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THE POTENTIAL OF THE WOMAN FOR THE CHURCH
IN A PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

by

Joan E. Yilek

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject Stated and Justified

The purpose of this thesis is to consider the position and role of women in primitive societies and in the light of this information, to consider the potential women have for the church in primitive areas.

One of the striking features of the church in primitive areas of Africa is that it seems to be a church made up largely of men and boys. To the visitor used to observing western churches where the reverse is often true, this seems very strange indeed. It is now commonly recognized in this country that a "women's church" is not a healthy one, and that a church must minister to whole families if there is to be vital, growing life in that church. One of the traditional emphases of reformed theology has been the importance placed on the roles of both husband and wife in the training of children in the things of the Lord, and the New Testament reveals that though women were expected to accept a subordinate position to men, their leadership and influence were

strongly felt by the entire Christian community.¹

By looking at the position of woman in various primitive societies, this thesis will seek to discover what status primitive woman has, how she brings her influence to bear, and to indicate what she could contribute to the life and vigor of her Christian community.

B. The Subject Delimited

The literature in social anthropology is vast, and to examine the role of woman in all primitive societies would be impossible. We will confine ourselves primarily, therefore, to examples from African societies, and in order not to be led into too many divergent strains of thought, we will deal only with tribes which are organized in patrilineal lineages.

C. The Method of Procedure

The first chapter will present a discussion of the role of woman in primitive family life. General considerations concerning the status of woman will be discussed. Her importance to the economic life of the community will be presented, her place in

1. O. J. Baab, "Woman," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick, IV (1962), 867.

the patterns of African customary marriage examined, and her responsibility in child rearing and education considered.

The second chapter will examine the role of woman in primitive religion. The essential elements of primitive religion will be presented, and woman's role as a participant and a conservator of primitive religion will be stressed.

The third chapter will present the role of primitive woman in the Christian Church. Pertinent New Testament insights will be presented and contributions now being made by women in primitive societies to their churches will be considered.

In the summary and conclusion, the data of these three chapters will be examined to see if women in primitive societies have a greater potential for their church than is now generally being realized and utilized.

D. The Sources for the Study

Basic to this study will be the answers to a letter of inquiry sent to missionaries now on active service in primitive areas in Africa. The observations of African leaders will also be presented, as well as the opinions of a representative group from the Anuak tribe. Examples will be presented from the literature of studies of various primitive peoples. There are many universals in primitive society, and if principles, rather than local peculiarities

are considered, generalizations may be drawn that will apply to all primitive peoples. This is a general method in social anthropology.¹

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1. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage and the Family Among the Nuer (Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia: The Rhodes Livingstone Institute, 1945), p. 3.

CHAPTER I

WOMAN'S ROLE IN PRIMITIVE FAMILY LIFE

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WOMAN'S ROLE IN PRIMITIVE FAMILY LIFE

A. Introduction

One of the foremost social anthropologists of our day, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, has observed that no systematic, comparative work has ever been done in the area of the problem of the social position of women in various primitive societies. He suggests that the laborious tasks of sifting through the many ethnographic monographs in order to bring the results of modern research to bear on the problem has probably not been undertaken because of the fact that the status of woman in our own society is no longer an acute public issue.¹ It can be seen that he presents his own essay on the subject with some apology:

This lecture was not published when it was given (October 25, 1955) because I did not think that what I had to say was important enough to merit publication. On re-reading it I think that, slight though it may be, it makes some points worth further consideration.²

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1. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, The position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology (New York: The Free Press, 1965) p. 40.
 2. Ibid., p. 37.

Evans-Pritchard has stated that when anthropologists in the early part of this century considered the problem of the position of primitive women, the reports available to them were only the superficial accounts of travellers, missionaries and administrators, and that these accounts (such as they were) were judged according to what the observer or writer thought the relation between the sexes ought to be, according to the standards of his own society. Most of the accounts on the social relationships of primitive peoples were written by men: men of middle class homes from an evangelical background who judged the status of primitive women with the same yardsticks they used for their own mothers and sisters. Speculation concerning the writings of Darwin and Huxley had great influence on the anthropologists of this period too, and it seemed quite logical to them that if man had evolved biologically, that there must also have been social and cultural evolution.¹

It should not be surprising then to read in an early account of the life of the Shulla people and of the status of their women, an unevaluated statement such as this:

If refractory or lazy, the man may give his wife a thrashing with a rope.²

1. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

2. Diedrich Westermann, The Shilluk People (Philadelphia: Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church in North America, 1912), p. xxxv.

Westermann, however, seems to have been somewhat more objective in his observations than other writers of his period, for rather than comparing the Shulla women, with those of his own country, he compared them with Arab women who lived geographically near enough to the Shullas for a more valid comparison to be made. He observes:

The position of the woman is no doubt a higher one than with most Mohammedan peoples of the Sudan. She is generally well treated and is shown remarkable respect. The women sometimes take part in public assemblies with the men, discuss the affairs that interest them and partake in dances and religious ceremonies. Even in their war dances the women play an active role.¹

In spite of his low evaluation on the work of early anthropologists in this area, Evans-Pritchard admits the difficulty of the problem, even in this day of more accurate and objective observers.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate objectively woman's position in any particular primitive society or in primitive societies in general. In the end any judgment is based on our own opinions and practices, and without prolonged study is, moreover, likely to be superficial, a judgment based on appearances strange to us rather than on social realities behind them, or, as one might put it, on the cultural expression of relations between the sexes rather than on the psychological and moral content of the relationship.²

1. Ibid., p. xxxv.

2. Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., p. 40.

One of the most interesting observations that can be drawn from the replies to a questionnaire concerning the status of primitive women which was sent to thirty missionaries working with women in primitive areas of Africa is that these workers who were selected because of their knowledge of and sympathy for the people among whom they work were so divided in their answers to one key question. When asked, "Is the woman's primary loyalty to her mother's or her husband's family?" they were divided in their replies. Thirteen answered that the woman's loyalty was primarily to the mother's family, eight answered that her loyalty was to the father's family, and two said that her loyalty was divided just about equally between the two.¹

This difference of opinion was most striking when it was observed that people working in the same tribal areas gave opposite responses to the question.²

The key to understanding this particular dilemma can be found in Herskovit's discussion on the situation among the Dahomey of West Africa. He raises the question as to the why

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1. Letters from twenty-three missionaries working among primitive women in Africa. Tabulated January 17, 1966.
 2. Letters from missionaries working among the Ghimeera, Shulla, Nuer and Anuak people.

of the significance of the mother's social group in the life of a tribe which is organized along patrilineal lines when there is no legal relation to a person's mother's line. Herskovits points out that while the legal tie binding a person to his father's clan is very strong, the sentimental and emotional tie to his mother's family is equally strong. To a child in a polygamus household, the father may belong to the children of many women, but the mother is shared with only a few others.¹

Illustrative of this is the fact that when a man is faced with a fine that he cannot pay, he will often go to his mother's kin for help, and find in them an aid and a tolerance which would not be expected from the father's family.²

Observations of the Nuer tribe also bring out the legal element in the question of the status of women.

The mother is comparatively unimportant from the legal standpoint since men take their status and derive their privileges mainly from their father. The position of pater is legally predominant. Through him, even though he did not beget or even see them, his children trace their descent. They belong to his lineage and clan and share in all that traditionally pertains to these groups. From him they inherit. His herd is their birthright and

1. Melville J. Herskovits, Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1938), p. 153.

2. Ibid., p. 154.

any cattle which would have been due to him had he been alive belong to them as his heirs. Whatever social or ritual status he may have had they may succeed to. Little though their relationship to their pater may count in childhood, it grows in importance as the children reach manhood.¹

These examples indicate that if the missionary informants were thinking along legal lines, the importance of the mother's clan would be small, but if they were thinking along emotional lines (which would perhaps be natural when thinking of a daughter's rather than a son's loyalties) the degree of loyalty to the mother's clan would seem very significant.

Since in most societies, women occupy a lower status and hold less property and authority than men do, relations between them and their menfolk are relatively unimportant in terms of the transmission of goods and status, though they may be highly important affectively.²

All of the tribes included in the survey were said to be polygamous³ and it must be admitted that even though, as it will be seen, the influence of woman is multiplied over young children because of multiple mother figures:

The polygamous element reflects fundamental inequality between the sexes which appears to be typical of African social systems. Whatever may be said as to the material advantages accruing to a wife as a result of having

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1. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage, p. 26 and 28.
 2. John Beattie, Other Cultures (New York: The Free Press), p. 109.
 3. Murle, Geleb, Anuak, Teshanna, Nuer, Maji, Ghimeera, Mesengo, Agow, Bena Lulua, Basula Mpasu, Shulla, Buluba of Kasai and Galla.

co-wives to share her duties, it can hardly be denied that the institution of polygamy is normally associated with a social system in which there is unchallenged male dominance.¹

Three other statements concerning the status of women bear some of the marks of the kind of anthropological writing Evans-Pritchard has called invalid, but show that women have a definite status and role in their tribes. Of the Nyoro, Beattie reports:

We have already noted the high status of the household head: this is particularly marked in his relations with his wife or wives, for men are always superior to women. Most of the domestic and farm work falls to women; a wife is required always to be submissive and deferential to her husband; she should kneel to hand him anything; and should address him as 'sir.' But she is by no means a slave; she has definite rights, and between many spouses there are very close bonds of affection. Her husband must provide her with a house, clothes and a hoe to dig with. If he fails in his obligation, or constantly neglects or abuses her, she may complain to her own people and in the last resort she may leave him, provided that her people are able and willing to return the bridewealth for her.²

The following quotation concerning the status of the Kgatta women of South Africa emphasizes what the author considers the very inferior position of women.

They were regarded as socially inferior to men, and in Kgatta law were always treated as minors. Before marriage a woman was under the authority of her father or guardian while after it she came under the control of her husband,

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1. Arthur Phillips, Survey of African Marriage and Family Life (London, New York and Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1953), p. XIV.
 2. John Beattie, An African Kingdom (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 57.

and, on his death, of some other male member of his family. She could never sue independently at court, she could own property but might not dispose of it without her guardian's consent, and she could not inherit cattle or other live-stock from her father or husband. Women took no part in the government of the tribe; they did not attend the tribal assemblies, and all the political offices were kept exclusively in the hands of men.¹

In writing about the Tallensi, Fortes speaks in a similar vein, yet manages to strike a more positive note as well.

Men hold the reins of authority, direct economic life, control the political organization and are supreme in religious and ceremonial thought and action. From his father a man derives his rights to inherit land and other property, his clan membership and the political rights and ritual obligations that go with it, and his ritual relations with his most important ancestors. A woman does not inherit land or property of value, nor does she succeed to political or ritual office. But clan membership and the concomitant totemic observances, as well as her ritual allegiance to her patrilineal ancestors, mean a great deal for her social destiny and for her children.²

These quotations tend towards proving that the status of woman in primitive society is of so little consequence that it is not worthy of further investigation, but another statement of Evans-Pritchard's will be helpful in getting these facts into proper perspective.

Now, I suppose that among those things that first strike a visitor to a primitive people is that there are no unmarried

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1. I. Schapera, Married Life in an African Tribe (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1940), p. 336.
 2. Meyer Fortes, The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 22.

adult women. Every girl finds a husband, and she is usually married at what seems to us a rather early age. This fact, taken together with the further fact that in a society with a primitive technology and economy, running the home is a whole-time occupation, to which is added the care of small children, tell us, without our having to consider other matters, what is one important difference between modern civilized woman and her savage sister. Women among ourselves can choose to marry or not to marry, and if they choose not to marry they can devote their lives to teaching, research, administration, charity, or whatever it may be; or they can combine married life with a profession or job and with all sorts of interests outside the home. The primitive woman has no choice, and, given the duties that go with marriage, is therefore seldom able to take much part in public life. But if she can be regarded as being at a disadvantage in this respect from our point of view, she does not envy her menfolk what we describe as privileges. She does not desire, in this respect, things to be other than they are; and it would greatly puzzle her if she knew that in our society many women are unmarried and childless.¹

The true position and status of primitive woman can thus be determined not by looking at these women through western eyes, but by considering their vital places in the areas of marriage and daily work and in the responsibilities of child rearing and education.

B. Position of woman in African Customary Marriage

1. Implications of Payment of Bridewealth

The function and significance of the payment of substantial amounts of things for wives has occupied much of the

1. Evans-Pritchard, The Position of Woman ... , p. 45.

investigations of social anthropologists in the past. As

Evans-Pritchard has observed:

On the basis of such evidences as were available it was generally accepted by theoretical writers of the Victorian era - Herbert Spencer for example - that in primitive societies women are property to be bought and sold, and are treated as slaves or even animals enjoying neither sympathy nor respect.¹

This attitude is not, however, reflected in Anuaks' answers to the questions: "Is it good or bad to pay things for a wife?" and "Why do you say this?". When ten Anuaks were asked these questions, they were unanimous in their opinion that the payment of bridewealth was a good thing because:

(1) The father of the girl becomes very happy in his heart about his daughter because of her value to him.

(2) The woman is given a feeling of worth in that her husband paid a good price for her.

(3) The stability of the home is established.²

The economic importance of bride wealth has led some observers to think that very little opportunity for normal courtship is available in primitive society, but this does not seem to be the case. It is true that an early betrothal is sometimes arranged by a girl's father, but on growing up the girl

1. Ibid., p. 41.

2. Letter from Alathker Kwut, Anuak Evangelist, after consultation with five Anuak men and five Anuak women, December 28, 1965.

may refuse to marry her fiance. The man whom she eventually marries will then have to pay to the former fiance.¹

The normal behavior of young men and women at the age of courtship indicates the amount of freedom of choice that is theirs.

As she [the Nuer girl] nears marriageable age she adorns her body with all the beads, anklets, wristlets, necklaces of various kinds that she can acquire. She also bleaches her hair and wears several headbands of beads.

Especially during the fishing season the lover is neither idle nor silent in his efforts to win the regard of his bride. He may be at the same fishing camp as she is; if so, he carefully grooms his best ox, then adorns his body with all possible ornaments, and getting someone to lead his ox, he circles around the camp. He dances as he follows the ox and sings praises of his ox, himself, and his sweetheart in loud tones that may be heard for some distance. This performance may be continued for some hours, especially the singing.

Usually the young man knows when he is not repulsive to the girl. When he has her assurance that she loves him, his people take up the subject of the marriage price with her people. The girl's physical appearance and possibility of bearing children figure largely in the estimate of her desirability. Also her temper and ability to control it are considered.²

Sometimes a girl may be forced into an engagement to a man who is repulsive to her, but she may extract herself

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1. Audrey Butt, The Nilotes of the A. E. Sudan and Uganda (London: International African Institute, 1958), p. 78.
 2. Ray Huffman, Nuer Customs and Folk Lore (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 36-37.

from the difficulty by bearing a child to one whom she loves. This is a very dangerous procedure, for the first fiance will demand immediate repayment of all that he has given; the girl's family then demands an immediate (and high) payment from her lover; and the boy may have to flee to the protection of his own clan until the payment can be gathered by his relatives. Furthermore, should the girl die in childbirth, serious trouble is on. If a member of her family does not kill her lover, he is fined heavily for causing her death.¹

If a Nuer girl is actually forced into marrying a man whom she detests, she may run off and become a concubine, perhaps even finding a lover in another tribe.²

The nature of bride-wealth differs widely between the tribes. For instance, the average Anuak man is required to pay a combination of cattle and antique articles comparable to these mentioned in a typical list:³

one bead necklace
 five waiststrings of "tet" beads
 two waiststrings of "dumoy" beads
 four cows
 one bull

1. Ibid., p. 59.

2. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage ..., p. 21.

3. Colonel Bacon in Sudan Notes and Record, Volume V, 1922, pp. 120-121, cited by Charles Seligman, Pagan Tribes of Nilotic Sudan.

seventy "okwen" spears
two "dem" spears
one "jo" spear
ten brass wrist bangles

A tribe, such as the Dinka, that has more cattle and whose life is more centered in them, may require payments mainly in cattle. It is said that a Dinka may give from five to one hundred cows for his wife. A woman's reputation is enhanced by the payment of a large bridewealth.¹

The transfer of large amounts of bridewealth obviously involves large groups of people so that marriage is a family affair and must be viewed primarily as an alliance between two kinship groups and only in a secondary aspect as a union between two individual persons.²

In spite of this union, the woman's primary loyalty with regards to the payment of bridewealth remains toward her father's clan, and she does all that she can to extract as much bridewealth as possible from her husband's people for the benefit of her father and brothers. The behavior of a new Luo bride seems typical of this attitude.

The bride now spends part of her time with the bridegroom and part with her parents. The bridewealth payments now begin and the wife's parents try to hurry up the payments by luring her home on frequent visits. The

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1. Audrey Butt, op. cit., p. 127.
 2. Arthur Phillips, op. cit., p. XV.

bridegroom cannot prevent her departure or demand her return. To get her to return, he hands over another animal and she then stays with him for a short while. This procedure is repeated until the bride is definitely recognized as his wife and stays with him except for brief visits to her old home.¹

The behavior of Anuak wives is very similar to that of the Luo. After the marriage "talk" is finished and the agreed initial payment produced:

The bridewealth is laid out on a skin in the homestead of the bridegroom and the bride's father takes it home with him. Some days later, often at a dance, the bridegroom siezes the bride and drags her to his home. She resists and cries for help. Her brother comes and the bridegroom has to pay him a marriage spear to take away his sister.²

Another example of the Anuak woman's attitude at this time is cited by Schapera in the course of recounting one of the Anuak legends.

In the village, Ukiro would not eat or drink. This represents for the Anuak his refusal to regard himself as a member of the community into which he has been brought. Today, for example, where a new wife is brought to her husband's village for the first time, she will not eat its food or drink its water until she has received many presents from the young men of the village. Only after this present-giving ceremony (kac dhago - hunger of the woman) does she become a member of the village and eat its food and drink its water, and she is expected to show much formal reluctance to do so.³

1. Audrey Butt, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

2. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, The Political System of the Anuak (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1940), p. 112.

3. I. Schapera, op. cit., p. 37.

Westermann gives a detailed account of Shulla marriage which indicates the initiative the bride and groom have in courtship, the involvement of both clans and the participation of the entire community in the dances and beer drinks that surround the event. One of the striking features of his account is the description of the way the bride refuses to settle down in her new home until additional gifts are brought on two successive days,¹ but even this is not the end, for when a child is born, still other cattle are demanded. Westermann presents the following account translated directly from the Shulla:

When the wife is with child, a cow is sent to her relatives by the husband. Before this is done, her relatives (parents) say: 'He (our son-in-law) is a bad man, and her father and mother are angry. But when the cow is brought, they are happy, and they say to the people who bring the cow: 'return to your family.' and they return. And they are sprinkled with water. And when the time comes that she is to be confined, she is brought to her family (to her parents). The child should be born in the home of the mother's parents.'²

2. Possibility of Divorce.

Divorce is not common among primitive people, as divorce involves the return of bridewealth (which may already

1. Westermann, op. cit., p. 110.

2. Ibid., p. 111.

have been used by a member of the clan for his own marriage payments) and troubles and difficulties for the bride's parents.¹

The Anuak people recognize the fact that their marriages are more stable because of the pressures a wife's family puts on her to stay with her husband so that they will not have to re-collect the things he paid for her. They, also, recognize that a woman's family will put pressure on her to be a good wife in cooking and home making so as not to shame the family.²

We must not assume, however, that in ordinary circumstances a woman's family will not stand up for her if she is unjustly treated. Another story translated from the Shulla by Westermann is indicative of this.

A certain man had married a woman. One day his wife came and brought him water (to wash his hands, as is the custom before eating). But the man was angry, and so he said: "What is that water for? I am not hungry." Thereupon the woman went outside, she too was cross. When they went to sleep, they were troubled by hunger (both having eaten nothing). Then the man tried to lie down, but his eyes refused to close on account of hunger.

In order to get something to eat, the man with a friend (who lived in the same house) went to steal dura. But in the meantime the woman had prepared food and came into the house, after the men had gone. After some time they returned bringing with them the stolen dura. They sat down in the house, but did not know that the woman too was there; she hid in a

1. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage, p. 20.

2. Alathker Kwut, personal letter previously cited.

corner of the house. And the two men ate. They talked to one another: "Ah brother, you have a thick ear of corn there, just let me touch it!" And he touched it. So they ate the corn from the ears. Suddenly the woman asked, "My brothers, how?" Why do you bring such shame upon me (by stealing corn and not eating the food I have prepared?" Then the man said: "You cursed woman, loosen my cattle." (This is the formula for 'I will be divorced from you.' Loosen the cattle - give back the cattle - which I have paid your father for you.) She asked "Why?" He said: "Why do you leave me hungry?" She replied: "Not so! did you not say yesterday: what is the water for?" The man went out and he called his wife's father. When the father came, he said to him: "Ask your daughter what has happened, and then give me my cows." The father asked: "Why?" He said: "Just ask her!" He asked the girl saying, "Girl, how is this? The man says he wants his cattle back!" She replied: "I don't know." The father said: "You cursed girl, tell me all about it." So she told: "Yesterday I brought water, then he said, 'What is the water for?' This is the matter. Then I went out." The father said: "All right." The woman continued: "In the night he was troubled with hunger, therefore they went to steal corn, in the meantime I brought the food, and saw that they were gone. Is not that the matter? And then, when they were eating, one said to the other: 'Brother, what a big corn-ear you have!' Then I said: 'Here am I!' and he said: 'You cursed woman, loosen my cattle!' And I replied: 'Dear me, was it not you who refused yesterday saying: what is the water for?' 'Is not that the whole matter? I brought food, and he cursed!' After that the father of the girl said to the husband of his daughter. "Why did you steal? How is that? Restore me my corn which you have stolen." (The man had without knowing it, stolen the dura of his father-in-law.) The man said: "Why? why was I left hungry?" The father only replied: "You are a thief! I will give you back your cattle." When the husband heard that, he brought an ox for reconciliation, with that he reconciled, he reconciled his father-in-law and so the matter was settled.¹

1. Westermann, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

Divorce does take place sometimes, for a woman can be stubborn and provoke one if she finds cohabitation with her husband too painful to continue,¹ and if a woman proves to be barren, or of an impossible disposition, her husband will often divorce her. This always involves the return of the bridewealth to the husband.²

If children have been born, they are considered the property of the father's clan, and though they may be raised by their mothers, a certain amount of the bridewealth is deducted for each child. The actual amount varies from tribe to tribe, but the principle is uniform.³

The Nuer have a proverb which is expressive on this point: "Cattle which have children on their backs cannot be returned."⁴

3. Status and Security of Older Women and Widows

The question on the survey list dealing with the problem of woman's status in old age was another one that brought a varied response - again bringing different answers from people working in the same tribe. One difficulty seems to have been in the

1. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage, p. 20.

2. Audrey Butt, op. cit., p. 100.

3. Ibid., p. 60, p. 79, p. 152

4. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage, p. 16.

definition of old age. Two who responded indicated that they did not know any old woman, as women died before they got old,¹ and another referred to women as "old" after they had had their first child.²

The only general principles that can be drawn from the replies have to do with the areas of productive work and the care of children, and this data will be introduced later.

The fact that there is not much mention of widows in the literature may be another indication that women do not live very long, or that, as Evans-Pritchard suggests:

Custom enables widows to remarry without difficulty, generally, though by no means always, a close kinsman of the dead husband.³

In another work, Evans-Pritchard points out that not all widows in primitive societies are as free as the Nuer women, for most African societies practice the levirate and women are inherited (and cared for) by one of their husband's male relatives, usually a brother.⁴

1. Lois Anderson and Ferne Millar, letters concerning the Ghimeera people.

2. Mildred Hay, letter concerning the Agou people.

3. Evans-Pritchard, The position of Women, p. 45.

4. Evans-Pritchard, Some Aspects of Marriage, p. 15.

Even though Nuer Women are free to take lovers from another village and may even be given cows from her dead husband's herds for the nourishment of her children,¹ the fact remains that:

Generally a young widow lives with a brother of her husband and it is only when there is no brother living that she takes a lover from an unrelated, or distantly related lineage. Tradition, good form and threat of divorce, are powerful sanctions to conformity in this respect.²

The clan that has passed over a portion of its wealth to another for a woman evidently values her and is willing to assume the responsibility for her support.

C. Contribution of Woman to Problems Involving Hunger and Work

It has been seen that a clan is willing to part with a great deal of wealth to add a bride to its community. Two reasons for this willingness are expressed by observations of the Nyaro tribe.

Nyaro theory is that however large the bridewealth, it can never balance the inestimable gift of a woman, who will bring to her husband's group both her labor and, most important of all, her capacity to bear him children to continue his line.³

1. Ibid., p. 49.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

3. John Beattie, An African, p. 56.

We shall first consider woman's contribution to labor and particularly her part in the raising and preparation of food for:

Nutrition as a biological process is more fundamental than sex. In the life of the individual organism it is the more primary and recurrent physical want, while in the wider sphere of human society it determines, more largely than any other physiological function, the nature of social groupings, and the form their activities take. Further, while sex is necessarily a disruptive force in any human society, and one which must be checked and regulated to some extent if the community is to survive, man's food-seeking activities not only necessitate cooperation, but definitely foster it.¹

1. Interdependency of Man and Woman

Any human community must feed itself, and it has been observed that there are three general approaches to this task in primitive society.

The very simplest communities subsist entirely by, as it were, directly raiding the environment; these are the hunters and collectors, sometimes they are also fishermen.²

An example of a tribe on this level is the Kimberley of Australia, and in examining the work of the women of this tribe, Malinowski has suggested that the women of the tribe are compelled to be drudges and slaves. He feels that the sex division

1. Audrey I. Richards, Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1932), p. 1.

2. John Beattie, Other Cultures, p. 184.

of work is only partially based on differences of natural capacities. He considers the work of the women in food gathering to be exacting, requiring steady strain, patience and regularity, while he finds that men's work is more like sport.

Phyllis Kaberry, a woman anthropologist who lived among the people and participated in the work both of men and of the women, has an entirely different view of the situation, and she writes:

It is true that the woman provides the larger part of the meal, but one must not automatically assume that the work is more onerous. Actually it is less so than the men's, as I can speak from experience. Merely to follow them in their hunting over rugged hills and in the blazing sun left me so exhausted that after two attempts, I was content henceforth to amble with the women over the plains and along the dry river beds. The element of sport distracts attention temporarily from fatigue, but too often it ends in the disappointment of seeing one's dinner leaping into the distance over the hills.¹

A second type of tribal approach to the problem of feeding itself is connected with the domestication of cattle, goats and sheep in such numbers that the tribe is able to sustain life on the produce of their flocks and herds.² No literature was discovered that indicated the division of labor between the sexes in this type of society, but since this type of social system is so adapted to

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1. Phyllis Kaberry, Aboriginal Women, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1939.), pp. 13-15.
 2. John Beattie, Other Cultures, p. 185.

raiding and warfare; it can be assumed that men are primarily engaged in herding their flocks, protecting them against hostile raids, and adding to the stock by engaging in raids on neighboring groups while women are involved in the problems of food preparation and in maintaining homes in a nomadic situation.¹

The third approach to the problem of food provision is the one seemingly most common among primitive people today, that is, agricultural. Though methods are often poor and of such a nature that garden land is quickly worn out and fields must often be shifted, this way of life does permit a more settled and stable way of life than do the other two economies. The literature seems to indicate that in a primitive agricultural society, the women contribute more than the man.

Over a wide area of South and East Africa the women are definitely responsible for the supply of all vegetable produce. The role of cook is invariably associated with that of tiller of the soil. It is said of the Bechnana that all the work of providing vegetable food, from the sowing of the grain to the reaping of the crop, the threshing of the maize and Kaffer-corn, the husking of it in a wooden mortar with a wooden pestle, the grinding of the husked grain the cooking of the porridge and the brewing of the beer are all in their hands.²

It is no wonder that with responsibilities of this magnitude, it is said of the Rikatla woman of South Africa:

1. Ibid., p. 185.

2. Richards, op. cit., p. 57.

"They are rarely seen playing in the day time."¹

Junod gives a brief description of the woman's daily schedule:

arises
warms food left over from evening
prepares new sauce for seasoning
goes (often stays there all day -- cooks food there
and brings it home to eat in evening) to work in
fields with baby on back
afternoon nap
digs clay and smears mud on yard
collects fire wood
goes to storehouse for food
grinds grain - using an effort that causes streaming
perspiration
carries water
serves food
cleans up²

Even though Junod remarks that the Rikatla women are "very busy" the observer of his data is forced to question the possibility of one woman accomplishing all of these tasks every day.

Other observers are more realistic about the interdependence of men and women in problems concerning hunger and work and have observed that:

Food simply cannot be obtained in a primitive society except through the full functioning of the family as the unit for its supply. The components of the daily diet cannot be bought over a shop counter ready made.³

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1. Henri Alexandre Junod, The Life of a South African Tribe, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Co., 1913.), p. 307.
 2. Ibid., pp. 304-306.
 3. Richards, op. cit., p. 60.

Richards indicates the very important place a woman has in food provision, however, and brings out the psychological overtones that are connected with it.

"In primitive societies, where the family acts as the sole food-consuming unit, there is a continuous association of the functions of motherhood with the preparation, production, and control of food.

Each Bantu woman presides over her own fireplace, even in the case of a polygamous household. The provision of cooked food for the husband is her essential matrimonial duty, as well as a cherished privilege and a source of power. Neglect to provide the husband with cooked food may be a cause for divorce among many of these peoples, and conversely, a husband who has left his wife in anger, may often be forced to return and sue for mercy, if he can get no one else to cook his food. So essential is the part of cook in the married woman's status, that a husband's neglect to taste a dish prepared by a wife is as potent a cause of jealousy between the woman of a polygamous household as omitting to sleep with her. The Kafir husband can reduce his wife to shame by shouting aloud her inadequacies as a cook from the door of his hut. The great wife of a Zulu Chief may be degraded in rank if she cannot serve strangers and visitors with suitable and sufficient food.¹

A common Nuer folk-story gives further light on the attitude of primitive man towards the function of a wife as the provider of cooked food.

It is said that a certain man met a starving "orge", gave it meat to eat, and was rewarded by being shown a secret sweet potato field. He was warned by the "orge" not to show the field to anyone, but to eat the potatoes as he wished. The man enjoyed

1. Ibid., pp. 56, 57.

the potatoes and each day satisfied his hunger with them and consistantly refused the food offered to him by his wife.

After a few days his wife said, "People of my village, why has my husband always refused my food? Why does a man marry a wife?" The people replied, "A man marries in order to have someone to cook his food."

Determined to discover where he was eating, the wife followed her husband, saw what he did and demanded an explanation. When he told her what had happened, the potatoes disappeared and it was assumed that he had lost his mind when he could not show his wife the field. The husband went home with his wife, ate the food she offered him and never refused her food again.¹

Even though it has been observed that primitive tribes fall into gathering, pastoral, or agricultural types of economy, it must be recognized that traces of all three of these economies may exist in one tribe, and that the work of women may fall into all three areas.

Only about forty years ago, R. W. Tidrick observed that approximately fifty years before he lived among them, the Shulla people had been purely pastoral. At that time the women tilled a small dura patch, and since their only tools were the shoulder blades of the giraffe or the buffalo, it can be imagined that the grain thus

1. Huffman, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

produced did not constitute a significant portion of the diet.¹

Now that the Shullas have begun an agricultural type of life, the men do a major part of the work of cultivation, and both sexes participate in the work of harvest.

Where the dura is ready for harvesting, the heads are cut off and heaped on a rock made of poles resting on forked poles about two feet from the ground. After drying it is flayed out with heavy clubs by the men, winnowed² by the women, and carried to the village for storage.

Cattle are still very important to the economy of the tribe, and milk an important part of the diet, but women are not permitted to have anything to do with cattle, and the work of milking is done by boys or old men.³

This pattern of women being excluded from anything to do with the work of cattle is followed by another tribe, the Luo of Kenya who are much like the Shulla,⁴ but in still another closely related tribe, the Nuer, the milking of cattle is an important part of a woman's daily work.⁵ We may conclude then that no pattern of honor or dishonor in the important work with cattle can be

1. Westermann, op. cit., p. 99

2. Ibid., p. 101.

3. Ibid., p. xxxii.

4. Butt, op. cit., p. 108.

5. Huffman, op. cit., p. 23.

discerned, but that each tribe has developed its own systems of the division of labor.

It is difficult to make general statements about work other than that related to food. For the most part, division of labor is related to the natural differences of age and sex.

Certain types of work are traditionally performed by women, others by man, but the determining factors in most cases seem to be suitability and convenience.¹

Both men and women cooperate in the building of huts, women are much occupied in the maintenance of home sites, women are the primary makers of pottery, and man traditionally occupy themselves with the provision of foods.²

2. Girl's Tasks

Since it has been demonstrated that the work of primitive woman is essential to the life of her tribe and is exacting and time-consuming, it is not surprising to find that little girls sense this important factor in life very early. It is said that when a little girl plays:

She amuses herself by cooking little dishes of her own, and when playing at married life with some small boy, she must always cook him a meal. She knows that her

1. Butt, op. cit., p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 39.

bride price may depend on her skill in this respect.¹

A girl does not just play at women's work, however, but has important parts in doing some of the actual work that is required by the tribe.

School-age girls have domestic duties that are not heavy but are routine and dull. They tend their younger brothers and sisters, wash clothes, and clean the house; they collect bits of driftwood and dried coconut leaf sheaths to be used as firewood. It is their job to keep their yards clean by sweeping them with a long bundle of coconut-leaf midribs. They help their mothers plant sweet potatoes near the house, and on occasion assist them in the taro fields. Not until they become marriageable do they undertake women's work in earnest, planting and gathering taro roots in the black knee-deep mud where the plant must be grown.²

Though primitive women do not seem to place insufferable burdens on their daughters, it is evident that girls are well prepared to assume adult responsibilities when these are required of her. It is said of the Dahoney girl:

A little girl, when she is but five years old, accompanies her mother to the market, does small tasks about the home, or pulls up weeds in the field, so that by the time she is ten or eleven years old, she is able to cook all of the staple foods used in a household, to wash the clothes used by the women, and to do all the minor tasks of their sex.³

1. Richards, op. cit., p. 58.

2. H. G. Barnett, Being a Palaman (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1960), p. 8.

3. Herskovits, op. cit., p. 274.

An account of the life of a Nuer girl emphasizes that there are certain skills to be mastered in order for a woman to make her proper contribution to the tribe, and that these skills are acquired in the course of helping her mother and in play.

The life of a girl in the Nuer home is a foretaste of the life of her mother. The bulk of the work which can be done by the children falls to her. When just a little girl she must take a gourd and carry water, learning to balance it on her head. She must help to care for the baby, carrying it astride one hip, with her arm around it. Cane stalks must be brought for fuel, or she may accompany her mother when she goes to the forest to get wood. She gathers sticks of wood, binding them together with grass, and carries them home on her head. Or she may accompany her mother when she goes out to cut grass for roofing the houses. She early learns to carry her burden poised on top of her head.

As she grows older she learns to pound dura and to sift and cook it. She learns all the art of the Nuer house-keeper and, indeed, soon becomes a small replica of her mother.¹

Thoughtful contemplation about the work and capabilities of these "small replicas" emphasizes the very important role women play in the economic life of primitive society.

B. Responsibility of Woman in Child Rearing and Education.

1. Considerations Previously Introduced.

1. Huffman, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

It is difficult to separate the responsibilities of primitive woman in child rearing and education from the other considerations already presented in this chapter. We have seen that barrenness in a woman can be the cause for the return of the bride price, for one of the essential features of marriage is the pro-creation of new members for the husband's clan. We have also seen that the education of girls is inexorably tied with woman's contribution to the economic life of the tribe. The importance of the mother to the child is definitely related to the fact that she is seen as one of the primary providers of food.

The mother prepares and grows the food, and she is also clearly the person who can distribute and divide it. The woman's power of owning and sharing out food differs of course from tribe to tribe, especially where the products of the herd are concerned, but as a general rule she has considerable power over the vegetable food, and may help herself from the store-houses she has filled for her husband, and in some cases, actually owns food in her own right. To her children she is clearly the center of the household, and the controller of the family supplies. The bonds which united the child to the suckling mother are deepened and extended as she assumes in his eyes the sociological functions of maternity in the nutritive scheme of his tribe.¹

That the emotional ties that bind an adult to his mother are tied to the amount of work she has done is shown in the answer given by ten Anuaks to the question: "Why do you love your mother?"

1. Richards, op. cit., p. 59.

All ten replied that they had given birth to them and brought them up, and there was a heavy emphasis on the long hard work involved.¹

2. Importance of Child Bearing and Maturation of Children

The survey question: "Does woman's status and security depend on childbearing and the maturing of the child?" evoked an almost unanimous response from those who replied. Only one answered negatively, though some who had used Christian native informants indicated that maturation was not as crucial a factor as childbearing.²

Though the influence of Christianity may be beginning to change the attitude of some men, a missionary to the Nuer has said,

I still don't know a Nuer who has kept a wife who hasn't successfully raised a child.³

Another missionary to the Nuer has observed:

The greatest desire of a Nuer woman is for children. She realizes that as long as she can bear her husband children

1. Alatker Kwut, personal letter previously cited.

2. Letters from 23 missionaries, previously cited.

3. Marion Farquar in collection of 23 letters previously cited.

he will care for her. Should she fail him in this, her position is insecure, and he, no doubt, will try to get another wife who will be able to give him his heart's desire.¹

Children are important to women for emotional reasons as well as for security in her relations to her husband. It has been said of the Talleusi:

To every woman, her own children are the most complete incarnation of her own social self, of her autonomy and status in the family, and of the differentiation of her clan from those of her co-wives. Emotionally wrapped up in them as she is, she becomes almost anarchical in her concern for their welfare.²

An expectant mother's care of herself and her desire to go to her mother's or grandmother's home for the birth of the child is indicative of its importance to her. It has been observed of the Dinka women that:

During the period just before and after the birth of a child the mother observes certain taboos. Usually the first born is delivered in the home of the maternal grandparents and when the baby is strong enough, it is taken to its father's home.³

When Anuak women were asked why they liked to go to their mother's home for the birth of a child (particularly the first one) they replied that the new mother is ignorant of how to care for a child, and especially needs instruction about how to sleep with a

1. Huffman, op. cit., p. 42.

2. Fortes, op. cit., p. 131.

3. Butt, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

baby so as not to hurt it by rolling over on it. The mother-in-law would perhaps hesitate to speak out at her son's wife when necessary to tell her what to do and not to do and would not have the patience to see the job through. A woman's own mother is aware of the importance of these things to her daughter and is willing to pay the price necessary to help her.¹

It has been observed that among the Dahoney, where women have more economic status than is usual, a barren woman is not despised or returned to her family, but may well become a favorite of her husband. The bearing of children must bulk large in the thought of the Dahoney, however, for it has been observed that if a woman does not become pregnant in the normal period of time after marriage, a witch doctor is consulted to see if any malevolent force is preventing conception, and steps are taken to correct the situation.²

A further observation on the Dahoney confirms the importance of children to the mother and the fact that having a child makes her something special.

A woman who is a favorite of her husband is permitted, if his means allow, to do no work outside his compound for a year after the birth of her child, or even longer, if she gives birth to twins. Others, not so well off, allow their wives to

1. Alathker Kwut, personal letter previously cited.

2. Herskovits, op. cit., pp. 341-342 and 259.

abstain from work in the field or market for six or seven months, but almost any husband, if he does not altogether scorn the will of his ancestors, will allow the woman to remain at home for three months after she has borne him a child, no matter what his circumstances, and during this interval the husband sees to it that she is provided with food, water and firewood.¹

These observations confirm Phillips contention that "procreation is the chief end of marriage" and that the importance of securing legitimate descendents accounts for the most characteristic features of African marriage law.²

3. Education of Children.

Nida has observed that one of the most important factors in the education of a child raised in a primitive culture is the fact of late weaning.³ While the child is still in the very close and dependent relationship with his mother, he achieves most of the developmental tasks of infancy and early childhood: learning to walk, learning to take some solid foods, learning to talk, beginnings of learning involved in the control of the elimination of body wastes (which is the first moral training the child receives), learning about sex differences, forming simple concepts of social and physical reality, learning to relate himself emotionally to other people, and

1. Ibid., p. 267.

2. Phillips, op. cit., p. xvii.

3. Eugene Nida, Translation secretary of American Bible Society. Personal Conversation on September 28, 1965.

beginning to learn to distinguish right and wrong to developing a conscience.¹

The child in a primitive culture could not survive without the breast milk of its mother or some other woman acting as a mother-substitute.

The first human relationship ever formed by the young organism is almost entirely nutritional. Food is the infant's most imperative and constant need. In the dim period preceding consciousness, hunger and the various degrees of satisfaction form its dominant sense - emotional states. While the act of sucking cannot, of course, be disassociated from the other coincident pleasures the mother provides - the warmth and tenderness of her physical contact and the services she renders - yet I think I am right in maintaining that nutritive dependence is the dominant element on which the child-to-mother sentiment is built.

The physical link between the baby and the mother influences profoundly not only the integration of the child's character, but also the subsequent relationships it forms both within the family unit, or the larger social group.²

The care of a small infant is an all consuming task, and the fact that a subsequent pregnancy would cut off the milk supply of the smallest child causes parents to avoid one another in sexual acts.³ All of these things tend to shut up a child to physical and emotional dependence on the mother.⁴

1. Robert J. Havighurst, Developmental Tasks and Education, (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1952.), pp. 6-14.

2. Richards, op. cit., p. 2.

3. Huffman, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

4. Richards, op. cit., p. 39.

The bond between the two individuals (mother and baby) is strengthened by the comparative isolation in which they live during the first years. In daily life the segregation of all women and children is fairly complete, especially in the case of the wives of a polygamous household each in their separate huts ringed around the kraal. No bantu husband will eat with his wife and children. He takes his food, either at the men's place in the centre of the kraal, or in a separate partition of the hut. Economic activities further separate, for the mother with her child works in the fields, while the father supervises the herd.¹

It appears that during the long period before the child is weaned, his father pays little attention to him, while on the other hand, the mother is never so completely in the possession of her child as during the first three years of his life.²

The median age for weaning appears to be about at two and a half years of age, and may be a time when the child is actually separated from his mother.³ It should be emphasized that this is a great contrast with the previous experience of the child. With the Dahoney, for instance:

It is to be observed that very young children are carried most of the time on the backs of their mothers, or in rare instances, of nurses. Unless prevented by special circumstances, a mother takes her baby with her wherever she goes, and women may be seen selling in the market, carrying burdens on the road, working in the fields or dancing in

1. Ibid., p. 45.

2. Ibid., pp. 39 and 46.

3. J. W. M. Whiting and I. F. Child, Child Training and Personality, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 70-71.

ceremonial dances with their infants straddling their backs. A child is "toilet-trained" by the mother who, as she carries it about senses when it is restless, so that every time it must perform its excretory functions, the mother puts it on the ground.¹

Weaning, then, can be a trauma-packed experience.

It has to be enforced and does not seem to take place without much effort and strain.²

It is here that the fact that there are many "mothers" in the life of a primitive child is a great help to him. It is said of the Nyoro that:

The term which we translate 'mother' is applied to one's mother. It is even applied to one's mother's brothers children, whom we should call our matrilinear cross-cousins, and to one's mother's brother's sons' children. The explanation of this peculiar usage is that all these relatives are members of the same agnatic descent group as one's mother, and so are all thought of as 'mother.'³

Not only does the child enjoy comfort and solace from many mother figures, but he may expect discipline from many women as well. The correction of children (including flogging) is to a large extent in the hands of the mother and her female relatives. A mother always strives to prevent the petty infractions of her

1. Herskovits, op. cit., pp. 272-273.

2. Richards, op. cit., p. 50.

3. Beattie, An African, p. 53.

children from coming to the ears of her husband.¹

As the child grows somewhat older, he is not so separated from his father, though attachment to the mother is still very marked. In Fortes account of the Tole, he writes as follows about the child in the period between weaning and the age of seven.

Children of this age delight in being with their parents. They will hang around their mother in the kitchen and trot around or sit with their father when he is resting under the shade tree. They see and hear everything that is going on in the house and are tolerated on all domestic occasions. In this way, and through their mimetic play, they build up the rudimentary schemes of ideas, manual dexterities and sentiments out of which grow the skills, interests and values of later life. Love and indulgence is still the key-note of their parents and other close relatives attitude to them. Talleusi say that the small children at this stage are still more attached to their mother than to their father because it is she who feeds them. Throughout all a Taleng's life, he thinks of his mother as the one who gave him food without stint, going hungry herself if need be, so that her child might be fed.²

But as soon as a boy grows out of childhood, he comes under the sole authority of his father.³ The men and the boys of the village sleep in the barn which is to be found in most villages,⁴ or a boy may build himself an entirely separate house after having

1. Hersekovits, op. cit., p. 343.

2. Fortes, The Web of Kinship, p. 190.

3. Evans-Pritchard, The Position of Women, p. 48.

4. Huffman, op. cit., p. 19.

received the permission of his father to do so.¹

Even though breaking away from his mother's sleeping house severs his close contact with her, the boy is reminded that:

The woman contributes to the formation of the child's soul, and it is she who provides the infant with blood and food for its growth while it is still in her womb and afterwards suckles it at her breasts. Where a Zauke speaks of the functions of motherhood he points to the way in which a mother bears her child in her body, to the way in which she suckles it, and to the way in which she carries it in her arms or on her hips. Thus a maternal aunt will reproach a boy by reminding him of his mother's pains during parturition and her cares during infancy.²

All of the missionaries answering the survey questions indicated that, as has been shown above, boys are only under the mother's discipline until they reach puberty. In some tribes, this is marked with initiation rites, but this is not universal.³

On the other hand, all of the answers indicated that girls were under their mother's discipline for a much longer period.⁴ When girls of the Dahoney reach the age for sex-education, they either continue to sleep with their mothers or in the houses of their paternal grandmothers, and are thus still under the strong

1. J. H. Driberg, The Lango, (London: Unwin, 1923.), p. 75.

2. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Essays in Social Anthropology, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962.), p. 122.

3. Letters from 23 missionaries cited previously.

4. Ibid.

influence of a mother figure.¹

E. SUMMARY

The information presented in this chapter indicates that the role of woman in primitive family life is a very important one, and that she enjoys significant status.

The payment of bridewealth enhances the value of the woman in her own eyes, and those of her family and indicates the value placed on her not only by her own husband, but by the members of his entire clan. She enjoys a degree of freedom in the choice of her mate, and if she is widowed knows a greater degree of security than does her western sister.

She is expected to work hard, but her work is considered indispensable, and because this is so, her husband is as much dependent upon her as she is on him. She thus enjoys a superior status to that of the entirely dependent wife.

Her status depends to a great degree on the successful bearing and rearing of children, but when she does accomplish this task, she is rewarded with the lasting love and appreciation of her

1. Herskovits, op. cit., page 277.

children, and by her close contact with both sexes during the early years of life, has the dominant part in shaping their characters.

Her role in her daughter's life is even more far-reaching and affects their relationship as long as they both live.

CHAPTER II

WOMAN'S ROLE IN PRIMITIVE RELIGION

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A. Introduction

The problem of locating material on the role of woman in primitive religion is even greater than that of finding systematic studies on her social position. In Lowie's text, Primitive Religion, there is a chapter entitled "Woman and Religion," but it is a chapter of only fifteen pages in a volume of three hundred and thirty pages and the author says of it:

If in spite of our ignorance a special chapter is devoted to the topic it is in order to direct attention to an interesting but neglected field.¹

Evans-Pritchard, in his exhaustive works on Azande² and Nuer³ religions, practically ignores women in his studies. There are no separate chapters on women, and only brief references to them in the indexes.

It is therefore evident that the method followed in chapter one must continue in this chapter of the study. It has been demonstrated that even though the literature of social anthropology gives little recognition to the role played by women in primitive society,

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1. Robert Lowie, Primitive Religion (London: George Rutledge and Sons, Ltd., 1936) p. 206.
 2. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).
 3. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

they do have a very important place in tribal life and enjoy a significant status. In this chapter, the literature on primitive religion will be examined to see if women have a significant role in the religious life of the tribes.

B. Essential Elements of Primitive Religion

It will be necessary first to consider the essential elements of primitive religion in order to see what its basic orientations are and how it affects the lives of primitive people. Tylor, who was one of the pioneers in the field of primitive religion, has suggested that religion may be defined simply as "the belief in Spiritual Beings," but Lowie and other more recent scholars have rejected this as being a definition that only recognizes the fact that religion arises in response to an intellectual need.¹

Lowie fails to give any definition in place of this one, however, and contents himself with considering concrete examples of various primitive religions from the viewpoint of those who practice them.² MacGregor offers a more helpful definition which he describes as useful "for working purposes":

1. Lowie, op. cit., p. xiv.

2. Ibid., p. xviii, xix, and pp. 3-96.

Religion is commitment to a kind or quality of life that purports to recognize a source beyond itself (usually but not necessarily called God), and that issues in recognizable fruits in human conduct, culture, and thought.¹

1. Idea of Gods and God

What, then, is this "source beyond itself" found in primitive life?

An examination of the literature indicates that primitive peoples are well endowed with gods, but the systems and inter-relationship of these gods are so complex that only the religious specialists of a people understand them. Nida and Smalley give evidence of the complexity of the pantheons of gods in Dahomean thought² and Evans-Pritchard, though asserting that Nuer religion may be described as monotheistic (for the Spirit is always considered the same as God) gives testimony to the difficulty of understanding the system when he says:

On one level Nuer religion may be regarded as monotheistic, at another level as polytheistic, and it can also be regarded at other levels as totemistic or fetishistic.³

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1. Geddes MacGregor, Introduction to Religious Philosophy, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959) p. 2.
 2. Eugene Nida and William Smalley, Introducing Animism, (New York: Friendship Press, 1959) p. 15.
 3. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, op. Cit., p. 316.

One striking feature of a great number of primitive religious systems is the belief in some sort of a "high god." This god is often considered as the creator, but he is thought of as quite far away, and unrelated to his creation.¹ This idea is expressed by a Lugbara man as he says:

Adroa [high god] made us here on the earth, and he made all the animals. Did he not put Gborogboro and Meme (the first beings) in the world? How then can he be a person? Can you make a person, or can I? No, we do not know what God is like; he is everywhere, in the wind and in the sky. He is far away and we do not sacrifice to him.²

The literature abounds with creation legends, and some are so similar to the Genesis account that the reader is forced to suspect some kind of Judeo-Christian or Moslem influence, but the Kono informant who told the following story was not aware of any such influence.

After God made the world he took a big, big log and placed it on the earth. He took some mud and made two rolls of dirt which he placed under the log for shelter, for there was no house to put them in. Then God went away and left them there. Later he returned and made two people from the mud, a man and a woman. And the two of them lived on dirt.

However, there was one tree near them which had fruit, but God had told them that He would return and tell them the time when they could eat it. One day the girl took the fruit and after eating it she said that it was very sweet. The boy said, 'What will our father say when he finds that you have eaten the fruit he told you not to eat?' The girl said that perhaps God would not know.

1. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 15.

2. John Middleton, Lugbara Religion, (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960) p. 253.

When God returned again he said, 'I can see by the look on your faces that one of you has done some wrong. Which one of you is guilty?'

The boy said, 'Since you left us, I have not done anything wrong.'

The girl said, 'I have not done anything wrong either, except that I ate some of the fruit of this tree.'

Then God said, 'It is all right. The time has come for you to eat it; but I must give you both a punishment -- the girl for eating the fruit, and the boy for looking on while she did it.' He gave the boy a cutlass and said, 'From now on you must clear the ground and plant the rice and pull the weeds from it.' To the woman he handed a pot and said, 'You have been eating that which you did not have to cook, but from now on you must cook all the food before you eat it.' That is the reason every man today has a cutlass, while every woman has a pot in which she cooks the rice.' ¹

Other observations about the Kono concept of god sound less corrupted by outside influence and are typical of thoughts about such a god held by other primitive peoples.

There are two words used for the name of the Supreme Being, 'Meketa' and 'Yata' ... The thought is that He is the one who was present in the world a long time before any one met him; that he is the one who remains, does not die, and each generation finds him living. Hence he is the Everlasting One. ... He is the one whom you meet everywhere. He is the Great One, above and over all. ²

God sees whatever we do. All things are for him. He made all things, but man is foremost, for one man and one woman were made first. The man and the woman somehow knew each other and from them the earth became peopled. ³

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1. Robert T. Parsons, Religion in an African Society, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964) p. 109.
 2. Ibid., p. 163.
 3. Ibid., p. 165.

Although this "high god" is thought to be unrelated to his creation, his name seems to be used by many in a way that would indicate that the people actually think of him as being active in the world. When a Kono has been wronged, such expressions as these are used:

It is in God's hands.
I left it to God (to get revenge).
God will pay him.
May God see this person.¹

It is also evident that primitive people call on the "high god" for help in extreme situations, such as when they consider themselves hopelessly lost in the forest and know that they will soon die of thirst if they cannot find their way to a river.²

Thomas, in his contribution to a volume on African ideas about god, says:

'Jok' among the Acboli and Lango, was a neutral all-pervading force, inherently neither well nor ill-disposed, but ready to intervene if suitably invoked.³

Westerman has recorded the prayer of a Shulla addressed to the "high god" when a sacrifice was being made for serious illness.

I implore thee, thou God, I pray to thee during the night.
How are all people kept by thee all day! And thou walkest
in the midst of the (high) grass, I walk with thee; when I
sleep in the house, I sleep with thee. To thee I pray for
food, and thou givest it to the people; and water to drink;

1. Ibid., p. 165.

2. Observation of the author during seventeen years among the Anuak people.

3. H. B. Thomas, in African Ideas of God, ed. Edwin W. Smith (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1950) pp. 206-207.

and the soul is kept (alive) by thee. There is no one above thee, thou God. Thou becamest the grandfather of Nyikango [King]. If famine comes, is it not given by thee? So as this cow stands here, is it not thus? Thou, God, to whom shall we pray, is it not to thee? Thou God, and thou who becamest Nyikango and thy son, Dak! But the soul (of man), is it not thine own? It is thou who liftest up (the sick).¹

2. Kinds and Nature of Spirits

It is only in extreme cases that primitive people call on a seemingly remote "high god" for, ...

In many cultures the high god is thought to be very much less interested in the affairs of men than are lesser gods or spirits who may be thought to play a frequent part in everyday life. Many African peoples make sacrifices and utter invocations to the ghosts of the dead and to other spirits, but they do not attempt to enter into so personal a relationship with the high god.²

It is difficult to observe many universals concerning the kinds and nature of spirits, for the various tribal religious systems vary greatly in this area. In general, however, it may be said that there are at least five important classes of spirits.

- (1) The creator spirit of spirits.
- (2) The chief spirits, usually with special responsibilities for earth, sky, sea, animal life, fire, etc.
- (3) The deified ancestors, who are not just temporary ghosts. ...
- (4) Evil or mischievous spirits
- (5) The relatively insignificant spirits of forest, field and stream who have mostly nuisance value, but who can give one a scare if they are not treated with respect.³

1. L. Westerman, op. cit., p. 171.

2. Beattie, Other Cultures, op. cit., p. 228.

3. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 17.

These spirits are what concern primitive people in their practical religion, for they impinge continually on the everyday world¹ and the worship and control of these spirits is what constitutes the practical part of primitive religion.

3. Mana

Not only are primitive people convinced of the reality of an elaborate system of gods and of spirits, but they believe that many things can possess power in themselves, and this power is called Mana.²

In Howell's study of Polynesian religion, he makes the statement that the comparison of Mana with electricity is inescapable. In Polynesian society, Mana could be contained in any person or thing. Chiefs were the main vessels, the priests next, and even commoners could possess it. It is important to this study to observe that women, who were considered to be "of the dark," or "of the earthly half of nature," were the least likely of all to have it.³

Tabu, which is often an important feature of primitive life, is an upset or anything that caused an upset in the proper balance of Mana.⁴

1. Rosemary Guilleband in African Ideas of God, op. cit., p. 181.

2. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 18.

3. William Howells, The Heathens (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1949), p. 38.

4. Ibid., p. 39.

4. Totem

Another prominent feature of primitive religion is the idea of totem.

Totemism is an idea, not of worshipping of animals, but of affiliation with them. Basically it is an association of human groups with animal groups in both a social and a religious way Socially, totemism goes with the formation of clans and more definitely 'religious' are the attitudes people hold toward their totems. Typically, they may neither kill nor eat their totem animal, though they usually do not take it amiss if members of other clans do so.¹

The totem animals are sometimes regarded as the guardian of the clan,² and there is a close relation between the people and their totem.

Instead of an extension of tabu there is, in some places, a feeling of brotherliness, good will, or dependence between the men and their totem. Among the tall Dinka of the White Nile, a crocodile man will swim fearlessly among his reptilian relatives (although even a crocodile can make an occasional mistake), and a lion man will sleep in the open when away from his village, while any other man would fear lions and make a barricade of thorn.³

5. Unity of Nature

Totem is one obvious expression of the attitude of primitive people towards the world of nature, and Mana is another.

Reality is all of one piece. That is to say, there is not the same water-tight distinction between human beings and animals, or between animate and inanimate existence. Animals may be ancestors of man, people may change into animals, trees and stones may possess souls, and the Mana of a stick may be transferred to a man.⁴

1. Ibid., pp. 167-168.

2. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 20.

3. Howells, op. cit., p. 169.

4. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 50.

And not only do primitive people identify with the world of nature, but with all their ancestors and future descendants, and they have an understanding of themselves "as psychologically akin to the inhabitants of the spirit world."

All of the ideas of religion are centered in this concept of unity,¹ as can be seen in this summary statement about Kono religion:

The Kono man turns to this unseen world in the confidence that it has the ability to protect all that man has failed to protect, and to guard all that man considers worthwhile.

Most important are the ancestral spirits, for they are the most real, nearest to him, and of his same nature. But the fact that they have some of the limitations which he feels within himself may explain why he also seeks help from the spirits in the mountains, rivers and hills, which he hopes may assist where other help fails.

Furthermore, the Kono man turns to the earth, whose great power is evidenced by her wealth of vegetation, and he concludes that she can help in the ever present struggle.

Besides these forces, the Kono man has come to believe in a mystic quality of energy present in certain objects, which is more potent than the physical properties of herbs. He musters this force in his defense, that his fortifications may be as strong as he can make them.

In desperation, after all other efforts have failed, or where all forces are appealed to in the same ceremonies, the Kono man seeks help from God, who, though far removed and not directly concerned in his affairs, yet has, as he believes, a power above all and will give help.²

1. Ibid., pp. 51, 52.

2. Parsons, op. cit., p. 169.

C. Woman's Participation in Primitive Religions

Primitive people believe that spirit powers can be controlled, that there are reliable techniques for this control, and that certain specialists have particular powers along these lines. All of the many functions of magic, divination, ordeals, witchcraft, spirit possession and ceremonialism are important in primitive life because of this belief.¹

1. Restrictions on Full Participation

If the average person were asked if men or women are the most religious and therefore most concerned with the control and worship of spirits, most would answer in favor of women, on the basis of their observations of woman's psychological makeup and her behavior in our own religious systems. The fact is, however, that in primitive society, women are excluded from many religious activities, and quite limited in the degree of participation allowed them in others.²

In Azande religion, the poison oracle is the most important ceremony in the religious system. "Benge," the poison, is fed to chickens, and by observations of the death of the chicken, the practitioner answers the questions of the one who has come for advice.

1. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., pp. 31 and 54.

2. Lowie, op. cit., p. 205.

A Benge seance is held privately, away from the village, and out of sight of women, who are a bad influence on it and might spoil it just by looking at it.¹

Lowie makes a strong point of the fact that primitive man exhibits a strong horror of menstruation, and says that this is one of the primary reasons for women's pronounced religious disabilities.² This seems to be particularly in the area of mana, for as among the Dahomey:

No menstruating woman may touch the charm for fear of dire consequences -- a common taboo for sacred or powerful objects.³

Some less immediately obvious reasons for restrictions on women's participation in primitive religion are psychological ones. Evans-Pritchard says, without any qualifying explanation, that Nuer women do not make sacrifices,⁴ but in another section of his book gives a very logical explanation for this; that women (and boys) simply never carry the fighting spears used for the sacrifices.

It is suggested that the spear as a projection of the right hand symbolizes the vitality of man, the manhood of man with the associations of lineage values that go with it. It is within the logic of the representation that we speak only of men. The spear stands for masculinity. Women do not bear fighting spears. The spear does not go with femininity.⁵

1. Howells, op. cit., p. 74.

2. Lowie, op. cit., p. 211.

3. Nida and Smalley, op. cit., p. 18.

4. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, op. cit., p. 297.

5. Ibid., p. 236.

Evans-Pritchard's work on Azande religion is old (1937) and reflects a much lower opinion of the status of primitive women than he later held.¹ Since his point that women hold an inferior position to men in legal matters has been demonstrated to be valid,² his assertion that the fact that women had little legal status in the tribe accounts for the fact that women took no important part in the magical or oracular ceremonies may also be considered valid.³

This idea is reinforced by Fortes when he says:

Women, in such patrilineal systems as that of the Tallensi, have no right to officiate or even to take any autonomous action in the worship of either their own ancestors or those of their husbands, though they have as close personal relationship with parental kin as their brothers and husbands. The explanation long ago given by Fustil de Coulanges, to wit that women have no juridical independence, and therefore no religious status in their own right, holds for African patrilineal descent systems.⁴

Other restrictions seem to grow out of the very natural division of men and women with respect to their work. For instance, among the Bororo,

Since women only play a secondary role in looking after the herd, it is not surprising that the magic recipes for the fertility of the herd are transmitted through the men.⁵

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1. Evans-Pritchard, The Position of Women, Op. Cit., p. 45.
 2. Ante, p. 10.
 3. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles, . . ., op. cit., p. 16.
 4. Meyer Fortes in African Systems of Thought, International African Institute (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) pp. 132-133.
 5. Marguerite Dupire in Women of Tropical Africa, Denise Paulme, editor. (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 88.

Nida has observed that even though most religious practitioners are men, this does not necessarily indicate that women are not concerned with primitive religion. The fact is that in most of the areas of primitive life, men are the specialists, for women (burdened as they are with daily work and the constant care of children) do not have the time to specialize.¹

That there are women witch-doctors is evident from an examination of the literature, but their nature and areas of responsibility are limited. When women are considered witch doctors there is a marked element of apparent demon possession involved which is not always evident in the male specialists. Among the Lybara, the work of divination is given to women, and involves demon possession.

The skill or power of divination is inherited in the female line. A diviner is possessed by God when she is an adolescent girl. She wanders about the bush, often naked, for several days. It is said 'she wanders about mad.' Later, when married, she becomes a diviner. A shrine is erected for her, of stones brought from the river where God, who possessed her, is said to live. This shrine is called 'hut of God' and a sheep is killed at its erection by another diviner who sponsors her. A bulb, with magical and sacred qualities, is placed on the Adrojo [hut of God.] Her sponsor contacts God with her diving gourd, and God says that he has possessed her to give her the power of divination. The girl then keeps her shrine for the rest of her life,² even if she does not actually practice as a diviner.

1. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation previously cited.

2. Middleton, op. cit., p. 249.

Butt observes that there are four classes of Dinka witch doctors, and one (called "Doll") can be man or woman. Their power is attributed to the indwelling of a spirit.¹ In an extremely complicated religious system among the Gã of West Africa, each god enters and possesses certain women, who are then appointed to the god's temple and expected to speak for the god after being "possessed" at ceremonies.²

Anuak women have often been observed to be possessed by what they call "Aciini" when they were attempting to cure. Evans-Pritchard has described in great detail a lengthy ceremony during which an Anuak woman witch doctor was so overcome by apparent demon possession that a more powerful Nuer (male) witch doctor had to be called to cure her.³

Because of this association of violent demon possession with many women witch doctors, it is surprising to note that the Anuak people apparently had no fear of these women when they were children, but considered them as people who could help them.⁴

It is not too likely that Anuak children would have seen many cases of demon possession, but it is quite probable that

1. Butt, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

2. Howells, op. cit., p. 131.

3. Evans-Pritchard, The Position of Women, op. cit., p. 253.

4. Alathker Kwut, personal letter, previously cited.

most of them would have been taken to a witch doctor for healing a number of times.

Evans-Pritchard's note on what he calls "Anuak Magicians" illumines this point.

The Anuak, like most of the Nilotic peoples, have very little magic. Nevertheless, they have a number of specialists who would generally be classed under the heading of magicians. These are called ajua, and their homesteads are often marked by branches stuck in the earth. One kind, who may be men or women, are called "ajuan wäri." These are diviners who divine by throwing strips of leather (wäri), cut from the skins of various animals and decorated with brass rings, into the air and observing how they fall onto a goat's skin.¹ Another kind of specialist is called "ajuan awal." She, or less commonly he, cures sick persons by locating and removing objects shot into their bodies by witches. She massages and oils the patient's body and then places a gourd (awal) containing water on it. She runs her hand round the gourd and taps it and eventually produces the objects of witchcraft from the water; pieces of skin, pieces of shell, and other small objects.²

The idea that women who are witch doctors are concerned primarily with healing is confirmed by observations of the Azande.

It is very seldom that women become witch doctors. A few are qualified to act as leeches, and occasionally a woman gains a considerable reputation among her patients, usually persons of her own sex Men also visit women leeches to be treated for ailments.³

Though the woman witch doctor among the Lango seems to have greater status, her primary concern is still healing.

Men or women may become ajoka, but the most competent and famous have always been women. The task of the

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1. The author has never heard of a woman witch doctor of this classification among the Anuak. If they do exist, there are not many.
 2. Evans-Pritchard, The Position of Women, op. cit., p. 252.
 3. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft Oracles, op. cit., p. 155.

Lango witch doctor is to interpret Jok's [God's] will and, by magical processes to safeguard and cure the members of the community. They give advice and treatment for all ailments, but some have acquired special ability to cure a particular disease.¹

2. Religious Practices Touching on Important Parts of Woman's Life

Magic and religion permeate every aspect of the life of primitive man,² but it must be recognized that there are certain crucial times when religious practices are especially important.

Among the Kono people the following crucial times deserve special attention because they are the occasions when aspects of the religion are called into play. They are: illness, suicide, murder, wrongs, oath taking, death and burial.³

It should also be recognized that there are certain areas of the life of a primitive people that are of particular concern to women and an understanding of this factor can help in the evaluation of the extent of woman's participation in primitive religion. Butt's analysis of one feature of Acholi religion points this up.

'Kwer' means a magical or religious ceremony and refers to a particular class of ceremonies designed to bring the Acholi into contact with his ancestors. Their motive is to ward off evil and obtain strength. Women have their own Kwer which are similar to those of men There are ceremonies for the first pregnancy, for the newly-born child and for the harvest thanksgiving.⁴

1. Butt, op. cit., p. 106.

2. Paul Radin, The World of Primitive Man (New York: Henry Schuman, 1953), p. 26.

3. Parsons, op. cit., p. 19.

4. Butt, op. cit., p. 89.

Evans-Pritchard stresses the fact that magic among the Azande is a male prerogative, but in making that point, he demonstrates the importance of magic for women in certain things.

Women are expected to use only those medicines which are associated with purely feminine pursuits; fishing by ladling out water from dry season pools, salt making, beer brewing, and so forth, and also for purely feminine conditions; childbirth, abortion, menstruation, lactation, and such like processes.¹

Since it has been demonstrated in the first chapter of this study that women have a great responsibility in providing a significant part of the food for the family, it should not be surprising to discover her in an active role in the magical practices associated with these tasks. Magic is very important to primitive people in activities connected with getting food.

Magic dictates a great many details and practices in hunting, fishing, or raising crops, or running the weather; all these are connected with getting food.²

Among the Baganda, the first fruits of the gardens (which have been planted and cultivated by the women) are offered by the women's husbands to their gods with a prayer for further blessing on the crops, but when the food is cooked, the women have a certain ceremony to perform as well.

When the beans were ready, a woman would call her eldest son to eat some of the first which she had cooked. If she

1. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles, op. cit., p. 427.

2. Howells, op. cit., p. 57.

neglected to do this, she would (it was thought) incur the displeasure of the gods and fall ill.¹

The time of harvest is an especially significant time to primitive people, and a time filled with religious significance.

Parsons indicates this factor in his study of Kono life.

The harvest comes to a climax with a big feast in which there is an abundant supply of rice and stew for all. If any one sneezes while eating at this feast, it is a sign that the ancestral spirits need food If the yield is not satisfactory, they believe that the witches have danced in the farm, or that it is due to the anger of the spirits, or a person who has just died.²

Though it is a male priest who officiates at the official harvest ceremonies, the women do all of the work of preparation of the foods for the feasts and for the sacrifices offered to the gods in thanksgiving.³

Fishing is a special female prerogative among some of the Kono, so a special ceremony is performed in connection with this work.

The women have a special ceremony in charge of the oldest woman of the village. She informs the women when they should take their gifts of rice, dry fish, nuts and baskets to the stream. At the water's edge, the priestess addresses the important fisherwomen who have died, and offers them the gifts as she throws them into the water. After a song, she gathers the nuts and fish baskets. She enters the water naked, with special beans making a medicine which she dips in the water. The water from the leaves is then sprinkled upon the nuts and

1. John Roscoe, The Baganda, (London, MacMillan and Co., 1911), p. 428.

2. Parsons, op. cit., p. 88.

3. Ibid., p. 88.

baskets, and is believed to transfer certain power to them. The stream is not touched again by the women until the appointed time to fish.¹

Since bearing a child and bringing him to maturity is so crucial for primitive women² many of the religious ceremonies with which they concern themselves center around fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and the protection of the new-born child. The Sonjo have a fertility rite that is enacted exclusively by women.

All the women of the village gather at one of the temples at dawn and there they pray, dance and sing till noon. During this time the men must vacate that part of the village. At noon the women come in procession to the village plaza and give a public performance of folk dancing and singing which is extremely well rehearsed. Sonjo religion is by no means confined to the men of the tribe.³

The time of a woman's first pregnancy is an especially important period, and as might be expected involves religious activity among the Kono:

When the woman becomes pregnant she informs her mother so that the two of them may secure certain charms for the birth of a live child, for the birth to proceed quickly, and for the good health of the child after birth. The Yawa-Gbasi-Mol will tell the women what charms they must get. One of the charms is a bell, representing the child, which because of its constant ringing as one walks about may thus characterize the child that is active and well. Another charm is a net-like thread garment which will protect the woman from witches. Besides these two charms the woman wears other talismen and eats certain medicine.

1. Ibid., p. 94.

2. Ante, p. 36.

3. Robert Gray in African Systems of Thought, op. cit., p. 55.

During the last part of her pregnancy at her mother's home, where she will give birth, the woman offers rice to her dead parents and promises them rice when the child is born.¹

If a Kono woman's delivery is difficult, it is believed that she may not have observed all the religious ceremonies properly, or that she may have been unfaithful to her husband. If delivery is delayed even after confession, it is believed that she has touched some "medicine" that is taboo.²

The deep religious concern which the Kono women have in the problems of child bearing and rearing carry over even into funeral rites.

The women talk to the dead woman's spirit, asking her to keep them well; to take care of the pregnant women and assist them in giving birth to healthy children, to take care of the new mothers and help them rear the children.³

D. Woman as the Conservator of Primitive Religion

Nida has observed that women are the fundamental communicators of cultures and are the natural conservators of its customs. In all societies, women tend to be less aggressive than men, they are the defenders of basic values, and are consequently quite defensive and resistant to change.⁴

Primitive women hold onto the practice of their faith because of a strong sense of "shame" about change. Anuak

1. Parsons, op. cit., pp. 36 and 37.

2. Ibid., p. 43.

3. Ibid., p. 32.

4. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation previously cited.

men make a strong point of the fact that the women of their tribe stick closer to the old customs than the men do, and that men are more likely to make a change in their beliefs than are women.¹

1. Woman's Particular Need for Supernatural Help

One principal reason that women hold onto their beliefs so tenaciously is that they recognize real need for the help of the supernatural in their daily lives. The woman does not have the physical strength to exert her position, as does the man, so is more likely to resort to non-physical means to protect herself from her enemies and to punish those who have offended her.²

When women are jealous in economic areas (as when there are competing beer makers in one village) or when personal animosity has built up over the sexual jealousy engendered when two women compete for the attention of one man, accusations of witchcraft are common.³ Because of the fear of witchcraft on the part of enemies, women are quick to suspect some malignant influence when misfortune comes to them. Among the Azande:

A woman whose sons died one after the other persuaded a kinsman to consult the rubbing board oracle on her behalf about some woman who had helped her to make beer but had not been asked to partake of it.⁴

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1. James B. Keefer, Personal letter containing digest of answers to questions directed to Anuak Evangelists.
 2. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation previously cited.
 3. J. Clyde Mitchell, in African Systems of Thought, op. cit., p. 197.
 4. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles . . ., op. cit., p. 104.

It has already been observed that the success of a woman's garden is very important to her, and at this point, it may be observed that women believe that they need to use the powers available to them through religious practices to help them in this work. Roscoe has observed that among the Baganda:

Should a garden yield poor crops, a woman would obtain a fetish from the medicine-man, which she would put into a pot with tobacco; she would then smoke the tobacco and blow smoke over the crops; the fetish was thought to give power to the tobacco, so that evil was remedied.¹

The very forces of nature seem to work against the gardener at times, and again, religious practices are the only apparent defense.

When lightning struck a garden and killed some of the trees, the women threw a knife and some grass out at the door, to let the god Kiwanuka know that they were there, that he need not cut any more fruit trees, and that they would cut them as he required them.
When a gale of wind blew and was breaking the plantain trees, the women took a knife and a hoe and beat the knife on the hoe-blade, to stop the wind from blowing and damaging their trees.²

But even though women depend heavily on the supernatural for help in their personal relationships and in their economic life, they feel their greatest need for help in their very basic desire to have children and to raise them successfully to maturity. When a Kono woman is barren she consults a witch

1. Roscoe, op. cit., p. 430.

2. Ibid., p. 432.

doctor or some other religious specialist, and if a mother gives birth to two children, both of whom die, it is the duty of her parents to consult a diviner in order to ascertain the cause of the deaths.¹

The Gã are convinced that witches have great control over conception: sending children to be born when they will cause embarrassment, as well as causing a woman to be sterile without her knowing it. It is also said that witches steal souls, ordinarily that of a child, and that as they consume the soul, its rightful owner sickens and dies.²

Difficulty in child-birth is not uncommon among primitive women, and supernatural reasons for the trouble and help for the mother are sought. Raum says of the Chaga women:

But even though a Chaga woman only moans during labour, difficulties do occur. The child may be delayed, and in the frantic search for the 'someone who has blundered,' it is the woman herself who is first singled out. Frequently a quarrel she has had with her parents-in-law is unearthed. She has to ask their pardon by sending her necklace around to be spat at, and thus have the curse withdrawn. Or it may be said that the woman's hard-heartedness has offended an ancestral spirit, who retaliates by obstructing the birth. The husband, as mediator between living and dead, must reconcile them, and the libation offered is to break the spell. The husband himself may be blamed, especially if the placenta is retained.³

1. Parsons, op. cit., pp. 37 and 38.

2. F. Howells, op. cit., p. 106.

3. O. F. Raum, Chaga Childhood, (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 84.

A new-born child is considered to be in special danger, and primitive women resort to many magical practices to protect him. The dropping off of the cord has significance in many tribes, as is illustrated by the behaviour of the Kono.

The child should not be touched by strangers until the navel is healed. If the cord drops off in the absence of the father, it is kept in a small shell until he arrives. On his arrival, he buries it and a banana or kola tree is planted over it. Should these trees flourish, the child is assured of life; otherwise death will come soon.¹

Even after the first crucial month is past, the Kono mother watches carefully over her child to protect him from witches, and sometimes boys are given girls' names, or a girl may be called "trash heap" to deceive the spirits.

Children are very welcome in a Kono home, and the parents use every means at their command to guard them as they develop.... The mother and her baby sleep on the same mud bed, with the baby next to the wall and the mother's arm across it so that witches may not carry it away.²

Certain diseases are recognized to be especially dangerous to children, and all possible religious precautions are taken by women to protect their children from epidemics.

When news had spread to one village that measles were in many parts of the country and that deaths were many, the women had a special ceremony to protect their children.

A powerful medicine concealed in a cloth secured from another village was placed upon a board. The women and girls, covered with white clay and decorated with

1. Parsons, op. cit., p. 43.

2. Ibid., pp. 45 and 46.

vines and ferns over their clothing, followed the medicine, carried on the head of one woman, as they danced around the town one whole morning. They sang to the accompaniment of a gourd rattle as they implored the spirits to protect their village from this disease.¹

Primitive women have deep concern for the health of their children and are convinced that there is help available through the observance of certain rites. This is the source of much conflict in some Anuak homes where the man has become a Christian, but where the woman has not yet believed. The men report that when their children are sick, the mothers will take their children to witch doctors no matter what their husbands say.²

2. Woman as Religious Teacher of Children

The preoccupation of the mother with religious observances regarding the child's health early causes the child to think of illness in relation to the spirit world.³ Even while children are still in their earliest years, they hear their mothers singing songs like this to their restless younger-siblings, and cannot help but be influenced by the words.

Hush, child of my mother,
Hush, hush on thy mother!
Imana who gave you to me
If only I could meet him
I would fall on my knees and pray to him
I would pray for little babies
For little babies on my back

1. Ibid., p. 48.

2. James Keefer, Personal Letter previously cited.

3. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation previously cited.

You came when the moon was shining
 You came when another was rising
 Hush field that we share
 That we share with Imana!
 Imana who gave you to me
 May he also bring up you for me
 You are ugly to the other Rundi
 You are beautiful to me.¹

Primitive mothers begin early to teach their children about the spiritual dangers around them, and continue this teaching throughout childhood for they believe that:

The beginning of infancy is characterized by the danger of the evil eye; its end lies under the shadow of the fear of poisoning [by sorcery] ... Gradually, by means of stories, proverbs, and blunt commands, she imposes upon it certain rules regarding the consumption of food outside the family circle. No child should eat food offered in strange houses or by unknown persons. Ripe or roasted bananas are the only exception. To make them safe it is but necessary to pass the first of them between one's legs. Amulets are hung around the child's neck to prevent the passage of spell-bound food.²

Childs, in writing about the Umbundu, brings out the fact that children would not fear the spirit world unless they were taught so to fear.

Children have no fear of ghosts unless there is someone who has told them of ghosts, or tried to imitate their cries or to make them see one. If after dark a child teases or cries, his mother may say, 'If you cry like that, a ghost will come and eat you.'³

Dinka children are early taught to fear anything strange for fear of the witches.

1. Rosemary Guillibrand in African Ideas of God, op. cit., p. 197.

2. Raum, op. cit., p. 113.

3. Childs, op. cit., p. 99.

From their earliest years Dinkas are taught that there exist among them men and women who may cause injury to their fellows simply by looking at them, or turning their attention to them. Any traveller in Dinka country may have my own experience of speaking to a small child who is suddenly snatched away by its anxious mother, who spits on its face to ward off evil. The child whimpers or cries, for the mother makes it afraid. A child is thus disposed to fear those whom it does not know and who seem to take an interest in it, and Dinka mothers will tell one that a child must be taught to fear what is strange and foreign, just as it must be taught to fear such potential dangers as wild animals, so that when it grows up it will be on its guard against them.¹

Raum's account of Chaga childhood brings out the fact that the early ethical and moral training of a child is also in the hands of his mother.

As soon as they can follow the trend of a tale the children hear from mother or nurse a great number of warning stories in which the consequences of trespassing certain prohibitions [against things like theft, playing with fire or knives, and so forth] are luridly depicted. The stories are not always heeded, but their cumulative effect is to create within the child certain restraints, that is, psychological sanctions active in the child itself, and emerging into its consciousness in fitting situations.²

These examples support Nida's contention that the earliest education of children's basic attitudes toward the supernatural are given by women. Attitudes are more important than information, for information only confirms previously acquired attitudes. The mother's role is to communicate attitudes by the time the child is three to four years old. It should be noted that in most primitive societies, because of the late weaning of the child,

1. Butt, op. cit., p. 303.

2. Raum, op. cit., pp. 136 and 137.

the child can verbalize before he is weaned. Therefore, while still dependent, he can understand his mother's religious attitudes.

Nida also asserts that primitive women are more "religiously aware" than are men and consequently use more little religious acts in everyday life. Since young children are constantly with their mothers, they are the observers of these acts and notice their mothers' attitudes towards them.¹ Though women do not have a significant formal role in much of primitive religious life:

The little rites, the talismans, and the demonic beliefs are usually of greater religious significance in the everyday life of ordinary people than are the pantheons temples, and intellectualized belief systems of the professional priests and theologians.²

The Kono women eat with their children, and repeated acts like these described by Parsons cannot help but have a cumulative effect on the child.

They pour water over the right hand [just before eating] and use the thumb of that hand to wash the ends of the fingers. The first water from the cups is usually poured on the ground and the first mouthful is spued out, perhaps offered to the family spirits. Lumps of rice are placed at the door, under the water pot, and at the head of each bed as an offering to the ancestral spirits.³

A child is early taught the importance of these rites by his mother's reaction when he disturbs their observance:

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1. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation, previously cited.
 2. Ward Hunt Goodenough, Cooperation in Change, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963), p. 480.
 3. Parsons, op. cit., p. 6.

There is a very interesting custom among both the Rundi and the Ruanda of keeping back a little water in the house until the morning. No married woman who still has expectation of child-bearing would ever go to bed without seeing that there was water in the house. Imana is supposed to create during the night... If he found no water he would miscreate... If a child accidentally spills or drinks the water, and there is none left in the house, he is liable to very severe punishment.¹

That women exert such a strong religious teaching influence on children is doubtless one of the primary reasons for the older women's continuing influence over her children, especially her daughters, who are closer to her for a greater number of years. Women train girls to conservatism.²

3. Restrictions on Woman's Life Reducing Likelihood of Change.

The age groups of African primitive society are always divided by sex. In indigenous educational patterns there is a division of men and women and there is no sharing of new things in the tribe. The woman gets out less than the man, because of her heavy daily responsibilities in the family. She sees no new things and is therefore far less likely to innovate than is the man.³ It has been suggested that all primitive people are slow to change for:

The knowledge and opinions of his elder relatives are the only views he hears. This limited range of contact

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1. Rosemary Guillibrand in African Ideas of God, op. cit., pp. 190 and 191.
 2. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation, previously cited.
 3. Ibid.

and stimulus is of fundamental importance in understanding the stability and slowness of change among the simpler societies of man.¹

If this is true of primitive society in general, it is especially true of women, who seldom leave their villages and rarely hear the conversations of anyone but other groups of women. Primitive woman is bound up in her daily routine and

A sense of authenticity comes to pervade the routine of daily life such as effectually to obstruct all innovations, whether in the ways and means of work or in the conduct of life more at large.²

Even the introduction of western education does not do much to change the picture, for ninety-percent of western education has been to men and boys, and women have reacted defensively to this, becoming even more conservative.³

Even in the parts of Africa where there have been greater opportunities for girls' education, fathers have not seen any reason for girls to learn and have hindered them.

In many peasant homes in Buganda the man treats his children, especially his daughters, with a mixture of careless neglect and absolute authority. There are fathers who refuse to pay school fees and have never bought their daughters either clothes or blanket..... Yet, when the child returns from school at midday she is expected to report immediately to do some household tasks and often she is so occupied in fetching water or running errands that she has not time to eat lunch before the afternoon school. The recent introduction of compulsory school lunches in Buganda has been designed

1. Radin, op. cit., p. 185.

2. Ibid., p. 27.

3. Eugene Nida, Personal Conversation, previously cited.

to meet this sort of neglect, and though it has met widespread opposition it has certainly resulted in more adults becoming aware of the children's need.¹

E. Summary

Primitive people have a very complex religious system concerned with the invocation of a "high god" but, more generally, with the control of the spirit world. They identify themselves mystically with the world of nature and believe that through certain religious acts they can exert control on the spiritual forces around them. Their religious systems demand that there be certain specialists who can act as oracles; who are especially in contact with the spirit world and who therefore are especially able to control its forces.

Women are not often found to be religious specialists because of the restriction of sex. Primitive man's horror of menstruation prohibits their handling of many religious objects, they are considered a bad influence at some ceremonies, their lack of legal status hinders them, and the normal division of labor and the sense of what is proper for a woman keep them from becoming religious leaders in most cases. However, it has been shown that they are active in religious practices involving demon possession and have a significant place as healers.

In spite of the fact that women are restricted in their participation in some aspects of primitive religion, they take

1. John Taylor, The Growth of the Church in Buganda, (London, SCM Press, 1958), p. 148.

an active part in ceremonies which are of special concern to important parts of their lives. Women use the religious forces they believe to be available to them in the normal work of providing food for their families and in connection with the bearing and raising of children.

These tasks are often fraught with dangers and difficulties, and women therefore feel a special need for religious help in overcoming these difficulties and in protecting themselves and their children from enemies and malignant spiritual forces.

Women tend to be the conservators of religious practices because they have such a strong felt need for religion. They are responsible for children's earliest religious education and have an especially long continuing influence over their daughters. Their freedom of movement is restricted and the opportunities for exposure to new ideas and education are very limited. They have thus become even more conservative in defense of the beliefs which they consider to be vital to their very existence and so act as the conservers of the old religious systems of their tribes.

CHAPTER III

PRIMITIVE WOMAN'S ROLE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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A. Introduction

The patriarchal form of life which is evident in the Old Testament had such a strong influence on the work and status of woman that it is not surprising to note the similarities of the status of woman in the Old Testament to that of primitive women who live in a similar system today.

Baab says of Old Testament woman:

Woman's principal function is performed in her role as wife and mother. In this connection, she makes her sexuality available to her husband for his pleasure and for reproductive purposes. As a mother she sustains a relationship to children which involves their care and nurture. In her wider relationships which extend beyond the family, she has taken part in the economic and social life of the community, and in its political and even military affairs. She shares also in the religious life of her contemporaries, both in the home and in the tribal, city or national community of worship.¹

The legal position of Jewish women was very low, just as it has been demonstrated to now be true of primitive women.²

The well-known synagogue prayer:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who hast not made me a woman.³

shows that even though women were permitted to participate in Jewish religious practices, men held that women were inferior

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1. O. J. Baab, "Woman," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, op. cit., p. 864.
 2. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Position of Woman in the Church (New York: MacMillan Co., 1958), p. 9.
 3. The Authorized Daily Prayer Book (London: Shapiro, Valentine and Co., 1947), p. 21.

to them. The covenant relationship given by the God of Israel extended to women too, however, and women were present when the Law was read, at feasts, and in certain areas of the sanctuary. They could participate in public prayer and take part in the sacrifices, though as a general practice, they were not leaders. There were a number of notable prophetesses, but they were the exception rather than the rule.¹

The major contribution of Jewish women was in their service in the home. Although their legal rights were practically nonexistent, they were accorded a place of honor in carrying out the privileges of motherhood. The general principle which applied to the status of woman in Judaism was, 'The King's daughter within the palace is all glorious' (Psalm xlv. 14), but not outside of it.²

B. Pertinent New Testament Insights on Woman's Role in the Church

1. Jesus and Woman

Around the time of the birth of Jesus, women in other societies had even less status than that enjoyed by Jewish women. Barrett quotes a letter from the Papyri that illustrates this point.

Hilarion to his sister Alis very many greetings likewise to my lady Berons and Apollonarion. Know that we are still in Alexandria. I beg and entreat you, take care of the little one, and as soon as we receive our pay I will send it up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out³

1. Ryrie, op. cit., pp. 11-13.

2. S. Schechter, Studies in Judaism (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1896), Vol. I, 391.

3. P. Oxy, 744. (H.E.105), I.B.C., quoted in C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 38.

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world heralded a new era for women.

The honor conferred upon Mary, as Mother of Jesus lifted her from her 'low estate,' made after-generations call her blessed (Luke 1:48), and carried its benediction to the women of all subsequent times.¹

The writers of the Gospels have illustrated a number of ideas about the status of women in dealing with the position of Mary in her story in the life of Christ.

The incidents which involve her introduce and illustrate a number of themes which are further developed throughout the New Testament. The inclusion of women in the genealogy of Christ as a sign of God's favor; the emphasis on the blessing of Motherhood; the responsibility of a Mother in the training of her child; the further, and often more difficult responsibility of not standing in the way of that child's spiritual obligations and calling; the duty of children to their parents - themes which are developed elsewhere in the New Testament - are all illustrated by Mary's position in the gospels.²

Jesus obviously had a sincere belief in the capacity of women to understand Him, for as Allworthy has observed;

..... each individual gospel writer records the powerful impression produced upon women by the personality and teaching of Jesus. This impression could only have been made by one which had a sincere belief in the intellectual and spiritual possibilities of women.³

2. Woman as a Worker in the New Testament Church

Many women did respond to the Lord Jesus, and from the beginning, their presence is noted in the young church. They

1. Dwight M. Pratt, "Woman", The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, ed. James Orr, Grand Rapids: Erdmans Co., 1915. V., p. 3102.

2. Ryrie, op. cit., p. 23.

3. A. Allworthy. Woman in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1917). p. 4.

were at the pre-Pentecost prayer meetings¹ and had a part in the decision about Matthias.

Immediately after Christ's ascension women gathered with the apostles and disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem. They were not there to cook for the men but to pray with them, and there is certainly no reason to believe that they were not included in the group who prayed for Judas' successor.²

Since they were with the group in the upper room from the beginning, it may be assumed without question that there were women present when the Spirit was poured out³ and that they along with the men began to witness as they had been commanded to do.⁴ Women were among the objects of Saul's furious persecution,⁵ and it is doubtful if he would have concerned himself with them if they were having no part in spreading the teachings of Christ.

The first European convert was a woman, Lydia, an important business woman had a heart prepared by the Lord to receive Paul's message.⁶ In the church at Philippi, two women (Euodia and Syntyche) had enough influence that Paul feared that their quarrel might split the church, and he recognized the importance of their work with him as well as the importance of

1. Acts 1:14.

2. Ryrie, op. cit., p. 53.

3. Acts 2:1-4.

4. Acts 1:8.

5. Acts 8:3.

6. Acts 16:14-15.

Clement's.¹

One of the most remarkable women in the early church was Priscilla. She and her husband are mentioned together six times in the New Testament, and in four of these instances her name stands first.² Her ability to instruct the cultured Greek Apollos is probably only one of the many ways in which she served the church.³

Numerous other references to the work of women in the New Testament could be cited, but an exhaustive investigation of this chapter of Romans is convincing proof of the fact that women were active in the life and work of the church.

St. Paul has sometimes been accused of want of due respect towards women. This last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans is sufficient in itself to refute such a charge. From the beginning to the end, the writer chooses with the most apt consideration, the title and merit which belong to each member of the household of God, and recognizes the special work which a woman, and often only a woman, can do in the church.⁴

Though women had an honored and significant part in the work of the early New Testament church, they did not often play a leading role.

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1. J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (London: Macmillan, 1896), p. 55.
 2. Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 17:3; I Cor. 16:19; II Tim. 4:19.
 3. Ryrie, op. cit., p. 55.
 4. R. J. Knowling, The Testimony of Saint Paul to Christ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p. 466.

The incarnation was in a man; the apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men, and, in general, the leadership of the churches was entrusted to men. Nevertheless, a prominence and dignity which women did not have either in Judaism or in the heathen world was theirs in the early propagation and expression of Christianity, the historical record of which would be immeasurably poorer without this prominence, secondary though it was.¹

3. Cultural Considerations

Even though women had an important place in the early church, their role in public worship was limited. Paul was very explicit in his instructions concerning women. He emphasized their position of subordination,² did not permit them to "teach or have authority" over men,³ and told them to ask their questions at home of their husbands.⁴

On the other hand, Paul also wrote:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.⁵

This seeming contradiction in Pauline teaching can only be understood in the light of the cultural situation of his day. Greek women had little opportunity for education. They grew up in the seclusion of the gynaikonites (the part of the house

1. Ryrie, op. cit., pp. 56, 57.

2. I. Cor. 11:3-5.

3. I Timothy 2:12.

4. I. Cor. 14:35.

5. Gal. 3:28.

reserved for domestic purposes) and even after marriage, the seclusion was continued so that they were not able to share in their husband's intellectual lives.¹

Though Roman women had a bit more freedom, their position was not an enviable one.

Although the position of women in Rome was for long a more dignified one than in Greece, there was latterly a greatly diminished value set on marriage, marked increase in divorces, a general casting off of moral restraint. In the last pre-Christian century almost every vice was rampant - immorality and paiderastia, abortion and infanticide, gluttony and avarice, cruelty and sycophancy, gambling and suicide, indecency in pictures, at public races and on the stage.²

The position of the Jewish woman has already been indicated, and though Christ's attitude towards women had modified all of these factors, Paul's concern, and the general concern of the early church, was to protect women in the midst of the difficult world-situation that then existed. The most strict instructions concerning women's behavior in public worship were given to the Corinthian Church,

this was at Corinth, a most dissolute city, where 1000 women were devoted to immorality at the shrine of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinthus, and therefore where it was most important to preserve the modesty of the Christian women from any suspicion or temptation.³

1. Ryrie, op. cit., p. 3.

2. Ibid., p. 6.

3. W. J. Abdeney, "Woman," A Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings, ec., (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1903), p. 936.

It must be further recognized that Paul was very emphatic in his teaching that the coming of the Gospel into men's hearts and lives must change some of the commonly-held attitudes toward women. Statements such as:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.¹

were revolutionary in the cultural situation in which the Ephesian church found itself, and they continue to have revolutionary force in societies where the Gospel is penetrating today. The World Council of Churches has recognized this fact and created the Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society.

The World Council of Churches by its statement on cooperation of men and women in Church and Society has reaffirmed that the Christian faith has something vital to say about the relationship that ought to exist between men and women, something revolutionary. It is that men and women, created by God as two different sexes, with diversity of gifts, can have a new relationship to each other by having a living relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship, when it is real, brings a completely new element into the present broken relationship between the sexes, and enables men and women to go beyond rivalry, beyond defensiveness and competition, beyond seeking status to acceptance and appreciation of each other in diversity. There is a very close connection between the New Testament understanding of the right relationship between men and women, and the quality and depth of the mutual love between Christ and His Church. This has a bearing on all realms of life in which men and women meet together.²

1. Ephesians 5:25.

2. World Council of Churches, Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society (Geneva: 1956), p. 6.

C. Current Status and Contribution of Primitive Women in Their Churches

1. Recognition of Need of Primitive Woman's Contribution to the Church

The value of the contribution of women to the church in primitive areas has long been recognized. Following the Lake Mohonok consultation in 1921 when the International Missionary Council discussed the relation of church and mission, it was recognized that many of the principle suggestions of the consultation could not be applied to men's work in many areas because there were so few educated women leaders in the different countries. The Council suggested an inquiry in the hopes that the situation might be improved.

Believing that the Christian Church in each country should be built on lines that ensure its continuity and its largest service to the life of the home and nation, and that therefore it must use the contribution of both men and women, the Council instructs its secretaries to institute an inquiry on the relation of women to the Christian Church.¹

The findings of this inquiry are not available, but it seems obvious that women's work has continued to lag behind that which is being done with men. In 1944, a questionnaire sent to four missionaries working in the Congo showed very clearly that:

little is being done especially with or for women or girls. Only one station, and that questionably, has a special missionary for such work in the villages. Only one station has special classes in villages for women, and none reported any instruction in preparation for marriage. Only half of the girls' boarding schools listed any women teachers and not more than two stations have special training for

1. Foreign Missions Conference of North America, The Place of Women in the Church in the Mission Field, 1923, p. 2.

women teachers. Enrollment of girls in village schools is low, and deplorably low in regional and group schools.¹

The conference suggested that training for women should be provided that would be equal to that given to men and boys. They asked for special teacher-training courses for women, and the establishment of more village schools (where girls could more easily come). Since it was recognized that village work among women could best be done by women, it was recommended that a one year Bible course should be set up for women and that special training be provided for the wives of men in school. The need for adult education was stressed and the fact that women needed special training in the meaning of Christian marriage and their responsibilities in raising their children was especially emphasized. The conference further suggested that women be trained in methodology so that they would be able to participate in the work of the church as Sunday School teachers.²

When the All-Africa Church Conference was held in Ibadan in 1958, there were sixteen women among the ninety-six delegates.³ No data is given to indicate how many of the women came from primitive societies, but the Council was concerned about the problems of primitive women. The reports on "Home and Family

1. Report on the Conference on Work Among Women and Girls (Kinipese, Congo Belge: August, 1944), p. 1.

2. Ibid., p. 6.

3. Report of All-Africa Church Conference, The Church in Changing Africa (New York: International Missionary Council, 1958), p. 6.

"Life" and "The New Status of Women" mention many of the factors discussed in chapters one and two of this study.¹

It is somewhat discouraging to note that the Conference, in suggesting that special committees be set up to give further consideration to these problems, does not seem to have gone beyond what was done by the Foreign Missions Conference in 1923.²

The answer to one of the questions sent to missionaries working in primitive areas indicates that the national leaders are very aware of the need to have the contribution women can make to the life of the Church.³ It is the men of slightly "higher" cultures (such as the Gallas and the Agows) who discourage the participation of women in the life of the church. Two missionaries who work along the Ghimeera people mentioned this factor.

Our pastor, who is a Galla, always says that the women and guests can go home after church and the men will have a church meeting. The women will take a vocal part in the discussion if they are given a chance. On one issue one of the men ventured the vote would have been different had the women stayed for the meeting.⁴

The Ghimeera leaders desire women's participation in the life of the church. They seem to appreciate their ideas and suggestions; however, in this area due to the "infiltration"

1. Ibid., pp. 26-30.

2. Ibid., p. 29.

3. Letters to 23 missionaries, previously cited.

4. Letter from Lois Haspels in 23 letters, previously cited.

of the Galla Christian leaders who discourage women's participation, they aren't invited to many of the church meetings. In church, the Ghimeera had always sat together in family groups until the Gallas discouraged this practice.¹

This situation seems even more acute among the Agow, who are very much under the influence of the higher culture of the Amhara people.

It would seem that they do not consider it [the participation of women in the life of the church] necessary. Recently I inquired of our church men whether women (believers) should have a part in choosing elders. They indicated negatively. Rarely does any woman show real enterprise in witnessing.²

It is surprising to note that the books on Church Growth and Group Conversion that are being prepared under the leadership of Donald McGavran have very little to say about the need of women's contribution to the church. Warnshuis makes a strong point concerning proper methods in building up the Church in non-Christian lands when he says:

.men and women missionaries of church and school and hospital will not be concerned only with separate individuals in scores of families but will be united in planning and working to reach the whole family of those individuals with whom they may be in contact.³

In Sunda's account of Church Growth in West New Guinea, he mentions the organization of Witness Schools with couples in

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1. Letter from Lois Anderson in 23 letters previously cited.
 2. Letter from Mildred Hay in 23 letters previously cited.
 3. A. L. Warnshuis in Church Growth and Group Conversion, with J. W. Pickett, G. H. Singh, and D. A. McGavran (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1962), p. 19.

attendance,¹ but nowhere emphasizes the need for a particular contribution from national women in order that whole families might move together in the acceptance of the Gospel.

2. Current Participation of Women in the Life of Their Churches

In spite of the difficulties presented above, a survey of current mission literature indicates that women in primitive areas are making a significant contribution to the Christian Communities where they live.

Before political disturbances caused the expulsion of missionaries from the Southern Sudan, the American Presbyterian Mission had three large boarding schools for girls among the Anuak, Nuer and Shulla peoples.² The Church Missionary Society had had several successful experiments with co-education,³ as well as with regular girls' schools, and it was believed that these schools did much to influence the life of the church.⁴

In Ethiopia, the Sudan Interior Mission has several girls' boarding schools in primitive areas. Girls are welcomed in all

1. James Sunda, Church Growth in the Central Highlands of West New Guinea (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1963), pp. 36 and 39.

2. Observation of the author.

3. Church Missionary Society, The Church in the Southern Sudan, (London: C.M.S. Press, 1948), p. 4.

4. Church Missionary Society, The Church in the Diocese of the Upper Nile (London: C.M.S. Press, 1950), p. 4.

of the mission schools as day pupils, and (when proper arrangements can be made) as borders. But since girls in Ethiopia marry at such an early age, completely separate schools have been found to have many advantages.¹ These schools are all in tribal areas, and as the Amharic language is the only legal language of instruction and publication in Ethiopia, the Church has rightly recognized the importance of training for girls in the reading of Amharic so that they will have access to the Bible and be able to teach others from it.²

One of the areas in which much progress seems to have been made is in special meetings for women, which they lead themselves, and have great influence on the church as a whole. In South Africa, the women's "Manyanos" which grew up out of the various denomination work among the Xhosa, Bantu and Zulu tribes are very highly organized. These meetings began to be held as early as 1878 and:

arose from a deep religious instinct which calls for fellowship and sharing, and ever since their earliest inception have been gathering momentum, until now they are certainly in the country but also in the town, the most powerful voluntary association, cutting through traditional tribal groupings.³

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1. Lucy Winifred Horn, Hearth and Home in Ethiopia (London: Sudan Interior Mission), p. 40.
 2. Ibid., pp. 41 and 42.
 3. Mia Brandel-Syrrier, Black Women in Search of God (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), pp. 15 and 16.

In places where mission work is younger, the women's meetings are not so highly organized, but are extremely influential. Through these fellowship meetings the women encourage one another in informal prayer and Bible study and enjoy a social time together.¹ It is interesting to observe that the missionaries working among the Nilotic tribeswomen reported no such meetings.²

Some missions have emphasized yet another type of women's meeting which has offered opportunity for training women in child care and home making so that their Christian homes would enhance the testimony of the Church. These meetings are reported by the Church Missionary Society in the Sudan,³ and in a very recent book of Roman Catholic mission work, the missionaries are urged to begin such meetings.

A nation's youth is formed above all in the nation's families, and the key role in the family is played by the mother Parents' associations and women's clubs of different kinds can seek to teach mothers how to bring up their children as good Christians A great object will have been achieved if mothers can be brought to realize that the moral and religious education of their children is not primarily the responsibility of priests and teachers, but their own.⁴

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1. Letters from 23 missionaries, previously cited.
 2. Letters from missionaries working among the Anuak, Nuer and Shulla women, in 23 letters previously cited.
 3. Church Missionary Society, The Church in the Diocese of the Upper Nile, op. cit., p. 2.
 4. Joseph Mullin, The Catholic Church in Modern Africa (London-Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), p. 198.

One of the most significant ways in which primitive women now contribute to the life of the church is as the wives of national evangelists. This has been recognized by the men, and all of the Anuak evangelists questioned in the connection were eager for their wives to be trained for this ministry. They said that they wanted their wives to be able to read Anuak so that they could see for themselves that the Word of God said "such and such" and that the teaching did not come only from their husbands. The evangelists observed that if women were equipped to teach other women it would help to reduce the opposition to the Gospel which comes from women. They noted that it is often impossible or inappropriate for male evangelists to teach women, and therefore they, the evangelists wives, have an important job which they are often fulfilling, in helping other women to embrace a religion which would otherwise have seemed to them to be a religion for men.¹

In Ethiopia, some Christian leaders have been so concerned that their wives be able to assist them in their ministry that they have paid the expenses to send their betrothed wives to be taught in a Christian school.²

The work among the Lisu described by Isobel Kuhn in Stones of Fire has long ago been disrupted by war, but the book still stands as a testimony to the importance of the work of evangelists' wives.

1. James Keefer, Personal letter, previously cited.

2. Horn, op. cit., p. 51.

The missionaries had discovered, through sad experience, that it is an important matter to whom a promising young evangelist proposes. More than one has been ruined for the Lord's work by choosing an unsuitable wife.¹

The Kuhns found that it was very important to have a Bible School for girls in order that evangelists' wives might be trained for the Lisu Church.² Such very practical subjects as Mothercraft and Obstetrics had important places in the curriculum,³ and there was an emphasis on children's work that enabled the evangelists' wives to do an effective piece of work with the children in their villages.⁴

3. Unusual Contributions of Primitive Women to the Life of the Church

One of the letters answering the survey questions mentioned that there were several women deacons and elders in the church in her area,⁵ but for primitive women to have such positions in their churches must be very unusual, for there was no mention of this in any of the literature examined.

Missionaries who had worked among the Nuer of the Southern Sudan also mentioned women who were elected deaconesses,

1. Isobel Kuhn, Stones of Fire (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), pp. 53 and 54.

2. Ibid., p. 88.

3. Ibid., p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 129.

5. Ruth Bolton, writing of the Baluba of Kasai in 23 letters, previously cited.

but emphasized that this was due to unusual gifts of natural leadership ability and spiritual power. For a woman to become an elected leader in a church in a tribe where men have failed to recognize the importance of women in their society and say "Women are not really worth anything" must be recognized as being very unusual.¹

Since the martyrdom of five young men in their attempt to open the way to the Auca tribe, the attention of the Christian world has been on the Aucas and the story of how God has used Dayuma, a woman member of the tribe, to be His instrument in bringing the Gospel to them is a thrilling one, but it must be acknowledged that this is an unusual story and cannot be counted as a normal example of how primitive women are used in the establishment and building up of the church.²

D. Contribution of Women to the East Africa Revival Movement

In one section of the church, that has grown primarily from among primitive peoples, the contribution of women has been so great that one of their leaders has said that the real strength of their church is in the women, not the man.³

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1. Mary K. Smith, Mary Alice Jordan, and Marrion Farquar, in 23 letters previously cited.
 2. Ethel Wallis, The Dayuma Story (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).
 3. Festo Kavenger, National Leader in East African Revival Fellowship, personal interview, November 7, 1965, at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

1. Nature of the Revival Movement

The Revival under examination at this point in this study is not a separatist movement,¹ but a fellowship within the church which began in Uganda in around 1936.²

There would appear to have been no specially original emphasis, but rather a steady growth in dissatisfaction with defeat in the spiritual life of individuals, and dismay at the apparent acquiescence in defeat in the common life of the Church. But one factor can be traced back in the experience of many which would seem to afford a key to the understanding of later developments. There was a deep hunger for human fellowship of the kind which would be an effective demonstration of the power of God to establish right human relationships.³

One of the missionaries who witnessed the beginning of the movement observed that there were three important things that could be observed about the Brethren. They had tremendous joy, they had a very evident love for one another, and they had a tremendous burden for their fellowmen and their church.⁴

These characteristics persist in the movement today as the Brethren continue their life of fellowship together, caught up together as they are in their love for Jesus.⁵

1. Taylor, op. cit., p. 99.

2. Max Warren, Revival An Enquiry (London: S.C.M. Press, 1954), p. 45.

3. Ibid., p. 39.

4. Ibid., p. 51.

5. Ibid., p. 55.

2. Women's Participation and Influence

One of the great burdens of the Brethren from the beginning has been that the husband and wife should be able to be free in their fellowship in a way that is not known in their normal cultural situation. There has been a general realization in their testimony that Jesus can make a man and his wife truly free: free in their relationships, free from the old customs and free from superstition and fear. When a man and his wife are liberated in this way, they become one and share the problems of raising the children and economic burdens.¹

Taylor points out that the stability of marriage is becoming an increasingly acute problem for the church in Buganda.

The last, and most thorny, factor threatening the stability of marriages in those days is the lack of commitment of husband and wife to each other. It is at this point that the great strength of the revival movement lies, with its insistence on spiritual partnership.²

In the interview held with Festo and his wife, the fact that husbands must be willing to have their Christian walk "challenged" by their wives was often emphasized. Such a spirit of freedom and fellowship stands out in a non-Christian community and people ask questions about it. Housewives tell one another what Christ has done in their homes and such testimonies make

1. Mr. & Mrs. Festo Kavengeri, Personal Interview, previously cited.

2. Taylor, op. cit., p. 187.

other people hungry for the Gospel.

The Christian couple being interviewed emphasized that though the people of their tribe now have more "things" and education than they once had, that these things had not brought peace and joy to the home.

They told of how a number of older women had been converted and thoroughly liberated from fear so that some, like Mrs. Kavengeri's mother, had even witnessed to witch doctors. The older women have witnessed to one another and even women of around seventy years of age have been converted. One old woman who used to be continually grieving over the death of her twelve children became a Christian and began rejoicing in the spiritual children Christ had given her. The very evident change in her life made people ask her what had happened and made them open to her testimony.

The women of the revival fellowship felt a responsibility to do things like boiling milk and keeping their homes in good order. They believe that in Christ, everything should be new, and the reality of their experience with Him results in an effective testimony. They witness at fellowship meetings and in their homes and in the markets and thus it can be said that the strength of the church in the revival areas is in the women. They do not ordinarily have places of formal leadership in the church, but their testimonies show what Christ can do in a life.¹

1. Mr. & Mrs. Festo Kavengeri, Personal Interview previously cited.

E. Summary

The world into which the Gospel came was not one in which women had high status. In the advanced civilizations, she was restricted in her social and educational contacts, and closely guarded from the immorality around her in heathen society. The Jewish religious system and way of life gave her a somewhat higher and more respected position, but the teachings and attitudes of Christ and His disciples were revolutionary and lifted her to a place of honor she had not known before. She had a significant, if limited part in the work of the early church, both in quiet influence and in leadership in certain areas of the life of the church.

The Gospel still has a revolutionary effect on the life of women when it is preached in new lands today, and it has been demonstrated that the importance of woman's place in the church has been recognized by its leaders, and that they are making a contribution to the life of the church. Most of their influence is exerted through their positions as mothers and as wives of evangelists, but some women have been used in an outstanding way because of their unusual abilities as leaders, unusual opportunities for education and because of obvious gifts of spiritual leadership.

A most unusual contribution is being made by the women in the East Africa revival movement so that it can be said that there, women are the real strength of the church, though their contribution is not an official one.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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A. Summary

The first chapter of this thesis has demonstrated that the role of woman in primitive family life is a very significant one, though this fact has not generally been recognized. Many investigators have failed to evaluate their data properly because they have observed the position of primitive woman in comparison to that of woman in other societies, and at different cultural levels. Others have missed significant factors by being primarily concerned with the legal side of primitive life, and it has been demonstrated that women have very little legal standing in the tribal societies and only rarely, and under the most unusual circumstances, do they assume positions of political leadership.

It is when woman's position in the family life is properly evaluated that the influence she exerts in primitive life can be discerned. Women are considered very valuable additions to a clan, and members of a fairly large kinship group are willing to contribute to the payment of bridewealth so that one of their number may acquire a good wife. When a woman is married, she is expected to bear and raise children and to make a large contribution to the provision and preparation of food for the family. It is in the successful accomplishment of these tasks that she finds her status and wields her influence. Mother, and various mother figures,

have complete control over the early development of children of both sexes, and a deep feeling of affection and appreciation is developed in both boys and girls that persists through life. This is especially observable in the relationship between a mother and her daughter, for a girl is dependent on her mother for all of her training, and she never ceases to give her prime emotional loyalty to her mother.

In chapter two, as the role of woman in primitive religion was examined, a pattern similar to that of chapter one emerged. Since women have very little place as specialists in primitive religion, most observers have passed over any evidence which would point to the significant role they play as the conservors of primitive religious practices. It has been demonstrated that though primitive women are barred by their sex from participating in many religious ceremonies, they are very active in the observance of religious practices which touch points in their lives which were shown in chapter one to be very vital to them. Since their daily work involves the provision of food for their families, primitive women regularly call on the spiritual powers in which they believe to help them in overcoming the difficulties that hinder them in carrying out this responsibility. It was shown in this study that women who failed to bear children and bring them to maturity lost status, so it was not surprising to note that their major religious concerns involved practices that are believed to be of help in child birth and in preserving the health of children -- and to some extent, that of adults.

It was further demonstrated that primitive women are more conservative than men because of their strong sense of need for supernatural help in meeting the problems of everyday life. They were shown to exhibit a conservative attitude because their opportunities for change are so limited. Since women are so concerned with preserving the old ways, it was concluded that they exerted great influence over their children's beliefs as they practiced religion before them and set the children's attitudes while they were still very young and in a dependent relationship to their mothers.

In chapter three, a change in the tone of the materials under examination was noted. Many have recognized the fact that primitive woman should play an important role in the Christian church, but few have been successful in spelling out what that role should be. Social anthropology has generally failed to recognize woman's role in primitive family life and religion while churchmen have seen that she should have a definite place in the life of the church. This attitude on the part of churchmen reflects the New Testament teaching on women. It was observed that women had played an important part in the development of the early church, and that though their role was delimited by social and cultural considerations, the attitude of Jesus towards women, and the teachings of Paul concerning the attitude Christian men should hold toward them gave them a place in the early church that was far above that which they had in their cultural situation before it had been touched by Christianity.

In spite of the general recognition of the importance of the role of women in the church, it was a discouraging task to search through the literature to find examples of how primitive women are currently serving in their churches. Women's and girls' work was seen to be a neglected field, though some missions have conducted girls' schools, encouraged women's fellowship meetings and mothers unions, and provided training for the wives of national evangelists. Through these avenues, women have been able to make some contribution to the life of the church. In some few cases, women have taken more aggressive leadership, but this has been shown to be the result of unusual combinations of natural ability, circumstances of freedom for change that were not ordinary, and unusual spiritual gifts. The one place where women were found to be realizing their potential in contributing to the life of the church was in the East Africa Revival Movement. Within this group, the Gospel has had a transforming influence over all relationships that has released the women and made them able to make a highly significant contribution.

B. Conclusion

It is the conviction of the author of this study that the full potential for the church in primitive women has not been generally realized. Though the church has paid lip service to the necessity of full participation of women in the church, the expression of what

that participation should be has remained vague and nebulous, and missions have failed to give the necessary priorities to work among women and girls.

The church as a whole has been unaware of what a powerful influence woman has in primitive society, for it has looked at the legal side of the picture and failed to recognize the tremendous force of the psychological and emotional ties between a woman and her children. The primary implication for mission work that can be drawn from the anthropological data which has been presented in this study is that women must be convinced of the truth of the Gospel, or they will exert a constant pressure on their children, especially the girls, to draw them back into paganism, and thus hinder the growth of the church. Positively, when women become Christians, and when they are given training which helps them in the practical work which they have to do, they continue to be the natural teachers of their children, and will exert the same strong forces in Christian education and nurture that they have exerted in teaching paganism in the past. It should not be assumed that the point being made here is that the potential of women for the church is that they should be Sunday school teachers. They can be very useful in this area, but their main contribution will be made when little children see their mothers thanking God for their food, recognizing Him as the source of every good gift, praying with their husbands when a child is ill (and giving it medicine which is also recognized as one of God's gifts) and bringing the teachings

of Jesus Christ to bear on the difficult problems of interpersonal relationships. This witness will have a tremendous effect on pagan neighbors who see this daily witness too.

It should also be recognized that the full potential of woman for the church in primitive areas has not been realized because missionaries (both from the Western church and nationals moving from more advanced tribal areas into primitive areas) have not realized the revolutionary nature of the New Testament teaching about women. Too many missionaries have carried their own cultural notions of what is right and proper with them and failed to see not only the potential in tribal women, but also how that potential can be released as the Gospel changes human relationships. Men in primitive society need patient instruction in the New Testament teachings about women, and also need to be made aware of how women exert force in their own societies, for most are quite oblivious of this fact. It is important that the local cultural situation and the New Testament teachings be viewed simultaneously, or else the church may be led into trying to set women in positions of legal authority which are not rightly theirs, and this could hinder the realization of their true potential.

The author recognizes that the practical working out of the implications of these principles is very difficult, and that the application of principles alone will not solve the problem. When the investigation of the place of woman in the East Africa Revival

Movement was being done, the informant kept reminding the author that it wasn't "programs" that had brought woman her place among the Brethern, but that it was revival. The potential of woman in the church cannot be realized in an unhealthy church, but when there is a movement of the Spirit of God among a people that is embraced by that people in such a way that Jesus Christ is permitted to have His way in every part of life, the full potential of men and of women will be released and all can have the part in the establishment and growth of the church that Christ has intended them to have.

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APPENDIX

(Questionnaire concerning the status of primitive women, which was sent to thirty missionaries working with women in primitive areas of Africa.)

November 5, 1965

Dear Fellow-missionary,

How often we have all received letters from the U. S. saying, "Please tell me all about your work." Here is a new version of such a letter, and I've tried to write it in such a way that you will answer it, and not tuck it away at the bottom of the pile "to-be-answered-while-on-vacation," as I have so often done. While on furlough, one of my projects is to finish the work for the M.R.E. degree here at the Seminary, and one of the major hurdles in my way is the thesis. Mine is to be entitled, "The potential of woman for the church in a primitive society." Would you please help me out in this by filling out this form and returning it ... the next time M.A.F. or a mail runner leaves your station? If you are pressed for time, just do the questions that are numbered from 1 to 8, but if you have time, answers to questions 9 and 10 will be appreciated too. If you have any other ideas along these lines, please throw them in for me. If your tribe does not have a patrilineal system, I can't use your answers to these questions, but still would appreciate any of your comments on women in the church. I wish that I could enclose air-mail postage, but will refrain from enclosing the 25¢ U. S. stamp that one person sent to me to get an answer from me while I was still in Ethiopia! Thank you so much for your help.

Name of Tribe _____ Country _____

1. Does your tribe have more than a token bride-price? Yes__ No__
2. Does your tribe practice polygamy? Yes__ No__
3. How long are boys under the mother's discipline? _____
4. How long are girls under the mother's discipline? _____
5. Does woman's status and security depend on childbearing and the maturing of the child? Yes__ No__
6. Is the woman's primary loyalty to her mother's or her husband's family?
7. Does woman's status wane with old age? Yes__ No__
If so, when? _____
8. Does her influence over her daughter degenerate at any stage in life?

Yes _____ No _____ If so, when? _____

9. Do the National leaders of the church in your area see any reasons for the participation of women in the life of the church?
10. What part do women now play in the life of the Christian community?

Joan E. Yilek
The Biblical Seminary in New York
235 E. 49th Street
N.Y., N.Y. 10017, U.S.A.

(Questions directed to Alathker Kwut, Anuak evangelist, with the request that he gather the answers of five Anuak men and five Anuak women.)

1. Who puts charms and things for gwiithw on a babies' neck?
Why do they do this?
2. Were you afraid of witch doctors when you were a child?
Why?
3. Did you ever know any women who were called witch doctors?
Were you afraid of them when you were a child?
Why?
Were they considered important witch doctors.
4. Is it good or bad to pay things for a wife?
Why do you say this?
5. Why do you love your mother?

Question for women only:

Why do you like to go home to your mother's home for child birth?

Question for men only:

Do you object to the influence of your in-law's (especially the mother-in-law) over your wife?
Why?

(Questions directed to ten Anuak evangelists, during training courses, by Dr. James Keefer.)

1. Do you think that it is important for your wife to be a Christian? Why?
2. Do you want your wife to be able to read Anuak? Why?
3. Do you want your wife to be able to read Amharic? Why?
4. Why are there less Anuak Christian women than Anuak Christian men?