentation, a fond farewell, sacrifices, and sometimes a last meal with the deceased."⁵ Taboos of all sorts are observed. The body is handled with loving care, cleansed shaved, perfumed, wrapped and buried with personal possessions, ornaments, and food.⁶ The spirit, though thought to go into a spirit world of ancestors,

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1. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 143.

2. Schapera, op. cit., p. 254.

3. Hebrews 9:27.

4. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 148.

5. Ibid., p. 149.

6. In some more primitive tribes, it is a common practice to kill wives or slaves of the deceased to bury with him. For detailed descriptions of various customs connected with death, preparation of body, disposal of corpse and funeral rites practiced in African tribes (not all Bantu), cf. Torday, op. cit., pp. 189-208.

goes to meet the Creator-Redeemer and await the coming judgment.

F. Conclusion

This chapter has been an attempt to record a study of the physical cultural characteristics of the Bantu tribes of Southern Africa particularly as they are effected by the spiritual conceptions of the people.

It was noted that the Bantu religious beliefs and practices constitute "the basis of their political institutions, the pre-supposition of their law and ethics, and the key to an understanding of their social life."¹ This being the case, chapter two began by a brief study of the religious beliefs and practices characteristic of the Southern Bantu culture even though the first chapter dealt entirely on the subject of primitive religion. The Bantu, as are other primitives, is animistic in his beliefs in that he believes in spirits, ghosts, demons and witches. The spirits of ancestors are thought to "have power to protect and help their descendants, as well as to punish them"² and "so a certain well-defined conduct towards them is traditionally prescribed"³ in the form of ancestral worship, fetishism, totemism, and taboo. Then too, evil spirits, demons, witches and other super-human evil powers exist everywhere to harm people, and so religious leaders are called upon to negate, or at least decrease, maleficient action by using witchcraft, magic, sorcery, and divination.

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 1.
2. Schapera, op. cit., pp. 247-249.
3. Ibid., p. 254.

Captivated, controlled, and motivated thus by an intense fear of these supernatural powers, the Bantu's culture is permeated with numerous and varied ritualistic ceremonies and taboos. In certain ways, they eat some things and not others; they wear some things and not others; and they build some things and not others. Various sacrifices are offered to the ancestral spirits in almost every activity that takes place in Bantu society. In fact, their whole economy is based on the "religious and moral relationship towards the powers that provide."¹ Social divisions are made on the basis of maternal and paternal descent from common ancestors who are now elevated to a position of divine authority in a spirit world somewhere. They are politically organized and judicially administered under a chief, one who can claim most direct descent from the common ancestor of the tribe. From birth to death, an individual's life is governed by forces beyond his control, and so, at times of change in an individual's growth countless rites are performed, fetishes are worn, taboos are observed, diviners are consulted, and witch-doctors are called upon--all to liberate him from the intense fear that has gripped his soul.

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1. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 56.

CHAPTER THREE

PROBLEMS OF ACCULTURATION FACING MISSIONARIES

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A. Introduction

From a study of the previous chapter, one who is inherently linked with Western civilization immediately becomes aware of cultural differences existing between one's own culture and that of the Bantu. Though aware of these differences, oftentimes one remains blinded as to the myriad problems of acculturation which result when the two cultures make contact. Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to make note of the problems resulting from these cultural differences from the viewpoint of the "Western," Protestant Christian missionary called of God to serve in such a primitive culture as that of the Bantu. Solutions to these problems and recommendations as to missionary policy may be suggested; however, the primary concern will be to enable the reader to acquire an awareness of the problems and thus to stimulate his interest and motivate his action toward further research as to their solutions.

Regretful and ironic to say, Islam, Roman Catholicism, Communism, The Standard Oil Company, and other external elements of Western civilization have in many cases contacted the primitive areas long before evangelical Protestantism. Excluding the numberless problems thus involved, the missionary's problems of acculturation could arbitrarily fall into two categories; namely, those having to do with his own adaptations to the primitive culture and those concerning the primitive's

adaptations to the Christian Way of Life. In approaching these problems, both categories will be dealt with simultaneously, with more emphasis being placed on the latter because of its present day dominance and relevance.

The problems concerning the latter seem to have their roots in interpretive differences as to the nature and extent of the primitive's separation from the "old way of life" to the "new way of life." When an American becomes a Christian, he still remains an American, and even though he is "a new man in Christ Jesus," he must still remain in a society dominated by the "old man." Obviously this condition gives rise to many ramified problems which must be solved both by the individual and the Church, which is ideally a body of unified believers. So too, the Bantu believer is a Bantu Christian, no longer of the world, yet called to live a life on a higher, supernatural plane in the world. He must separate himself from the sinful ways of the world and live a righteous life of Christian testimony in the world.

Concerning this universal problem of separation from the world, one may draw the line anywhere between two extremes--entire association or entire separation. The establishment of this line of demarcation constitutes a real problem to each individual believer. It multiplies into many more when the Church, as a body of believers, attempts to unite on this line to promote Christian fellowship necessary for the maintenance of an effective witness. One can draw this line only in the light of his past experiences, both with the Holy Spirit and with man. Divine conviction interpreted through human experience gives the basis for its establishment. Thus, when the fellowship of believers consists of people

whose behavior has been entirely patterned by different cultural backgrounds of human experience, the interpretations are bound to differ. The difference in these interpretations give rise to most of the problems of acculturation to be dealt with in this chapter.

A list of six principles governing the relationship between the missionary and indigenous culture will be stated at the outset to establish an initial awareness of the problems to be considered. These principles are the result of the combined efforts of missionaries in Kodai Kanai, South India and the Hyderabad State Christian Council to unite on suggested solutions to the missionary's problems of acculturation. Although they were written from the viewpoint of the Indian primitive culture, they may be validly applicable to other primitive cultures, including the Bantu. They are as follows:

Firstly, those customs which are essential to the followers of Jesus Christ and for the edification of His Church must be adopted. Monogamy and the whole framework of the Christian family may be cited as an example . . . It is also essential in the Christian marriage ceremony that the man and the woman should make their vows to each other before God and not merely that there should be a contract between two families . . .

Secondly, those customs which are unchristian must be given up. Idol worship, placation of evil spirits, caste, the colour bar, child marriage and the degradation of widows are a few examples . . .

Thirdly, those customs which are socially expedient should be adopted, even though they be sanctioned by religious beliefs that are unchristian; for such beliefs can be purged. For example, frequent bathing should be continued, with science rather than the ceremonial law as the sanction . . .

Fourthly, those customs which are socially destructive should be surrendered or altered. This includes all that puts life, health or happiness in jeopardy. The unscientific and superstitious treatment of disease (e.g., applying cowdung to wounds), the lack of sanitation, the uncle-niece marriage and the eating of carrion may be cited as examples of injurious customs that should be given up.

Fifthly, those customs which are neither unchristian nor socially destructive may be adopted or rejected as desired. Examples are: vegetarianism, both burial and cremation, modes of worship and ritual, postures in prayer and styles of dress.

Sixthly, those customs which are not essential to Christianity, nor socially destructive, but which tend to restrict the expansion of the Gospel or limit the Christian fellowship, should be surrendered.¹

Before passing hasty judgment upon these six principles perhaps it would be best to consider the problems further for "many customs and ceremonies, particularly those connected with birth, puberty, marriage and death, will involve more than one principle."² All problems, whether social, economic, judicial, physical, or mental are rooted and grounded in religious problems. They all seem to be an outgrowth of the religious beliefs and practices inherent in the Bantu culture.

B. Problems of Religious Beliefs and Practices

1. General Problems.

All of the religious beliefs and practices of the Bantu people are not fallacious, such as belief in one Supreme Being, power of evil spiritual forces, immortality of the soul, and efficacy of propitiatory sacrifices; while others are, such as belief in the authority of ancestral spirits and power of fetishes, totemic affiliation, and witches. Because the propagation of the Christian message must be in religious terminology understood by the receivers, it is absolutely essential that a missionary acquire such an understanding of the beliefs and practices as to make possible adequate meaningful communication. How is such an understanding to be acquired? How can one best utilize the positive beliefs to aid the primitive in his own thinking? Wherein is

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1. C. Dermott Monahan: "The Christian Church and Indigenous Culture," International Review of Missions, Vol. XXXIV, October 1945, No. 136, pp. 397-399.
2. Ibid., p. 399.

such utilization possible? These and many other questions could be raised; however, the beliefs themselves constitute tangible problems mostly insofar as they are manifested in practices incompatible with Christian teaching. Practices of totemism, ancestral worship, fetishism, divination, witchcraft and many others give rise to many problems because of the tenacious grasp they have on the people. Probably the greatest problems by far can be classed under the name of witchcraft.

2. Witchcraft.

Because the Bantu, as typical of other primitive people, are so bound by fear of evil spirits, demons, and witches, the medicine-men and witch-doctors have a tremendous grasp on their every action. They believe that some supernatural spiritual force is behind every moment of suffering, every natural calamity, every accident, every ceremony and literally everything within the realm of human experience. So ingrained is this belief and intense fear in the life philosophy of the Bantu that his becoming a Christian often times does not negate all his previous fears. Temptations, powers, and fears are continually driving Bantu believers back into the old pitfalls of witchcraft.¹ For this reason witchcraft "is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, hindrances and stumbling blocks in the way of Christian missionary work"²

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1. Little has been said concerning the work of Satan in the religious beliefs and practices (esp. witchcraft) because its being such a controversial issue among Biblical scholars makes a separate study absolutely necessary if the topic is even mentioned. However, the writer of this thesis is fully aware that the temptations, powers, and fears which so easily beset the people are the direct result of the deceiver, Satan, who "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," and his cohorts, evil spirits and demons.
2. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 407.

in Africa. The following quotation places emphasis on this problem.

Rev. Calloway, a missionary in South Africa, has said:

Although there is much effort to conceal the fact, every experienced missionary in these parts [South Africa] knows how tenaciously the old beliefs in sorcery cling to the minds of our Christian people, and how great is the temptation in times of sickness to believe that they are the victims of sorcery, and that only the witch-doctor, so called, can protect them. What is new to most of us is that some of our Christians themselves are being captured by witch-doctors, to be trained themselves for the profession.¹

The problem seems to be essentially this: How can the missionary adequately prevent this common occurrence of regression back into the old ways of witchcraft? Is there some kind of educational policy which could be applied in the training of new converts to prevent this? If, after joining the church upon confession of faith, a believer goes to a witch-doctor, consults a diviner, or participates in some other associated practice, should he be excommunicated from the church? If so, upon what conditions should such "backsliders" be permitted back into the fellowship of believers?

C. Problems in Social Organization

1. Communalism.

In his recent book, African Heritage, Emory Ross states:

Africa is truly and wholeheartedly communalist in its traditional way of life. It has communal ownership of land within (but not usually among) the diverse tribal groups. Its barter economy, which includes the manufacture of articles by hand, has full communal control. All of its social affairs are communally managed. Its education is almost completely communal. So are its recreation and its political organization. But through all this communalism, there is

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1. As quoted from a letter by Rev. Calloway in the Cowley Evangelist, February, 1935. Ibid.

a God, known from afar and recognized in his power. There is a religion, animism. And that spiritual belief, primitive and inadequate as it is, is the most powerful single control of this whole communal organism.

African animistic communalism has, like all social systems, its weaknesses and its strengths. It is full of superstitions. It has within it oppression and terrorism . . . In it the individual has small freedom. But at least there has been a solidarity that has enabled man to exist.¹

This tribal solidarity resulting from communal living has been "one of Christianity's greatest obstacles."² The Christian message demands individual response. To become a Christian, one must personally receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of one's life. To so do, may involve individual deviation from accustomed participations in the social activities of everyday life. It is extremely difficult for an individual in Bantu communal society to make a personal choice of action apart from the tribe. Such a conception is almost beyond his reasoning capacity because he thinks only in terms of communal living. This has always been a great problem in the church of South Africa. Rev. Seth Mokitimi states it in the past tense from the viewpoint of the individual Bantu by saying:

He and his family were part of a tribe and all his thoughts and actions were in terms of how the tribe thought and acted. He had never felt able to strike off in a new path on his own. Where the tribe moved "en masse" into Christianity the matter was easy; but where, as often had to be the case, an individual had to decide to hive off and cast away the beliefs of the family and tribal tradition in response to the call of the new faith, it was not easy. Many an individual was torn in conflict, and deterred by fear of the ancestral spirits. Christianity required conversion as a personal matter, an affair between God and individual man.³

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1. Emory Ross: African Heritage, p. 80.
2. Ibid., p. 23 (quoted from a letter by the Rev. Seth M. Mokitimi of the Union of South Africa).
3. Ibid.

Then too, the Christian message is all-inclusive in that "whosoever will may come," whereas the Bantu communal social structure is exclusive in that exclusory distinctions are made between clans, age groups, totems, sex, and other tribal social groups. To a large extent these distinctions govern intra and inter-tribal action. The individual governs his actions only in terms of the particular groups to which he is affiliated. Until the all-inclusive message of Christianity takes root in the Bantu's thinking, he cannot possibly comprehend the inclusion of other groups outside of his own in the accomplishment of any cooperative enterprise. Tribal solidarity is not negated by such exclusive elements for the tribe moves "en masse" cooperatively on all enterprises sanctioned by the chief for the welfare of the tribe. However, there still remain all the intra-tribe exclusive social elements such as kinship, sex, and age, as well as inter-tribe exclusion through difference in ancestral lineage.

Christianity with its all-inclusive elements is based on individual action. African communalism with its exclusive elements is based on communal action. In view of these facts, it is no wonder that the missionary's problems of acculturation are multiplied. What approach is the missionary with a personal message to use in a communal society? Would it be possible to strive for community conversion rather than individual conversion? To what extent can concentration of missionary effort be effective in reaching key men of society (i.e., chiefs, sub-chiefs and religious leaders)? What are the possibilities, limitations, and problems involved in establishing a Christian Community?¹ Can this

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1. Emory Ross, on pp. 32-39, discusses the ramifications of the problems

Christian community be regarded as a part of the Bantu communal society rather than as something alien, externally imposed? Or should it be set up apart from the tribe? How can a missionary aid in the prevention of detribalization with its subsequent demoralization which is the usual outcome of external imposition—including Christianity? What part does education, both individually and communally play in the establishment of Christian community and the prevention of detribalization?

In making suggestions for a re-orientation of native education and mission policy, John Graham and Ralph Piddington have made the following contribution:

A comprehensive and carefully planned educational policy is clearly called for . . . It will involve consideration of educational policy against the background of the lives which natives will have to lead as adults, a rigid determination that it shall not become a means of alienating children from their parents, and a careful consideration of claims of the mass of natives against the "favored few." Needs, organization and degree of detribalization of each native community must be taken into account with a view to raising the general educational standards of the community and at the same time providing a corps of native leaders, technicians, teachers and other specialists. The problem is one which is obviously related to the question of individual against community conversion in mission policy, and this again must be treated in the light of the need of making both schools and missions an integrative rather than a disruptive force. They must be regarded as part of the native community rather than as something alien imposed from without.¹

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(con't from previous page) involved in the establishment of a Christian community which he defines as follows: "By Christian community here is meant that group of Christians, whether in daily touch or seeing one another rarely or never, who each in his daily, his hourly life seeks humbly and earnestly to put Christ's teaching and example into practice in everything he is called to do. No one ever succeeds fully. But it is the one who tries consciously, humbly, and ceaselessly, who is in the Christian community in the sense in which those words are used . . ." Ibid., p. 32.

1. John M. Graham and Ralph Piddington: *Anthropology and the Future of Missions*, p. 16.

2. Family Life.

"Christian community must begin in the Christian home."¹

At the heart of the Christian home is the Christian mother. But the mother in Bantu society does not share this honor with the mothers of Western Christianity. For "the individuality of the woman in the whole system of Bantu marriage is of little account."² The close bond of Christian love which unites Christian homes is missing to a large extent even in Bantu Christian marriages because of the different basis of parental relationship, and oftentimes the mis-used, degenerated and misunderstood practices of sex life. In Bantu society, a woman is considered as an inferior being just because of sex and the women seem to be resigned to this attitude.³ Most of their time is spent in hard work either in the fields or with household chores. "In African society the wife is a kind of a servant."⁴

With these inbred attitudes, beliefs, and customs, the Bantu mother cannot possibly fulfill her task of maintaining a Christian home as Western Christians know it. The mother as the center of the Christian home must not only be soundly converted from the old ways but educated in the new ways as well. She must be educated not only in Christian family life but in all areas of life which will enable her family to become a vital part of the Christian community.

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1. Ross, op. cit., p. 39.
2. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 389.
3. Cf. Ross, op. cit., p. 63.
4. Ibid.

3. Education.

This opens up many educational problems, the solutions of which are not as simple as they may appear on the surface. Through many years of experience Dr. Ross seems to be aware of this problem as related to family life. He says:

One of the greatest weaknesses of Christianity in Africa is that it has concerned itself so much less with women than with men. As seen when we deal with education, even the single women missionaries from the West, designated to work with women and girls, too often leave them and work principally in teaching and training boys and young men. The latter are freer and more eager. The women seem somehow duller and inaccessible.¹

Past mission work with the primitive Bantu has verified this; that the men and boys are eager and quick to learn as over against the girls who "seem somehow duller and inaccessible." Consequently the girls have been sadly neglected. Then too, "the education of girls is more expensive per capita if it is of the proper type, which is training for motherhood and married life, and it requires much more patience than that of boys."² This problem is complicated once a wife becomes exposed to Christian education, for, as Dr. Ross states it:

The more educated she is, the less blindly obedient she is to her husband. It is a tragedy that often educated girls have great difficulty finding husbands. So the economic factor enters in; parents fear to lose the dowry that suitable marriage brings for all African girls. Above everything, the African girl is the guarantee of the life continuity of the tribe; that is not to be trifled with by any new fangled education.³

What should be the missionary's responsibility toward education? What should be its main purpose in relation to mission work? Concerning this Dr. Ross states:

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1. Ibid., p. 40.
2. Ibid., p. 63.
3. Ibid.

On the one hand, in Africa, the purpose of education is to develop the personality, enlighten the conscience, strengthen the character of the African; thus education gives aid toward the salvation and the perfecting of the whole man. On the other hand, its aim is to bring to the people the Word of God, which is God's rule of faith and conduct; thus education is a means of evangelism . . .

If education is to achieve its good goal in Africa, it must help destroy superstitious beliefs in ancestral spirits, magic, and witchcraft. But destroying these beliefs without replacing them by other and better ones will do only harm to Africa. This is where the great responsibility of missions toward education lies.¹

In Western Christian culture, man's education is derived from the family, community, church and school. In Africa, the family and community have little to offer in the development of one's personality as compared to the Christian home and community. This being the case, even more responsibility lies on the Church and mission schools to educate each individual, believer or non-believer, toward the development of his personality, enlightenment of his conscience, strengthening of his character, destroying of his superstitious beliefs and the understanding of God's Word--all to give aid toward the salvation and perfecting of the whole man. It is evident that the acquisition of the first four presupposes the centrality of the latter.

To achieve such a purpose, how broad should the mission educational policy be to give the Christian message its full interpretation? Is it possible that a large program of educational polity would cause the missionary to deviate from his central task? Is the Christian message "for the soul alone" or is it for "redeeming and uplifting the whole personality of man"?² Wherein is agriculture, politics, economics,

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1. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

2. Ibid.

hygiene, "the three-R's" and other technical skills applicable?¹ What part should indigenous leadership play in such an educational program? What about racial prejudice in connection with indigenous leadership?² What sort of education would be best for the Bantu child? What about the missionary's child?

D. Problems in Individual Development

1. Initiatory Rites.

There are many implications and ramifications to the problems of family life and education in a primitive communal society such as the Bantu. They manifest themselves in all the beliefs, customs, and traditions concerning the growth of the individual through different distinct stages of development. During childhood the Bantu individual receives what little education he gets either in his own home or the home of his paternal or maternal grandparents. At puberty, he receives a, so called, "formal education" of short duration in an initiation school which is designed to prepare him for adult life. These schools, where various initiatory and circumcision rites are traditionally

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1. "In China, Japan, Latin America, or some other parts of the world, the Christian missions, because they work among advanced people with their own culture and discipline of the mind, might perhaps seek to fulfill their task without sponsoring an elaborate program of formal education. But in many parts of Africa people live in such a primitive stage that a wide education is essential in order to make the message of the Gospel accessible." Ibid., p. 52.
2. Expressing an attitude so common even among the evangelical missionaries, Malinowski says, "This belief that only European ways of thinking, of clothing themselves, of playing games, of buying and selling goods, are right, and that all things African are of inferior quality, is one of the most destructive and undermining influences in Africa." B. Malinowski: "Native Education and Culture Contact," International Review of Missions, Vol. XXV, No. 100, October 1936, p. 498.

performed, give rise to many problems which are in dire need of solution.

It has been noted that during initiation, most valuable instruction is given, coupled with impressive ceremonial, but unhappily linked to much that is immoral and in direct opposition to Christian teaching. During initiation the Bantu child learns loyalty and reverence for his elders and chief. He learns that he is a social animal to regard himself not merely as an individual but rather as a member of the tribe with duties and responsibilities to all his "kinfolk." Clan life and its institutions become holy. "In it are imbedded his most sacred conceptions of morality; separated from it he is in fact uprooted."¹ It is apparent that the good and the bad elements of the initiation schools are mutually inclusive. Therefore it remains a tremendous problem facing the missionary as to what should and what can be done with them. "What shall the attitude of the Christian Church be to these non-Christian initiatory rites?"² Should it be wholly condemnatory—even in areas where "the general breakdown of tribal codes, and particularly the decay of initiation ceremonies, has led to a weakening in the moral attitude towards premarital pregnancy . . ."³ and sexual immorality. "Is it impossible to preserve all the undoubted good, to tolerate for the present those elements which are not incompatible with Christianity, to eliminate the teaching which is contrary to morals, the obscene songs

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1. D. Westermann: "The Value of the African's Past," International Review of Missions, Vol. XV, No. 59, July 1926, p. 430.
2. W. V. Lucas: "The Christian Approach to Non-Christian Customs," Christianity and Native Rites, p. 47. Cf. pp. 47-52 for a suggested answer to this problem.
3. Graham and Piddington, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

of dancing,"¹ substituting instruction in Christian morals? On the other hand, is it possible to transform the initiation rites by "Christianization"? "How far is it possible to preserve, transmute, and transform this very vital and important institution?"²

Many answers and solutions have been proposed by both the Roman and Protestant Church groups; however, little has been done and these problems are still a great burden on the missionaries laboring with the Bantu people. The problem and general attitude of the Church is probably adequately stated by J. Raum who says:

The attitude of Christian missions to these ceremonies has been up till now, and still is, with a few exceptions, one of definite rejection. Is this attitude justified or are the missions, in forbidding these ceremonies to their congregations, guilty of or implicated in the disappearance of a valuable spiritual heritage from the tribes which trust their leadership?³

Because of its functional basis, the question of initiatory rites may be called a part of "one of the most difficult problems of the missionary--marital and sexual codes among African peoples."⁴ Marriage "is, perhaps, the most difficult subject and greatest stumbling block of all the institutions of primitive society in its connection with Christianity."⁵ As there are both good and bad elements in initiatory rites, so are there both good and bad elements in Bantu marriage. And because of man's very nature (established through the creation and

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1. Lucas, op. cit., p. 48.
2. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 375. Cf. pp. 375-379 for a recommended approach to the Christianization of initiatory rites.
3. J. Raum: "Puberty Rites and the Church," International Review of Missions, Vol. XVI, No. 64, October 1947, p. 586. This attitude is generally true today.
4. Graham and Piddington, op. cit., p. 10.
5. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 379.

the fall), sex life and marriage are real problems in any society, but especially in a primitive society such as the Bantu.

2. Sex Life and Marriage.

a. Polygyny.

Polygyny cannot be recognized as an institution compatible with Christianity. If this statement is true, then it follows that the problem of polygyny is not so much whether one is to agree with this statement or not but rather what one is to do with the institution as it now exists. The problem is adequately expressed by Daniel Fleming and W. C. Willoughby, respectively, in the following two quotations:

Fleming says:

There is absolute agreement that Christian marriage is that of one man with one woman, and there is unanimity also in the determination to uphold this ideal among the members of the young church in the mission field. But a very real problem and difference of opinion arises in connection with those who have entered into polygamous relationship before seeking baptism.¹

Willoughby says:

To condemn polygyny, however is not necessarily to condemn polygynists. He who makes a polygynous marriage proves by that very deed that he has not caught the Spirit of Christ, but converts from heathenism who blundered into these entanglements before Christianity found them need all the sympathy and help that we can give.²

With traditional marriage customs such as they are in Bantu communal society, the wives in a polygynous marriage are all wives (not concubines), taken by recognized, religiously sanctioned tribal formalities that the whole community respects, and entitled thereby to

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1. Daniel Fleming: Contacts With Non-Christian Cultures, p. 126.
2. W. C. Willoughby: "Building the African Church," International Review of Missions, Vol. XV, No. 59, July 1926, p. 465.

fair treatment and a respectable position in the household. If the husband of such a family becomes a Christian, must he immediately become a monogamist by discarding all but one wife? If so, which wife should he keep? What should be done with the other wives? Should a discarded secondary wife be allowed to re-marry by Christian rites as the sole wife of another man, if she so desires? If one of the wives in a polygynist marriage becomes a Christian, should she be forced to leave her husband even though she is not violating the Christian precept which enjoins fidelity to one husband? Should a wife of a polygynist be admitted church membership though, because of the intricate network of tribal bonds, she fails to find release from cohabitation? Similarly, should polygynous husbands who cannot honourably free themselves from marital entanglements be permitted church membership upon acceptance of Christ?

The intensity of these problems is better understood in the light of the underlying causes for polygyny being such a strong marriage institution in Bantu society. The dream of every Bantu is to have offspring, especially of the male sex. Male children are very much desired because through them the clan name is carried down and multiplied. Then too, there is tremendous pressure upon husband and wife who are religiously convinced that it is necessary to have a son to perform the religious rites upon which depend the happiness and welfare not only of their immediate family but of their ancestors as well. Such a conviction makes having a son an imperative duty. For various reasons the mortality rate is very high for babies and children, especially boys. Therefore, if one wife is sterile or produces only female babies, the Bantu can only see one solution to the problem--wife number two. In most tribes sterility

constitutes religious and legal grounds for divorce (which has remained a big problem in every society) because they believe that childlessness is obviously a proof that the supernatural forces did not approve of the marriage. With the taboo forbidding sexual intercourse for two, three, or more years after a birth, polygyny is a real problem and temptation to the man who has but one wife or whose moral scruples prevent his associations with other women. Another cause for polygyny is the lobola system of marriage transactions. To the Bantu man, more cattle means only one thing--namely, more wives and thus more heirs. The problems involved in the lobola custom are so numerous as to warrant their being dealt with separately.

b. Lobola.

In the old tribal life, the conditions on which husband and wife may live together vary from lobola completely or partially transferred, to lobola merely promised. To the Bantu lobola is a time-honored method sanctioned by the ancestral spirits for stabilizing the woman's position through property. It is a guarantee of good treatment for the wife. It gives her social security and enhances the social value of marriage. The husband has no claim on children until the lobola is paid. The people of the Bantu community do not regard marriage without lobola as legal.

On the surface lobola may not appear to be much of a problem; but, on the contrary, the bad elements involved give rise to many problems some of which can here be mentioned. For instance, since the amount to be paid is a matter for bargain in every instance, some bargainers unduly delay and frustrate many marriage plans resulting in

illicit intercourse. The installment practice of payment leads to constant dispute, and a man is often hampered throughout his life by incessant demands often leading to the termination of the union by the maternal family. In many cases the husband is chosen by the maternal family according to his material wealth rather than his suitability. Because in some tribes the girl's clan brothers control her marriage, often Christian girls are forced into marriages that are not only outside the Christian group but highly unsuitable as well. Ofttimes there is an increase in the demands because a girl has received Christian education. This results in young men, often teachers and ministers, marrying uneducated girls because of insufficient means. The bond of Christian love which unites Christian marriages is often secondary in lobola marriages. If a Christian dies before the lobola has been paid, the children are usually taken away from the mother and placed in the home of relatives who are often non-Christians. Culmination of marriage is usually indefinite with children being born before the couple are married. In the eyes of a Christian missionary it is often difficult to determine whether or not a couple are married.¹

In spite of all that can be said concerning lobola marriage, the Bantu believers as well as unbelievers, find it extremely difficult to even think of marriage in terms other than lobola. It is a dominant feature of their religious, social, and economic life, and the women themselves generally desire it.

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1. Cf. Newell Snow Booth: "Mission Priorities in Africa," International Review of Missions, Vol. XXXVII, No. 145, January 1948, pp. 96-97, for discussion concerning lobola problems.

As Willoughby states:

This [lobola] is in strict accord with the characteristic sentiments of Bantu communities and the teaching of their puberty camps, and that women are, therefore, its most ardent defenders, believing that they are not properly married unless their bride-price has been paid or promised, just as some of our women would feel uneasy if wedded without a ring.¹

In view of this, what is to be the policy of the missionary concerning lobola? "Is it an unmitigated evil in the present social condition of the people, or does it serve a good purpose till their conception of wedlock can be Christianized?"² Can bride-price be reduced to reasonable proportions by proper legislation and freed of its evil implications? Is it possible for a Christian marriage also to be a lobola marriage? Would the marriage of the Bantu by European law tend towards greater permanence and loyalty in the conjugal relationship in the primitive communal society?

These and many other questions could be raised revealing the problems with which the Christian missionary is faced. Regarding present day mission policy, Fleming says:

Missionaries are divided on the question as to whether lobola should be permitted as part of a Christian marriage. Where lobola is recognized by the church, constructive emphasis should be placed on giving a girl to a suitor who can make her happy and whom she herself is inclined to take, keeping the financial transaction subordinate.³

c. Widowhood.

Closely linked with the problem of lobola is the problem of widows. Because of the inheritance customs and lobola arrangements, it

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1. Willoughby, "Building the African Church," op. cit., p. 463.
2. Ibid.
3. Fleming: What Would You Do? p. 18.

is often impossible for a man to provide for his widow or to plan for the welfare of her and the children after his departure. There is also the question of re-marriage. If the widow is to be free, what will happen if she marries again? Will the family receive lobola a second time? In most tribes it is the duty of the eldest brother of the husband to take over the widowed wife after his death.¹ Is this practice compatible with Christian teaching or should the widow be free on the death of her husband in direct opposition to Bantu beliefs?

Marriage to the Bantu woman means separation from one group and inclusion into another. In the form of lobola her parents receive compensation for the loss of her services. Her husband's death does not alter this new relationship she has with his clan. In Bantu thinking she cannot possibly go back to her original family without their giving back the lobola compensation. This is improbable. Neither can she be left without a group. This is inconceivable. Then too, the lobola was probably paid by the father or eldest brother of the deceased. Therefore, she must go to her husband's brother and there she lives with him though still considered to be married to her former husband. No re-marriage takes place. Regarding this religiously sanctioned custom, James W. Welch says:

The woman is still married to her husband, now alive in the spirit world, and the duty of the brother is to raise up seed for the deceased, and for their group, since he is of the same flesh and blood. Thus he does not marry the woman, she simply goes to him as to her husband, because she belongs and because he is acting for the deceased. The widow and any children belong to the family, and the eldest brother acts for the group, alive and dead.²

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1. The early Hebrews practiced this (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
2. James W. Welch: "Can Christian Marriage in Africa be African?" *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XXII, No. 85, January 1933, p. 24.

What should be a missionary's policy toward a widow believer who cannot free herself from the bondage of such a situation? Should a Christian widow, who is forced by legal and religious laws of communal society to live with her brother-in-law (who may be an unbeliever and polygynist), be admitted to full membership in the church? The problem seems to be essentially the same as that concerning the initiatory rites, polygyny and lobola. What is the missionary to do with believers who are tenaciously bound by socio-religious laws to practice customs seemingly incompatible with Christian teaching?

E. Problems in Cultural Traits and Complexes

1. Diet, Housing, and Clothing.

Heretofore, the problems dealt with have primarily concerned the missionary in his dealings with the primitive Bantu believer who must make adaptations to the Christian way of life. The problems of diet, housing, and clothing largely concern the missionary's adaptations to the Bantu culture. The Christian missionary from America or Europe is placed in a culture where nothing seems to be the same as that to which he has been accustomed.

The food is different. It may be extremely distasteful, nauseating and unhealthy. Grasshoppers, ants, flies and caterpillars eaten dead or alive may not seem to be congruous with modern nutritional science. In ignorance, the food may be prepared and consumed in such extremely unsanitary conditions that bacterial diseases inevitably result. Filthy, unsterilized utensils and unboiled water may be used with no knowledge of its danger. How far is the missionary to go in adapting

himself to eating unsafe food in filthy conditions merely to maintain a vital contact with the people? In putting this problem in practical terminology, Fleming asks:

Should a missionary continue to eat food in the homes of Christians [or non-Christians] to show appreciation and friendliness, even when he knows that this will be injurious to his health? If a grateful village Christian offers him a vessel of milk to drink, and he can plainly see that some straining would help, should he 1) unhesitatingly take it; 2) say that it is his custom to take hot, boiled milk; or 3) use the occasion to share his information about sanitation?¹

Concerning the missionary's reaction to this and many more similar situations, Fleming goes on to say:

There is no universal practice in such not-uncommon situations. It depends on whether faith in God's protecting care, fearless courage, desire for identification with the people, education, or concern for one's health dominates the person to whom the test is presented. It still leaves the question as to what should be the determining consideration in such challenges.²

The housing is different. It may be unsafe, unsanitary, and impractical. Dwelling places without floors, doors, and windows may not seem to be the best in housing according to either previous customs or common sense. One's house may be on stilts because of heavy rains, snakes, or lizards. Should the missionary adjust himself to living in the customary structure used by the nationals to have closer contact with the people? Or should he endeavor to build a home quite different and distinct from the native homes patterned after Western design? Does privacy, health conditions, or protection from thievery justify this? Is it right to set up expensive buildings for churches, schools, and missionaries' houses? What should be the missionary's policy toward

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1. Fleming: What Would You Do? p. 83.
2. Ibid.

housing in the face of all the strange customs confronting him?

A missionary in Liberia has said:

It is very easy for the missionary's standards of living to become, not only a stumbling-block, but also a cause for jealousy and racial feeling even with the Christian natives. The tendency is to have the Native think that a certain material standard is the expression of one's standing before God, and as far as possible simple clothing and inexpensive living quarters ought to be the aim of the missionary.¹

The clothing is different. In fact, it may not be at all. In many primitive societies, including Bantu, a little ornamentation and fetishistic adornment is all that is worn. In most tribes, the clothing is very scanty, due mostly to the climatic conditions. In the past, drastic things have happened in tropical rainfall areas where missionaries have advocated full dress among the believers. What should be the missionary's attitude toward primitive dress, if only from the waist down? Is the custom of partial dressing to be considered immoral when in the eyes of the primitive, it is not immoral? What part could education play in changing the customs of Bantu primitive dress considered immoral by the missionary?

In answer to the questions concerning Bantu clothing, many proposals have been made ranging anywhere between two extremes. These two attitudes are revealed in the following quotations by W. V. Lucas and Rev. James Dennis, respectively:

Bishop Lucas says:

The preaching of the Gospel should not involve any change of customary native dress in those who become converts. The New Testament does indeed plead for a simplicity of raiment as worn by Christians, and there may well be a need in certain parts of the world today to make a similar appeal that no undue expense be incurred on unnecessarily

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1. Willoughby: "Building the African Church," op. cit., p. 473.

costly clothing . . . Where radical changes in attire have been encouraged or required by converts, it has happened in some places that serious results have followed in reduced stamina and liability to diseases of the chest.¹

Rev. Dennis says:

The question of clothes is one upon which Christian civilization has a very firm and pronounced opinion. Whatever variety and adaptability there may be in the styles of clothing in different countries, the person should be decently covered, and this surely is not the case as yet among most savage races. Among semi-civilized peoples, and even within the precincts of civilization, there are customs in dress which are certainly not prompted by the truer instincts of refinement.²

Other questions concerning clothing could be asked which reveal real problems facing the missionary. For instance, what would his attitude and policy be toward ornamentation? Should Christian nationals be permitted to ornament their bodies in instances where such ornamentation is not strictly associated with some pagan religious ceremony performed in the name of the spirits? How far should the missionary go in adapting himself to native dress, in changing native dress, or in establishing church policy?

2. Dancing, Beer-Drinking and Smoking.

As over against the problems of diet, housing and clothing which primarily concern the missionary's adaptations to the Bantu culture, the problems of dancing, beer-drinking and smoking largely concern the missionary in his dealings with the national believer who must make adaptations to the Christian way of life. To the national these adaptations may appear absolutely incongruous to human experience. To the

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1. Lucas, op. cit., p. 40.

2. James S. Dennis: Social Evils of the Non-Christian World, p. 131.

missionary they may seem absolutely essential to the salvation of the national. Is the negation of traditional customs of "recreation" such as dancing, beer-drinking and smoking essential to one's salvation? to one's witness?

In Bantu Africa dancing (in which the sexes are usually separated), is a primary form of recreation. African life cannot be pictured apart from dancing and drums. Some dances, especially those connected with initiatory rites, are often obscene, suggestive, and immoral. Others are not. Is all form of dancing to be condemned by the missionary whether or not it appears immoral?

Should beer-drinking and smoking be permitted when such participation is required by social and legal laws in regards to negotiations and ceremonies? Can a blank condemnatory missionary policy be justified? Is it possible that these and other problems could be solved by indigenous leadership? What part should indigenous leadership play in their solution?

3. Communication of Ideas.

a. Illiteracy and Translation.

God's judgment of sin was manifested in the curse of Babel which resulted in the confusion of tongues into more than two thousand mutually unintelligible languages. Most of them are found in primitive areas yet unreached by white man and his education, where ideas are communicated from one to another only by word of mouth. To a Western missionary, accustomed to sharing ideas through reading and writing, this poses a tremendous problem. His purpose is to communicate a

message to people of a strange tongue who cannot write their own language. He must not only learn to speak the vernacular, but he must also learn to write it. Then he must teach it to the people who use it in order that they may be able to read God's Word and in turn communicate it to others. Illiteracy is a barrier to the communication of the Gospel which must be broken down. To the missionary this means extremely difficult work which taxes to the limit all the God-given graces of his personality. Countless problems must be squarely faced and adequately solved.

The missionary must work out an alphabet beginning with nothing but a maze of strange sounds completely foreign to his "English ear." "Some of the sounds are exasperatingly complicated, and the process of mastering them is tortuously difficult."¹ The grammatical structure of the language may even be stranger and more complicated than its system of sounds. Dr. Eugene A. Nida emphasizes this by saying:

If sounds were the only trouble, then it would be relatively easy, but some languages have grammars which almost defy description, at least for the beginner. Imagine running into a Bolivian Quechua word like this: ruwanayashaskasniyquichejmantaka. Thirty-two letters is not too bad; but when one finds that this word is made up of eight distinct grammatical parts and that the parts must always occur in just this order and that the entire word means "concerning your continually accomplishing your future work"--well it is enough to stump some of the experts. In the Quechua language of Bolivia it is possible to take almost any verb root and add more than 50,000 combinations of at least twenty different sets of suffixes and particles which combine to make up these complicated forms.²

In communication of the Gospel, the missionary must use words which are meaningful to the primitives in terms of the life they them-

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1. Eugene A. Nida: God's Word in Man's Language, pp. 28-29.
2. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

selves live. The King James Version of 1611 was particularly suited for the English culture of that day, but the modern missionary must translate the Bible for the primitive in words the primitive can understand.

Humorous (or even sacriligious) as they may sound, the two following statements by Nida are good examples of what is meant by this problem:

The Uduks along the Ethiopian border speak of "worry" and "being troubled" as "shivering in one's liver." John 14:1 does not sound like English: "Do not shiver in your livers; you believe in God, believe also in me."¹

The Eskimos of Barrow, Alaska, describe reconciliation in the simple terms of "making friends again." That is to say, "God was in Christ making friends again with the world."²

b. Indigenous Church.

In the light of relative importance, the problem of the establishment of an indigenous church may well be the greatest problem of acculturation facing the missionary. The proper solution to the problems of illiteracy and translation make possible the establishment of an indigenous church, which is in keeping with the Christian missionary purpose. Paul, the greatest of all missionaries, in writing to Timothy, said, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."³

Dr. Emory Ross stresses the importance of this task by saying:

The purpose of missions, after having persuaded men and women to accept Christ as their personal Savior, is to gather and organize

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1. Ibid., p. 23.
2. Ibid., pp. 140-141.
3. II. Timothy 2:2.

them into Christian churches . . .¹

To think or to act as though Africans are unable to understand and undertake the work of the Christian Church today would be to deny the power of the Holy Spirit and to forget the lesson of growth and development of the early church, and of the church in every land . . . This problem of building up an indigenous African Church and helping to solve the difficulties of human relationships is the most important task Christian missions face in Africa.²

The establishment of a Christ-centered, self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing indigenous church in Africa is the answer to many a missionary's problems of acculturation. The present need is an African church which can communicate Jesus Christ to Africans in the language of every day African life. The missionary and the African church can solve the problems by working together in Christian love regardless of differences in race, nationalities, cultures and views. Reconciliation of these differences constitutes the real problem, which in turn is rooted in the more basic problem which must be answered, both by the missionary and the national. The answer to the basic problem lies in absolute surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of one's life. This is real Christianity, and real Christianity can adequately meet any problem of acculturation facing the missionary.

Emory Ross, in expressing this basic acculturation problem, says:

Today probably more people recognize more clearly than ever before in history the power, on the one hand, of real Christianity, and the weakness on the other hand, of Christianity's Western pattern . . . There is a more fundamental and baffling weakness in the West: that Christians do not seem to believe that Christianity has the duty and right--and the realism--to control the whole of the life of all its believers . . .

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1. Ross, op. cit., p. 93.
2. Ibid., p. 98.

That is the core of the problem that Christianity faces in all its relationships with African men and women and African society today.¹

F. Conclusion

This chapter has been a study of the problems of acculturation facing Western missionaries when serving in a Bantu type primitive culture. Some possible solutions and recommended mission policy were suggested; however, the main burden of the chapter was merely in terms of bringing the problems into the light. Most of the problems had to do with the primitive's adaptations to the Christian way of life; some had to do with the missionary's adaptations to the primitive culture; both were approached from the viewpoint of the missionary.

Numerous problems of acculturation were noted. Witchcraft, which "is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, hindrances and stumbling blocks in the way of Christian missionary work,"² is a real problem in that it has such a tenacious hold on the people that Christians often regress back into its pitfalls. Tribal solidarity resulting from communal living has been "one of Christianity's greatest obstacles"³ in that it so diametrically opposes individual action apart from the tribe. Marriage, with its various customs of polygyny, lobola, and widowhood, "is perhaps the most difficult subject and greatest stumbling block of all the institutions of primitive society in its connection with Christianity."⁴ Many other problems of diet, clothing, housing,

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1. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
2. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 407.
3. Ross, op. cit., p. 80.
4. Shropshire, op. cit., p. 379.

education, recreation, and ideological communication are prevalent but "the problem of building up an indigenous African church and helping to solve its difficulties of human relationships is the most important task Christian missions face in Africa."¹

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1. Ross, op. cit., p. 98.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has been an attempt to (1) discover the main problems of acculturation confronting a Christian missionary in a primitive society and (2) understand the underlying causes for these problems. The accomplishment of the latter of this two-fold aim was realized through a study of a particular primitive culture, namely, the Bantu culture of South Africa. Then too, in order to understand more fully the nature and characteristics of the Bantu culture, the first part of this thesis was given to a study of the religious beliefs and practices of primitive societies.

Chapter one was a recorded study of the basic religious beliefs and practices of primitive societies in general. The predominant beliefs, such as those concerning a Supreme Being, mana, spirits, ghosts and demons, were discussed in the first part, and the manifestation of these beliefs as evidenced in the subsequent practices of fetishism, idolatry, totemism, divination, ancestral worship, and tabu were considered in the second part. It was discovered that the primitive, at the mercy of supernatural powers, lives in constant, intense fear of displeasing them and thus he regulates his daily existence by striving adequately to fulfill their pleasure through rituals of all kinds.

In chapter two, a study was made of the Bantu primitive culture from the viewpoint of its religious beliefs and practices because Bantu life is essentially religious. "The relation of the individual to the family, the clan, and the tribe--politics, ethics, law, war, status, social amenities, festivals--all that is good and much that is

bad in Bantu life is grounded in Bantu religion."¹ Animistic beliefs in spirits, both good and bad, were manifested largely in practices of witchcraft and ancestral worship. It was noted throughout that the Bantu culture is permeated with numerous and varied ritualistic ceremonies and tabus practiced only because of an intense fear of the supernatural powers which captivate, control, and motivate their every action.

In view of this type of primitive culture, the last chapter was given to the problems of acculturation resulting from cultural differences between Western civilization and primitive Bantu Africa. Approached from the viewpoint of the Western Christian missionary serving in that type of culture, the problems had to do both with the missionary's adaptations to the culture as well as with the primitive's adaptations to the Christian way of life.

In conclusion: (1) the religious beliefs and practices of primitive societies have been studied, (2) the cultural differences between an uncivilized primitive culture and Western civilization have been noted, and (3) the primary, subsequent problems of acculturation have been discussed.

By approaching the problem from the viewpoint of the religious beliefs and practices of a primitive society, it was possible to acquire an intelligible outlook as to the reasons for the primitive's thinking, feeling, and acting the way he does. With their spiritual life as the basis for their cultural characteristics, this outlook should in turn promote and foster sympathetic understanding on the part of the missionary in his relationships with the primitive--and all his strange customs--and thus aid in the removal of barriers which would otherwise exist.

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1. Willoughby: The Soul of the Bantu, p. 1.

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