

## THE POKOT WORLDVIEW AS AN IMPEDIMENT TO THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE POKOT PEOPLE

<sup>1</sup>Tom K. Ngeiywo\*; <sup>2</sup>Ezekiel M. Kasiera; <sup>3</sup>Rispah N. Wepukhulu

*Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology*

*P.O. BOX 190-50100*

*Kakamega, Kenya*

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Christian missionaries established the first mission work among the Pokot people of West Pokot County in 1931 when the Anglican Bible Churchman's Missionary Society (BCMS) set up a mission centre at Kacheliba. They, however, encountered a lot of resistance and non-response from the Pokot people. To date, the bulk of the Pokot people are still conservative to their traditional lifestyle and reluctant to open up to change and new ideas. This paper examines the Pokot worldview as a challenge to the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people. In so doing, the author seeks to establish ways through which evangelization could be done to make the Pokot people embrace change in order to utilize development opportunities that come with it. A descriptive design was employed for the study. Purposive, snowball and random sampling methods were used to select the respondents. The study was guided by the structural functionalism theory by David Merton of 1910. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the collected data which was obtained through questionnaires and oral interviews. The study established that the Pokot community is much acculturated and the people are strongly bound together by their tribal customs; majority of whom prefer their traditional lifestyle to modernity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Christianity, Acculturation, Pokot community, Pokot worldview.

### INTRODUCTION

Worldview is a system of beliefs, feelings and behaviour of a people group. It is expressed through rites. The Pokot people have a set of beliefs and practices (worldview) which enable them to handle life experiences that are beyond human control. They believe that these traditional beliefs and practices not only give meaning to their existence but also enable them to gain control and security over their lives. In this regard, they perform rituals and liturgies in order to get success, happiness, security and ability to handle daily dilemmas which they believe are controlled by spiritual forces that are more powerful than humans.

### LITERATURE UNDERPING

Visser (1999) in his book, *Pokot Religion*, presents the historical progress of the Christian religion since its introduction in West Pokot County by the BCMS in 1930 to

date. He does this by outlining the strategies the Western missionaries used to evangelize the Pokot people and the challenges they encountered when doing mission work among the Pokot people. According to Visser, BCMS established the first mission station in West Pokot County in 1930 at Kacheliba, but later relocated to Nasokol due to climate reasons.

Visser states that the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) under BCMS established schools and colleges in the following years in order to open up the Pokot community to change and Christianity. But they found out that the Pokot people were resistant to change despite a lot of effort to evangelize them. Visser reports that the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) established their first mission station in West Pokot County in 1945. This mission centre was established at Tartar, and their language of communication was Latin. Visser exhibits a wide knowledge of the Pokot traditional beliefs and practices and the history of the Christian religion in West Pokot County. The author, however, tends to have a negative attitude toward the Pokot traditional beliefs and practices.

Schneider (1959) in his book, *Resistant to Changes*, states that the Pokot people resisted change and Christianity due to their isolation and conservatism. He says that the economic reforms that were introduced by the Colonial Government in 1930 to improve the standard of living of the Pokot people and to help them contribute to the economy of Kenya were met with a lot of resistance. This was largely due to the failure of the Colonial Government to understand the cultural values and pastoral lifestyle of the Pokot people.

Schneider further states that the effort by G.H. Chaundy, the Principal of the Government School at Kapenguria, to persuade the Pokot people to adopt new crops and farming skills between 1930 and 1943 failed because of the fact that the Pokot peoples' economic lifestyle was majorly centered on herding. The effort of both the Colonial Government and the Christian missionary agencies to transform the Pokot community from 1918 to 1930 did not succeed.

Edgerton (1965) in his work, *The Disillusionment in Culture Contact*, says that after doing a research among the Menomini of India in 1959 and four East African tribes in the year 1961 and 1962, he discovered that the process of disillusionment in culture was remarkably similar in every place Europeans did mission work. This was due to the fact that European populations always sought to dominate native populations politically, economically and culturally. Disillusionment in acculturation occurred when Europeans presented themselves to the native populations as good people and yet they had sinister motives. Edgerton says that the request for friendship between the natives and the Europeans encountered four challenges; one of which was the challenge of ignoring each other's culture. This was the greatest danger in acculturation since it was indicative of indifference, insincerity, disrespect, bad faith and the verification of some stereotype.

Other challenges identified included mistrust, prestige, power differentials, and stereotype misconceptions. This made the natives to view the history of the Europeans

as filled with constant exploitation. According to the natives, the history of the Europeans was marked by military aggression, land alienation, repression of the traditional and sacred practices of the natives and economic enslavement. Instead of the Europeans admitting that they committed these atrocities against the natives, they argued that they brought many positive benefits to the natives. These benefits include: medical care, education and new technology. Europeans were, therefore, puzzled that the natives refused to acknowledge these benefits and they too decided not to trust the natives.

According to Edgerton, there are three tests that the natives needed to do before trusting the Europeans. The first test is the “Traditional test.” They would have done this by asking the European some favors and complying with this would have been a demonstration of sincerity, friendship and good faith on the part of the Europeans. Despite the positive response, however, the natives were still reluctant to embrace the Europeans until they established the basis for their friendship. The second test is the “Hinting test.” This test is basic to the natives but relatively foreign to the Europeans. Hinting is the aspect of not openly making a request but simply leaving it to the one to whom the hint is directed to figure it out. The natives used hinting because they believed that Europeans do not know how to politely say “No”. They also used it because they feared the implications of making forthright requests to the Europeans. However, when hinting was not understood and interpreted, the natives became disappointed and angry. But the Europeans on their part did not know hinting because their way of communication was direct and honest.

The third test is the “Outrage test.” Due to the excessive anxiety on the part of the natives because of not trusting the Europeans and not knowing what should be the limit of friendship with them, the natives were supposed to do this test. Natives believed that Europeans could not be trusted to fulfill their obligations of friendship because they often refused to consent to their demands. This made the natives, therefore, to respond to the Europeans with accumulated anger, abuses and eventually withdrawal. Withdrawal took place when the natives became convinced that Europeans could not be trusted and, therefore, treated them suspiciously, deviously and antagonistically. Disillusionment normally results into a hostile withdrawal on the part of the natives because of the feeling of not being appreciated by Europeans.

Guided by the structural functionalism theory developed by David Merton in 1910, this study sought to find out how the Pokot worldview has been a hindrance to the spread of Christianity in West Pokot County. The basic principle of this theory is that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote its solidarity and stability. According to this theory, society has evolved as an organism and should therefore be studied from the perspective of the social structures and the functions of its constituent elements which include norms, customs, traditions and institutions. In this regard, the structural functionalism theory strongly emphasizes on the pre-eminence of the social world over individual parts.

Merton developed the concept of “deviance,” in which he made a distinction between the “Latent” and “Manifest” functions of the institutions of society. Manifest functions are the recognized and intended consequences of social patterns. While the Latent functions refer to the unrecognized and unintended consequences of any social pattern. Merton states that not all parts of the complex modern society work for its functional unity because the society can sometimes experience some social dysfunctions which disrupt its operations and therefore producing some undesirable consequences. In the same vein, Merton emphasizes that every actor in society is normally faced with the following five alternatives: Conformity, Innovation, Ritualism, Retreatism and Rebellion. The study thus sought to establish whether the Pokot people responded to Christianity in any of the five ways articulated in this theory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted using the descriptive design. According to Oso and Onen (2011), a descriptive survey involves studying the situation as it is with an intention to explain why the situation is the way it is. Since it was the intention of this study to describe variables as they are, the descriptive survey design was an ideal method to conduct the research. West Pokot County, in North-Western Kenya was the area of study. West Pokot County is administratively divided into four sub-counties and twenty-one divisions. The respondents for the study were selected from eight divisions of West Pokot County, using the simple random sampling method. These were Alale and Kacheliba Divisions in Pokot North Sub County, Chesogon and Sigor Divisions in Pokot Central Sub County, Kapenguria and Sook Divisions in West Pokot Sub County and Chepareria and Lelan Divisions in Pokot South Sub County. Respondents were drawn from West Pokot County population of 512,690 (*Kenya Population and Housing Census, 2009*). The respondents thus included: thirty-two (32) selected clergy from the selected denominations (Anglican Church of Kenya-ACK, African Inland Church-AIC, Associated Christian Churches of Kenya- ACCK, Full Gospel Churches of Kenya-FGCK, African Gospel Church-AGC, and Evangelical Lutheran Church-ELC), eighty (80) informed Pokot elders, forty-eight (48) Pokot specialists (circumcisers, medicinemen and seers), and 224 Pokot community members. Clergy, Pokot elders and Pokot specialists were sampled using the purposive and snowball methods, while the Pokot community members were sampled randomly. According to Kothari (2013, p. 59) purposive and snowball sampling methods are non-probability sampling methods whereby the selection of the sample items depend on the subjective judgement of the researcher. The purposive sampling method was also used to select thirty-two clergy from the denominations that have a big following throughout West Pokot County. These included the clergy from ACK, AIC, ACCK, FGCK, AGC and ELCK. This study used questionnaires and interviews to collect primary data from the selected respondents. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive methods.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study were founded on the effect of Pokot traditional beliefs and practices on the spread of Christianity. According to Mugambi (2002), there is a big disparity between the Christian worldview and the African traditional worldview. The Christian worldview is three-sectional because the Christian statement of faith teaches that the universe is in three sections. These sections include heaven above, the earth in the middle and hell below. Christians believe that heaven above is the abode of God, the earth is the abode of Man, and hell is the abode of Satan and the dead who are wicked. In this regard, Satan is associated with death and hell, while God is associated with life and heaven. Christians believe in God the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ the son of God who, after being crucified on earth, died and descended into hell and, on the third day, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. All these are expressed in the Christian statement of faith.

According to Pastor Kaprech of AIC, the Pokot worldview is dual-sectional. They believe that the world consists of the earth on which humanity lives and the sky which is the abode of the sun, moon and stars. According to the Pokot people, therefore, there is neither heaven nor hell. The Pokot believe that the world is inhabited by inanimate objects, visible and invisible beings. Inanimate objects include mountains, rocks, caves and rivers. Visible beings include humans, animals (both domestic and wild) and plants; while invisible beings include deities, ancestors and unborn children. Also, Pokot people do not believe that the world will one day come to an end as taught in Christian faith. They instead believe that when people die, they change their physical mode of existence to a spiritual (ghostly) one. They believe that as long as people have fulfilled all the social obligations required of them, they do not have to fear death because it is merely a rite of passage.

This study found out that one notable mistake Western Christian Missionaries committed when evangelizing the Pokot people was the failure to take into consideration the challenge of the differences between Christian and Pokot worldviews. They did not know that the three-sectional Christian worldview was not only strange but also unacceptable to the Pokot traditional thought. Mugambi (2002) states:

The mono-sectional worldview is entrenched in the traditional African thought. Considering this fact, it would be absurd to suggest that an African convert to Christianity suddenly denounces and abandons this worldview as soon as he accepts the Christian faith. The convert may talk of hell and heaven, of death and resurrection, Satan and God as he has been taught in Church. But cosmological context in which these concepts were originally codified into Christian doctrine differ greatly from the cosmological assumptions of the African convert (p. 52.)

Pastor Kaprech of AIC stated further that the majority of the Pokot people were acquainted only with the Pokot worldview because they had not been influenced before

by the innovations from the Western world. It would have been prudent, therefore, for the Western Christian Missionaries to have first sought to learn the Pokot way of life before evangelizing them. Due to their Western worldview and theological training, however, the Western Christian Missionaries had very limited understanding of life according to Pokot worldview. This made it hard for them to teach Christian theological principles in light of the Pokot traditional worldview and context. The lack of knowledge about the spiritual realm made the Western Christian missionaries to also fail to understand the difference between Pokot and Christian value systems. For example, unlike the Westerners, the Pokot people value relationship more than anything else and are ready to sacrifice anything to maintain it. But Westerners are individualistic and goal oriented and are, therefore, ready to sacrifice anything else to achieve their goals.

The failure of Western Christian Missionaries to evangelize the Pokot people in the context of their worldview made Pokot people regard the Christian message as foreign and irrelevant to them because it did not address their needs and concerns. The implication of this is that up to date, some Pokot Christian converts secretly turn back to their traditional spiritual power sources to address their needs and concerns.

### **Pokot Concepts of God, Man, Sin, Sacrifice and Salvation**

According to Pastor Rong of FGCK, the main teaching Western Christian missionaries emphasized when evangelizing the Pokot people was the doctrine of God. They taught the Pokot people that there is only one benevolent God. They did this by giving many rational proofs to ascertain this as a fact. On the contrary, Pokot people believe in the existence of three gods and several spiritual beings. Pokot people found it difficult, therefore, to understand the concept of the existence of one benevolent God as it was taught by the Western Christian Missionaries. They further found it difficult to understand why this powerful God, the Creator of the whole earth, would seek to get into a relationship with man as it was taught by the Western Christian Missionaries.

Pokot people too found it difficult to comprehend the Christian teaching that after creation, this benevolent God, without any ritual manipulation, would generously give man a position of supreme authority over all the creation (Genesis 1:26-30). They wondered too, why man, who was said to have once lived in a state of perfect peace according to the teachings of Christianity, would rebel against God and consequently lose this privileged position (Gen. 3:23, 24). The Pokot people found it equally hard to believe the Christian teaching that man can have a personal relationship with this benevolent God.

Unlike Christians, Pokot believe that man can have a relationship with spiritual beings. This relationship can guarantee man harmony and protection against mistreatments from evil spirits. In this regard, according to the majority of the Pokot people, the Christian teaching about one benevolent God was not only illogical but also irrelevant. Blaschke (2001) agrees with this argument:

If given the opportunity to do it again in Africa, Don indicated that as to content, he would not start the study of theology with Western view of the doctrine of God. Rather he would start with the familiar: the animistic man's dilemma. That he is in struggle with evil spiritual powers from whom he must seek personal spiritual empowerment to successfully attain the state of 'Alafia' in this life (2001, p. 109).

Rev Kapelo of FGCK stated that another challenge the Western Christian missionaries encountered when evangelizing Pokot people was the difference between Pokot and Christian concepts of sin and salvation. According to Christian teachings, salvation is basically deliverance from sin. This was contrary to Pokot people's belief that salvation is deliverance from the wicked spiritual powers that always seek to dominate people's lives. Therefore, since the Pokot people believe that they face imminent attacks from wicked spiritual powers, they were convinced that embracing Christianity would make them more vulnerable to wicked spiritual powers because of lack of protection.

There was also a difference between Pokot and Christian concepts of man and sacrifices. According to Mr. Lomwai, *Werkoyon* (a Prophet) from Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub County, Pokot people offered sacrifices for the purpose of appeasing spirits in order to live in harmony with them. These sacrifices were offered along river banks, rocks, shrines and in the homesteads. They were performed by specialists for specific purposes and during special occasions. For example, sacrifices were performed before embarking on cattle raids in order for them to be successful. Other performances followed a successful cattle raid to cleanse the warriors and to give thanks to *Tororut* (god of the sky) for protection and success.

Pastor Rong of FGCK said that according to Christian teachings, the only one meaningful sacrifice was of Jesus Christ the Messiah who was sacrificed once and for all to deliver humanity from sin (Revelation 13:8, Hebrews 10:1-4). Due to this, Western Christian Missionaries condemned the Pokot traditional sacrificial system as demonic and as a worship of the creation. The Western Christian Missionaries said that by offering these sacrifices, the Pokot people were attracting upon themselves God's curses. This attack on their sacrificial system made the Pokot people to aggressively resist the Christian religion.

Due to the reasons given above, majority of the Pokot people were convinced that Christianity was foreign and completely unable to provide them with the protection they desperately needed from the wicked spiritual powers. This was due to the fact that Western Christian Missionaries failed to present the Gospel to Pokot people in the context of their worldview. They also failed to see the importance of Pokot cultural beliefs and practices to the Pokot people. Instead, they merely emphasized the reason why the Pokot people needed salvation from their sins. Despite the fact that the Gospel of salvation from sin is a crucial biblical theme, it was difficult for Pokot people to embrace it because it did not address the reality of the spiritual warfare that they struggle with on daily basis.

Mrs. Naset (midwife) from Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub-County stated that the Christian Gospel as presented by the Western Christian Missionaries did not provide a solution to the challenges the Pokot people were facing because it was merely based on the concept of deliverance from sin. She stated further that the challenges Pokot people faced on daily basis, to which they sought solutions, were poverty; sickness; attacks from unpredictable evil spirits; community pressure; witch doctors and crop failures.

Pokot and Christian concepts of sin vary. According to Pokot people, sin is that which violates their customs and the requirements of the spiritual world. Pokot people do not have written moral standards that are similar to the 'Ten Commandments' as it is in Christianity. They do not have the concept of good and evil that provides guidelines on how people should relate with God, man and God's Law, as it is in Christianity. They instead, only have the concept of the "permitted" and the "forbidden". To the Pokot, a person's behaviour is considered to be bad only if they commit that which offends Pokot customs. Therefore, transgressions committed consciously or unconsciously are only regarded as a disorder and not sin. Such disorders only require the restoration of order and not deliverance as was taught by Western Christian Missionaries.

In light of this, Christian teachings about sin compounded Pokot people's confusion about Christianity. They did not understand why Western Christian Missionaries regarded them as sinners who deserved death and yet they had not breached their customs. This confusion emanated from the fact that Western Christian Missionaries did not define sin and salvation according to Pokot worldview. Majority of the Pokot people were, therefore, persuaded that Christianity was merely a Western lifestyle that was unable to address their felt needs.

Bishop Tundo of AGC stated that another reason why Pokot people resisted Christianity was due to the fact that it was merely strong on the theme of salvation from personal sin, but weak in providing the power that Pokot people needed to practically address the daily dilemmas they were facing from evil spiritual forces. Bishop Tundo further stated that, the Western Christian missionaries lacked knowledge of the fact that Pokot people believe that they are in daily struggles with unpredictable wicked spiritual powers that always seek to harm them. This belief made them live a lifestyle of anxiety and fear. They believe that these wicked spirits are responsible for miscarriages during pregnancies, sickness, curses, drought and even death. Therefore, the Pokot people are always looking for power to combat these wicked spirits.

According to Bishop Mali of FGCK, majority of Pokot people think that the Christian concept of salvation is a mere philosophy that is unable to address their challenges. There is a need therefore for Western Christian missionaries to contextualize the Gospel when evangelizing Pokot people. Blaschke (2001) stresses the importance of the contextualization of the Gospel:

Expressing the process here in simple Western theological terms; one would say that Western evangelism presents the Gospel of forgiveness of sins,



emphasizing first, the saviourhood of Jesus. Then follows discipleship on submission to Jesus Christ. In the animistic context, having recognized the strength of the animist's belief and practice requiring submission to the authority and power of spiritual beings, evangelism amongst them should first emphasize submission to the Lordship of Jesus; the Gospel of power and authority to deliver and protect them from evil spiritual beings (2001, pp.29- 30)

### **Pokot Communication System**

Communication is key if any message has to be passed across. This paper, however, posits that Western Christian missionaries encountered communication challenge as they evangelized the Pokot people. Bishop Tudo of AGC stated that since Western Christian missionaries lacked knowledge about Pokot language and culture, they found it hard to understand life according to Pokot thinking. Due to this, their presentation of the Gospel was mono-cultural and consequently it was not received by the Pokot people. According to Blaschke (2001), effective communication involves both the preacher (the speaker) and the receptor (listener). Basic to any communication is the language or the code that is mutually understood by both the speaker and the receptor (listener).

Bishop Tudo further stated that the mistake that the Western Christian missionaries committed when evangelizing the Pokot people was that they did not seek first adequate information about the Pokot worldview and culture. They were thus unable to encode the Gospel in the code that was understood by the Pokot people. Missiologists say that if a missionary (speaker) implements most of the cultural codes of the receptor group, it becomes easy for the receptor group to decode (understand) the message. The codes are the cultural equivalents, redemptive analogies or points of contact (Blaschke, 2001).

In light of this, Western Christian missionaries were supposed to use Pokot cultural elements which have concepts that are similar to biblical ones to effectively communicate the Gospel to the Pokot people. For example, since the concept of forgiveness of sin is in both the Pokot and Christian worldviews, and are secured by the means of a mediator and the shedding of the blood (Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Exodus 12:13), Western Christian Missionaries were supposed to utilize this to communicate the Gospel. Also, to effectively communicate the Gospel to the Pokot, Western Christian Missionaries were supposed to have first sought to acquire knowledge about Pokot cultural beliefs and customs in order to gain access into Pokot thinking and then use it as a communication bridge to encode the Gospel in terms of Pokot worldview.

According to Bishop Mali of FGCK, one of the blunders Western Christian Missionaries committed as they evangelized the Pokot people was that they failed to provide cultural or linguistic bridges that would have paved way for Pokot people to understand the Christian Gospel in terms of their own worldview. Therefore, their presentation of the gospel was simply providing answers to questions Pokot people were not asking. The situation became even worse when they established a standardized

Bible training curriculum which they thought was universally appropriate to all believers everywhere.

According to Blaschke (2001), to contextualize the Gospel means to teach people according to their worldview, their level of Christian maturity and the issues that the people are dealing with at a particular time. This will ensure that the challenges people face at that particular time are addressed. Contextualization is, therefore, the act of ministering to people on the basis of where they are; their worldview; their local challenges and the level of their Christian maturity. In light of this, Western Christian Missionaries did not evangelize the Pokot according to their cultural context, worldview, traditional teaching methods and social situation. Consequently, it became hard for the Pokot people to understand the Gospel.

### **The Pokot Concept of Spiritual Beings**

A big disparity between Pokot and Christian concepts of spiritual beings was established. The Western Christian Missionaries, having come from the scientific and secular world that focuses only on precepts and empirical evidences that separate the natural from the supernatural, found it hard to comprehend Pokot concept of spiritual beings. They could not begin to imagine that spiritual beings and witchcraft exist and, therefore, failed to understand what the Pokot people were fighting against. Due to this, they only preached the Gospel of deliverance from personal sin and were, therefore, unable to address the felt needs of the spirit-troubled Pokot people.

Pokot people, unlike Western Christian Missionaries, focus on spiritual reality and relationships. Therefore, what they seek is not a conversion from wrong faith to the right one, but a demonstration of greater power that will make them safe. Blaschke says:

To put the Gospel presentation in context we would first do well to recall the animist's dilemma. Animists are in daily struggle with spirit beings. By the use of rites, rituals and liturgies, animists cajole, appease, placate and manipulate these spirit forces for empowerment to try to gain control of all aspects of their daily lives (2001, p. 77).

In this regard, Western Christian Missionaries were unable to address the spiritual needs of the Pokot people and this made most of them think that Christianity was irrelevant to them. Pokot people were convinced further that embracing Christianity would make them vulnerable to attacks from the wicked spiritual powers because it merely promises wholeness of life but never delivers it.

According to Mr. Lokudia from Murpus Village in Chepareria Division in Pokot South Sub County, Pokot people believe in the existence of several spiritual beings. These spiritual beings are revered and also feared. They believe that spiritual beings inhabit rocks, trees, mountains, shrines, geographical areas, persons (both alive and deceased), rivers, uninhabited areas, the wind and animals. In addition, the unseen forces such as sickness, death, ancestral spirits, evil spirits and curses are feared. The belief in the existence of an array of scary unseen spirits makes Pokot people live a lifestyle of fear.

Mr. Lokudia further stated that Pokot people also believe that they are subject to an array of scary unseen spiritual forces that they need to manipulate in order to survive. In order to have their needs addressed, they have to reach out to these spirits in specific ways. Therefore, the spirits have to be invoked in order that good or bad things to happen. Pokot people also believe that the environment is under the authority of the spiritual beings and if people want to secure wholeness in life, they must constantly seek empowerment from the spirits. Kraft (1995) states:

In working with the Kamwe in Nigeria, the Thai, and the Navajo, I have become convinced that the biblical portrayal of a world filled with spirits is more accurate than given the Western assumptions. The Bible very clearly presents a world where spiritual powers exist and struggle and tensions between good and evil are in focus. God is clearly a God of power, often revealing himself through the “power encounters” with wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and the cosmic powers of this dark world age (Eph. 6:12) (1995, p. ix).

Mr. Komolkat from Kasongwor village in Lelan Division in Pokot South Sub County said that the Pokot believe that there must be spiritual solutions to the problems affecting the community. In this regard, *Kaworokion* (a diviner) has to be consulted whenever there is a problem. Whenever Pokot people encounter challenges, they ask the “Who,” and “Why” questions. The reason why they consult diviners is to not only identify the problem but also the kind of sacrifices that need to be performed in order to appease the offended spirits. This is the reason why the Pokot people always strive to secure harmony with all the spiritual beings. Mr. Komolkat further stated that the Pokot believe that spirits are stronger than humans and that is why they seek empowerment from them. They believe that if the spirits are appeased and manipulated, they will in return acquire protection, fertility, health, wealth, authority, respect and a good name. Pokot people also believe that the spirits must be manipulated so that they can assist women to get the ability to become pregnant.

Mr. Kiara, *Chesogeyon* (a medicine man) from Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub County reported that Pokot people believe that after humans have gained enough favour from the spirits, they can even persuade them to curse their enemies on their behalf. The emissaries the Pokot use to carry out this include the witch doctors, *Werkoyon* (prophets/ diviners), and *Chepsogeyon/Chesogeyon* (medicine women /medicine men). Any of these can be consulted to interpret the source of any problem, and to prescribe solutions to challenges faced by members of the community. In light of this, the difference between Pokot and Christian concepts of spiritual beings made the Pokot be convinced that Christianity is foreign and is unable to address their needs. Blaschke (2001) says:

Or consider the Western response to the cause of a high way automobile accident. Either carelessness on the part of the chauffeur or the mechanical failure of the vehicle would usually be judged to be the cause. The response of the non-Western (the animist) would be that a curse had been put on the

passengers. A diviner therefore, would have to be consulted to determine who did this and why. Then the appropriate ritual performed to restore the relationship with the offended spiritual being that instigated the accident. The key restoration of balance and harmony in the animists world is always performance of the correctly and meticulously prescribed ritual (2001, p.73)

### **Pokot Concepts of Death and Eternity**

This study established that the difference between Pokot and Christian concepts of death and eternity affected the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people. According to Mr. Kerker from Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub County, Pokot people believe that at death, the spirit of the deceased person stays around the family household to harass and to admonish the living members of the family until the rites of liturgy are performed to please it to move to the resting place of the ancestors.

One of the ceremonies the Pokot perform during the burial ceremony involves the spilling of blood on the grave of the deceased to appease the spirit of the deceased to move to the resting place of the ancestors. The wealth of the family, the social position and the power of the deceased are among the factors that determine the number of animals to be slain during this special ceremony. But according to the teachings of Christianity, after death, the spirits of the dead do not go to the same place. The spirits of the righteous people are taken to heaven, while those of the wicked people are taken to hell (Hebrews 9:7 and Luke 16: 19-31). The “righteous” are people who convert to Christianity while the “wicked” are people who refuse to convert Christianity. The Pokot people regarded this concept as not only foreign, but also offensive to their traditional beliefs and practices.

### **Pokot Educational System**

The disparity between Pokot and Western educational systems affected the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people. According to Mr. Chepellion from Simat village in Sook Division in West Pokot Sub County, Pokot traditional educational system is oral because they do not have a written language. The teaching time frame is continuous and is not based on a block of classroom time like a semester, but on a flow of teachings and topics that are determined by the seasons of the year and what is happening in the lives of the Pokot people at a particular time. The Lessons include teachings about climatic seasons, annual rites and holidays, market days and emergency events.

Daily life experiences are lessons also to the Pokot. Information in the Pokot community is shared and people are allowed to participate in the teaching activities according to their age and their ability to learn. In light of this, day to day occurrences in Pokot community are curricula for learning. The instruction modes include the ‘on-site hands-on instruction’ such as how to milk, how to herd, how to make sacrifices and how to identify both human and animal footprints.

The times when ceremonies are held also provide opportunities for passing on information to learners. Learning among the Pokot people is conducted in groups, not

on one-on-one strategy as it was used by the Western Christian Missionaries when evangelizing the Pokot people. Due to this, there is no secrecy and privacy in the traditional Pokot educational system. This type of communication style is referred to as “high-context,” since the meaning of the message is deduced from the context of the situation. Individuals in every group-setting where a message has been communicated are, therefore, always expected to draw conclusions and make decisions in their own minds based on the consensus of the opinion expressed by their group.

Mr. Aker from Lomut village in Chesegon Division in Pokot Central Sub County said that teachers in Pokot traditional educational system are all adults and elders (both males and female), who usually come from, but not limited to, a person’s extended family. In the hands-on instructions, adults and elders carry on demonstrations before the young people; while the indirect learning is undertaken during the time when children sit around the fireside to listen to the discussions of the adults. During this forum, adults pass information through songs, riddles and proverbs. In this regard, the Pokot traditional educational system is family-centered, whereby adults formally and informally, teach young people the moral values of the community and pass on to them skills that are relevant to all aspects of daily life.

In contrast, in the Western educational system, information is expressed to their finest details. This communication style is referred to as “low-context.” It was due to this fact that Western Christian Missionaries established schools and colleges when evangelizing Pokot people. Blaschke says:

A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; the mass information is vested in the explicit code (2001, p. 114).

### **Pokot Concept of Leadership and Authority**

The difference between Pokot and Christian concepts of leadership and authority affected the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people. Mr. Shakin of Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub County told that the Pokot society is patriarchal. Men are the bearers of authority and societal leadership in this community. They also have the responsibility to communicate the tribal lore (wisdom, traditions, teachings, knowledge and experience). In Pokot leadership structure, the highest position of leadership is held by *Werkoi* (the Prophets). However, the Prophets are not many at any given time in the Pokot community. The function of *Werkoi* (the Prophets) is to foresee the future by the means of dreams. Those who come after *Werkoi* in the hierarchy of leadership are *Kiruokin* (the community elders). The *Kiruokin* are old men who have wisdom and skill and therefore have the responsibility of making decisions for the community, solving marital conflicts, addressing the needs of those who are in difficulty, punishing those who commit serious crimes. This social organization enables the members of the Pokot community to co- exist peacefully. *Kiruokin* (the community elders) are selected by other elders. However, women and the youth are not given

leadership positions in the Pokot community because it is the preserve of *Poi* (the old men) and *Kiruokin* (the community elders).

However, according to Christian teachings, leadership is a calling from God and therefore somebody can become a leader regardless of age and gender (Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6-8). Pokot people found it hard to understand this because it was contrary to their traditional beliefs and practices. In this regard, when Western Christian Missionaries gave women and the youth leadership responsibilities in the church, the Pokot regarded this as an attack on their culture and the office of the *Werkoyon* (prophets) and *Kiruokin* (community elders) as the leaders of the Pokot community.

According to Mrs. Ywapaa from Tilak village in Kapenguria Division in West Pokot Sub County, the Pokot have a lot of respect for the authority of *Werkoyon* (the prophets) and *Kiruokin* (the community elders). They believe that the words they speak contain power to either bring curses or blessings upon the community. Pokot people also believe that for peace and harmony to prevail in the community and family, Pokot traditional beliefs and practices should carefully be observed. Pokot customs are protected by taboos. The observance of taboos is conditional and therefore those who observe them are blessed and those who transgress against them are cursed. Mrs. Ywapaa further states that every situation or activity in the Pokot community, from life to death has their own set of taboos. Taboos are the instruments of control between spiritual beings and mankind in the Pokot community. They are used to instill fear in the members of the community about the consequences of doing things that are forbidden. The worst penalty for disobeying taboos is a curse or even death.

According to Rev. Ngo'riareng AIC, when Western Christian Missionaries came to evangelize the Pokot people, they taught against the observance of taboos by stating that it is only God who has the authority to either bless or curse people. Western Christian Missionaries, therefore, condemned the observance of taboos as demonic practice and so advised Pokot converts to Christianity to discard them. They further taught that behind these taboos is the devil who desires to keep Pokot people under satanic bondage. They also taught Pokot people that they can acquire true harmony only by converting to Christianity and by obeying the word of God. Also, they told them that it is only the Bible that is the standard to judge what is right or wrong in the society and not the taboos.

### **The Pokot Concept of Economics**

The difference between the Pokot and the Western concepts of economics affected the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people. Mr. Kapkai of Asar village in Sigor Division in Pokot Central Sub County informed that cattle have a very crucial role in the Pokot culture. Anybody or anything that attempts to diminish the importance of cattle is strongly resisted because it threatens the self image of the Pokot people. The economic life of the Pokot people centres largely on herding. Farming takes the second place of esteem in the Pokot community since it is practiced on a small scale depending on the nature of the land. Their livestock consist of Zebu cattle, fat-tailed sheep, goats and a few donkeys. All the male stocks, except for a few that are kept for the breeding

purposes are castrated. Cows are very important because they provide calves, milk and meat.

According to Pastor Micha of Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCK), the Western Christian Missionaries were resisted by the Pokot people because they advocated not only for an alternative belief system, but also for an alternative economic activity. The Pokot people resisted the Western Christian Missionaries' efforts to persuade them to adopt new economic activities and more especially the persuasion to destock in order to get land for farming. They interpreted this as an attack on their lifestyle, and that it was geared toward making them poor. Schneider (1959) says:

In 1930, the British colonial government undertook economic reforms in West Pokot County because of a desire to raise the standard of living of the people and to increase the Pokot contribution to the economy of Kenya. However, because of the conflict of cultural values and lack of understanding of pastoralism, this endeavour met a lot of resistance since the British government criticized the Pokot economic practices throughout their early years of contact with the Pokot. For example, Barton (the DC) commented in 1920 that the Pokot were not much interested in adding maize in their crops. In 1926, another DC described Pokot as a very lazy tribe that cannot attempt to increase their cultivation by growing better crops. These two didn't understand that this resistance stemmed from the fact that the Pokot had a different concept about economy from theirs. Even the economic reform began by G. H. Chaundy, the principal of the government school at Kapenguria from 1930-1943 was resisted because of this. In his attempt to transform the Pokot economically, G.H. Chaundy instituted a curriculum at this school that was heavily based toward good farming techniques in the hope that the pupils will disseminate the knowledge they gained, but he did not succeed. He hoped to induce the Pokot to leave their pastoral life, as he established demonstration plots throughout the reserve in order to show them the advantage of diversifying their crops and to give them the experience in handling new crops, including cassava, cashews, tomatoes, potatoes, bananas, pawpaw, beans, oranges, lemons, sugar cane and peppers but he failed (1959, P. 155).

### **The Turning Point in the Evangelization of the Pokot People**

This study established that the turning point in the evangelization of the Pokot people was brought about by Pokot graduates of the missionary schools and colleges. Pastor Micha of ELCK reported that after acquiring Western education and interacting much with Western Missionaries, some Pokot youths who were graduates of the missionary schools and colleges, and who had converted to Christianity experienced a change of worldview and began to propagate Christianity in their community. Kraft (1995, p. 22) states that although worldview conserves the old ways and is resistant to change, it can be changed gradually by the means of forced behavioural change from outside and

exposure to new information. This is exactly what happened to Pokot youths who had graduated from missionary schools and colleges.

The constant exposure to new information made the Pokot youths who had graduated from missionary schools and colleges to re-evaluate their previous concepts and values, and eventually they gradually embraced change. In the mission schools and colleges, the Pokot youths were not only taught reading, writing, arithmetic and life skills, but also Christian education. Consequently, they not only acquired new skills, but also converted to Christianity. Also, the knowledge and the skills they acquired in these missionary schools and colleges enabled them to secure employment in secular organizations.

The Pokot youths who graduated from missionary schools and colleges became teachers, doctors, nurses, agricultural officers and priests. The Western Christian Missionaries used them wherever they were posted to advance the missionary agenda among the Pokot people of West Pokot County. This is the reason why most of the schools and colleges in West Pokot County before and after independence of Kenya are still under the management of Christian denominations.

According to Rev Ng'aritany of ACK, the turning point in the evangelization of the Pokot people of West Pokot County happened in 1970s, during the time of the East African Revival movement. It was from this year that the denominations that were doing mission work in West Pokot County began to experience some breakthrough. Shingledecker *et al.* (1982) agrees with this fact:

Some significant response to Christianity began in the early 1960s through the effect of the East African Revival Movement, but the Church among the Pokot has only really begun to establish itself since 1970. Many new denominations have begun to work among the Pokot within the last decade. With increasing pressure for development and modernization, the traditional Pokot way of life is breaking down and the people are becoming open to new ideas, including Christianity (Shingledecker, 1982, p. 18).

In light of this, the turning point in the evangelization of the Pokot people was initiated by the Pokot youths who were the graduates of the missionary schools and colleges and the East African revival of the 1970s. From that time, the Pokot people began to experience a gradual change in attitude toward Christianity and innovation. However, the change is small as compared to what is happening in other communities in the Republic of Kenya.

## **IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

Christianity can be said to be the world's largest and, regionally the fastest growing religion. Most of it is happening in the developing world. In parts of Africa however, Kenya in particular and with a great focus on West Pokot County of Kenya, spread of Christianity brings Christians into contact and often conflict with the culture of the



Pokot people. While religious practice (Christianity) has enormous potential for addressing today's social problems, many communities still find it difficult to fully embrace it in view of killing their cultural lifestyles. This paper provides an insight to the evangelists and the community on the most favorable manner of promoting Christianity with a concern to considering the people's lifestyle. Collaboration between the two parties is therefore important.

## **CONCLUSION**

Pokot worldview (traditional beliefs and practices) posed a challenge to the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people of West Pokot County. This is due to the differences between the Pokot and the Christian concepts about God, spiritual powers, man, sin, sacrifices, salvation, death, eternity, leadership and authority among other aspects. These differences made it hard for the Pokot people to understand the Christian Gospel. This was worsened by the fact that when Western missionaries first came to evangelize the Pokot people, they did not have knowledge about the Pokot worldview and how they did their things traditionally. Instead of seeking knowledge about the Pokot worldview, the Western Christian Missionaries condemned the Pokot cultural practices as satanic. Therefore, they failed to adapt to the situation and instead developed Christian programs that were foreign in structure and geared toward meeting Western needs and not the needs perceived by the Pokot people. For example, the failure of the Western Christian Missionaries to acknowledge the existence of spiritual powers made them not to understand life according to the Pokot worldview. In this regard, majority of the Pokot people were convinced that the Gospel was not able to address their spiritual needs. Consequently, this perception greatly affected the spread of Christianity among the Pokot people of West Pokot County. There is need for the Christian denominations doing mission work among the Pokot people in West Pokot County to contextualize the Christian Gospel by presenting it in light of the Pokot people's culture and worldview (way of life).

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

A study should be carried out on how to contextualize the Gospel such that it is culturally relevant to the targeted people groups and to address the needs perceived by them.

## **REFERENCES**

- Blaschke R. C. (2001). *Quest for Power: Guideline for Communicating the Gospel to Animists*. Sri Lanka: New Life literature.
- Edgerton, R.B. (1965). Some of the Disillusionment in Culture Contact. *South Western Journal of Anthropology* (20), 404-418.
- Kothari, C.R. (2013). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. Rajasthan, India: New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers.

- Kraft, M. G. (1995). *Understanding Spiritual Power*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Mugambi, J.W.K. (2002). *Christianity and African Culture*. Nairobi: Action Publishers.
- Oso, W. Y. & Onen, D. (2011). *Writing Research Proposals and Report*. Nairobi: Prints Arts Limited.
- Schneider, H. K. (1959). *Pokot Resistance to Change*. Chicago: Chicago Press.
- Shingledecker, K., Karanja, S., Makau, P., Muindi, P., Okeyo, N., Oehrig, B., Quist, M., & Severns, R. (1982). *The Unreached Peoples of Kenya Project Pokot Report*. Nairobi, Kenya: Daystar Research Centre.
- Visser, J. J. (1999). *Pokot Religion*. Zevenhuzen: ZH.